

# BIG CHANGES COMING TO THE TEXAS CAPITOL IN 2015

by Angela Hale

*Big changes will be coming to the Texas Capitol when the Texas Legislature reconvenes in January of 2015. When change comes to Austin, organizations like ours --Community Associations Institute and our statewide organization, Texas Community Association Advocates-- will have to spend a significant amount of time at the Texas Capitol educating all the new statewide elected officials and legislators about issues facing Texas business, industry and homeowners.*

We along with many organizations from across the state including business owners, electric utilities, oil and gas companies, other regulated industries, trade associations and other groups will have to be more vigilant than ever making sure our voices are heard by all the new elected officials. The 2014 statewide elections feature more open seats — posts without incumbents seeking re-election — than any Texas election since 1990. The biggest change will be a new governor for the first time in 14 years. Since Governor Rick Perry decided not to run for re-election, Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott is leaving his post and competing against Ft. Worth State Senator Wendy Davis for the top job as governor.

Not only will we have a new governor, we will have a new lieutenant governor presiding over the Texas Senate and the Senate itself will be markedly more conservative. After 11 years in office, current Lt. Governor David Dewhurst lost in the Republican primary to Houston State Senator Dan Patrick. Patrick will face San Antonio State Senator Leticia Van De Putte for the post of Lt. Governor in November. The Senate itself will be much different than it has been in the past. In the 2012 elections, six faces changed in the Senate, including five Republicans who were a notch or two more conservative than their predecessors. An additional eight seats will change in 2014 and will likely be held by more conservative senators than their predecessors. Whether a Republican or a Democratic lieutenant governor ultimately leads the Senate, it will have a Republican majority, and the majority of those Republicans will enter the room as movement conservatives.

What do all these changes mean to CAI and TCAA? To put it in perspective, every legislative session approximately 5,000 bills are filed by members of the legislature hoping the measures will become new laws. Each session, dozens or sometimes hundreds of bills are targeting homeowner,



property owner and condominium owner associations attempting to add more regulations or make changes to how we live or do business in some way. The sheer number of bills filed require TCAA, as your legislative advocate at the Capitol, to be ever vigilant in tracking, watching, testifying and visiting offices to ensure our position is known to the 150 members of the House, 31 members of the Senate and the leadership, including the Governor, Lt. Governor and Speaker of the House.

Also of note, several prominent faces at the Texas Capitol who have advocated for property owner associations and the industry for many years lost their seats in the legislature this election. With some of our biggest champions gone, we will have to spend more time building new relationships with members of both parties to become new champions for our cause.

We also know our opponents, those who wish to over-regulate, over-tax, those who wish to cost homeowners and business owners valuable time and money, those who oppose requiring all homeowners to pay their fair share of expenses for the right to live in a property owner association, will be at the Texas Capitol painting homeowner associations as wrongdoers and calling for new laws to regulate property owner associations.

It will be up to all of us to ensure legislators receive accurate information about how we do business, how we manage our associations, how we govern, how we operate and teach best practices and how the vast majority of Texans are pleased with their homeowner associations. This means we will need to spend time educating a new crop of leaders about property owner and homeowner association issues. We will need the help our members to be

vigilant in advocating our positions and getting to know your local representatives and senator to make sure they know you are their constituent and you are an active, thoughtful citizen who cares about your community and your state government.

We will need a large turnout at the TCAA rally day during the session. Nothing speaks to the legislature more than a powerful presence at the Capitol. There is considerable

strength in numbers and representation from every corner of the state.

Get an early start. Either now, or after the November election, look up your state house representative and state senator on the legislative websites. It will be a good first step, because when the legislative session begins in January, it will be more important than ever for members of CAI and TCAA to communicate with our legislators to ensure we protect all Texans who live in homeowner associations and we advocate for the businesses that serve the associations. We will end on an inspirational closing note from Myla Chandler, CMCA, AMS of Planned Community Management, Inc., one of the participants in our 2013 legislative advocacy day and we encourage you to participate in our 2015 legislative advocacy day.

“I came to Austin because personally and professionally my values align with the TCAA and I value the work that TCAA and CAI do for our industry. It is important to use our experience and expertise to share our perspective with the lawmakers, and to share with them the ideas and reasonable language to add to the bills that will consider the grass roots living of homeowners and neighborhoods, which form communities that we live in. I learned that there is a good chance that my personal ideas as a homeowner and as an association manager were listened to and were taken seriously by those I was addressing. I felt like I contributed to a positive impact and had a genuine opportunity to support the collective efforts of TCAA and other homeowners. It was great to be a part of a group of people from all over Texas that came together to have a unified voice. I learned that it is important to speak to the context that we are communities of connected people and not just associations filled with rules. We need to remember that this is the smallest form of self government in the world and that we need to help protect the rights of and defend the communities that we live in for ourselves and the future generations.”

***TCAA is the public policy voice of community associations and the professionals who serve them. Our supporters are united by a common mission: To ensure that Texas community associations function properly for the benefit of all residents, that property values are protected and that community associations are well governed and properly managed to serve homeowners across Texas.***

