



## **Senator Brian Birdwell's Capitol Update (5-30-25)**

Greetings from your Texas Capitol! It has been almost two weeks since our last Capitol Update, and things have indeed been busy during that time. Wednesday was the deadline for all bills to be considered in the Senate. The next few days before *Sine Die* are dedicated to concurring on amendments on bills between the chambers, or working out differences in them via “Conference Committees.” This edition of the newsletter is focused almost solely on legislation that have passed since the last update. I’ll have one last update after we officially *Sine Die* next Monday and then look for our official Newsletter that will be mailed out in early fall! With that, lets dive in.

### **Historic School Finance Legislation (HB 2) Moves Forward**

The Senate and House have been working together diligently throughout the session to deliver thoughtful, effective, and historic public school funding and teacher pay raises. On May 23<sup>rd</sup>, the Senate passed House Bill 2 by Rep. Buckley (R-Salado), sponsored by Sen. Creighton (R-Conroe), which targets specific needs that will direct record new funding where it will make the biggest difference in the lives of students and teachers. HB 2 is a bold, student centered plan with targeted investments for all 1,200 hundred school districts that focuses on better supported teachers, school safety and greater opportunities for students to succeed. This legislation provides the largest teacher pay raise in history and affords teachers an opportunity to earn additional pay for improved outcomes in the classroom, targeted funding for our special education students, investments in early childhood learning, and additional funding for our schools to address the rising fixed costs of operation. Additionally, HB 2 provides a separate allotment that will increase pay for auxiliary and support staff and offset the costs associated with insurance for school properties, retirement and other benefits.

Some highlights of HB 2 include:

- \$8.5 billion in new funding, the largest single increase in public education funding in Texas history
- \$4.2 billion for record permanent teacher and staff pay raises
- Expanded incentive pay and teacher training programs
- \$1.3 billion in Allotment for Basic Costs (ABC) to assist districts with expenses like insurance, utilities, and Teacher Retirement System contributions
- Nearly \$2 billion to update special education formulas and fund full-day pre-K, early learning interventions, and Career & Technical Education (CTE)
- \$430 million for school safety

Though the amendments the Senate made to the bill had been negotiated on between members of both chambers, the House will still need to concur to the Senate amendments by this Sunday to send the bill to the Governor.

### **Update on SJR 59 (Texas State Technical College Endowment)**

In a recent Capitol Update, I shared with you some details of my legislation creating a constitutionally dedicated, permanent endowment to fund the capital infrastructure needs of career and technical education programs offered by the Texas State Technical College System (TSTC). Since that time, SJR 59 passed the Senate by a bipartisan supermajority and moved on to the House. The House amended the bill to reflect changes needed for the overall higher education budget issues and the Senate concurred with those changes Tuesday morning. I want to thank Rep. Stan Lambert (R- Abilene) for his work and for sponsoring this legislation in the House this session. This will now appear as a constitutional amendment on your November 2025 general election ballot to be decided by voters.

### **Legislation I Authored/ Sponsored That Have Made it to the Governor’s Desk**

In the last two Capitol Updates I provided you with a breakdown of all of the legislation I have been working on that has passed the Senate this session. As I did in the last Capitol Update, I wanted to take a moment to update you on those bills that have made it through both Chambers and are now awaiting the Governor’s signature (or in the case of the Joint Resolutions, have been sent to the Secretary of State for certification for the Nov. 25 general election), including House filled bills I sponsored in the Senate.

