

State Senator

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

Representing you in the Texas Senate is not only a significant responsibility but an honor and privilege that I take very seriously. To represent you effectively, it is essential for me to know your opinion and views on important state government issues.

That is why I include a questionnaire in the newsletter I send to you during the time between regular legislative sessions. Please take a few minutes from your busy schedule to respond to the questionnaire. I've also left space for your comments about issues that are not covered in the opinion survey.

In addition to the annual newsletter, I write a non-partisan weekly column that focuses on many different subjects. It is e-mailed to the media and to individuals who ask to be placed on the distribution list. If you'd like to receive the column, please check out Page 6.

Since the end of the last legislative session in May 2007, Senate committees have been studying issues that the Legislature will consider when it convenes again in January 2009. These standing committees have conducted hearings around the state gathering information that will be included in the report the committees submit to the Legislature by December 1.

Some of these issues and legislation that I intend to file in next year's session are discussed in this newsletter. I welcome your comments on proposed legislation as well as the issues being studied during this interim period between regular legislative sessions.

Thank you for responding to the questionnaire and for participating in this democratic, representative process.



Fighting for you on the floor of the Texas Senate.

Sincerely,

Jeff Wentworth

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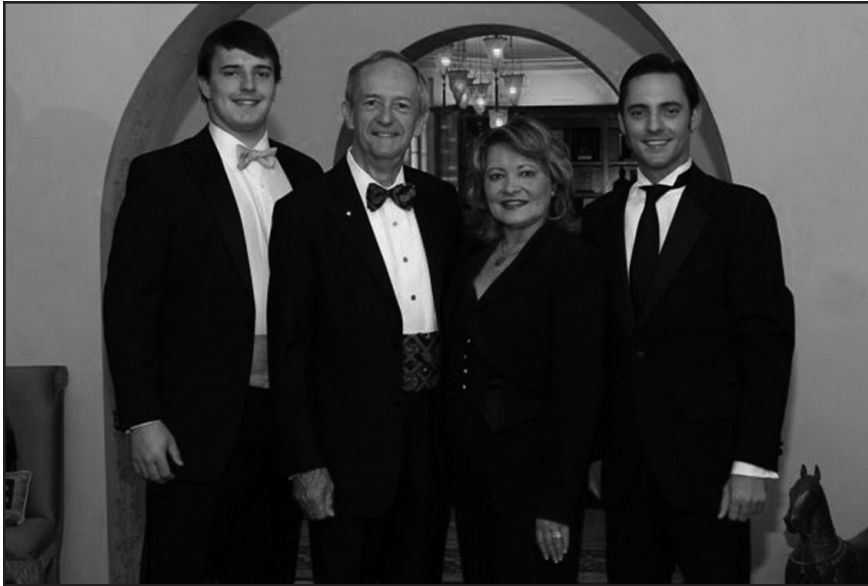
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LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM

One of a Texas state senator's many responsibilities is deciding which legislative issues to pursue during a regular session. Bills related to the following issues will be part of my agenda when the Legislature convenes in January 2009.



Posing for the family Christmas card photo with Matthew, Karla and Jason. (L-R)

Bipartisan Congressional Redistricting Commission

Every 10 years, the Texas Legislature uses new United States Census Bureau figures to redraw both congressional and state legislative districts. Regardless of which political party is in power, this process always results in partisan gerrymandering that leads to expensive, time-consuming federal lawsuits, unwittingly paid for by you, the Texas taxpayer.

For 15 years, I have introduced redistricting reform legislation every time the Legislature convened in regular session. The bill has twice been passed by the Texas Senate. In 2007, my congressional redistricting bill passed the Senate by a vote of 20-10. It was referred to the House Redistricting Committee where it was supported by a majority of the committee; however, the bill died because the committee chairman never called for a vote on the bill.

While I was disappointed that the bill died in a House committee, I am encouraged by its Senate passage, and I will continue my efforts to bring some semblance of fairness to the congressional redistricting process.

Real Estate Sales Price Disclosure

Currently, all taxable real estate in Texas must be appraised at fair market value unless the law provides for a different value. Because the disclosure of a property's selling price is not required in Texas, county appraisal districts must rely on the multiple listing service (MLS) and various other, sometimes unreliable, sources of information to discover a property's value.

As a result, the tax burden has shifted to owners of residential property because the purchase price of commercial property is not listed on MLS or otherwise disclosed, preventing the property from being valued and taxed accurately.

