

AUGUST 2002

State Senator

# JEFF WENTWORTH

## LEGISLATIVE REPORT & QUESTIONNAIRE

**Dear Fellow Texans,**

For almost 10 years, it has been an honor and a privilege to represent you in the Texas Senate. Because of the redrawing of Texas Senate lines that takes place every decade following the federal census, I regret that I will no longer be representing many of you as of next January when the Texas Legislature convenes.

Senate District 25 will include all of Comal, Guadalupe, Hays and Kendall Counties and portions of Bexar and Travis Counties.

At the end of November, I will close my San Angelo district office. Many of you have had the opportunity to work with my district administrative assistant, Kay Bates. Kay has been a committed and dedicated staff member, and I publicly thank her for her hard work and conscientious service on behalf of my West Texas constituents.



Those of you in Blanco, Gillespie, Kerr, Kimble, Llano and Mason counties will be in Senate District 24 beginning in January. Schleicher and Tom Green Counties have been moved to Senate District 28. Bandera, Medina and Sutton Counties will now be part of Senate District 19, while all of Williamson County will be in Senate District 5.

Those of you whom I have represented in Travis County will now be in Senate District 14, and I will represent a portion of southern Travis County.

Inside this newsletter you will find information on some of the committees that have been appointed to study and make recommendations on issues that will be considered when the Legislature convenes in January. I encourage you to send me your ideas and opinions concerning the work of these committees.

I would be grateful if you would take a few minutes to tell me your opinion on a wide variety of issues. Two years ago, more than 18,000 constituents took the time to complete and return the questionnaire.

For those of you who will no longer reside in Senate District 25, I will be happy to forward your responses to your new Senator in January.

Thank you very much for your participation in this democratic, representative process.

Sincerely,

Jeff Wentworth

### HOW TO CONTACT SENATOR WENTWORTH

#### **Austin Office**

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#### **San Antonio Office**

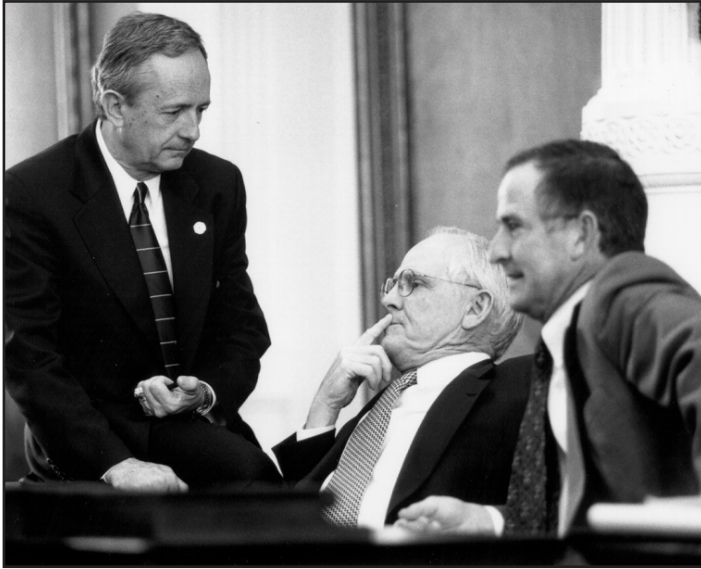
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Internet E-Mail Address: [jeff.wentworth@senate.state.tx.us](mailto:jeff.wentworth@senate.state.tx.us)

# LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM



*Conferring with Lt. Governor Bill Ratliff and Senate parliamentarian Walter Fisher on the dais in the Senate chamber.*

## County Development

As one of the fastest growing areas of Texas, Senate District 25 faces challenges in managing what many call “urban sprawl.” Between 1990 and 2000, Comal, Hays and Kendall counties doubled in population, while Guadalupe County grew by a third.

Between legislative sessions, Senate and House committees are studying the impact of this growth in unincorporated areas of counties, including housing development, subdivision regulation, water, and general health, welfare and safety.

County governments lack sufficient authority to provide protection for the purchaser of lots or homes in these subdivisions. During the 2001 legislative session, I filed two bills that would have helped manage “urban sprawl.” S.B. 800 would have given county commissioners courts the authority to require a plat for land that is subdivided into two or more lots, each of which is five acres or less, and intended for residential use.

