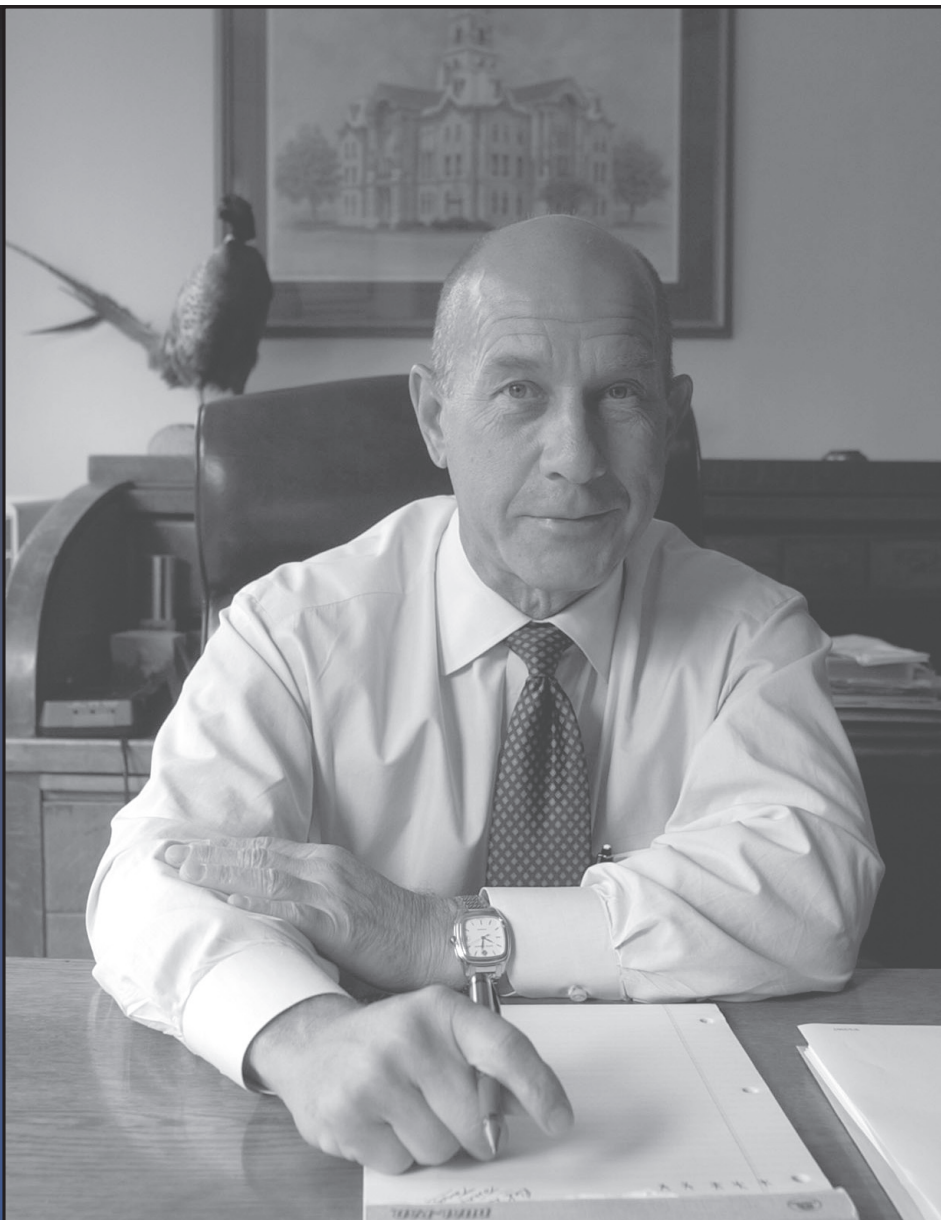


SENATOR JOHN WHITMIRE

Senate District 15 • Fall 2009 Capitol Report



Dear Friends and Neighbors,

I am pleased to provide this update on some of the important issues impacting the State of Texas and the residents of Senate District 15.

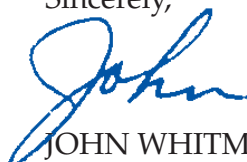
The 81st Legislature ended the regular session on June 1st and was quickly followed by a 2-day special session in early July. While we tackled some very important issues, I know there is still a great deal of work to be done to address the challenges we face in Houston and Harris County and across this great state.