I intend to carry a bill that would require sales price disclosure when a person sells a piece of real estate, resulting in a fairer property tax system in Texas, particularly for homeowners, who are currently carrying a disproportionate share of the tax burden.

Concealed Handguns on University Campuses

Currently, concealed handguns are not allowed on college campuses. Mass murders on the campuses of Virginia Tech University and Northern Illinois University may well have taken far fewer lives had a person with a license to carry a concealed handgun been at the scene.

In an effort to prevent such a senseless tragedy on a Texas college or university campus, I will introduce a bill that will allow persons who are licensed to carry a concealed weapon to do so on a college campus. Because most college students are 17, 18, 19 or 20 years old, and because only persons who are 21 years of age or older may be licensed to carry a concealed weapon in Texas (with a couple of exceptions for honorably discharged or active duty military) very few college students would be eligible to carry a weapon on campus, and those who do would have to be trained and licensed before they could.

Jury Reform

Currently, the range of actions that a juror may take while on jury duty is limited. Note-taking, limited juror discussion and the submission of anonymous written questions to a witness are rarely allowed by judges. My bill would require that judges allow jurors to take notes during the trial, to submit written questions to the judge, and that instructions be provided to the jury regarding the elementary legal principles that will govern the proceedings.

Changes to the law that would allow these actions should assist jurors in competently and confidently fulfilling their duty to determine the credibility of any presented evidence.

My bill also would require that the name of a prospective juror who is not called to serve due to an excuse be returned immediately to the jury wheel.



Sometimes I feel like I spend half my waking hours on the telephone.

INTERIM CHARGES

Between regular legislative sessions, Texas Senate committees work on interim charges that are as varied as the Texas landscape and as broad in scope. A few of the Senate committees and their respective charges are listed below.

Jurisprudence Committee

The majority of the charges to the Jurisprudence Committee, which I chair, may be divided into two categories: charges related to children and those related to juries.

Lt. Governor David Dewhurst, who assigns interim charges, asked the committee to identify and study the best practices for representing children in child abuse and neglect cases. The committee also will review laws governing suits affecting the parent-child relationship that involve non-parents.

In studying the jury experience, the committee is exploring ways to increase and enhance jury duty in civil cases.

Transportation and Homeland Security Committee

From bridges to billboards, the charges to the Texas Senate Transportation and Homeland Security Committee are as varied as the roads that Texans travel.

As a member of this committee, I have listened to testimony regarding the regulation of billboards, reinforcing structurally deficient bridges and the funding of new roads. Lt. Gov. Dewhurst also asked the committee to study the effectiveness of the Trans-Texas Corridor and to make recommendations regarding its future role in the state's transportation system.

Other charges include making recommendations to the Texas Legislature concerning the state's role in enforcing federal immigration policy, including ways to stem the tide of illegal immigration and reduce criminal activities within the border region.



Speaking at a news conference at the Capitol announcing the filing of the Castle Doctrine Bill with Senators Juan "Chuy" Hinojosa, Representative Joe Driver and Senator Bob Deuell. (L-R)

Health and Human Services Committee

This committee has been hard at work on the interim charge of revamping the state's Medicaid system. Committee members are focusing on incentive strategies, such as those used by other states, to improve the quality of health care. Some of these strategies, including supplemental pay to top health care providers, are currently being used in pilot programs.



Checking a vote count on the floor of the Texas Senate with Secretary of the Senate Patsy Spaw.

Finance Committee

Members of the Finance Committee are reviewing the budgets of a number of state agencies to ensure that the monies appropriated to them are being spent wisely. The committee also is studying the effectiveness of cash management strategies.

A subcommittee on higher education is considering the impact of university and college tuition deregulation in 2003 on college participation.

Education Committee

Special education students are the focus of one of the interim charges to this committee. Its members are studying the effectiveness of public school programs for special needs students, including autistic students.

Other charges to the committee include reviewing current property tax rates, recommending methods for controlling the cost of textbooks, and finding ways to improve the state's Adult Basic Education program.

Intergovernmental Relations Committee

This interim, the Intergovernmental Relations Committee, of which I am a member, was asked to focus on Texas' housing programs and ways in which to significantly improve home ownership rates through self-help initiatives.

In addition to a number of housing program charges, the committee also is reviewing the process for creating Municipal Utility Districts.

Natural Resources Committee

Charges to this committee include studying the safety of major dams, levees and other flood control structures. In addition, committee members are assessing the use of advanced control technologies for the reduction of point source pollution emissions and identifying state-of-the-art pollution control technologies.

