

State Senator

JEFF WENTWORTH**LEGISLATIVE REPORT****Dear Fellow Texans,**

When the 80th Texas Legislature convened on January 11 of this year, I was sworn in to represent the families of Senate District 25 for a sixth term. I deeply appreciate your confidence in granting me the privilege to continue to represent you in the Texas Senate.

Working for you in the Texas Senate is an honor, but, more importantly, it is a responsibility that I take seriously. This newsletter is designed to provide you with a brief overview of the legislative session and with information about bills that passed and some that should have, but didn't. During the 140 days of the 80th Legislative Session, legislators, both senators and representatives, filed a total of 6,190 bills. Of that number, 1,480 passed, and 49 were vetoed by Governor Perry, who also used his line-item veto to take away funding for a number of projects, some in Senate District 25.

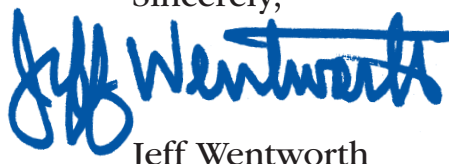
This session was especially successful for me, and therefore, I hope, for you. The Legislature passed 85 bills which I authored or sponsored, more than any other legislator.

One of my bills, the Castle Doctrine, was the first bill signed into law this year. The Castle Doctrine Bill, Senate Bill 378, protects Texans' right to use deadly force to protect themselves and their families if they are attacked at home, in the workplace or in their vehicles. This is a bill that an overwhelming majority of you supported.

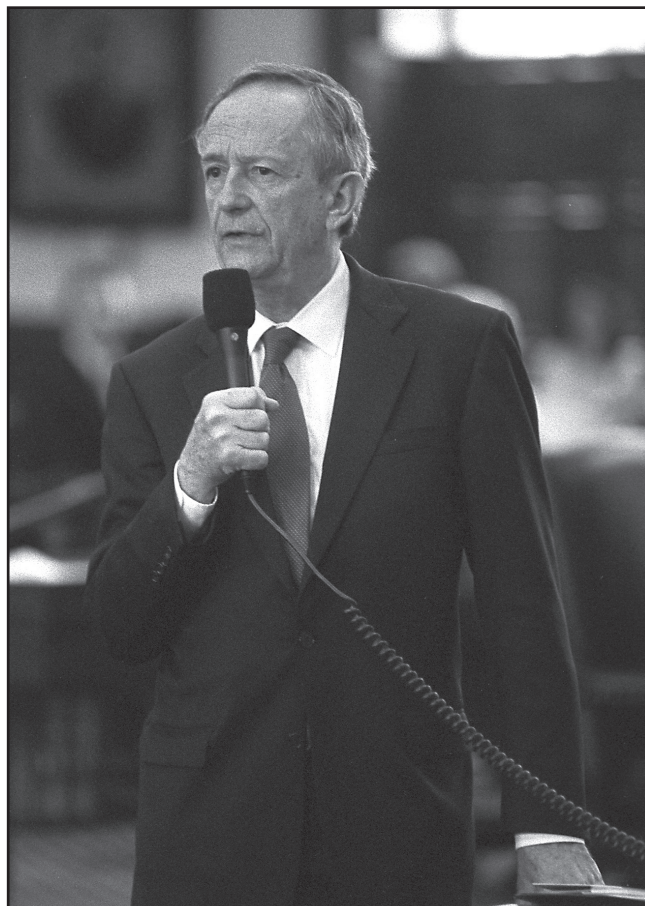
During each and every legislative session, my litmus test for bills I author, sponsor and vote on is: will my actions help improve the lives of all Texans, especially the 700,000 who live in Senate District 25?

As we work on interim charges during the 19 months between regular sessions, please contact me about state government issues that are important to you. Communication from you, my constituents, is essential for me to represent you effectively in the Texas Senate.