I am proud to continue to serve as Chair of the Senate Criminal Justice Committee and as a member of the Finance Committee, Administration Committee, Government Organization Committee, and the Legislative Budget Board. Given the importance of criminal justice and public safety, I remain very busy as Chair of the Criminal Justice Legislative Oversight Committee.

Having served longer than any other member of the Texas Senate, I am honored to serve as the Dean of the Texas Senate. I continue to take my role as Dean very seriously and use the position to foster compromise among my colleagues and do what is best for Texas.

It has been my privilege to represent Senate District 15 for the past 26 years and I am committed to continuing to work on your behalf in Austin and in our community.

Sincerely,


JOHN WHITMIRE

IN OUR COMMUNITY

PROTECTING URBAN PARKS

Since 1979, the Legislature has made funds available to local communities by providing matching grants for local park additions and improvements. Three parks in our community, the Sylvester Turner Park, Herman Brown Park, and the West 11th Street Park have benefitted recently from grants provided by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department.

Senator Whitmire led the effort to secure \$3.75 million for the West 11th Street Park to preserve this important part of our community and neighborhood. "The strong support from community leaders and the residents surrounding the park was a tremendous help in our success," said Senator Whitmire. "I was honored to work with the City of Houston, the Houston Parks Board, and the Friends of the West 11th Street Park to protect this wonderful asset."

Senator Whitmire will continue to work with park advocates and community leaders to ensure our parks remain safe, vibrant, and well equipped.



Senator Whitmire speaks at a West 11th Street Park celebration.

HOUSTON FOOD BANK

In 1995, with the help of Senator Whitmire, the Houston Food Bank joined forces with the Texas Department of Criminal Justice to develop a program where inmates use a portion of prison farmland to raise fresh food for the hungry.

Continuing his strong support of the Food Bank, Senator Whitmire was proud to champion an additional \$4 million in state funding over the next two years for the Houston Food Bank's Serving for Success program.

Serving for Success is a collaborative effort that will train inmates and probationers for living wage jobs while they work at the Food Bank. "This is a win-win situation which will allow the Food Bank to keep costs down, feed additional people, and help rehabilitate and train former offenders," said Whitmire. "I am honored to continue my work with the Houston Food Bank to fight hunger and provide an opportunity for our offenders to learn while giving back to the community."

PRESERVING OUR HISTORY

As a member of the Senate Finance Committee, Senator Whitmire was successful in securing federal stimulus money for the preservation of the Barbara Jordan and Mickey Leland papers maintained by the Barbara Jordan - Mickey Leland School of Public Affairs at Texas Southern University.

"Barbara Jordan and Mickey Leland are our heroes and now we will ensure that the papers of these two outstanding leaders will be protected and preserved for generations of Texans," stated Whitmire.

HOUSING STANDARDS

During session, Senator Whitmire worked with his colleagues to require the City of Houston to develop and adopt multi-family housing standards. Not only will the new ordinance require landlords to bring their buildings up to livable standards, it will also require the City to make a good faith effort to relocate any displaced residents in housing with comparable rent and in the same school district.

"No one should live in substandard conditions and I applaud the efforts of the Legislature and the City of Houston to adopt tough building and maintenance requirements for multi-family housing," commented Whitmire.

NEW TRAFFIC LAWS

Every session, the Legislature debates ways to make our streets and highways safer. Some of the new laws that went into effect in September include:

- ★ all occupants of a vehicle must wear a seat belt;
- ★ children under eight years old and under 4 feet, 9 inches in height must be in an approved safety seat;
- ★ the use of a wireless communication device is banned in a school zone unless the vehicle is stopped or a hands-free device is in use.



Senator Gallegos and Senator Whitmire congratulate Harris County Commissioner Sylvia Garcia for being elected President of the National Association of Elected and Appointed Officials.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE & PUBLIC SAFETY

REFORMING JUVENILE JUSTICE

In February 2007, the Texas Youth Commission (TYC) abuse scandal shocked the state. Since then, state leaders and criminal justice experts have worked tirelessly to revamp our juvenile justice system.

TYC was never intended to be a large system, but due to years of cracking down on juvenile offenders and failing to provide adequate community care and intervention, TYC had grown to more than 4,700 juvenile offenders in institutions, halfway houses, and contracted care. Now, after reforms to TYC operations and juvenile justice policy, the population has dropped to less than 2,400.

