STATE LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

January 27, 2011

(This update is produced by the UH System Office of Governmental Relations and the UH Division of University Advancement as a service to our students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends.)

Senate Files Appropriations Bill and Finance Committee Hearing Set

On Friday, we will be celebrating the University of Houston's new status as a Carnegie top tier research university so this weekly report is being issued a day early. It should be noted that Senator Dan Patrick invited Chancellor Renu Khator to discuss this new achievement on his radio program last week.

The third week of the session was dominated by Voter ID legislation in the Senate and by adoption of rules in the House. House members had until Wednesday afternoon to turn in their preference cards for committee assignments. The House has two types of committees. Substantive committees consider issues directly relating to specific topics (higher education, transportation, public health, e.g.). Procedural committees handle internal issues like administration of the House and the setting of calendars. Half of the membership of the substantive committees is named based on seniority preference. The balance is named at Speaker Straus' discretion. We do not expect the Speaker to announce committees until late next week at the earliest.

Senator Steve Ogden (R-College Station) filed the appropriations bill (SB 1). It bears some resemblance to the bill released by Representative Pitts last week. Special items were treated equally in both bills with a standard twenty-five percent reduction. In addition, financial aid is devastated in both bills. However, formula funding is roughly four percent higher in the Senate bill, yet still a substantial reduction from current levels. Vice Chancellor Carl Carlucci has posted a detailed analysis at http://www.uh.edu/af/budgetbiennialFY12-FY13.htm.

The Texas Constitution limits the order of business for the Legislature and restricts the first 30 days of the session for the introduction of bills and the succeeding 30 for committee hearings unless the Governor has designated legislation as an emergency. More often than not both the Senate and the House vote to suspend this rule which requires a four fifths affirmative vote. The Senate has suspended the rule so that only the Finance Committee may proceed with hearings on the appropriations bill. Their first meeting is on Monday. Our hearing is scheduled for February 14, Valentine's Day.

Lt. Governor David Dewhurst officially named the Finance Committee membership this week: Senator Ogden, of course, was renamed as chairman. The other members are Senators Juan Hinojosa, vice chair (D-Mission), Bob Dueull (R-Greenville), Robert Duncan (R-Lubbock), Kevin Eltife (R-Tyler), Craig Estes (R-Wichita Falls), Eddie Lucio (D-Brownsville), Jane Nelson (R-Lewisville), Dan Patrick (R-Houston), Kel Seliger (R-Amarillo), Florence Shapiro (R-Plano), Royce West (D-Dallas), John Whitmire (D-Houston), Tommy Williams (R-The Woodlands), and Judith Zaffirini (D-Laredo).

We have not seen it mentioned in the papers yet, but State Comptroller Susan Combs has let it be known (and it is being discussed on various political blogs) that she intends to run for Lt. Governor in the event that Lt. Governor Dewhurst succeeds Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison. Many others are being widely discussed.

Please see the weekly bill report for a listing of pertinent bills. More information on legislation may be found at http://www.capitol.state.tx.us.