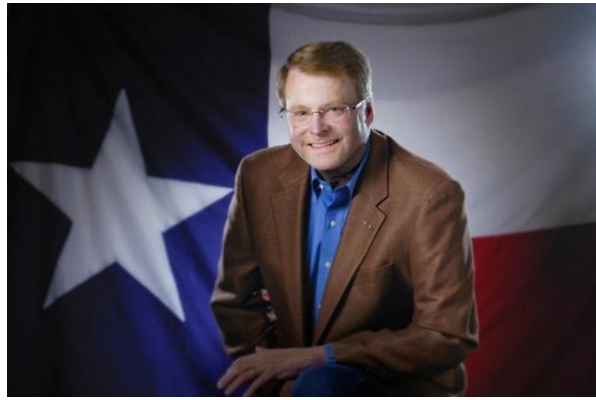




Senator Birdwell's Capitol Update

Special Sessions Edition

9/12/25

Greetings from your Texas Capitol! The Legislature has now adjourned "sine die" from the [second called special session](#). During the first and second called special sessions, the Senate worked to pass legislation for disaster preparedness and recovery from the July 4th floods, protecting women's spaces, providing additional property tax relief adding to that which passed during the regular session, prohibiting abortion-inducing drugs, and more. In the first called special session, the Senate worked quickly in the first nine days on the items outlined in Governor Abbott's call, but ultimately no legislation made it through both bodies. Below, I will highlight and outline each piece of legislation that was passed during the second special session and is now on Governor Abbott's desk awaiting signature or has already been signed by the Governor, as well as a few that the Senate passed, but did not make it through the process.

Bills sent to Governor Abbott's Desk

The bills below are those that made it through both Chambers and are either now awaiting the Governor's signature or those which he has already signed.

SB 1 by Sen. Perry (Rep. Darby) – Youth Camp Emergency Plans and preparedness; co-authored

Known as the Heaven's 27 Camp Safety Act, this legislation prohibits the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) from licensing youth camps with cabins in Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)-designated floodplains, requires annual emergency training and planning, creates an online registry of licensed youth camps, and extends safety standards to campgrounds and recreational vehicle parks. Governor Abbott signed this bill into law on Sep. 5th and became effective immediately.

SB 3 by Sen. Bettencourt (Rep. Wilson) – Flood Emergency Communications and Warning; joint-authored

Creates a grant program at the Office of the Governor to offer financial support to cities, counties, and other government entities for the installation of early-warning sirens in areas prone to flash-flooding. Governor Abbott signed this bill into law on Sep. 5th and became effective immediately.

SB 5 by Sen. Huffman (Rep. Bonnen) – Relief Funding for Hill Country; co-authored

Establishes a framework for funding the response to, and recovery from, the catastrophic storms that struck the Hill Country region in July 2025. Specifically, SB 5 includes \$200 million to cover the projected 25% non-federal matching funds for FEMA reimbursement; \$50 million for the purchase of sirens, rain gauges, and other equipment in the Hill Country flood region; \$24 million to develop enhanced atmospheric measurement and modeling techniques; and \$20 million toward a new swift water training facility.

SB 8 by Sen. Middleton (Rep. Orr) – Protecting Women’s Spaces; *co-authored*

Requires state agencies, schools, universities, and political subdivisions to designate any multiple-occupancy restrooms, locker rooms, and changing facilities according to biological sex. Private businesses, churches, and other non-government institutions are unaffected. This only applies to government-owned or government-controlled spaces. The bill does allow agencies to provide single-occupancy or family restrooms as alternatives.

SB 11 by Sen. Parker (Rep. Cook) – Protecting Human Trafficking Victims

Currently, in the State of Texas, survivors of human trafficking are often convicted of crimes their traffickers force them to commit. Traffickers do so as a form of control: once they have forced their victim to commit a crime, they hold that crime over their head to dissuade seeking help from law enforcement. This bill establishes an affirmative defense to prosecution for criminal offenses if the survivor can demonstrate that his or her conduct was caused by force, fraud, or coercion as a victim of Trafficking of Persons.

SB 12 by Sen Hughes (Rep Shaheen) – Attorney General Authority to Prosecute Election Crimes

Delegates ultimate authority to the Attorney General to prosecute election crimes in Texas to ensure that no election crime goes unprosecuted as a general policy. Under current law, the Attorney General may only prosecute election law offenses with the cooperation of local prosecutors. This bill shifts that framework by giving the Attorney General the power to act independently of local district and county attorneys.

