

State Senator

JEFF WENTWORTH

LEGISLATIVE REPORT

Dear Fellow Texans,

One of the most important responsibilities a Texas state senator exercises is providing information about a legislative session. Because figuring out how the dust settled on certain issues can be challenging, I summarize some of the more important issues in a newsletter at the close of each legislative session.

I appreciate your reading this newsletter and signing up for my weekly column, which is emailed each Friday to those who ask to receive it. Please see Page 6 for information.

During a 140-day regular session and a two-day special session this year, the Legislature passed 1,461 bills. Governor Perry vetoed 38 bills, including two of mine. This session, I authored, co-authored, or sponsored a total of 72 bills that became law.

A legislative session, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder.



CHAIRMAN
SOUTHERN LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE
2008 - 2009

PRESIDENT PRO TEM
OF THE TEXAS SENATE
2004 - 2005

COMMITTEES
JURISPRUDENCE, CHAIRMAN
ADMINISTRATION
INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS
TRANSPORTATION AND HOMELAND SECURITY

Lawmakers who pass their most important bills deem the session a success. Those whose bills failed to pass or were vetoed by the governor take a more jaundiced view.

I believe that the 81st Legislative Session was less productive than it should have been; however, we accomplished what the Texas Constitution requires of us. We passed a balanced budget, ensuring that the state will continue to serve Texans in a fiscally responsible manner in spite of hurricanes, droughts, recessions and partisan politics.

Representing you in the Texas Senate continues to be a high honor and a privilege. Thank you for trusting me to be your voice in the halls of the state capitol and on the floor of the Texas Senate.

Sincerely,

Jeff Wentworth

HOW TO CONTACT SENATOR WENTWORTH

Austin Office

State Capitol, Room 1E.9
P. O. Box 12068
Austin, Texas 78711
(512) 463-0125
Fax (512) 463-7794

Toll-Free (888) 824-6984
Dial 711 For Relay Calls
Internet E-Mail Address:
jeff.wentworth@senate.state.tx.us

San Antonio Office

925 North Frost Center
1250 N.E. Loop 410
San Antonio, Texas 78209
(210) 826-7800
Fax (210) 826-0571

Bexar County gets new courts

Each session, the Legislature approves the creation of new district courts for counties that exhibit substantial judicial need. As chairman of the Senate Committee on Jurisprudence, each session I oversee the evaluation process whereby we assess the needs of various judicial districts. Criteria for creating new district courts include increased caseloads, case backlogs, population growth and county support.

House Bill 4833, which I sponsored in the Senate, established new district courts in certain counties to support a more efficient judiciary, including three new district courts and three new county courts-at-law for Bexar County.



Senator and Committee Chairman Wentworth presides at a meeting of the Senate Jurisprudence Committee.

Texas Legislature creates a Department of Motor Vehicles

The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) manages the state's transportation network, including planning, maintaining and expanding the state's highways and bridges. Through the years, TxDOT has assumed more functions, such as those related to vehicle titles, registration, license plates and burglary and theft prevention.

House Bill 3097 transfers various administrative functions related to motor vehicles to a new Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) and moves the Automobile Burglary and Theft Prevention Authority to the governor's office.

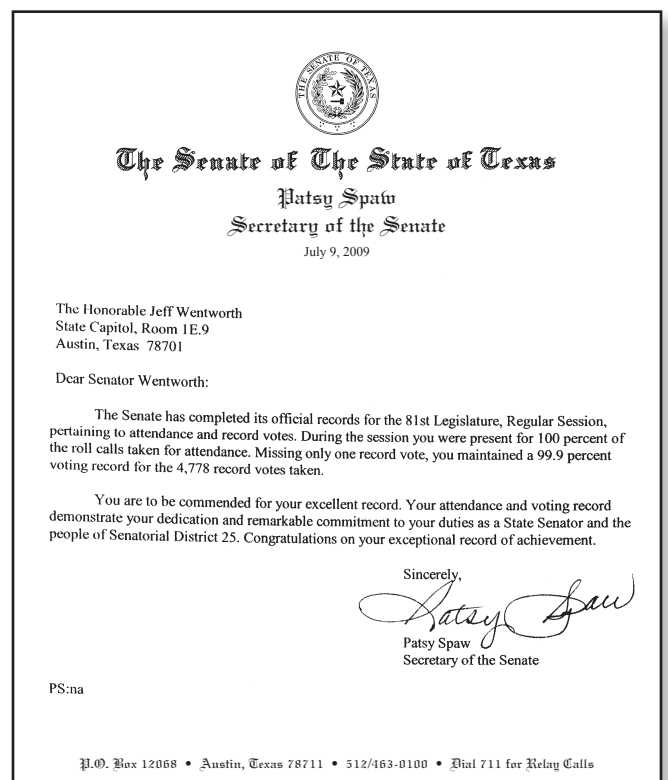
The DMV will oversee vehicle titles, registration, motor carrier registration, sale and lease of vehicles and other primarily administrative functions, leaving the building and maintaining of roads and bridges to TxDOT.