This session, Senator Whitmire continued to push for the closure of older, more remote TYC facilities which are not suitable for young people to live in, cannot be fully staffed, and do not have access to adequate treatment, health care or education services. To date, the state has closed two institutions and will close two additional facilities next year.

With proven success in reforming the adult criminal justice system, Senator Whitmire turned his focus on similar reforms to the juvenile system. Working with local probation departments across Texas, Senator Whitmire was successful in obtaining funding for a diversion program to keep non-violent offenders in smaller community settings and provide comprehensive education and treatment programs similar to the current juvenile probation system.

Reducing the number of offenders in TYC will give the agency a more manageable population where they can continue to look at closing outdated, remote facilities and better focus on the more serious needs of the boys and girls confined in TYC.

Senator Whitmire again led the effort to keep TYC under Sunset review so the Legislature can continue to focus on keeping non-violent juvenile offenders in the community, while reserving TYC for the more violent, troubled offenders. TYC will be the focus of a more targeted review during the next year with recommendations on further reforms to be considered next session.

"We cannot continue to fail the young boys and girls we have traditionally sent to TYC," said Whitmire. "We have to provide adequate treatment and prevention to our young offenders and their families in the community. Otherwise, they will simply end up in the adult criminal justice system which is unacceptable."



Senator Whitmire chairs the Senate Criminal Justice Committee during session.

As Chairman of the Senate Criminal Justice Committee, Senator Whitmire spends a vast amount of time focusing on reforming our criminal justice system and strengthening public safety. In addition, he is the Chair of the Criminal Justice Legislative Oversight Committee.

SUCCESSSES IN THE ADULT SYSTEM

For the first time in decades, the Legislature entered the session without a shortage of adult prison beds. This was due in large part to efforts pushed by Senator Whitmire during the previous session to fund more than 8,000 new treatment beds for inmates, parolees, and probationers.

The additional funding and beds give judges alternatives to prisons and provide treatment for parolees or probationers who were otherwise being revoked to prison for minor or technical violations. The funding also established a DWI prison unit to rehabilitate low level DWI offenders.

"Texas is the toughest state in the nation on crime," said Senator Whitmire. "By rehabilitating low level offenders and preparing them to return to the community as productive citizens, we can also be smart on crime."

"The reforms we enacted were successful at every level and saved the state millions in incarceration costs and, more importantly, saved lives and families," stated Whitmire. "I am proud our programs have become a nationwide model and I look forward to following and improving on their successes."

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AT A GLANCE

155,163	Inmates in the Adult Prison System	7,444	Parole Revocations
70,087	Inmates in County Jails	43,582	Inmates with Mental Illness History
11,997	Women in Texas Prisons	10th	Average Grade Level of Adult Inmates
235	Babies Born to Female Inmates (2008)	82,449	Inmates Receiving Education Services
248,582	Felony Probationers in Texas	340	Inmates on Death Row
178,341	Misdemeanor Probationers in Texas	2,315	Texas Youth Commission Population
25,782	Felony Probation Revocations	35,967	Juveniles on Probation

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE 81ST LEGISLATURE

PUBLIC EDUCATION

Public school funding and accountability were top on the agenda this session. Legislation passed this session directs \$1.9 billion in new money to public schools, improves equity, and reduces the recapture of property taxes.

Senator Whitmire led the charge in the Senate to guarantee an across-the-board pay raise for public school teachers, librarians, nurses, and counselors. "I am pleased we were able to provide a much-needed and well-deserved pay raise for our educators," stated Whitmire. "It is a start, but we still have a great deal of ground to make up in teacher salaries."

Because of growing concerns about school district accountability, legislation was passed that sets a goal for college readiness, sets standards for end-of-course exams, and reduces the reliance on standardized tests. The new law also gives more options when dealing with failing campuses and gives the Comptroller additional tools to diagnose the financial stability of school districts.



Students from Helms Elementary visit Senator Whitmire during session.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Creating additional Tier One universities is now closer to reality. The Legislature provided the top seven emerging research institutions the funding and a pathway to reach Tier One status. "The steps we took this session will make it easier for my alma mater, the University of Houston, to become the next Tier One university in Texas," Whitmire said. "I look forward to working with UH to help them obtain this important goal for the University, the faculty and students, and the Houston area."