SB 14 by Sen. Perry (Rep. Cecil Bell) – Water Project Incentives; *joint-authored*

SB 14 is a refile of SB 1253 from this past session, which was vetoed by the Governor due to a late amendment put onto the bill in the House. SB 14 removed that amendment and will authorize political subdivisions to reduce impact fees for builders who include facilities that increase water conservation and efficiency.

SB 16 by Sen. West (Rep. Dyson) – Stopping Title Theft and Deed Fraud

SB 16 is also a refile from this past session, SB 648, which was vetoed because the Governor believed the bifurcated process created for the filing of real property transaction documents disadvantaged rural and low-income Texans. SB 16 removes the bifurcated process from SB 648, but still aims to protect the rights of property owners and address the growing problem of deed fraud and title theft in Texas by creating new, specific criminal offenses and penalties for real property theft and real property fraud, and by requiring county clerks to record photo ID information from people filing title transfer documents in person.

SB 18 by Sen. Zaffirini (Rep. Gerdes) – Maintaining Texas Dams; *joint-authored*

Addresses permitting delays that can hamper maintenance and rehabilitation of flood control structures, helping strengthen the long-term safety and reliability of Texas flood control infrastructure by providing a targeted exemption from the requirement to obtain a state water permit from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) for certain small dams and reservoirs. By allowing these targeted exemptions, the dam and surrounding natural infrastructure can be maintained in a timely manner.

SB 54 by Sen. Hughes (Rep. Shaheen) – Same Day Registration Clean Up

During the 89th Regular Session (2025), the Texas Legislature enacted SB 2217, which became effective on September 1, 2025, which would allow a person's voter registration to take effect immediately upon the voter registrar's receipt of certain notices of a voter's change of address if the voter changes residence within the same county as the voter's current registration address. However, local election officials who attended training presented by the Secretary of State's office expressed concerns regarding this new same-day registration process, with one official specifically noting that, because the voter's address would be changed by election workers at the polling location without additional address and mapping verification steps that election officials typically take, there is a risk that a voter could get the wrong ballot. SB 54 addresses these concerns by repealing the provision that would cause these issues and reverts the process back to how it has been handled in recent elections.

HB 1 by Rep. Darby (Sen. Perry) – the Youth Camp Alert, Mitigation, Preparedness, and Emergency Response (CAMPER) Act

In addition to SB 1, this legislation seeks to improve youth camp emergency preparedness by requiring youth camps to adopt and annually update emergency plans, train staff, orient campers, notify parents of floodplain risks with signed acknowledgment, and share plans with local emergency services. The Department of State Health Services (DSHS) is also authorized to enforce compliance through inspections, complaint investigations, and license suspension or denial. Governor Abbott signed this bill into law on Sep. 5th and became effective immediately.

HB 4 by Rep. Hunter (Sen. King) – Texas Congressional Redistricting Map; co-sponsor

The governor's call for the 89th Legislature, 2nd Called Session, identified congressional redistricting legislation as an item to be addressed in that session. HB 4 revises the composition of the districts for the election of members of the U.S. House of Representatives from Texas by replacing the map implemented in 2021. These new congressional districts, if approved by the courts, will change some of Senate District 22's Congressional representation. Specifically, there are changes within Tarrant County, along with both Bosque and Hill County being moved into the TX-17 Congressional District. To view the new congressional maps, please click here: <https://dvr.capitol.texas.gov/Congress/89/PLANC2333>. You can also check the Who Represents Me? website for specific address related information on Federal and State elected officials, which includes the updated congressional maps information.

HB 7 by Rep. Leach (Sen. Hughes) – Protecting Unborn Children

Prohibits the manufacturing, distribution, mailing, transportation, delivery, and prescription of abortion-inducing pills for the purpose of obtaining an illegal abortion.

HB 8 by Rep. Buckley (Sen. Bettencourt) – Phasing Out the STAAR Test; co-sponsor

Reconstructs the state testing program by phasing out the STARR test with an instructionally supportive state testing program that will be developed or approved by Texas Education Agency (TEA) and implemented by the 2026-2027 school year. Additionally, this legislation refines the metrics by which public schools are evaluated while enhancing transparency and promoting parental access to information across Texas public schools.