During this year's special session, the Legislature passed House Bill 1, which allocates \$1 billion for highway construction and \$1 billion for the State Infrastructure Bank, which provides innovative financing methods to the list of options available to communities to assist them in meeting their infrastructure needs.

Senate Bill 581, which I authored, expands membership in the Austin-San Antonio Rail District so other governmental entities, such as Texas State University-San Marcos, could be directly involved in planning for passenger rail service.



Senator Wentworth reviews an amendment to a bill with Senate Secretary Patsy Spaw who reads amendments to the Senate.



100% attendance record and 99.9% voting record

Economic development and endangered species

Texas' population growth continues to spur commercial and residential growth that might threaten certain endangered species. State agencies need model legislation that will assist regional governmental entities and communities engaged in economic development activities in complying with endangered species laws and regulations.

Senate Bill 2534, which I authored, creates a Task Force on Economic Growth and Endangered Species, composed of the heads of certain governmental agencies. The bill provides information and direction regarding endangered species issues in certain areas of the state, specifically the area around Camp Bullis in Bexar and Comal counties.

House Bill 469 creates significant incentives for the development of clean coal technology. Although a major air quality bill failed to pass in its entirety, parts of it were included in House Bill 1796, concerning the adoption of standards for the location of carbon dioxide repositories.

A few good bills that failed to pass the Legislature

Senate Bill 315 – I continued my effort to take congressional redistricting out of the hands of the Legislature and place it in the hands of an independent bipartisan citizens' redistricting commission by filing Senate Bill 315. This year, the redistricting bill passed the Senate on second reading, but failed on third reading and final passage by one vote.

House Joint Resolution 29 – This resolution would amend the Texas Constitution to allow the Legislature to convene after the governor's 20-day, post-session deadline for filing veto proclamations to consider the vetoes and override the ones that lawmakers believed needed to be resolved before the next legislative session. I filed the identical resolution in the Senate and sponsored HJR 29 in the Senate.

Senate Bill 362 – The Voter ID bill passed the Senate and moved on to the House of Representatives where it fell victim to "chubbing" during the final days of the legislative session. The bill would have required a citizen to provide a valid photo ID or two alternative pieces of identification before being allowed to vote.



The Wentworths, Matthew, Jeff, Karla and Jason, at their home in San Antonio.

Bills protect vulnerable Texans

When Texans with developmental disabilities are placed in state care, they must be treated with respect and compassion. Thanks to Senate Bill 643, the quality of care for some of our most vulnerable citizens in state schools and community-based programs will be thoroughly reviewed, and permanent improvements will be made. Senate Bill 643 increases both oversight and accountability for the protection of intellectually and developmentally disabled Texans. It also changes the name of state schools to "state supported living centers."

A rider to the appropriations bill provides more home and community-based services to serve persons who might be able to utilize community services instead of being institutionalized. In addition, the Legislature appropriated money for a home-health care provider wage increase. Home-health care providers are in short supply, and a wage increase might encourage Texans to work in the home-health care industry, which is sorely in need of individuals dedicated to caring for others.

Along with numerous bills to expand benefits for children in the foster care system, one bill provides a three percent increase in reimbursement payments for foster children. Another bill establishes a health insurance pool for foster children and other children in state care.

The Legislature also passed House Bill 2154, which increases funding for physicians in rural, border and underserved areas. Funds for the program will be derived from taxes on smokeless tobacco.