Counties do not have the authority to address and correct the problems of substandard developments in the unincorporated areas of counties. My other bill, S.B. 1762, would have authorized a county, after approval by local voters, to regulate land development in the unincorporated area of the county.

When the Legislature convenes in January, I plan to file these two bills again to help Texans who want better health and safety in rural Texas.



*Visiting with Representative Delwin Jones of Lubbock who chairs the House Redistricting Committee.*

## The Rising Cost of Homeowner’s Insurance

Many Texas homeowners are receiving huge increases in their homeowner insurance premiums. In addition, some insurers have stopped writing new homeowner’s policies in Texas due to the rising number of mold claims. Many insurance companies that are still providing policies in Texas are now offering only a Homeowner’s A (HO-A) policy which covers only the types of damage specifically named in the policy. Until this year, most Texans were covered by a Homeowner’s B (HO-B) policy which provided all-risk coverage.

In the homeowner’s insurance market in Texas, non-rate regulated insurers currently write 95 percent of policies issued. The *policies* are subject to regulation, but the *rates* charged by these insurers are not. In November 2001, Insurance Commissioner Jose Montemayor modified the Texas standard HO-B policy to retain coverage for mold only if it is the result of a sudden and accidental discharge of water. Texans now have the option of buying additional mold coverage in increments of 25, 50, or 100 percent.

The Senate Business and Commerce Committee and the House Insurance Committee are studying the current homeowner’s insurance market in Texas. These committees are expected to make recommendations to the 78th Legislature on how to maintain a competitive market for homeowner’s insurance in Texas.

In the meantime, I encourage my constituents to compare the rates of several different insurance companies before choosing a policy for their home. Information regarding mold issues and homeowner’s insurance rates may be obtained on the Texas Department of Insurance web site at [www.tdi.state.tx.us](http://www.tdi.state.tx.us), or by calling TDI’s Consumer Protection Division at 1-800-252-3439.



*Presiding as chairman of the Senate Redistricting Committee at a committee meeting in the Senate chamber.*

## Texas Online

Texans may avoid the hassle of driving to government offices and waiting in line by visiting [www.texasonline.com](http://www.texasonline.com) which is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

TexasOnline.com is the official e-Government website for the State of Texas where you may access state and local government services through one central website. You may renew your driver’s license, vehicle registration and some professional licenses, pay traffic tickets and business sales taxes. You may also apply for admission to a state university or join the Texas Tomorrow Fund.

Additional services are being added to make government services more accessible and convenient for everyone.

# INTERIM STUDIES

Below are the names and functions of some of the interim committees. For complete information, please go to [www.capitol.state.tx.us](http://www.capitol.state.tx.us). You may direct inquiries or recommendations concerning a committee to me at my Capitol office. I will forward your communication to the appropriate committee chair.



*Taking the oath of office with my colleagues on the floor of the Texas Senate at the beginning of the 77th Legislature.*

Interim committees have conducted dozens of public hearings across the state, gathering information from Texans about important matters.

Texans may be unaware that between legislative sessions they may become involved in the legislative process by testifying at a committee hearing. Hearings are open to the public, and citizens are invited and encouraged to attend and testify by signing up on the day of the hearing.

In addition, you may listen to past committee hearings on the Internet. You may access Senate committee audio archives at [www.senate.state.tx.us](http://www.senate.state.tx.us). House of Representatives committee audio archives are available at [www.house.state.tx.us](http://www.house.state.tx.us).

**House Insurance Committee:** homeowner insurance coverage of toxic mold claims; medical liability insurance market; review of state-administered health insurance programs; Texas Department of Insurance efforts to enforce prompt payment of "clean claims."

**House Land and Resource Management:** urban sprawl into formerly rural areas; ownership and maintenance of rural roads; implementation of new Office of Rural Community Affairs (HB 7).

**House Agriculture and Livestock:** agricultural community access to capital markets; potential benefits of no-till farming; federal farm legislation and its impact on Texas producers.

**House Criminal Jurisprudence:** cooperation with Mexican states to reduce drug trafficking; elimination of ambiguity about legality of "eight-liners"; identity theft; discrepancy in statistics on reported sexual assaults in Texas.

