

## **Update from Austin**

**January 10, 2017**

Dear UH System Faculty and Staff –

Today marks the first of the 140 days of the 2017 Regular Session of the Texas Legislature. As an agency of the state of Texas, our University of Houston System actively participates in the important activities that will take place at the Texas Capitol in Austin.

The 2015 Legislative Session was particularly successful for higher education in general and for the University of Houston System in particular, thanks to the support of our elected leaders. We received authorization for \$320 million in tuition revenue bonds (TRBs) to build much-needed infrastructure at all of our universities, obtained an increase in the basic funding formula based on the number of semester-credit hours taken by our students, and secured further investment in university excellence, like establishing the Governor's University Research Initiative (GURI), which

allowed UH to recruit and hire three new members of the National Academy of Sciences.

For this legislative session, success for higher education will be measured in a much different way as a result of the financial outlook of our state budget, primarily because of reduced oil prices leading to reduced state revenues. We have already been asked to submit a preliminary budget request cutting 4 percent from the special items in our budgets, a reduction of about \$2.5 million to our System. Texas Comptroller Glenn Hegar has just released his first revenue estimate for the next state budget, estimated at \$104.9 billion, \$2.1 billion less than the final state budget of the current biennium. Depending upon how our legislative leaders choose to address this difficult budget cycle, it is possible that we could be asked to face further reductions.

With that being said, our agenda this legislative session focuses on asking the Legislature to continue to invest in higher education in order to maintain affordability and promote excellence at all four of our institutions.

The legislative priorities of our System are:

- Avoid the 4 percent cut to special item funding
- Increase our base formula funding to 2011 levels (\$55.39/semester credit hour to \$62.19/sch)
- Invest in state-supported financial aid, specifically TEXAS Grants
- Provide full coverage for the cost of Hazlewood benefits (approximately \$13 million/year in FY 2016)
- Equalize funding between health and non-health institutions for health-related programs like nursing and pharmacy

For further details and a more comprehensive list of all the requests of UHS and each university, please visit: Legislative Agenda

( <http://www.uhsystem.edu/governmental-relations/tx-legislature/agenda/index.php> )

In addition, our system will continue to oppose the University of Texas System's expansion into Houston through the purchase of 332 acres of land within 10 miles of UH and UH-Downtown and 20 miles of UH-Clear Lake.

Traditionally, this office coordinates a “University of Houston System Day at the Capitol” each session. This session, however, each university within the System will be holding its own “Day at the Capitol” on separate dates (UH and UH-Victoria will be held the same day). While this is primarily an opportunity for students and alumni to voice their support for our priorities, it can also be attended by staff and faculty. If you are a faculty or staff member and wish to attend, you must take a vacation day unless you are participating as part of your regular duties. (For more information about that, please contact my office or refer to this [SAM \[http://www.uh.edu/af/universityservices/policies/sam/9GovRelations/9A1.pdf\]](http://www.uh.edu/af/universityservices/policies/sam/9GovRelations/9A1.pdf) for further guidance.

The UH System Days at the Capitol are scheduled for:

- Tuesday, Feb. 21, UH-Downtown
- Tuesday, Feb. 28, UH-Clear Lake
- Wednesday, March 1, UH ( [www.uh.edu/uhdadc](http://www.uh.edu/uhdadc) ) and UH-Victoria

Going forward, I plan to update you on a timely basis as the legislative session progresses. In order to review up to date information, please visit

our web page (<http://www.uhsystem.edu/governmental-relations/tx-legislature/index.php> ) regularly. I also encourage you to follow me on

Twitter @UHjsmith.

Regards,

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