LEGISLATIVE REPORT

Higher education

Texas legislators increased both higher education funding and financial student aid and appropriated funds to help state research universities develop new programs. Unfortunately, we failed in our effort to limit tuition increases at four-year public universities.

The Legislature addressed the top 10 percent rule by passing a bill I co-authored. Senate Bill 175 modified the top 10 percent automatic admissions law by capping at 75 percent of the entering freshman class at UT Austin that can come from the top 10 percent. The remaining students would be selected based on additional criteria. As a long-time proponent of abolishing the top 10 percent rule altogether, I was pleased to see some progress made in that direction.

Another bill I co-authored, Senate Bill 297, allows military veterans, their spouses and their children to pay in-state tuition and fees at state colleges and universities regardless of the length of their Texas residency.

Texas first state to utilize college readiness as education standard

Texas will be the first state in the nation to use college readiness as the standard for measuring student success. The Legislature passed House Bill 3, which changes the state's standardized test-based system of public school accountability to one based on student preparedness for success at the college and university levels.

House Bill 3 requires students to earn four credits each in English, math, science and social studies, two credits of the same foreign language, one physical education credit, one fine arts credit and six electives selected by students and parents. In addition to choosing six electives, House Bill 3 increases students' options by creating applied math and science courses and career and technical education courses developed by higher education partners.

Public school teachers

House Bill 3646 – Appropriates an additional \$1.9 billion for school funding that includes an \$800 across-the-board teacher pay raise.

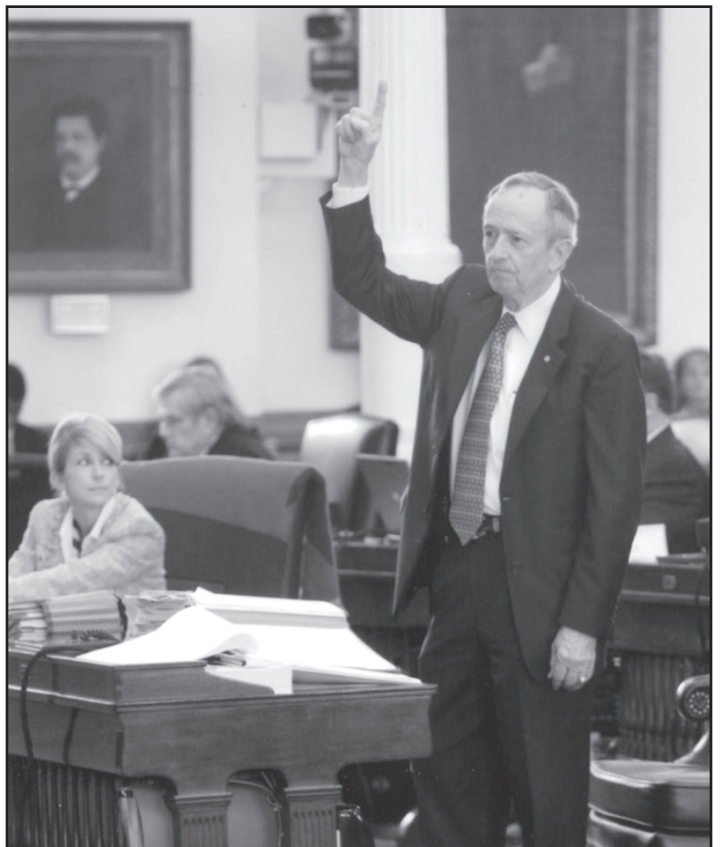
House Bill 3347 – Provides for a \$500 supplemental payment to retired teachers if it is approved by the Texas Attorney General.



Senator Wentworth poses for a photograph on the floor of the Texas Senate with Hannah Waggener of Cibolo on the day she served as a Senate page.

Criminal Justice

Evidence presented in criminal trials may be psychologically disturbing to jurors. House Bill 608, which I sponsored, authorizes post-trial psychological counseling for a juror or alternate juror in any criminal trial involving graphic evidence and testimony. The bill also authorizes juvenile boards to approve a program that allows post-trial psychological counseling for jurors in applicable juvenile adjudication hearings.



Senator Wentworth holds up one finger to indicate he is voting "yes" as Senator Wendy Davis looks on.