Sincerely,



Jeff Wentworth

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2008 - 2009 Budget

Texas state budget increases, taxes don't

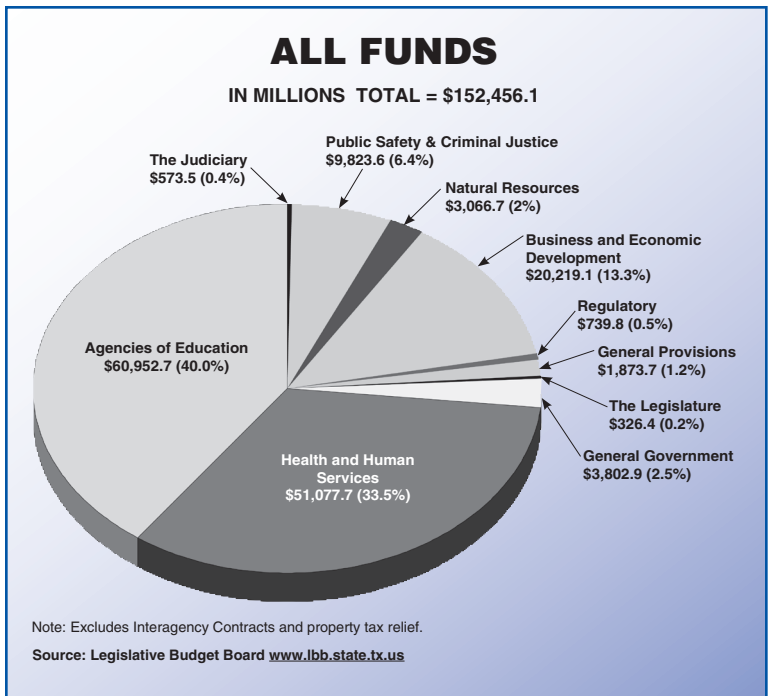
Between 2000 and 2006, Texas' population increased by 12.7 percent, almost twice that of the national average of 6.4 percent. As more and more people move to Texas, so does the demand for, and cost of, government services, as this year's budget indicates.

I am pleased that the \$152.5 billion 2008-2009 biennium budget is a modest 3.5 percent increase over the last two-year budget, while the population has grown much more significantly. For example, six of the 21 biggest cities in the U.S. are in Texas, as are 13 of the 50 fastest growing cities. In the last two years, only two Texas cities lost population, while 22 California cities experienced a population decrease, according to U.S. Census Bureau information.

We managed these increases while still providing \$14 billion to pay for the local school property tax cuts we voted for during the 2006 special session.

In addition, we set aside \$2-3 billion to ensure that those local school property taxes are protected against future potential business downturns and to provide for local school property tax relief to elderly and disabled Texans.

As a fiscal conservative, I am happy to report that we increased the state's 2008-2009 budget without increasing your taxes.



Specific increases by category

- ✓ \$1.5 billion for higher education
- ✓ \$662 million for teacher pay raises
- ✓ \$635 million for the Teacher Retirement System
- ✓ \$196 million for state parks
- ✓ \$302.7 million for the Children's Health Insurance Program
- ✓ \$95 million for Child Protective Services reform
- ✓ \$233.4 million for three new prisons
- ✓ \$145.5 million for higher education financial aid

Tax reform

- ✓ **House Bill 735** -- Eliminated the fee for Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund from phone bills in 2008, resulting in a savings of \$600 million tax dollars to Texans per year.
- ✓ **House Bill 1022** -- Exempted from property taxes vehicles used for both business and personal transportation.
- ✓ **House Bill 3928** -- Protected the state's small businesses by increasing the margins tax revenue exemption from \$300,000 to \$600,000.
- ✓ **Senate Bill 377** -- Mandated the electronic payment of taxes, saving both businesses and the state time and money.
- ✓ **House Bill 3430** -- Established an online state contract and spending database, increasing accountability and transparency in government spending.

