



## Representative Dan Huberty



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## Interim Update

The Texas legislature meets on a biannual basis, but that doesn't mean the work ever comes to a halt. The interim period is essential to the legislative process. It is a time to conduct legislative research, continue to meet with committees, and begin to build an agenda for the upcoming session. There are numerous issues facing our state this interim and I have been lucky enough to serve on several committees that are extremely active in preparing and researching issues that are vital to the future of our state.

As always, public education has been one of my top priorities this interim. We have already conducted three hearings on various interim study topics that were passed down by the Speaker of the House, Speaker Joe Straus (R-San Antonio). During the 83rd session, House Bill 5 was adopted by both chambers and signed in to law by Governor Perry. This bill, authored by Chairman Jimmy Don Aycock (R-Killeen), is a new educational reform package for Texas. Starting this Fall, high school students will have several new options for which path they would like to take to earn a high school diploma. Creating multiple paths to graduation allows students, their parents, and counselors a great opportunity to find the educational path that best fits the student's individual learning and career goals. House Bill 5 is still in the implementation phase and what remains to be seen is exactly how the curriculum will look once it is fully in place. When asked about the new law Chairman Aycock stated, "Any tweaks to the law won't be discussed until later this year. Until then, the focus remains on implementation." There are many more important decisions to be made leading up to the 84th legislative session, but we must allow enough time for the full implementation of the new education system before we jump to any premature conclusions regarding its success or failure.

In addition to the Public Education committee, this interim I was selected by Speaker Straus to serve as a member on the House Select Committee on Transportation Funding, Expenditures and Finance. The committee is chaired by Representative Joe Pickett (D-El Paso), who has a great deal of knowledge regarding transportation infrastructure and funding. I am serving on the committee with nine other members who represent districts all across Texas. Transportation has become one of the most pressing issues in our state. Building transportation infrastructure to match our growing population is essential to the future success of Texas. In addition to the ever growing population demands, ensuring that proper infrastructure is in place for businesses to continue to grow and operate in Texas is yet another major concern of the committee.

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## **Interim Update (continued)**

To this point in the interim, the committee has met once to consider the current state of transportation in Texas and to review the overall funding process. Chairman Pickett and his staff were instrumental in providing the committee with a fantastic panel of experts, including the newly appointed head of the Texas Department of Transportation, General Joe Weber.

I have also had the pleasure of serving on the House Committee on State Affairs this interim, which met in early May to consider campaign finance in the State of Texas and the issue of "dark money" campaign contributions. I am concerned that some contributions to entities that are actively seeking to influence elections in Texas are not subject to disclosure, while others are required to report contributions. It is essential to protect the integrity of our elections and that depends entirely on the ability of the public to be fully informed. During the committee hearing, Chairman Jim Clancy of the Texas Ethics Commission, gave very informative testimony on the matter of requiring disclosure of all donors to non-profit organizations. This is an issue that the committee as well as the rest of the legislative body will continue to monitor and review as we work toward the 84th Legislative Session.

My office and I are also in the process of developing new legislation to address many issues that impact District 127, the City of Houston and the state as a whole. We are conducting research on several diverse topics ranging from the sale of fireworks to the safety of high school student athletes. There will be many tough decisions that must be made during the 84th session. Legislators must work together to address many pressing issues that will affect our state long into the future. Water infrastructure, education reform implementation, transportation infrastructure and campaign finance are just a few of the issues that are important to every Texan. I am looking forward to working on a solution to these issues with many of the great leaders in our state to make the future brighter for all Texans.

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## **Kingwood Area Mobility Study Website Now Available Online**

Gunda Corporation, LLC. and the Kingwood Mobility Study Steering Committee launched a website today as part of ongoing efforts to provide information to and get feedback from the community regarding the ongoing Kingwood Mobility Study. The website provides the public transparent information regarding the traffic counts that were collected in February across the community as well as maps and corresponding data that were made available during the public stakeholder meeting earlier this month. The website will remain live during the duration of the study and will be periodically updated should any information be changed. Additionally, notifications about public meetings will be posted as well.

To view the website, please visit the link under "Kingwood Resources" on Council Member Dave Martin's webpage at [www.houstontx.gov/council/e](http://www.houstontx.gov/council/e) or at <http://gundacorp.com/kingwood-mobility>. Additionally, to submit feedback regarding the study or to offer traffic mitigation suggestions, the public is asked to send an email to [kingwoodmobility@gundacorp.com](mailto:kingwoodmobility@gundacorp.com). For more information, please contact Council Member Martin's office at (832) 393-3008 or [districte@houstontx.gov](mailto:districte@houstontx.gov).