\$9 billion saved for a rainy day

Legislators balanced the 2010-11 state budget without dipping into the state's \$9.1 billion Rainy Day Fund despite population growth and economic downturns. Senate Bill 1 appropriates \$182.3 billion in All Funds, including \$87.1 billion in General Revenue, which derives its funds from state sources, such as taxes, fees, and oil and gas revenue. The General Revenue portion of the budget actually decreased by \$1.6 billion, or 1.8 percent, from the 2008-09 spending level.

The All Funds Budget, which includes federal dollars, increased by \$12 billion, or 7.4 percent, from the last biennium, as a result of \$12.1 billion in federal stimulus money.

I am pleased the budget includes a safeguard provision concerning federal stimulus dollars that directs state agencies to make one-time expenditures first. The provision also gives the governor and the Legislative Budget Board the power to disallow expenditures that would lock Texas into future fiscal obligations.

While we allocated funds carefully, we did not neglect Texans' needs. We appropriated more money for public and higher education, healthcare, job training, and transportation.

Specific increases by category

- \$1.9 billion for public education
- \$1.2 billion for higher education
- \$2 billion for highway bonds
- \$500 million for job training programs
- \$450 million for cancer research
- \$271 million for criminal justice
- \$264 million for higher education financial aid
- \$95 million for the Emerging Technology Fund



Senator Wentworth and Finance Chairman Senator Steve Ogden check out the specific wording of a bill during debate on the floor of the Texas Senate.

Tax cuts

Challenging economic times require difficult decisions when balancing a \$182 billion budget. We were able to provide tax relief to 100 percent disabled veterans and many small businesses.

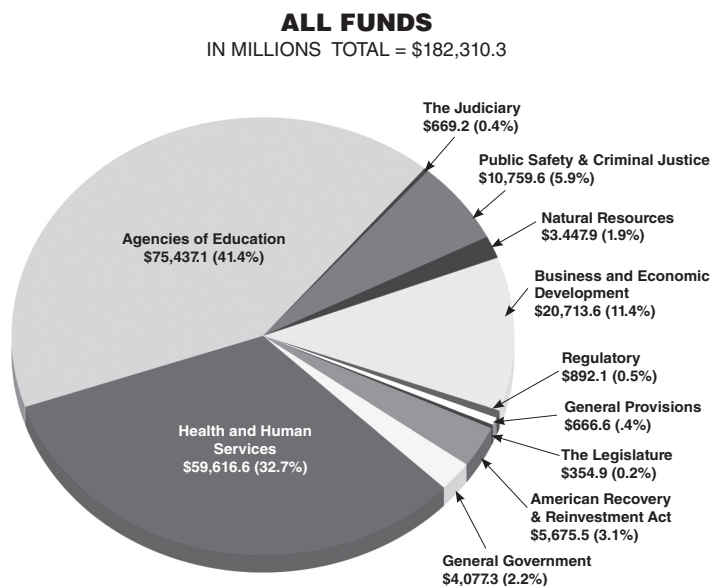
Texas veterans who have a 100 percent disability rating or are considered individually unemployable by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs will no longer pay any property taxes on their residential homesteads. Approximately 40,000 small businesses will benefit from a bill that increases the state's business tax exemption from \$300,000 to \$1 million for the first year, and then back to \$600,000 in subsequent years.

Private property protection

On November 3, Texans will have the opportunity to add another layer of protection to their private property rights when they vote on a proposed amendment to the Texas Constitution if and when government agencies attempt to use eminent domain to acquire private land for economic development. Proposition 11 would prevent government from taking private property unless it is for a legitimate public use.

Another one of the 11 proposed amendments, Proposition 3 would provide for uniform standards and procedures for the appraisal of property for ad valorem tax purposes. If approved, the proposition would amend the tax code to require the market value of a residence homestead to be determined solely on the basis of the property's value as a residence homestead.

2010-11 BIENNIAL RECOMMENDATIONS



Note: Excludes Interagency Contracts.

Source: Legislative Budget Board www.lbb.state.tx.us



The Senate of The State of Texas

Senator Jeff Wentworth
P.O. Box 12068
Austin, Texas 78711-2068

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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 also is sent via email to constituents who request it.

If you would like to receive my column by email, 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 email address.

My columns are not politically 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)