**House Elections Committee:** recruitment, retention, and education of election-day workers; increasing voter participation and election process efficiency.

**House Public Education Committee:** reducing shortage of teachers, principals and other education professionals; problems with student truancy, dropouts and disruptive behavior.

**House Public Safety Committee:** weapons possession laws, including concealed handguns; drug use by teens and young adults; local law enforcement use of advanced technologies, including high-tech surveillance.

**House Committee on State Affairs:** advanced telecommunications systems and availability of broadband service; siting of electric transmission lines.

**House Committee on State, Federal and International Relations:** potential local impact of military base closings; tourism in rural areas; oversight of state veterans' medical facilities and implementation of state veterans' cemetery system.

**House Committee on State Recreational Resources:** water safety regulation; taxation of real property under wildlife management plan (HB 3123).

**House Select Committee on Teacher Health Insurance:** implementation of new public school employee health insurance program.

**House Committee on Ways and Means:** appeals of appraised values for property taxation and Comptroller's office process for reviewing and adjusting values by appraisal districts; dedicated uses of local sales and use taxes and hotel



*Working for you on the floor of the Texas Senate with the two other senators who live in Bexar County, Leticia Van de Putte and Frank Madla.*

occupancy taxes; Internet taxation, including economic impact on state and local tax revenue, proposed federal legislation, and Texas participation in multi-state administration of sales taxes.

**Senate Committee on Business and Commerce:** rate regulation of homeowners and automobile insurance, the use of county mutual companies to circumvent rate regulation, and the effects of deregulation on insurance rates and consumers.

**Senate Committee on Education:** implementation of the group insurance program for school employees; certification programs and their effect on the recruitment and retention of teachers; accessibility of higher education.

**Senate Committee on Finance:** Texas' current tax system, including taxation authority given to units of local government; economic value of current taxes as well as exemptions and tax abatements; rising medical care costs and the impact on the state budget.

**Senate Committee on Health and Human Services:** adequacy of mental health services for children; Texas' Supplemental Security Income disability determination procedures.

**Senate Committee on Intergovernmental Relations:** property owners' associations; development in unincorporated areas of counties.

**Senate Committee on Natural Resources:** federal Clean Air Act; use of alternative fuels and fuel additives.

**Senate Committee on State Affairs:** Texas Transportation Plan; the state's transportation funding shortfall; truck safety regulations.

**Senate Committee on Veteran Affairs and Military Installations:** veteran land and housing fund programs, including veteran nursing homes.

**Joint Interim Committee on Health Services:** Medicaid and Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) cost issues.

**Long-term Care Legislative Oversight Committee:** quality of care, nursing home regulation, nursing home rate methodologies, liability insurance.



*Answering questions from newspaper reporters about one of the 94 bills I authored or sponsored last session.*

# QUESTIONNAIRE



## Budget and Taxes

- |   | Voter 1                  |                          | Voter 2                  |                          |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
|   | Yes                      | No                       | Yes                      | No                       |
| 1. The State Comptroller has estimated a \$5 billion shortfall for the state's 2003 fiscal year. Much of the shortfall may be attributed to the nationwide economic slowdown and the rapidly rising cost of health care. What areas of the budget would you recommend cutting, if necessary?                                    |                          |                          |                          |                          |
| A. Environmental Protection   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B. Business and Economic Development  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| C. Health and Human Services  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| D. Higher Education   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| E. Highways and Public Transportation   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| F. Public Education   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| G. Public Safety and Criminal Justice   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. Cities and the state rely on sales taxes for revenue. When you purchase items at the mall or your neighborhood store, you pay sales tax on that purchase. When you purchase items on the Internet, you pay no sales tax. Should sales over the Internet be taxed the same way as goods are taxed in retail establishments?   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. The <b>Joint Select Committee on Public School Finance</b> may make recommendations to the next Legislature to provide homeowners relief from rising property taxes. The options below have been presented to the committee. Which of the following possible options would you support to lower local school property taxes? |                          |                          |                          |                          |
| A. a statewide property tax   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| B. a state income tax   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| C. a voluntary state income tax   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| D. a business activity tax  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| E. an expanded and/or increased sales tax   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |