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## State Lawmakers Focus on Early Learning Through NCSL Fellows Program

Story by Carroll Andrade



DENVER—Twenty-three state legislators and legislative staff from 14 states have been selected as Early Learning Fellows by the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL). Now in its third year, the program exposes fellows to the latest research and state policy ideas during a yearlong series of webinars and meetings on how best to make sure young children get a positive start in life.

“I have enjoyed the opportunity to work with colleagues from around the country on an issue so important to our future,” said South Dakota Senator Deb Soholt. “The rich information learned at last year’s meeting was immediately put to use in my state, and the contact with NCSL and other experts truly deepened my knowledge of early care issues.”

The fellows were nominated by state leadership and selected based on their interest and commitment to a wide range of education, health, human services, state budget and other issues as they relate to early learning. In addition to exploring new research and policy ideas, lawmakers and staff will learn and strategize about federal initiatives, including the Race to the Top-Early Learning Challenge and the Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting grants. This year’s efforts will build on the accomplishments made during the last two years by giving fellows the latest informational tools on brain research, economic findings and evidence-based programs.

“The Fellows program is a great opportunity for NCSL’s members to learn from each other, as well as to take advantage of the wealth of research on early learning conducted in recent years,” said Bill Pound, executive director of NCSL.

The 2014 Early Learning Fellows program kicks off May 15 and 16 in Denver. The fellows will meet four times, culminating in a final gathering focusing on best practices and the latest science Aug. 18 and 19 during NCSL’s Legislative Summit in Minneapolis. Program expenses are covered by a grant from the Alliance for Early Success. For more information, please visit [www.ncsl.org/fellows](http://www.ncsl.org/fellows).

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## **The Texas Miracle depends on our students**

By Michael Williams, Raymund Paredes and Andres Alcantar, May 26, 2014

Texas' economy is still the envy of the nation. The state has added 310,000 jobs across its 11 major industries in the last year. Monthly job growth has remained positive for more than three years. Our unemployment rate is well below the national average and continues to fall.

Economic indicators point to continued growth in Texas as new companies form and businesses expand or relocate here. But we can't just be the envy of the nation. We're competing not just with other states, but with countries like China and Germany. And while factors like tax policy and infrastructure will play important roles in our economic growth, a skilled, educated workforce will be Texas' greatest asset as we compete in a global economy. To keep our businesses competitive, we must identify and implement innovative education and workforce development opportunities.

Texas employers are already increasingly requiring employees to possess advanced math and critical thinking skills and technical capabilities. We consistently hear from employers about their need for workers with some form of education or skills training beyond a high school diploma. Given the changing workforce needs and economic demands here at home and around the world, it's our responsibility to work collaboratively to create more accessible and affordable education and training opportunities for all Texans. That's why we must provide every high school student with a strong academic foundation to support a lifetime of learning while offering them opportunities to explore college and gain marketable career skills.

The Texas Legislature last year passed House Bill 5, which gave local communities more control in setting high school graduation requirements and expectations. With more control comes more responsibility to ensure that young people leave high school with a diploma that has prepared them for the modern workforce or for additional education and training. We recently started traveling around Texas to meet with local employers and education leaders to strengthen partnerships, identify alternate pathways for students to gain marketable job skills, and encourage local innovation that will help meet current and future educational and workforce demands. Our message and purpose is clear: For Texas to compete, public and higher education must work more closely with business and industry to strengthen the education-to-workforce pipeline.

The good news is that local leaders have accepted the challenge. We're encouraged by many initiatives already in place throughout the state that represent the kind of local and regional collaboration that is essential. But the state must also do its part to support and nurture these efforts. That's why, in an unprecedented partnership between our three agencies, we each earlier this year committed \$1 million in seed money toward creating a series of career and technical education early-college high schools around the state. The initiative is designed to give high school students a head start on getting a high-skill, high-demand job by allowing them to simultaneously earn a high school diploma and a postsecondary credential in a career and technology field. Earning college credit while in high school will help students save money and offer them early exposure to the type of environment they'll encounter either in the postsecondary classroom or in the workplace.

Under the initiative, school districts and higher education institutions will jointly develop these programs in close coordination with workforce boards to ensure a high degree of alignment with existing and future jobs. Interest in this effort has been robust, and we anticipate announcing grants by early summer. Our hope is that these pilot programs provide a roadmap for other innovative partnerships. The Texas economic boom did not happen by accident — and it will not be sustained by chance. That's why we're encouraging leaders around the state to increase local academic standards, expand and encourage education and training beyond high school, raise student expectations and, most importantly, foster a culture of collaboration and innovation among school districts, higher education institutions and employers. As public education, higher education and workforce development leaders in every part of our state continue to do their part, we remain committed to doing ours.

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## **Texas Speaker of the House says "Use All Of The Highway Fund For Transportation"**

The Texas House will propose a budget next year that uses all of the money in the State Highway Fund for transportation instead of sending some of those dollars to other state agencies, House Speaker Joe Straus said Wednesday.

