



Senator Birdwell's 'Capitol Update' **2-16-15**

Greetings from your Texas Capitol, and Happy President's Day. The last two weeks were quite busy at the Capitol as Senate committee hearings began taking place and the pace of bill-filing picked up. Additionally, this is the time during session in which legislators are visited by constituent groups the most. I'll touch on all of this and more below.

Additional Legislation Filed

In our last Update, we shared summaries of a few of the bills I had filed thus far, and even touched on a couple of important measures on which I had become a joint- or co-author. Here are a few more of my bills and two joint-authored bills:

SB 523 – Texas river authorities are charged with managing our state's most precious resource—water. This bill would place all such authorities under a limited, recurring review to be administered by the Sunset Advisory Commission, analyzing specifically each entity's governance, management, operating structure, and compliance with legislative requirements.

SB 526 – This simple free-market bill will remove an antiquated statute that unfairly protects major package-store chains by giving them a competitive advantage over smaller, independently-owned package stores.

SB 528 – I'm pleased to be working with Rep. Kyle Kacal on legislation that addresses the concerns brought up after the tragic 2013 explosion at the West Fertilizer Company. We have been fortunate to work with business owners, property owners and local governments to find solutions to the hazardous-chemical storage challenges in Texas.

SB 5 by Nichols (R-Jacksonville) – SB 5 (and SJR 5) would propose a constitutional amendment to dedicate the existing motor-vehicle sales tax directly to transportation infrastructure costs. This is a step forward in our continued efforts to increase truth-in-taxation and decrease diversions, all without raising taxes or fees.

SB 233 by Schwertner (R-Georgetown) – This legislation aims to make the skyrocketing cost of higher education more affordable for Texans by capping tuition and fees at their current levels and limiting any future increases to no more than the rate of inflation.

NOTE: When discussing my TSTC Red Oak Reclassification bill and Sen. Bettencourt's Homestead Exemption bill in the last Update, we did not yet have bill numbers to share with you. I can now tell you that those measures are SB 420 and SB 515, respectively.

Campus Personal Protection Act

Last week, I was proud to see the Campus Personal Protection Act (SB 11) pass the Senate Committee on State Affairs. This legislation will remove the criminal prohibition on the possession of a concealed handgun by a Concealed Handgun License-holder on the campus of a public or private institution of higher education. (With respect for private property rights, SB 11 allows for private and independent institutions of higher education to

set their own rules regarding CHL-holders carrying on campus.) The Act explicitly outlines and reiterates the places that a CHL-holder may not carry, even if such a location is on the premises of an institution of higher education (e.g. sporting events, hospitals, bars, and K-12 education facilities, etc). Additionally, SB 11 affords universities the ability to establish rules for the storage of handguns in dorms/campus residences, and the bill provides universities immunity from liability for the actions of a CHL-holder on campus. The Campus Personal Protection Act will be a major step forward in the affirmation of citizens' rights to self-defense. I'm eager to ensure that our CHL-holders—the most law-abiding demographic of our society—are not stripped of the rights they exercise at nearly all other types of locations in Texas.



Nominations Committee Hearing

As Chairman of the Senate Committee on Nominations, I held our first hearing on February 5 (pictured above). At that hearing, the committee members voted on our operating rules, introduced their respective staff members, and discussed our plan for the committee going forward. At our February 12 hearing, I invited two of our more time-sensitive gubernatorial nominees to come before the committee: Carlos Cascos, nominee for Texas Secretary of State, and Stuart Bowen, nominee for Inspector General of the Texas Health and Human Services Commission. Both candidates were unanimously approved by the committee, and both will go before the full Senate for a confirmation vote on February 18. In the coming weeks, I have announced my intention to call before the committee appointees to the Office of State and Federal Relations, the Texas Department of Insurance, and the boards of regents for the Texas A&M University and University of Texas systems.

Keeping Up During Session

Want to read (and see) more of what's going in my office and at your Texas Capitol? Be sure to follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#). With the Capitol Updates, my team and I work hard to boil down approximately two weeks of events and news into an enjoyable, informative product for the constituents I serve. As expected, we can't fit everything into the Update, so much of our day-to-day news can be found on our social media pages—especially photos of all the things we're up to in Austin.



Recent Visitors from Senate District 22

As I mentioned, our social media pages have lots of great photos of SD-22 visitors at the Capitol. Pictured above are just a few of the folks I was able to visit with recently (clockwise from top left): the City of Arlington legislative delegation; Johnson County Commissioners Larry Woolley (Pct. 4) and Kenny Howell (Pct. 2); the Hood County and City of Granbury legislative delegation; 2/4/15 Pastor of the Day, Dr. Richard Blanton, of New Hope Baptist Church (Waco) and the Central Texas Veterans Health Care System.

That's all for this edition of the Capitol Update. 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. Please visit my official website at www.senate.state.tx.us, follow us on Facebook/Twitter, and for all other needs, please visit the Texas Legislature Online at www.capitol.state.tx.us.

God bless you and God bless Texas!

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