## Public Safety

- |   |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 4. Should life imprisonment without the possibility of parole be an alternative to the death penalty?   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. The number of auto crashes caused by red-light runners is escalating. To aid law enforcement, would you support the use of cameras at intersections to record the license plate numbers of those who run red lights? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. Do you favor making the use of cell phones by drivers in moving motor vehicles to be only hands-free?  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |



## Health Insurance

- |  |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 7. If you are employed, does your employer offer you health insurance?   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. If you answered "yes" to #7, do you pay to insure other family members?   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. Are your children insured through the state's Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP)?   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. If you are an <b>employer</b> , do you offer health insurance to your employees?   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. If you are an <b>employer</b> and do <b>not</b> offer health insurance to your employees, did you offer it a year ago?   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12. With 63 mandates, Texas leads the nation in mandated coverage for health insurance -- things like hearing screening for newborns, contraception, and chemical dependency. Would you favor eliminating some required coverage if it would reduce the cost of your health insurance? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

# QUESTIONNAIRE



## Education

13. In 2001 the Legislature passed a bill prohibiting schools from starting before the week in which August 21 falls. Do you favor this law to prohibit schools from beginning the school year earlier than that?
14. Current law allows school districts to **permit** a moment of silence in schools for meditation or reflection. Would you favor a law that **mandates** a minute of silence in schools for not only meditation and reflection but also prayer as well?

Voter 1		Voter 2	
Yes	No	Yes	No

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



## General

15. Some states allow the governor to appoint judges at the appellate level, then voters may vote to keep them or not keep them in office at a later election. Would you favor such retention elections for Texas judges at the appellate level?
16. Should the Legislature further restrict abortion beyond the current Texas law, which prohibits abortion in the third trimester?
17. County governments lack authority to provide protection for the purchasers of lots in subdivisions in unincorporated areas of counties. Would you favor giving county commissioners courts the authority to require a plat for land that is subdivided into two or more lots of five acres or less, and intended for residential use?
18. County governments lack authority to correct the problems of sub-standard developments in the unincorporated areas of counties. Would you favor a bill that would authorize a county, after approval by local voters, to regulate land development in the unincorporated area of the county?

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

## Comments

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SENATOR JEFF WENTWORTH  
 P.O. Box 12068  
 Austin, Texas 78711-2068

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# The Senate of The State of Texas

## Senator Jeff Wentworth

P.O. Box 12068  
Austin, Texas 78711-2068

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## *Legislative Report and Questionnaire*



State Senator

# JEFF WENTWORTH

THE TEXAS SENATE IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER AND DOES NOT DISCRIMINATE ON THE BASIS OF RACE, COLOR, NATIONAL ORIGIN, SEX, RELIGION, AGE OR DISABILITY IN EMPLOYMENT OR THE PROVISION OF SERVICES.

### HELPFUL TOLL-FREE NUMBERS

- Abuse Hotline (Children, Elderly, Disabled) .....1-800-252-5400
- Area Agencies on Aging Information .....1-800-252-9240
- Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).....1-800-647-6558
- Child Support Enforcement.....1-800-252-8014
- College Financial Aid Information .....1-877-782-7322
- Consumer Protection Hotline.....1-800-621-0508
- Crime Victim Clearinghouse .....1-800-848-4284
- Crime Stoppers .....1-800-252-8477
- Domestic Violence Hotline .....1-800-799-SAFE
- Governor's Citizens' Assistance Hotline.....1-800-843-5789
- HIV / AIDS Hotline .....1-800-342-2437
- Insurance (Texas Dept of) Consumer Service .....1-800-252-3439
- Nursing Homes Consumers' Information.....1-800-252-8016
- Open Government Hotline .....1-877-673-6839
- Public Utility Commission Consumer Complaints.....1-888-782-8477
- Runaway Hotline .....1-888-580-HELP
- State Tax Assistance Hotline.....1-800-252-5555
- Tobacco Cessation Hotline.....1-877-937-7848
- Voter Registration/Elections Information.....1-800-252-8683
- Workers' Compensation Commission .....1-800-252-7031

### COUNTIES IN SENATE DISTRICT 25 (as of January 2003)

- |              |         |               |
|--------------|---------|---------------|
| Bexar (part) | Comal   | Guadalupe     |
| Hays         | Kendall | Travis (part) |