With the increasing cost of higher education in Texas, the Legislature significantly increased funding for financial aid programs including TEXAS Grants.

TRANSPORTATION

Funding our transportation system in Texas has dominated the discussion for many years and was a contentious issue in both the regular and special session. "We were able to pass \$2 billion in bond money for new road construction without allowing any new privately-owned toll roads," commented Whitmire. "Ultimately, the powerful voice of the people prevailed."

HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Texas continues to rank 1st in the number of uninsured. While attempts to expand the Children's Health Insurance Program failed in the House, the Legislature was successful in creating the "Healthy Texas" insurance program to make health insurance more affordable to small employers.

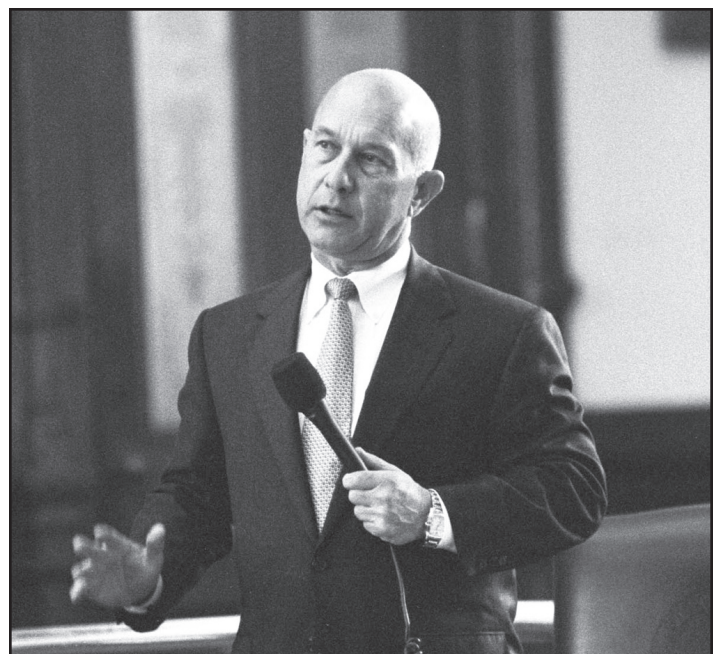
A great deal of scrutiny has been raised about the deplorable conditions in our state schools. Reforms adopted include: additional funding for state schools, enhanced safety and quality of care standards, and increased oversight of the services provided in the community. Reforms passed this session are important steps to help protect Texans with intellectual or developmental disabilities.

The 81st Legislature continued the commitment to improve access to mental health services by appropriating an additional \$84 million for community mental health programs. "Our emergency rooms and prisons have become the de facto mental health providers in Texas," Whitmire said. "Shifting to community care programs and providing prevention and early-intervention saves lives, families, and money."

TAX POLICY

Several bills passed this session aimed at reforming the property appraisal process. A constitutional amendment will be before the voters in November to give the state enforcement over uniform appraisal standards. Legislation also passed which gives the Comptroller the ability to review the governance and operations of each appraisal district.

Small businesses are vital to the Texas economy. Under the new business tax, small businesses were experiencing substantial tax increases. Senator Whitmire was pleased to support legislation to exempt more small businesses from the margins tax.



Senator Whitmire debates legislation on the Senate Floor.

AMENDING THE TEXAS CONSTITUTION

On November 3, 2009, Texans will go to the polls to vote on proposed changes to the Texas Constitution. The Texas Constitution has been amended 456 times since its adoption in 1876. This November, voters will have an additional 11 amendments to approve or deny. Below is a brief description of the constitutional amendments on the ballot.

Prop. 1 (HJR 132) "The constitutional amendment authorizing the financing, including through tax increment financing, of the acquisition by municipalities and counties of buffer areas or open spaces adjacent to a military installation for the prevention of encroachment or for the construction of roadways, utilities, or other infrastructure to protect or promote the mission of the military installation."

Prop. 2 (HJR 36-1) "The constitutional amendment authorizing the legislature to provide for the ad valorem taxation of a residence homestead solely on the basis of the property's value as a residence homestead."

Prop. 3 (HJR 36-3) "The constitutional amendment providing for uniform standards and procedures for the appraisal of property for ad valorem tax purposes."