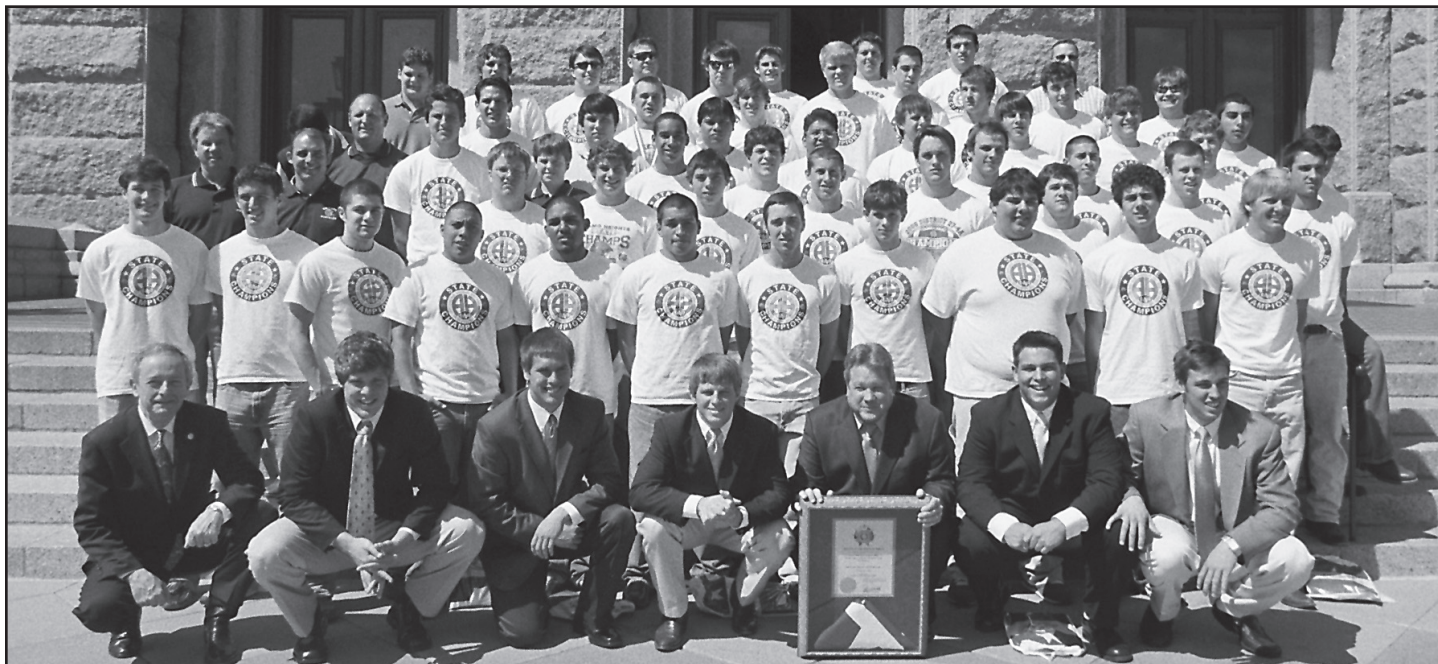


Senator Wentworth welcomes veteran newsman **Walter Cronkite** to the floor of the Texas Senate.

Public and Higher Education

Top priorities for Texas Legislature

Public and higher education together comprise 40 percent of the state's budget. In addition to appropriating the lion's share of state funds to education, this session the Legislature focused on public school students' graduation rates, safety, steroid use, class ranking and academic progress.



Senator Wentworth with the Alamo Heights High School varsity football team and Head Coach Don Byrd after they were recognized in both the Texas Senate and House of Representatives as 2006 Class 4A Division 1 state football champions. In recognition of the Mules' victory, Senator Wentworth sponsored Senate Resolution 434 and presented Coach Byrd with a framed Texas flag. Matthew Wentworth is third from the left, in dark glasses, on the top row.

Education roundup

📎 **Senate Bill 1031** -- Phases out TAKS test for grades 9-11, replaces it with end-of-course exams in four core areas.

📎 **House Bill 3851** -- Directs the Higher Education Coordinating Board to establish standardized method and rules for computing high school GPAs.

📎 **House Bill 2237** -- Establishes initiative to improve secondary school instruction and a pilot program designed to reduce high school dropout rate.

📎 **Senate Bill 9** -- School Safety Act creates a methodology for identifying registered sex offenders and felons convicted of offenses against children.

📎 **House Bill 1250** -- Allows home-schooled students to qualify for financial aid.

📎 **Senate Bill 1517** -- Strengthens the no-pass, no-play rule for high school athletes by exempting only honors classes in core-subject areas from the no-pass, no-play rule.

📎 **Senate Bill 1788** -- Creates a statewide virtual school network to ensure all students' access to quality courses.

📎 **Senate Bill 8** -- Requires University Interscholastic League to establish criteria for the administration and implementation of steroid testing of high school athletes.

📎 **Senate Bill 530** -- Mandates school districts to incorporate physical education activities into the student curriculum.

📎 **House Bill 3900** -- Establishes Texas Tomorrow Fund II, savings plan for future higher education needs.

Teachers

Next to parenting, teaching is the most important job in the world. This session's educational appropriation included a teacher pay increase and a possible 13th check for retired teachers.

