Texas A&M
Advocacy Network
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Howdy, Advocates!

With the elections in the rearview mirror, members are gearing up for new legislative sessions in both Washington, D.C., and Austin. In a surprise announcement, U.S. Sen. Lamar Alexander - the chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee - said he would not seek re-election in 2020. In Austin, it's now clear who will lead the lower chamber: Dennis Bonnen (R-Angleton). I would like to also add a special congratulations to one of our newly elected Aggies: Jared Patterson, who received his bachelor's degree in political science as a member of the fighting Texas Aggie Class of 2005. We are excited for his work to come on many important issues which face our state and our nation.

Most political pundits and new or returning members seem to agree on the likely agenda of the 86th Legislature: education funding (K-12), property tax reform, and Hurricane Harvey recovery. Other likely topics will be infrastructure, criminal justice reform, and school safety. Similar to previous sessions, revenues and expenditures will be the main focus. Please see the enclosed section from Texas A&M's Government Relations department for a breakdown of state and federal legislative issues.

Prior to each state legislative session, Texas A&M develops a set of priorities to guide and inform the elected members in Austin. For the 86th session, there are four areas of particular importance to our university: **formula funding,** the **Texas Research University Fund, funding for non-formula items,** and **Data Science for Energy**. Further details, and a detailed explanation of each priority, can be found in this edition of the Advocacy Newsletter.

Lastly, if you have not already done so, please consider joining our volunteer contingent during Orange and Maroon Legislative Day (OMLD) by clicking **here**.

Happy holidays from the Advocacy Network!

Dave Fujimoto '17

Director of Strategic Engagement

Government Relations: Federal Update

Five of the 12 appropriations bills have been passed by Congress and signed into law by President Trump (including education). These five bills account for approximately 75% of annual discretionary programs. The remaining appropriations bills have been part of a continuing resolution (CR) that was to end on Dec. 7.

With the passing of former President George H.W Bush on Nov. 30, Congressional leaders and President Trump agreed to a two-week extension that will fund the federal government through Dec. 21. Currently, the major roadblock on moving the remaining appropriations bills forward is the debate over increased border security funding. The president has indicated that without increased money towards border security, he is willing to shut down the government. We will continue to monitor this situation and report back as appropriate.

On Dec. 10, leaders of the House and Senate Agriculture committees reached a compromise on the Farm Bill. The conference report passed the Senate by a vote of 87-13. The House took up the measure in an overwhelmingly bipartisan vote. President Trump is expected to sign the measure into law once it reaches his desk.

As the 115th Congress winds down, it was expected the House and Senate would adjourn this week. However, with several remaining appropriations bills to consider (see above), in addition to some other proposals (tax bill, financial aid reform), Congress is expected to be in session heading into the new year.

The 116th Congress will convene Jan. 3, and for the first time in four years, we will have a divided Congress with Democrats reclaiming the majority in the House, while the Republicans maintain their majority in the Senate. It is all but certain that Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) will reclaim the speakership in the House once the next Congress begins, and that both Sen. Mitch McConnell (R-KY) and Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-NY) will remain their respective party leaders in the Senate.

Government Relations: State Update

Today marks just 17 days until the start of the 86th Legislative Session on Jan. 8; however, activity for the session has already started:

Rep. Dennis Bonnen (HD-25) from Angleton has secured a sufficient number of pledges that should elect him speaker of the Texas House when they reconvene.

Legislators started "pre-filing" bills on Nov. 12, and by noon had already filed more than 400 bills. To date, over 700 bills have been pre-filed (not including continuing or joint resolutions), with 42 of those directly related to higher education, 72 related to land, housing and real estate, and 118 related to schools and teachers.

On average, a little over 6,000 bills are filed each session by the Legislature, with about 20% being signed into law. However, in the past two sessions (85th and 84th), about 15% were signed into law.

While the total number of bills filed over the past three sessions has increased an average of 4.3% each session, the rate of bills signed by the governor into law has decreased an average of 3%.

Throughout each session, almost 30 unit leaders (bill analysts) across campus provide analysis on a variety of filed bills that could impact Texas A&M if passed into law. This provides our administration and state relations team with critical and timely information to provide to legislators and staff during the session.

For the 85th session, Texas A&M bill analysts (or their delegates) provided analyses on 459 higher education-related bills, of which 59 (13%) were signed into law. Having analysis on bills that did not pass is also beneficial, since those can be refiled in future sessions.

Property taxes and school finance are likely to be top legislative priorities this session for the Legislature. However, as with every session, the challenge remains in finding the revenue and resources for these priorities.

Texas A&M Priorities for the 86th Legislature

1) ROBUST FORMULA FUNDING

Base funding - through the general academic formula - provides the same state funding for students taking the same courses across all public higher education institutions. Formula funding and tuition are the two primary sources of funding for instruction and operations at Texas A&M. General revenue (GR) per student has dropped from $5,216 ($6,070 when inflation-adjusted) in 2008 to $4,716 in 2018. When the state is unable to maintain formula rates to keep up with inflation, enrollment growth, the increasing costs of educating tuition-exempted students, and the cost of maintaining excellence for our students, it puts pressure on tuition.

2) TEXAS RESEARCH UNIVERSITY FUND (TRUF)

Our second priority is to maintain current funding rates for the TRUF formula, Texas A&M's second largest source of GR. This fund, in addition to the Governor's University Research Initiative, allows Texas A&M to compete with other national research universities in recruiting and maintaining outstanding faculty. The support provided by these programs was instrumental in bringing a number of highly recruited faculty to Texas since 2015. Since that time, our research expenditures have increased 4.48% from $866.7 million to $905.5 million, and the number of our National Academy members has increased from 30 to 37. Funding for TRUF decreased almost 22% from last biennium to this biennium.

3) NO CUTS AND FULL FUNDING FOR ALL PROGRAMS

Our third priority is for all programs to be fully funded and not incur any cuts, including non-formula items (e.g., Texas Sea Grant, Texas A&M Cyclotron, Texas A&M Colonias Program, and Energy Resources Program). Our non-formula funding helps the state in public service, basic and applied research.

While we do not receive a large amount of non-formula funds, what the university does receive and how it leverages these funds are important to Texas.

4) DATA SCIENCE FOR ENERGY

Through Texas A&M's strong energy-related programs and the newly created Texas A&M Institute of Data Science, the university is uniquely positioned to make an impact on both the research and workforce development aspects of Texas' current and future energy supply. Data Science for Energy will seed projects to attract significant external federal and industry funding. It will also enable researchers to collaborate with energy industry partners to analyze and act on massive amounts of complex data from oil, wind, solar and nuclear sectors. All of these areas hold the keys to Texas' leadership as the energy capital of the 21st century. The institute will also focus on training the future workforce to fill jobs in the energy industry and other data intensive sectors of the state and U.S. economy.

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AggieNetwork@AggieNetwork.com   AggieNetwork.com

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