Various taxes and fees, such as the gas tax and fees on drivers' licenses, go into the State Highway Fund to pay for transportation. But for almost 80 years, some of that money has also helped fund agencies that are not directly related to transportation, such as the Department of Public Safety (DPS) and the Office of State Administrative Hearings. Using the State Highway Fund exclusively for transportation would increase funding for roads by about \$1.3 billion over two years.

"This approach will make the state budget even more straightforward, just as taxpayers expect," said Straus, R-San Antonio. "It will also provide needed transportation revenue – without a tax increase – as Texas continues to grow twice as fast as the rest of the country." Straus said that the continued strong performance of the Texas economy will allow the Legislature to fund DPS and other agencies affected by Wednesday's announcement.

"We will not abandon the state troopers and others who so bravely serve and protect Texans every day," he said. "The budget is a statement of priorities, and both public safety and mobility are top priorities for the Texas House."

The reform that Straus announced Wednesday is the latest piece of the House's effort to increase transparency in the state budget. For more than two decades, the state has increasingly relied on the practice of collecting taxes and fees for designated purposes, such as state parks and trauma care, but instead leaving that money unspent so that it could be counted to balance the rest of the budget.

The House reversed that trend last year, reducing by \$1 billion the amount of money that piled up in various accounts for the purposes of budget certification. "It's now time to take the next step," Straus said. "The House will continue working to increase transparency and accountability in state government as the next legislative session approaches. So far, we've made good progress. Using gas-tax dollars for transportation makes sense for our economy and for taxpayers."

With the Texas population continuing to grow rapidly, Straus said comprehensive transportation reforms continue to warrant discussion. He added, "I will continue to encourage all Members to propose bold transportation solutions that will make Texas an even better place to raise a family and do business."

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## **DPS Urges Texans to Prepare Early for Hurricane Season**

The Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) is informing residents about the upcoming hurricane season and advising individuals to begin preparing now for any possible storms. Hurricane season begins June 1 and continues through Nov. 30. "One of the best defenses against the destructive – and potentially deadly – power of a hurricane or tropical storm is early and adequate preparation, and Texans should start taking precautions now for the 2014 hurricane season," said DPS Director Steven McCraw. "Although residents living along the Texas coast are the most vulnerable, storms can disrupt and endanger the lives of residents throughout the state." All Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico coastal areas are subject to hurricanes or tropical storms. Because the strongest winds in a hurricane are not located precisely at the center, it is possible for a storm to affect conditions over land even if landfall does not occur.

Hurricanes can cause catastrophic damage to coastlines and areas several hundred miles inland, and winds can exceed 155 miles per hour. In addition, hurricanes and tropical storms can also spawn tornadoes, create storm surges along the coast and cause extensive damage from flooding.

Here are several measures residents can take now to prepare for potential storms:

- Assemble an emergency kit that includes essential documents, supplies and provisions.
- Review hurricane evacuation maps, and select a route for you and your family.
- Plan how all family members and pets will evacuate safely.
- Consider any special needs for individuals with disabilities or the elderly.
- Stay informed about changing weather conditions in and around your area.

For more information on these tips and other ways to prepare for the 2014 hurricane season, please visit: [www.texasprepares.org](http://www.texasprepares.org).

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## **House Committee To Review Proposed EPA Regulations**

The Texas House Committee on Environmental Regulation will review newly proposed federal rules to determine their impact on the Texas economy, as well as their impact on the reliability and affordability of electricity, Speaker Joe Straus said Thursday.

The Obama administration recently proposed a plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions nationally by 30 percent, as compared to 2005 levels, by 2030. Because individual states may have to reduce more than 30 percent in order for the country as a whole to meet that threshold, Texas faces a reduction of 39 percent.

"It's important for legislators to understand the potential impact of this federal mandate, not only on the cost and availability of electricity, but also on the broader Texas economy," Speaker Straus said. "The committee's work will guide the House's approach to this issue in next year's legislative session, and the seriousness of these proposed rules demands that we start working on that approach soon."

The committee will also review the state's standards for renewable energy and energy efficiency to determine if those standards can help meet any proposed reductions in emissions. In addition, committee members will work to determine what changes to those policies, if any, could help the state meet the new federal standards.

"A reliable energy supply is especially critical in a state like Texas because our population is growing twice as fast as the country as a whole," Straus said. "A number of Members have expressed concerns about the effects of these proposals on our power supply and our economy. The House will work with a range of stakeholders to make sure that Texas responds to these regulations in a prudent and responsible way."

Speaker Straus gave every House committee interim charges at the beginning of the year. Since that time, he has continued to highlight other House priorities heading into the next legislative session. That session will begin in January.

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