- [\*\*SB 869\*\*](#) – Texas Ethics Commission dismissal/ resolution timeline (House Sponsor – Rep. Matt Shaheen)
- [\*\*SB 876\*\*](#)– Renames the Newly Finished Cresson By-Pass Between Johnson and Hood Counties After Former Cresson Mayor Bob Cornett (House Sponsor – Rep. Shelby Slawson)

- [\*\*SB 1146\*\*](#) – Inactive Well Plugging Liability (House Sponsor – Rep. Drew Darby)
- [\*\*SB 1198\*\*](#) – Designating Spaceports as Critical Infrastructure (House Sponsor -Rep. Eddie Morales)
- [\*\*SB 1242\*\*](#) – Fixes 2013 Oversight and Allows the Texas State Technical College (TSTC) to Proceed with Capital Projects or Purchases of Any Land or Facilities without the Approval from the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (House Sponsor – Rep. Terry Wilson)
- [\*\*SB 1243\*\*](#) – Dissolution of Brazos Regional Public Utility Agency (House Sponsor -Rep. Shelby Slawson)
- [\*\*SB 1758\*\*](#) – Pilot Program to Find Effects on Aggregate Production Operations and Semiconductor Wafer Manufacturers (House Sponsor – Rep. Brooks Landgraf)
- [\*\*SB 2052\*\*](#) – Codifies Texas Supreme Court Ruling that in Certain Suits Affecting the Parent-Child Relationship a Parent Acts in the Best Interest of a Child (House Sponsor – Rep. Cody Vasut)
- [\*\*SB 2053\*\*](#) – Creates the Governor's Medal of Service Award (House Sponsor – Rep. Will Metcalf)
- [\*\*SB 2204\*\*](#) – Exempting Water Assistance Fund, Water Loan Assistance Fund, and Rural Water Assistance Fund (which have higher, more precise, standards) from Texas Grant Management Standards (TGMS) (House Sponsor – Rep. Caroline Fairly)
- [\*\*SB 2781\*\*](#) – Allows for a Maximum Threshold on Certain Texas Ethics Commission Rulings to be Twice the Amount of the Contribution or Expenditure in Question (House Sponsor -Rep. Matt Shaheen)
- [\*\*SB 3048\*\*](#) – Creating the Bluebonnet Hills Municipal Management District No. 1 in Midlothian (House Sponsor – Rep. Caroline Fairly)
- [\*\*HB 2014\*\*](#) by Rep. Kerwin (R – Cleburne) – Companion to SB 2784 – Alters the election cycle and term length of the Somervell County Hospital District board members
- [\*\*HB 2663\*\*](#) by Rep. Darby (R – San Angelo) – Requiring electric service equipment to be removed from oil and gas wells that have been inactive for 10 years or more, reducing risk of wildfire
- [\*\*HB 4112\*\*](#) by Rep. Landgraf (R – Odessa) – Clarifying statute relating to the ban on storage and disposal of high-level radioactive waste in Texas
- [\*\*HB 4384\*\*](#) by Rep. Darby (R – San Angelo) – Companion to SB 2780 - Addresses the significant regulatory lag experienced by Texas gas utilities without compromising ratepayer protections or regulatory transparency
- [\*\*HB 4903\*\*](#) by Rep. Haris Davila (R – Round Rock) – Companion to SB 2049 – Establishes the Quad-Agency Child Care Initiative and the Quad-Agency Child Care Initiative Commission
- [\*\*HB 5093\*\*](#) by Rep. Bhojani (D – Euless) – Companion to SB 1571 – Allowing for the Office of the Secretary of State to disclose contact information of notary publics
- [\*\*HB 5696\*\*](#) by Rep. Cook (R – Mansfield) – Creates the Reserve Municipal Management District in Mansfield



Thank you to Pastor Jeremy White from Stone Water Church in Hood County, and his wife Mitsy, for coming down to Austin to be our “Pastor of the Day” in the Texas Senate.



Pastor Joey Crenshaw (middle) of Parkview Baptist Church in Waco was here today as our “Pastor of the Day” in the Texas Senate. We were joined by Ralph Patterson, another friend from Waco, on the Senate Floor, too!

