

# State Capitol Highlights

By Ed Sterling of Texas Press Association

## Dewhurst appoints Senate Finance chair

AUSTIN — Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst on July 17 appointed Sen. Jane Nelson, R-Flower Mound, as chair of the powerful, state budget-writing Senate Finance Committee. The two-year state budget totals close to \$200 billion.

Nelson, the first woman in the history of the state to chair the committee, called the appointment “a tremendous honor and responsibility” and pledged that under her leadership the committee would “keep the Texas miracle moving full steam ahead.” She has served as a member of the committee for seven legislative sessions, including the current session. The committee soon will be at work, as state agency legislative appropriation requests pour in.

Dewhurst, who presides over the Texas Senate, also named additional members of the committee: Sens. Brian Birdwell, R-Granbury; Kelly Hancock, R-North Richland Hills; Robert Nichols, R-Jacksonville; and Sen. Charles Schwertner, R-Georgetown. Those senators replace Sens. Tommy Williams, R-The Woodlands, who resigned to take a position with Texas A&M; Bob Deuell, R-Greenville, who was defeated in the March Republican primary elections; Robert Duncan, R-Lubbock, who resigned to become chancellor of Texas Tech University; and Glenn Hegar, R-Katy, who is running for state comptroller.

Dewhurst also appointed Nelson and three senators to another powerful panel, the Legislative Budget Board. The three are Sens. Kevin Eltife, R-Tyler; Craig Estes, R-Wichita Falls; and Juan “Chuy” Hinojosa, D-McAllen. The

board is a body of five members of the Senate and five members of the House of Representatives. The body sets the constitutional spending limit and develops the draft appropriations bill.

Dewhurst’s term of office ends Dec. 31. Sen. Dan Patrick, R-Houston, and Sen. Leticia Van de Putte, D-San Antonio, are vying to be the state’s next lieutenant governor. Whoever wins will have the power to appoint all Senate committees.

## Election law case is heard

A state House redistricting plan passed by the 2011 Texas Legislature was challenged in a San Antonio U.S. district court last week.

The lawsuit, brought by minority voting rights plaintiffs and joined by the U.S. Department of Justice, alleges the Texas Legislature intentionally diluted the voting strength of minorities in several districts. Also in question is whether Texas should return to the federal voting rights law’s “preclearance” requirement that the state had been subject to since the law was passed in 1965 — until 2013 — when federal preclearance of election laws passed by covered entities such as Texas was struck down in a 5-4 decision by the U.S. Supreme Court in *Shelby County (Alabama) v. Holder*.

Later this summer, the court will hear other cases over the Texas Legislature’s 2013 House redistricting plan and 2011 and 2013 congressional redistricting plans. A decision by the three-judge court panel is to be rendered after all of the cases have been heard.

## Texas adds jobs in June

Texas Workforce Commission on July 18 announced the state economy added 19,100 seasonally adjusted total non-farm jobs in June for a total of 371,000 jobs added since June 2013.

Texas’ seasonally adjusted unemployment rate in June was 5.1 percent. In June 2013 the rate was 6.4 percent. Nationally, the unemployment rate for June 2014 was 6.1 percent, an improvement of 1.4 percent over the previous year, as calculated by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

## Ranger reaches high rank

Texas Department of Public Safety on July 17 announced the promotion of Texas Ranger Wende Wakeman to the rank of lieutenant, making her the highest-ranking woman in Texas Ranger history, according to an agency news release.

The promotion is effective Aug. 1. Wakeman joined the DPS as a highway patrol trooper in 1998. She became a DPS narcotics sergeant in 2003 and moved to the Texas Rangers in 2008.

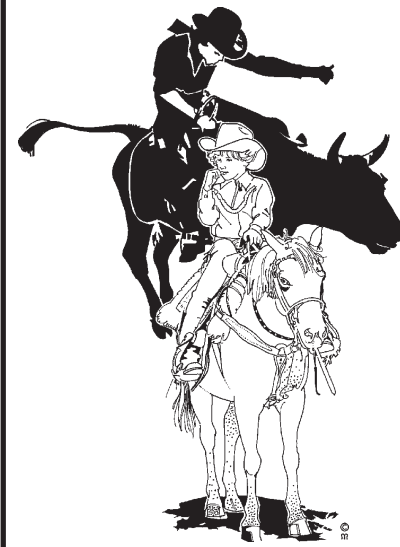
## Council rejects proposed ban

Denton City Council, at its July 15-16 meeting, voted down a citizen-driven proposed ordinance to ban hydraulic fracturing by the oil and gas industry within city limits. A citizen petition, however, gained enough signatures to put the proposal on the November election ballot.

## Court OKs admissions policy

The U.S. Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals, in a 2-1 decision on July 15, ruled the University of Texas’ method of achieving racial diversity in selecting incoming freshmen did not violate the constitutional rights of a white student who did not gain admission to the institution in 2008 and sued.

Heard by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2012, the case was remanded to the Fifth Circuit for “strict scrutiny,” that is, to determine if the university’s policies were necessary and effective toward enrolling a “critical mass” of minority students.



**Rodeo  
begins at  
8 p.m.  
on Friday**



**WILBUR-ELLIS**

*Home Is Where The ‘Hart’ Is*



**Brown Crop  
Insurance Services**