



BRIAN BIRDWELL

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BIRDWELL PASSES RIVER AUTHORITY SUNSET LEGISLATION THROUGH TEXAS SENATE BY VOTE OF 31-0

AUSTIN—In an important step forward to ensure the accountability of Texas’ river authorities, State Senator Brian Birdwell (R-Granbury) passed Senate Bill 523 unanimously through the Texas Senate on Thursday, moving the permanent, recurring review of these entities one step closer to becoming law. Birdwell’s legislation requires the Sunset Advisory Commission to analyze each Texas river authority’s governance, management, operating structure, and compliance with legislative requirements.

“River authorities were created by the legislature, but their boards of directors are appointed by the governor and they receive no funding through the appropriations process,” Birdwell said while discussing the bill on the Senate floor. “Unfortunately, this creates a unique, quasi-governmental agency that provides no public recourse for citizens with concerns.”

“These appointed boards are not accountable to voters, and as such, a Sunset review will give citizens the ability to publicly discuss the governance and efficiency of how their water is managed, and further enable their legislators to impact necessary change through the Sunset recommendations,” Birdwell said after the vote. “I’m proud to have garnered the unanimous support of my colleagues, each of whom clearly sees the importance of this major legislative action.”

The Sunset Advisory Commission is appointed by the Lt. Governor and Speaker of the House; consists of five State Senators, five State Representatives, and two public-citizen members; and is supported by a nonpartisan research team with expertise across the legislative spectrum. The Commission works to identify and eliminate waste, duplication and inefficiency within state government, and through Senate Bill 523, will apply the same stringent review process to river authorities on a recurring basis. Most important among these functions, the Commission will make specific recommendations of a river authority, which can then be enacted in law by the legislature. Still, because of the critical role river authorities play in managing our state’s precious water resources, Senate Bill 523 notes that a river authority cannot simply be eliminated through this process.

River authorities will be reviewed on a biannual basis in an order recommended by Sunset Advisory Commission staff. Specifically, the assigned order will maximize efficiencies for the Commission by grouping together authorities of similar size and type. Not only will this ensure that the Commission staff is prepared to execute the most effective possible review of larger river authorities, but the order will guarantee a significant cost savings to the river authorities; thus benefitting water users and ratepayers. The order of review in Senate Bill 523 does not, however, prevent the legislature from enacting laws related to a river authority outside its review period.

Senate District 22 is impacted by two of the largest river authorities in Texas—the Brazos River Authority (BRA) and the Trinity River Authority (TRA). Senator Birdwell facilitated independent reviews of the BRA by both the Legislative Budget Board and the State Auditor’s Office in late 2014, the combination of which are nearly identical to the type of review the Commission will execute upon each river authority. As such, the BRA is scheduled for Commission review in 2021-22 and legislative action in 2023. The TRA is scheduled for review in 2019-20 and action in 2021.

Senate Bill 523 now moves to the House of Representatives for additional legislative action.

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Brian Birdwell is a native Texan, decorated military veteran, lifelong conservative Republican, survivor of the 9/11 terrorist attack on the Pentagon, and a proud husband and father. He currently represents the Bosque, Ellis, Falls, Hill, Hood, Johnson, McLennan, Navarro, Somervell and Tarrant [partial] Counties in Senate District 22.

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