HB 16 by Rep. Leech (Sen. Hughes) - State Judicial Omnibus Package

Provides needed support for improved efficiency and effectiveness of the Texas Judiciary, establishes new courts, modernizes judicial administration and operations, and delivers additional resources to address judicial workloads. Among the new courts this bill creates will be the 504th Dist. Court in Ellis County.

HB 18 by Rep. Shaheen (Sen. Adam Hinojosa) – Prohibiting Campaign Fundraising While Purposely Breaking Quorum

Creates new restrictions on political contributions and expenditures made by or on behalf of Texas Legislators who are intentionally absent from the state without an excused absence. The bill is targeting scenarios in which Legislators leave Texas to prevent legislative business from proceeding, a tactic previously used to block votes by denying the chamber a quorum. Overall, the bill aims to deter future quorum-breaking walkouts by limiting a legislator's ability to benefit from or support such actions financially through campaign activity.

HB 20 by Rep. Darby (Sen. Perry) – Enhancing Consumer Protection During Disaster Response

Aims to help protect disaster victims and Texans seeking to financially contribute to disaster recovery efforts from fraudulent solicitations. Following the catastrophic flooding in the Hill Country in early July, Texans reported many instances of scammers soliciting flood relief donations under false pretenses, including in one case by impersonating a local volunteer fire department that was carrying out recovery operations. This bill establishes a framework for educating the public, providing transparency for legitimate nonprofit disaster relief efforts, and creating criminal and civil penalties for those who exploit disaster victims or misrepresent themselves as disaster volunteers.

HB 23 by Rep. Harless (Sen. Bettencourt) – Promotion of Agriculture in Populous Counties

Codifies a property tax exemption for property owned by the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo that is used exclusively for charitable, educational, and scientific purposes and promotes agriculture, youth initiatives, and educational resources that benefit the state.

HB 25 by Rep. Shofner (Sen. Hall) – Making Ivermectin Easily Accessible

Allows for pharmacies to be able to sell Ivermectin over the counter without a prescription, with emphasis on rural areas. The pharmacist would have to act in accordance with any written standardized procedures or protocols issued by the Texas State Board of Pharmacy, including, if required, providing the person with instructions on the proper use of ivermectin.

HB 26 by Rep. Oliverson (Sen. Bettencourt) – Harris Co. Law Enforcement Services Contracts

Grants sheriffs and constables in counties with populations exceeding 3.3 million, currently applicable only to Harris County, the authority to enter into contracts for providing law enforcement services. These contracts may be made with local governments (including municipalities, school districts, utility districts, and others), property owners' associations, or individual landowners.

HB 192 by Rep. Oliverson (Sen. Bettencourt) – Harris Co. Law Enforcement Budget Reduction Elections

This bill, like the one above, only currently applies to Harris County and would require them to obtain voter approval before implementing budget reductions or reallocations affecting law enforcement agencies.

Bills Passed out of Senate

Below are those bills that were either on the Governor's Special Session call, but did not make it to his desk, or were not on the call, but were passed out of the Senate.

SB 6 by Perry (Rep. VanDeaver) – Banning THC Products; joint-authored

This bill would have banned the sale of all consumable hemp products that contain THC. The only consumable hemp products that would have remained legal under this bill are products that only contain cannabidiol (CBD) or cannabigerol (CBG). Both of these cannabinoids (active compounds in cannabis and hemp plants) are non-psychoactive compounds found in hemp that have therapeutic benefits including anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties, and may help manage conditions like anxiety, pain, and inflammation. This bill would not have altered the Texas Compassionate Use Program (TCUP) or laws related to the farming of hemp. A similar version of this bill was passed by both the House and Senate during session and was vetoed by the Governor. This version passed the Senate 22-8 and died in the House.