## **Property Tax Relief Legislation Passes**

Senate Bill 4 and Senate Joint Resolution 2 by Sen. Bettencourt (R- Houston) and Sponsored by Rep. Morgan Meyer (R – Dallas) provide meaningful reduction in school district property taxes to Texas homeowners by raising the Homestead Exemption from \$100,000 to \$140,000. This means homeowners will only pay school property tax on the value of the home above the \$140,000 threshold for your local school district Maintenance and Operation (M&O) and Interest and Sinking (I&S) levies. SB 4 includes a holdharmless provision, guaranteeing that the state will fully cover any ISD funding shortfalls resulting from the exemption increase. Additionally, SB 4 maintains its protections for over-65 and disabled homestead exemption owners.

SB 23 and SJR 85, also authored by Sen. Bettencourt/ Rep. Meyer, increases the homestead exemption for disabled Texans and Texans aged 65 or older from \$10,000 to \$60,000. When combined with the across-the-board \$140,000 homestead exemption passed in Senate Bill 4 and Senate Joint Resolution 2, seniors and disabled Texans would receive a \$200,000 homestead exemption for school property taxes.

Additionally, HB 9/HJR 1 (Rep. Meyer/ Sen. Bettencourt) increases the property tax exemption to \$125,000 for tangible personal property a person owns that is held or used for the production of income (business personal property) and establishes that certain reporting was only required for individuals whose business personal property was greater than that amount.

When including the 6.3 cents of compression (meaning roughly a 63% reduction in the school M&O portion of your property tax bill) in the state budget, this package totals \$10.3 billion dollars in new property tax relief, reaching \$51 billion in total cumulative budget dollars over the past four sessions going towards tax relief. All three of the above mentioned measures will be proposed as constitutional amendments to voters on the November 4, 2025 general election ballot.

## **Recent Bill Passage Highlights**

This session, the Texas Senate has moved forward a wealth of conservative legislation as desired by the citizens of our state. In the last few weeks several of these bills have been sent to the Governor, a few of which I want to briefly highlight here:

- [HB 4](#) (Rep. Buckley/ Sen. Bettencourt) reconstructs both the state testing program and the metrics by which the success of public schools is evaluated to better enable both stakeholder involvement and responsiveness by, among other provisions, implementing an instructionally supportive state testing program, revising the manner in which indicators of achievement and public school performance ratings under the public school accountability system are modified and implemented, establishing a grant program for school district local accountability plans, and providing for actions challenging Texas Education Agency (TEA) decisions related to public school accountability to be settled in a timely manner.
- [HB 12](#) (Rep. K. Bell/ Sen. Parker) improves on the regulatory process in Texas and provide greater transparency by creating a limited sunset review for regulatory agencies that focuses on identifying inefficient rules, by establishing efficiency audits overseen by the state auditor and the Legislative Budget Board, and by increasing reporting on an agency's performance measures and requiring agencies to give public notice and solicit input during the sunset review process.
- [HB 18](#) (Rep. VanDeaver/ Sen. Perry) establishes the State Office of Rural Hospital Finance, the Texas Rural Hospital Officers Academy, and several new grant programs for rural hospitals to provide technical assistance and financial support for rural hospitals participating in Medicaid and other state or federal programs. This is intended to help meet the growing needs of rural hospitals across the state and ensure that Texans in rural communities have access to hospitals and essential health care services.
- [HB 143](#) (Rep. King/ Sen. Hancock) establishes new requirements for collaboration between the Public Utility Commission (PUC) and the Railroad Commission (RRC) regarding safety conditions at oil and gas well sites to help prevent wildfires like those that destroyed over 1 million acres of the Texas Panhandle in February 2024.



