Rodríguez: Sine Die marks end of 86th Regular Session

Report on Statewide issues, District 29 priorities

Austin –Sine Die, or "without day," signifies the last day of the Texas Legislature's regular session. For 140 days, legislators have met in committee and on the floor of both chambers to debate and vote on laws. Of more than 7,500 bills, joint resolutions, and concurrent resolutions filed, about 1,100 have been sent to the governor, while other bills have found their way into law as amendments.

During the 86th Texas Legislature's Regular Session, Sen. Rodríguez passed 33 bills as the primary author or sponsor addressing education, health care, local governance, economic development, and more. He also helped secure local funding priorities, including funding for the TTUHSC El Paso Schools of Medicine ($30 million) and Dentistry ($20 million), UTEP Pharmacy ($6.5 million), international bridge infrastructure ($32 million), and the Wyler Tramway ($5 million).

Laws passed by the Senator included one of his priority education bills - SB 139, informing parents about students' rights under federal laws for special education - and another priority, extending a pathway to diploma aside from passing a standardized test, passed as an amendment to SB 213. Sen. Rodríguez also passed a bill to help El Paso hospitals draw down federal money (SB 1751), and one that requires the state to assess shortages in certain health professions (HB 80).

It often takes several sessions for bills to pass, and Sen. Rodriguez this session advanced several important issues in health care and education by pushing bills further through the process than they had previously been. SB 2438, which would allow nurses to work within the scope of their training to provide more patient care than they are currently allowed, therefore increasing access to health care, received a hearing for the first time; so too did SB 514, which aims to protect journalism students and teachers from arbitrary censorship.

The Senator voted for a budget that advanced the ball on public education, a significant step toward reversing the disastrous 2011 budget cuts, and as noted worked with members of the legislative delegation to ensure that several El Paso priorities were funded (more details below). He co-authored a
bill that will add significant resources to our state parks and historical sites (SB 26 and SJR 24), and helped mitigate or stop legislation that would hurt Texas taxpayers and voters. SB 500 provides $857 million for the Texas Infrastructure Resiliency Fund (TIRF), which will provide entities across the state access to funding flood planning initiatives, resiliency planning, and hazard mitigation funding drawdown; the passage of HB 1325, the Hemp Bill, will provide Texas with a new source of revenue and provide our ag industry a new crop to produce and export across the nation, and the budget contains more than $2 million for the state hemp program for seed certification, product inspection, and other activities related to this new commodity.

"Our responsibilities in the Texas Legislature begin with the budget, the only law we are constitutionally mandated to pass each session. It is an expression of our priorities. It is long past time that we made public education the major priority," Rodríguez said. The Senator filed a bill to increase the added money for bilingual programs, and while that bill did not pass, the final education bill, HB 3, did end up increasing the amount of money in bilingual education by almost $1 billion. According to legislative calculations, the bill adds an average of about $700 each student in the 18 traditional public school districts in Senate District 29.

Regarding budget items of importance to District 29, the Senator worked with members of the El Paso House delegation, Speaker Pro Tem Joe Moody, and State Representatives Mary Gonzalez, Cesar Blanco, Lina Ortega, and Art Fierro, to:

- Secure a $10 million increase in overall funding for TTUHSC El Paso, which includes a medical school, nursing school, graduate biosciences school, and dental school. With respect to the dental school, the delegation secured $20 million in line item funding;
- Gain a $16.7 million increase in UTEP's overall budget, including $6.5 million for the pharmacy school, an increase of $1.8 million over last biennium;
- Ensure that the City of El Paso and the Texas Department of Transportation are able to apply the $32 million authorized last biennium to improve international bridge operations at Zaragoza and Bridge of the Americas;
- Find $5 million for repairs to the Wyler tram, the only tram in the state of Texas and an international attraction;
- Add more than $600,000 over the previous biennium for El Paso Community College; and
- Maintain funding of $30 million for Defense Economic Adjustment Assistance Grants to communities that support military bases.

Bills passed by the Senator as primary author or sponsor:

- **Criminal Justice**
  - SB 1164 addresses counterfeiting
  - SB 815 protects the rights of the accused
  - SB 1593 training TXDOT employees to detect human trafficking
  - HB 2747/SB 1433 licenses massage parlors to prevent human trafficking
  - HB 156/SB 217 addresses occupational license for a person convicted or under court supervision
• **City and County**
  - SB 1402 addresses fractionalized lots in east El Paso
  - HB 36/SB 253 expedites court proceedings for dangerous, deteriorated buildings
  - SB 254 allows appointment of court receivers for rehab of buildings
  - HB 145/SB 219 relates to sheriff and constable fees
  - HB 853/SB 512 allows El Paso Electric to deploy advanced metering infrastructure
  - HB 2287 authorizes HACEP to operate in the county
  - HB 4730 creates the El Paso Municipal Management District #1 in Northeast El Paso

• **Health Care**
  - SB 1751 allows UMC to create a LPPF to draw down federal dollars for uncompensated care
  - HB 4559/SB 593 allows mental health services providers to collect and bill private health plans for jail costs
  - SB 2038 occupational skills training for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities
  - HB 80 health professionals shortage report

• **Environment**
  - HB 1059/SB 1381 biennial report on stormwater infrastructure

• **State Bar of Texas**
  - Family Law: HB 553/SB 266 reduces conflict during child summer possession; HB 558/SB 262 clarifies child support for an adult disabled child
  - Real Estate, Trusts, and Probate Laws - HB 2779/SB 1167, HB 2780/SB 1166, HB 2782/SB 1208, HB 2245/SB 631, HB 2246/SB 309, HB 2248/SB 259

• **Veterans**
  - HB 714 establishes a veterans reemployment program
  - SB 1806 creates a specialty license plate for Nuclear Deterrence Operations Service Medal

• **Transportation**
  - SB 2248 allows Camino Real RMA to contract with TPWD on the Wyler Tramway
  - HB 2620 oversize vehicles
  - HB 3029 creates the Henry Gallegos Sr Memorial Highway on Spur 16 in Canutillo

• The Senator also helped make dozens of bills better via the amendment process, an important component of a Senator's work on the Senate floor, where bills are debated and voted upon for final passage from the chamber. The "pathway to diploma," filed as SB 140 and amended onto SB 213 as well as the "slow down to get around" bill, filed as SB 780, which adds sanitation workers to those whose work involves being in traffic, and adds penalties to motorists who don't slow down when passing them while engaged in their work.

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José Rodríguez represents Texas Senate District 29, which includes the counties of El Paso, Hudspeth, Culberson, Jeff Davis, and Presidio. Senator Rodríguez currently serves as the Chairman of the Texas Senate Democratic Caucus.