🍏 **Senate Bill 1846** raised the state's minimum contribution rate to the Teacher Retirement System (TRS) from 6 to 6.58 percent to put TRS on a financially sound footing so that retired teachers will receive annuity raises and current teachers' annuities will be assured.

🍏 **Senate Bill 135**, which I authored, will prohibit a school district's employment policy from restricting communication between a school district employee and a member of the board of trustees regarding matters related to the operation of the district.

Transportation, Immigration, and Homeland Security

The federal government is responsible for immigration and for securing America's borders; however, an increase in illegal activities along the Texas-Mexico border prompted the Legislature to raise the state's level of participation in border security. As a member of the Senate Committee on Transportation and Homeland Security, I worked on, and helped pass, bills relating to immigration, border and homeland security, and transportation issues.

Border Security and Immigration

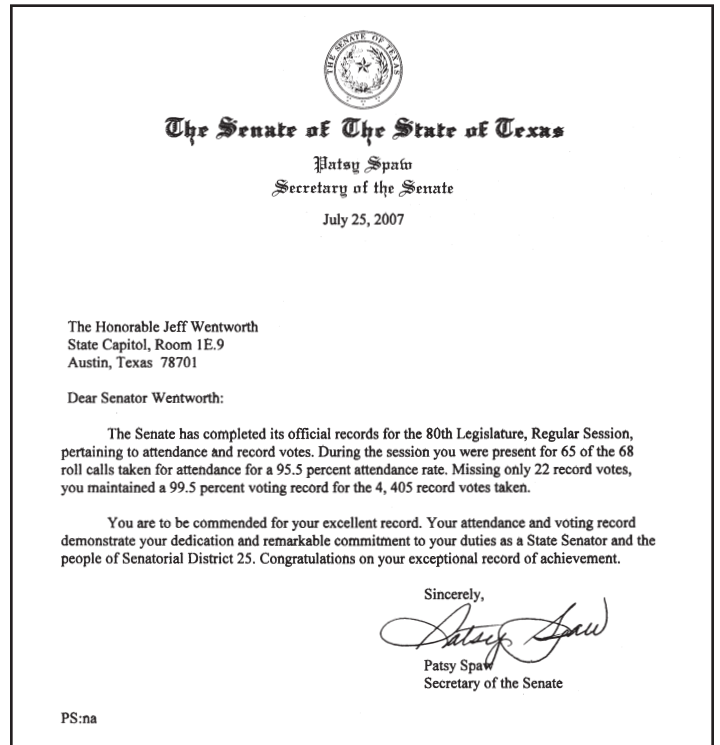
- **Senate Bill 11** -- Omnibus border security bill establishes a statewide mutual aid system designed to improve response capacity between local government and law enforcement entities; expands use of wiretaps; creates a Border Security Council; and enhances other crime control devices.
- **House Bill 1196** -- Requires businesses to attest on applications for public subsidies that they do not and will not employ illegal aliens. Stricter penalties will be imposed on anyone who tampers with government documents used to establish residency and citizenship.



Senator Wentworth, Representative Joe Driver, and Senator Bob Duell announce the filing of the Castle Doctrine bill, which Senator Wentworth authored, Senator Duell co-authored, and Representative Driver sponsored in the House.

Transportation

Transportation was one of the most controversial issues we encountered this year. Responding to the needs of Texans in one area while satisfying the desires of those in another was difficult. When all the dust had settled, the Legislature passed **Senate Bill 792**, which establishes a two-year moratorium on comprehensive development agreements for proposed toll road projects.



Jurisprudence

The court system is the foundation of our judicial system. As chair of the Senate Committee on Jurisprudence, I presided over committee meetings where we voted on a wide range of court-related bills, including **Senate Bill 1951**, an omnibus district court bill.

In addition to creating 11 new district courts, **Senate Bill 1951** added certain district attorneys to the Professional Prosecutors Act and addressed a wide range of issues in courts in a number of Texas counties.

Criminal Justice

- **House Bill 914 and Senate Bill 103** -- Reform the Texas Youth Commission (TYC) so young offenders and their families may be assured that state juvenile facilities are safe.
- **House Bill 8** -- Jessica's Law will increase penalties for repeat sex offenders, including making a second offense of aggravated sexual assault against a child under the age of 14 a capital crime.
- **Senate Bill 136** -- Targets predators who use the Internet to prey on children by increasing criminal penalties.
- **House Bill 1355** -- Puts teeth into a dog bite bill by making it a third degree felony for owners whose dogs attack and severely injure a person and making it a second degree felony if the dog kills someone.
- **Senate Bill 378** -- **Castle Doctrine** - Protects the right of self defense at home, in the workplace, and in vehicles, by allowing Texans to use whatever force they deem necessary to defend themselves.