Prop. 4 (HJR 14-2) "The constitutional amendment establishing the national research university fund to enable emerging research universities in this state to achieve national prominence as major research universities and transferring the balance of the higher education fund to the national research university fund."

Prop. 5 (HJR 36-2) "The constitutional amendment authorizing the legislature to authorize a single board of equalization for two or more adjoining appraisal entities that elect to provide for consolidated equalizations."

Prop. 6 (HJR 116) "The constitutional amendment authorizing the Veterans' Land Board to issue

general obligation bonds in amounts equal to or less than amounts previously authorized."

Prop. 7 (HJR 127) "The constitutional amendment to allow an officer or enlisted member of the Texas State Guard or other state militia or military force to hold other civil offices."

Prop. 8 (HJR 7) "The constitutional amendment authorizing the state to contribute money, property, and other resources for the establishment, maintenance, and operation of veterans hospitals in this state."

Prop. 9 (HJR 102) "The constitutional amendment to protect the right of the public, individually and collectively, to access and use the public beaches bordering the seaward shore of the Gulf of Mexico."

Prop. 10 (HJR 85) "The constitutional amendment to provide that elected members of the governing boards of emergency services districts may serve terms not to exceed four years."

Prop. 11 (HJR 14-1) "The constitutional amendment to prohibit the taking, damaging, or destroying of private property for public use unless the action is for the ownership, use, and enjoyment of the property by the State, a political subdivision of the State, the public at large, or entities granted the power of eminent domain under law or for the elimination of urban blight on a particular parcel of property, but not for certain economic development or enhancement of tax revenue purposes, and to limit the legislature's authority to grant the power of eminent domain to an entity."

In addition to voting on constitutional amendments in November, citizens will be able to vote in many local elections including the City of Houston mayoral and city council elections. If you are not registered to vote, you can request an application from the Harris County Tax Office at 713-368-VOTE or by stopping by any of the Harris County Tax Offices. Applications can be downloaded from the Tax Office at: <http://www.tax.co.harris.tx.us/voter/voterintro.asp>

October 5, 2009

Last Day to Register to Vote in November Election

October 19-30, 2009

Early Voting

November 3, 2009

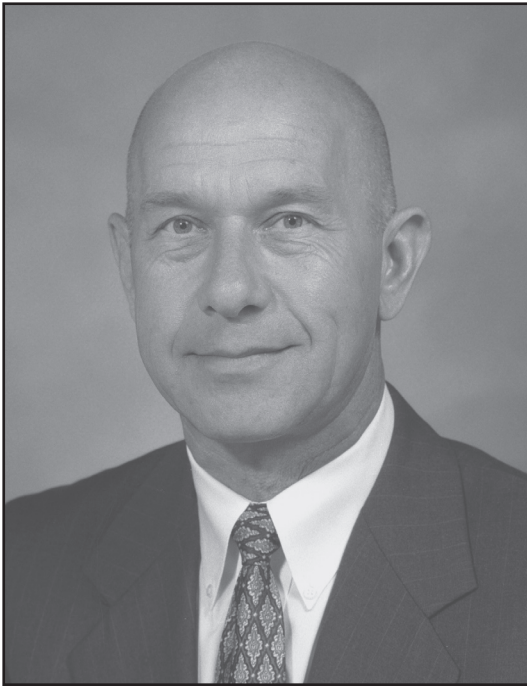
Election Day



Senator John Whitmire

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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	Injured Workers.....	1-800-252-7031
Children's Health Insurance (CHIP)	1-800-647-6558	Insurance Information and Assistance	1-800-252-3439
Child Support Enforcement.....	1-800-262-8014	Legal Referral.....	1-800-252-9690
Consumer Protection (Attorney General)	1-800-621-0508	Medicaid Hotline.....	1-800-252-8263
Consumer Credit Helpline.....	1-800-538-1579	Runaway Hotline.....	1-888-580-4357
Crime Victims Compensation	1-800-983-9933	Student Financial Aid.....	1-877-782-7322
Crime Stoppers.....	1-800-252-8477	Taxpayer Information	1-800-252-5555
Emergency Roadside Assistance.....	1-800-525-5555	Voter Registration/Elections.....	1-800-252-8683
Governor's Citizen Assistance Hotline	1-800-843-5789	Youth Hotline	1-800-210-2278