- [HB 2440](#) (Rep. Curry/ Sen. Parker) prevents a state agency or the state's air quality state implementation plan from restricting the sale, use, or ownership of an engine powered motor vehicle based on the vehicle's energy source.
- [HB 2563](#) (Rep. Ashby/ Sen. Kolkhorst) came from a 2021-2022 interim study we conducted in Senate Natural Resources and Economic Development, in which I chaired. This bill establishes the Certified and Insured Prescribed Burn Manager (CIPBM) Self-Insurance Pool and the CIPBM Self-Insurance Program to help encourage more individuals to become CIPBMs and increase the capacity of existing CIPBMs, who are needed to carry out prescribed burns on private land to maintain wildlife habitats, land management, agricultural production, and wildfire risk mitigation.
- [HB 3809](#) (Rep. Darby/ Sen. Schwertner) establishes decommissioning and recycling regulations for battery energy storage facilities, provide clear, consistent, and rigorous standards requiring operators to fully remove battery infrastructure and restore the land to its original condition when decommissioning a facility.
- [SB 7/ HJR 7](#) (Sen. Perry/ Rep. Hunter) will constitutionally dedicate an annual revenue stream of \$1 billion to the Texas Water Fund to help address the deficit in funding for Texas' pressing water needs. HJR 7 is in conjunction with Senator Perry's SB 7 aim to make "a generational leap" for water policy in Texas. This will now appear as a constitutional amendment on your November 2025 general election ballot to be decided by voters.
- [SB 12](#) (Sen. Creighton/ Rep. Leach) reaffirms that parents guide their children's moral, religious, and educational pathways by prohibiting DEI-driven hiring and expanding parental involvement via online portals, transfer policies, and in-person conferences.
- [SB 20](#) (Sen. Flores/ Rep. Capriglione) creates a state-jail felony offense for the possession or promotion of obscene visual material appearing to depict a child younger than 18 years of age.
- [SB 38](#) (Sen. Bettencourt/ Rep. Button) creates a fair, efficient, and predictable civil eviction process to remove unlawful occupants, including squatters, so courts can swiftly return possession to the rightful owner.
- [SB 571](#) (Sen. Bettencourt/ Rep. Leach) strengthens reporting, investigation, and tracking requirements of educator and school-affiliated misconduct involving students, including abuse, inappropriate relationships, and failure to report.
- [SB 647](#) (Sen. West/ Rep. Anchia) strengthens current mechanisms for court clerks to stop complex scammers who file convincing fraudulent documents and manipulate instruments of conveyance to steal property.
- [SB 1333](#) (Sen. Hughes/ Rep. Leach) strengthen property owner rights by providing an initial step for property owners to recover their homes from squatters through a speedy resolution via law enforcement action. This would allow the property owner to request the removal of a person from their property if the person unlawfully entered and is occupying their property without the owner's consent and is not a family member or a current or former tenant.
- [SB 2148](#) (Sen. Hall/ Rep. Slawson) requires the Public Utility Commission (PUC) and Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT) to conduct simulated or tabletop exercises with providers of a transmission and distribution service and providers of an electric generation service in the ERCOT power region to mitigate and prepare for a threat of an attack or an actual physical attack on a critical facility.
- [SB 2514](#) (Sen. Hughes/ Rep. Hefner) creates a Hostile Foreign Organizations Unit within the Department of Public Safety to develop a strategy to identify, investigate, and track foreign influence operations.



Every Session on the Saturday of Memorial Day weekend the Legislature recognizes families who lost loved ones in service since the last regular session. Pictured here during the ceremony on the House floor with my Senate colleague and fellow veteran, Juan "Chuy" Hinojosa, who served as a Marine in Vietnam.

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That wraps up this edition of the Capitol Update, folks. I welcome you to share this newsletter with your friends, family and colleagues in Senate District 22. Additionally, they can subscribe to the Update here: <http://www.senate.state.tx.us/75r/Senate/members/dist22/Signup.htm>.

As always, I hope you will take advantage of the opportunity to keep up with the happenings at your Texas Capitol. If you missed any of my previous Capitol Updates and want to read them too, you can find them [here](#)! You can also follow us on Twitter and Facebook, or keep in touch with legislative happenings via [www.capitol.texas.gov](http://www.capitol.texas.gov) or via my Senate [website](#), where you can also find other pictures and updates from this session and past ones.

Sincerely,

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