



85th Texas Legislature

Legislative Issues and News Update

January 13, 2017

The Texas Legislature convened January 10th and will be in Austin until May 29. During those 140 days, legislators will make decisions that profoundly impact long term care in Texas. Throughout the session, the Texas Health Care Association team will work to make sure the voices of long term care providers and friends are heard while also keeping you informed on the activities of the Legislature.

Stay tuned to these communications for the latest information on what is happening at the State Capitol.

Legislature

The 85th Texas Legislature officially came to order on Tuesday at noon.

The first order of business was to swear into office members of the House and Senate. Before family, friends and other well-wishers, legislators took their oaths with three new Senators and 20 new House members joining the ranks of their respective chambers.

As expected, the House unanimously reelected Joe Straus (R-San Antonio) as Speaker. Straus, who was endorsed in his reelection to the House by THCA PAC, becomes just the third member elected to a fifth term as Speaker.

Governor Greg Abbott and Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick (who presides over the Senate) will continue in their roles. Neither faced reelection last year.

Following the pomp and circumstance of opening day, little official action is expected from the Legislature over the next few weeks as members await committee assignments and referral of bills to committees. Behind the scenes, however, members and staff are discussing decisions which must be made on the budget and other major legislation.

Budget

Slow economic growth means Texas legislators will have less money to spend on the state's needs.

That was the message delivered by state Comptroller Glenn Hegar on the eve of the opening day of the 85th Legislative Session.

Hegar delivered what is known as the Biennial Revenue Estimate (BRE). The report comes every other year before the start of a new legislative session and tells legislators how much the state has in its coffers and expects to bring in for both the current and coming budget cycle. After a budget is adopted by legislators—likely at the end of this session in May—it will have to be certified by Hegar's office as not exceeding their revenue projections.

According to Hegar, legislators will have \$104.87 billion in state funds available for the 2018-19. That is about 2.7 percent less than they had to spend in the 2016-17 budget.

Hegar said several factors led to the reduction in available revenues. Those include falling oil prices, lower growth in sales tax revenue, and the decision of voters in 2015 to dedicate up to \$5 billion in sales tax every two years to the state's highway fund.

With state leaders showing no interest in tapping Texas' estimated \$11.9 billion Rainy Day Fund, Rep. Drew Darby—who is expected by many to be named as Chair of the House Appropriations Committee—said there are “obviously going to be cuts to the budget.”

Bills of Interest and Hearings this week:

The Speaker and Lieutenant Governor have not yet made their committee assignments so hearings on legislation are not expected to take place for at least 2-3 weeks.

Legislators have been able to file bills since November. Thus far, more than 1,500 have been offered. Those of interest to long term care providers include:

[HB 284](#) (Springer) Relating to authorization for certain health care facilities to secure residents with wheelchair self-release seat belts.

[SB 382](#) (Burton) Relating to donation of unused prescription drugs.

In addition, numerous bills have been filed to increase the minimum wage in Texas.

Capitol Visitors:

THCA providers have actively engaged their legislators and other state leaders for most of the association's 66-year history. Each legislative session has seen members taking time from their busy schedules to walk the halls of the Capitol to let their voices be heard. Those actions often have made a difference when legislators have made decision affecting nursing facilities.

This session, we are again urging all our members to visit the Capitol at least once. Our goal is to have groups coming every week of the session in order to get our message heard loud and steadily until legislators go back to their districts at the end of May.

Please let Scot Kibbe know if you are interested in advocating on behalf of long term care this session and he will be able to provide you current information and materials for your visits. He can be reached at 512-458-1257 or skibbe@txhca.org.

You can find who represents you and his or her contact information at <http://www.fyi.legis.state.tx.us/Home.aspx>.

Today in Texas History

1871—Jose Antonio Navarro, one of three Mexican signers of the Texas Declaration of Independence, died in San Antonio.

1974—DFW International Airport officially opened.