SB 10 by Bettencourt (Rep. Meyer) – Lowering the Voter Approval Property Tax Rate Threshold

The Senate's version of SB 10 would have modified the formulas used to calculate the voter-approval tax rate for a unit of local government except a municipality or county with a population of less than 75,000 or a special taxing unit. For a unit of local government to which the provisions of the bill apply, the percentage by which the no-new-revenue maintenance and operations tax rate would be increased in the voter-approval tax rate calculation would be reduced from 3.5 % to 2.5%. This bill passed both chambers, but the House added several amendments to the bill that basically uncapped Truth-In-Taxation allowing an unlimited property tax revenue increase on public safety expenditures, essentially allowing local governments to increase taxes well above the 2.5% without voter approval. A reasonable compromise was not able to be reached during conference committee.

SB 15 by Sen. King (Rep. Hefner) – Police Personnel Files

Would have protected the sensitive information of all peace officers in Texas by establishing a new category of employment records known as a "department file" for each licensed peace officer employed by a law enforcement agency. Specifically, this bill would have created a confidential department file to contain any letter, memo, or document related to the license holder that is not included in a personnel file, which is the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement's (TCOLE's) model. The legislation seeks to create greater inter-agency transparency and regulatory oversight in the hiring and evaluation of peace officers, while balancing confidentiality concerns. This legislation passed the Senate 18-12 and died during the House floor debate due to a sustained point of order.

SB 19 by Sen. Bettencourt – Banning Campaign Fundraising During Special Sessions

Currently, Texas law prohibits the Governor, Lt. Governor, and Legislators from raising campaign funds during regular legislative sessions. This bill would have banned campaign fundraising during special sessions to align with the law that already applies to regular sessions. Passed the Senate 21-6 and the House Elections Committee 5-0, but died in House Calendars.

SB 34 by Sen. Huffman – Transactional Immunity for Persons Testifying

Current law does not allow a person called by the Legislature or a legislative committee to refuse to testify or produce a document on the grounds that doing so will incriminate the person. In exchange, if a person is compelled to testify while claiming that the testimony or document may incriminate the person, Texas law grants the person complete immunity from prosecution, such that the person may not be indicted or prosecuted for any matter related to the testimony. This is known as transactional immunity.

This bill would have removed the incentive to testify to avoid criminal prosecution. Instead of transactional immunity, SB 34 would have granted testimonial immunity to compelled witnesses, meaning that the testimony or evidence a person must produce may not be used against the person in a criminal prosecution, but the person can still be indicted for the crime, excluding prosecution for any offense involving perjury. This bill passed the Senate 30-0 and failed to receive a hearing in the House

HB 27 by Rep. Harris (Sen. Nichols) – Groundwater Study of East Texas Aquifers

There are proposed large-volume groundwater production and export projects in the Neches & Trinity Valleys Groundwater District (NTVGCD) that could have substantial impacts on the Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifer, one of the East Texas's (SD 22 remains unaffected) key underground water sources, on other aquifers in the area, and on hydrologically connected surface water resources. Current available science to assess the anticipated hydrological effects of such large-volume projects is limited. HB 27 would have directed the Texas Water Development Board (TWDB) to conduct a comprehensive analysis that includes: (1) the maximum sustainable annual groundwater yield from aquifers within the district; (2) a comparison of that yield to the modeled available groundwater previously determined; and (3) an assessment of hydrological impacts from both existing and proposed groundwater production and transfers. The assessment must consider recharge rates, surface water interaction, spring flows, and other relevant environmental indicators. Though this bill passed both chambers, it ultimately died in conference committee.

On top of the work the special sessions provided, my team and I are hard at work on our post-session newsletter that is mailed to all registered voters in the district. This multi-page document will cover all the major activities that took place during the session, what legislative issues we tackled, and much more. Our newsletter serves as an excellent tool to help us reach the overwhelming majority of you. Look for the newsletter in the fall!

Thank you again for your interest in our updates. I hope you find them to be informative and that you'll share them with your friends, family, and colleagues in Senate District 22, who may find our past Capitol Updates [by clicking here](#).

In closing, I want to reiterate some comments from my farewell statement. As I conclude the mission the Lord has given me over these past 15 years, I do so with a sense of gratitude at all we have accomplished. Thank you for your unwavering support across the years, and for your part in helping ensure Texas remains strong and free. I will not only cherish the time I have had as your State Senator, but I will also cherish the remaining time in the interim until I officially depart. Talking with the citizens in each of the 12 counties I represent, I am reminded each day how truly blessed I am to have represented you in the Texas Senate. It continues to be my honor to serve you, and I look forward to seeing you around the district soon!

God Bless,



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