All Committee Charges

All Senate committee and subcommittee charges and minutes from committee meetings are available on the Internet at www.senate.state.tx.us. Click on "Committees."

QUESTIONNAIRE



Budget and Taxes

Voter #1
Yes No

Voter #2
Yes No

1. Although most of a projected budget surplus will be needed to pay for the 80,000 new students who will enroll in our Texas public schools, the growth in federally mandated programs, and escalating gas prices and utilities' costs, if there are extra funds, in what areas of the budget, if any, do you favor an increase in spending?

- A. Environmental protection
- B. Health and human services
- C. Higher education
- D. Highways and public transportation
- E. Mental health and mental retardation
- F. Prisons
- G. Public education
- H. Public safety
- I. State parks

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2. To help ensure that all Texans pay their fair share of property taxes (because taxes are based on the fair market value of the property), do you favor legislation requiring that the actual sales price of real estate be included on the deed filed in the county clerk's property records?

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3. Do you believe that your county appraisal district has accurately appraised the fair market value of your home?

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Government

4. Do you favor transferring from the Legislature the power to draw congressional district boundaries to an independent, bipartisan, citizens' Texas Congressional Redistricting Commission, to be comprised of four Democrats and four Republicans who are not elected officials or officials of any political party?

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5. Some states allow the governor to nominate judges with confirmation by a two-thirds vote of the senate; voters then may vote to keep them or not keep them in office at a later election. Do you favor such gubernatorial nomination, senate confirmation, and retention elections for Texas judges?

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6. County governments lack the authority to correct problems of sub-standard developments in the unincorporated areas of counties. Do you favor a bill that would authorize a county commissioners court, after approval by local voters, to regulate land development in the unincorporated area of the county?

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7. Currently, Texas primary elections where political parties select nominees are conducted in March, leaving eight months before the general election in November. Do you favor moving the primary elections to May, or even later, in order to shorten the campaign season before the general election in November?

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Education

8. Do you favor consolidation of **your** independent school district, resulting in a larger district but fewer superintendents and administrative staff?

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9. Do you favor a pilot voucher system for students who are at risk of dropping out of public school, whereby the state would pay a specified amount of money per student to any accredited public or private school selected by the parents?

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10. Do you favor repealing the law that grants automatic admission to the top 10 percent of Texas high school graduates to the state's public colleges and universities, thereby allowing admissions officers at Texas colleges and universities to consider SAT and ACT scores, grade averages, as well as extracurricular activities and student employment, instead of only class standing as is the current situation?

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11. Currently, the tuition rates at Texas public colleges and universities are set by boards of regents and not by the Texas Legislature. Do you favor returning that responsibility to the Legislature?

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12. Do you support allowing parents of school-age autistic children to transfer their children to an educational institution, public or private, that offers the best educational services for their children, resulting in the selected schools receiving state funds for the children?

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QUESTIONNAIRE



Court System

13. During a civil trial, do you favor allowing jurors to take notes and submit written questions to the judge?
14. If you are called to serve on a jury, would requiring judges to provide detailed instructions about the legal process make you more likely to show up at the courthouse for jury duty?



Public Safety

15. Do you favor restricting the use of cellular devices, such as mobile phones and personal digital assistants, by drivers in moving vehicles to only those devices which may be operated hands-free?
16. Do you favor allowing Texans 21 years of age or older who are legally licensed to carry a handgun to do so on a college or university campus?



Immigration

17. Do you favor a guest worker program that would let Texas employers hire temporary workers from Mexico?
18. Do you favor a law requiring that Texas voters produce a photo ID in order to vote?



Transportation

19. Recognizing the need to expand and repair the state's highway system, instead of relying solely on toll roads or higher fuel taxes for revenue, do you favor taxing vehicles on the number of miles traveled?



Constituent Satisfaction

20. Have you ever contacted me or my office for assistance?
21. If so, were you treated courteously by me and my staff, and were we able to help you?



Comments

Before mailing, please detach questionnaire along the dotted line and fold so that the mailer panel is on the outside.

Voter #1		Voter #2	
Yes	No	Yes	No
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Legislative Report & Questionnaire



State Senator

JEFF WENTWORTH

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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 also is sent via e-mail to constituents who request it.

If you would like to receive my column by e-mail, please contact me at jeff.wentworth@senate.state.tx.us and ask to be added to the distribution list. Please include your full name and street mailing address as well as your e-mail address.

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

COUNTIES IN SENATE DISTRICT 25

Bexar (north)
Hays

Comal
Kendall

Guadalupe
Travis (south)

