

Legislative Update

A Publication of the TEXAS COMMUNITY COLLEGE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION
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August 2014

Healthy Finances to Greet 84th Regular Session

Whatever the results of the November elections for seats in the Texas Legislature, the state financial outlook will be robust compared to previous Sessions. House and Senate budget writers will use the latest estimate of projected revenues for the next biennium (2016-17) from the Comptroller of Public Accounts during the Regular Session, which convenes in January. “Available revenue” is a strong predictor of appropriations, absent tax cuts or shifts in policy priorities. One wild card to watch closely is pending litigation over public school funding.

Many observers credit the booming oil and gas industry with driving the healthy economy in Texas, plus an overall—albeit slow—recovery nationwide from the disastrous recession that began in 2008.

The revenue picture is certainly good news for community and technical colleges, but many schools have reported enrollment declines, which some observers attribute to a plethora of job opportunities in the energy industry for high school graduates. As community college leaders know, two-year schools often experience soft enrollments during periods of low unemployment—an unfortunate circumstance since funding from the Legislature is driven largely by contact hours.

Another development to follow closely is the projected implementation of outcomes-based funding for community colleges, based on Student Success Points. These benchmarks of student achievement will determine ten percent of appropriations for instruction, as stipulated by a law passed in 2013. Rider #23 in the General

Appropriations Act (SB 1) requires a new methodology for success points allocation be developed for the 2016-17 biennium “that compares the performance of the college district to itself” (SB1, p. III-200). Presumably, therefore, colleges will not compete against other schools (which obviously may have different challenges) for revenue.

A New Slate of Leaders

Whatever happens in the November elections, the legislative landscape will look very different when the Regular Session convenes in January.

First of all, we will have a new governor—either Attorney General Greg Abbott or Sen. Wendy Davis (D-Fort Worth). Most media prognosticators are betting on Gen. Abbott, partly because we haven’t had a Democrat in statewide office in two decades. However, you can expect a well-funded and interesting race. Some analysts believe Texas is poised (due to demographic factors such as age, gender, and ethnicity) to turn from “red” to “purple.”

Because of the defeat of Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst by Sen. Dan Patrick (R-Houston) in the Republican primary run-off, this office will change hands as well. Sen. Patrick’s opponent is Sen. Leticia Van de Putte (D-San Antonio). The Lieutenant Governor presides over the Senate, with formidable powers over legislation in that chamber.

Two other changes are noteworthy in the Senate. First, as noted earlier, is the departure of Sen. Robert Duncan (R-Lubbock), who chaired the important Committee on State Affairs. Second is the appointment (unless something very unexpected happens) of Sen. Jane Nelson (R-Flower Mound) to become the chair of the Committee on Finance. She replaces former chair Sen. Tommy Williams (R-The Woodlands), who resigned his Senate seat months ago to take a position with Texas A&M University. As for the House, the most

What You Can Do by Beaman Floyd

TCCTA Lobbyist



Now that the primary races are over, we need to be thinking about the most effective way to advance our priorities. After the November elections, successful candidates will start filing bills for the Regular Session, which will begin in January.

Due to a 2013 compromise, state budget writers and community colleges will probably not endure another round of “proportionality” debates when it comes to health benefits for community college educators under the Group Benefits Program. However, we can expect plenty of benefits-related funding difficulties when the Legislature meets to assess the revenue picture for the next biennium.

The general economic outlook for the future is mixed. On the one hand, the state’s economy is robust, with sales tax revenues and property values increasing. The boom in the energy industry is an important part of this story. However, public education and Medicaid will continue to consume an increasing share of resources. Regarding the former, we’ll want to keep a close eye on the abundant law suits aimed at equitable funding.

When visiting with members, I am asked, “What can I do?”—especially before the Session begins. First, join TCCTA. Your association is respected in Austin, and policy makers pay attention when your professional voices speak in unison, from every campus—and legislative district—in Texas. Next, get informed. Pay attention to our communications and contribute to the discussion on the TCCTA Blog.

Third, get to know your legislators now, while they are “at home.” Invite your representative and senator to visit your campus, ideally in a joint meeting with faculty, administration, and board members. It’s always impressive when all stakeholders are on the same page.

Finally, participate in TCCTA events—especially the Fall Conference for Faculty Leaders and the Annual Convention. I hope to see you there! ☆

Plan Now to Attend

**TCCTA Conference for
Faculty Leaders
September 26-27**

Marriott Hotel South, Austin

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