Health and Human Services

The rising cost of health care continues to challenge legislators as we try to provide health care services to our most vulnerable Texans -- children, the elderly and the disabled. This session, we passed a comprehensive Medicaid reform bill that emphasizes preventive care and healthy lifestyles. We continued our commitment to Child Protective Services reform by providing additional funding for early intervention, more staff, and new programs.

In response to your concerns about requiring an HPV immunization for sixth grade girls, I co-authored, and we passed, Senate Bill 438, which states that the immunization cannot be required.



The Wentworths, Jason, Karla, Jeff and Matthew (with Kid 'N' Kid)

★ **Medicaid reform -- Senate Bill 10** -- Encourages Medicaid recipients to adopt healthy lifestyles by losing weight, quitting smoking, and making other responsible lifestyle choices. Provides methods for better detection of fraud.

★ **Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) -- House Bill 109** -- Improves CHIP by making it more responsive, efficient and effective. Extends re-enrollment time from six to 12 months, eliminates a 90-day waiting period, and streamlines the eligibility process.

★ **Foster care -- Senate Bill 758** -- Reforms the state's foster care system by requiring unannounced visits to foster homes and other conforming regulations.

Natural Resources

Texas' population boom makes water conservation, air pollution control, and energy efficiency critical for current and future Texans. We addressed all these issues, while providing funding to protect one of Texas' most valuable resources, her state parks and historical sites.

Senate Bill 3 -- Takes a comprehensive approach to the state's water policy, which includes stressing conservation, providing for future sources of water, addressing environmental flows, and maintaining the ecological balance in our state's current natural water resources. It raises the Edwards Aquifer region's pumping cap to 572,000 acre-feet from 450,000 acre-feet; incorporates critical period pumping into law; and empowers the Edwards Aquifer Authority to construct, own, and maintain facilities to enhance aquifer recharge.

House Bills 3732 and 3693 -- Creates financial incentives for ultra clean energy projects; establishes an ultra clean energy grant and loan program; and puts in place energy efficiency mechanisms to provide reductions in consumption and demand during peak times.

House Bill 12 -- Raises the cap on the amount of the "sporting goods" sales tax revenue that can go toward state parks and transfers 18 historic sites from the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department to the Texas Historical Commission.

Two of my bills that should have passed but didn't

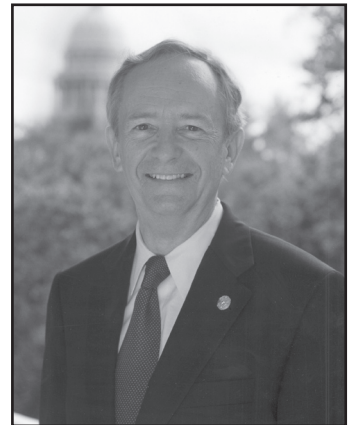
Senate Bill 270 -- Would have required sales price disclosure when a person sells a piece of real estate, resulting in a fairer property tax system in Texas, particularly for homeowners. Voted out of the Senate Intergovernmental Relations Committee but never debated or voted on by the full Senate.

Senate Bill 1068 -- Would take congressional redistricting out of the hands of the Legislature and place it in the hands of an independent, bipartisan citizens' redistricting commission. Passed the Senate by a vote of 20-10; referred to the House Redistricting Committee where it was given a public hearing and was supported by a majority of the committee. It died in committee, however, because the committee chairman would not allow a vote on the bill.



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Legislative Report

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.

Join the growing list of informed Texans

Texas state government functions best when Texans are informed.

To keep you informed about state issues and about state services that are available to you, I write a weekly column that appears in many, but not all, of the newspapers in Senate District 25. It is also sent via e-mail to constituents who request it.

If you would like to receive my column by e-mail, please e-mail me at jeff.wentworth@senate.state.tx.us and ask to be added to the distribution list.

My columns are not partisan in nature. They are written to inform, and I believe you will find them both useful and informative.

COUNTIES IN SENATE DISTRICT 25

Bexar (north)
 Hays

Comal
 Kendall

Guadalupe
 Travis (south)

