

Senator Judith Zaffirini



Reports to the Families of District 21

Dear Friends:

As we approach the 80th Legislative Session, I am amazed at our collaborative success and progress for the families of Senate District 21 and look forward to new challenges.

During this interim we are afforded time to consider initiatives to champion during the legislative session that convenes on Jan. 9. The makeup of the Senate will change significantly, and I will become the second highest-ranking senator. This places me in a strong position to promote a bold legislative agenda of initiatives that further will enhance the unique needs of our diverse and expansive region.

Since my first election to the Texas Senate in 1986, I have been proud to work every day to improve the quality of life for the hard working families in SD 21. I applaud the leadership of Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst and appreciate his appointing me to chair the newly created Subcommittee on Capital Funding for Higher Education.

By also naming me vice chair of the Senate Finance Committee, he enabled me to influence significantly legislation and funding for valuable programs related to higher education, early childhood education and K-12 education.

Improving access to early and higher education is my greatest passion and highest priority. There is no better way to prepare for the challenges ahead than to equip our children with the educational tools needed for a better future.

SD 21 comprises nearly 700,000 persons living in 17 counties, namely, Atascosa, Bee, northeast Bexar, Dim-



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– Senator Judith Zaffirini

of my leadership for SD 21. I pray the Lord continues to guide our work and actions.

mit, Duval, Frio, Jim Hogg, Karnes, LaSalle, Live Oak, McMullen, San Patricio, Starr, Webb, Wilson, Zapata and Zavala. It is a region that thrives on the collaborative efforts of leaders who are committed to building strong communities.

To work together efficiently, we must communicate effectively. Accordingly, it is again my pleasure to submit *Senator Judith Zaffirini Reports to the Families of District 21*. My annual newsletter serves as a progress report and a plan of action. It focuses on our opportunities to assess our community needs and plan for positive action and resolution of area concerns. Together we can applaud our successes and look forward to accomplishing new goals and providing families with better services.

Increasing access to quality health care, promoting a healthy and prosperous environment in SD 21 and caring for the needs of a vibrant and flourishing regional population could not be more important or challenging.

Faith and family continue to serve as the foundation for every initiative, every aspect

Judith Zaffirini
Judith Zaffirini

State Senator, District 21

Dewhurst Prioritizes Public School Finance, Higher Education

By Lieutenant Governor

David Dewhurst

The Texas Senate had an extraordinarily successful Special Session this spring. We passed a school finance bill that not only improves our public schools, but also reduces local school property taxes by one-third the year after next. Local school property taxes are too high in Texas, and high property taxes hurt homeowners and businesses. I didn't want to just solve the school finance lawsuit and lower local school property taxes—I wanted to improve our public schools. There is nothing more important to you and to me than ensuring our children have the opportunity to succeed in life. We must provide our children with the necessary tools to get good jobs and achieve their version of the American Dream. I appreciate the work of Senator Judith Zaffirini and the other members of the Senate Committee on Education for putting Texas children first.

Another priority of mine last session was to pass HB 153, legislation sponsored by Senator Zaffirini, that authorizes universities in Texas to issue \$1.9 billion in tuition revenue bonds—state-backed bonds used to construct needed new classrooms and buildings. This year, Texas A&M International received \$37.5 million in bonds. I am proud that the Senate passed this unprecedented piece of legislation that is the largest investment in higher education in the history of our state.



We must allow every hardworking man and woman in the state the ability to prosper, and we must strive to improve the overall quality of life for the almost 23 million men, women and children who call Texas home.

Our universities play key roles in ensuring the future success of our state. We must continue building a world class higher education system that prepares today's students to become tomorrow's leaders. A quality public education and great universities not only provide opportunity for our children, but also create a well-trained workforce that is crucial to our economic growth.

As our economy continues to grow and more people call Texas home, we

must continue to work to improve the quality of life in Texas. We must work to keep our citizens safe, make our healthcare system more accessible and affordable, build new and better roads, ensure adequate and clean water and protect our environment. These are issues that affect every family in this state in every region—issues that I believe will determine the future of Texas.

To ensure a brighter future for our great state, we must offer each student the opportunity to succeed and fulfill their dreams. We must allow every hardworking man and woman in the state the ability to prosper, and we must strive to improve the overall quality of life for the almost 23 million men, women and children who call Texas home.

Working together with leaders like Senator Zaffirini and the other members of the Texas Legislature, we can meet the future challenges of the state. Whether it's balancing our

budget or working to improve our schools and the way we pay for them, as Lieutenant Governor I try to anticipate tomorrow's challenges and turn them into today's opportunities. This last legislative session was a successful one for the people of Texas, and I look forward to the days and years ahead as we continue to work to ensure that the future of all Texans is bright.

Lieutenant Governor David Dewhurst is president of the Texas Senate.

Zaffirini's Eight Amendments Improve School Finance Bill

EXPANDING ACCESS REMAINS TOP PRIORITY

During the three special sessions called by the governor to address public school finance, Senator Judith Zaffirini continued to prioritize creating opportunities for all Texas children to attain an excellent education. Specifically, her priorities included developing an equitable school finance system; increasing funding for meaningful teacher pay raises; restoring fully the promised health-care stipend for teachers and support personnel; meeting transportation, bilingual and special education needs; and reducing property taxes.

The new law passed by the Texas legislature in May contained many of these provisions, largely because of amendments authored by Senator Zaffirini. These included removing onerous language that would have impacted students with limited English proficiency and restoring the health care stipend for school support personnel.

House Bill 1 will reduce property taxes by an historic \$15.7 billion and the net tax burden by \$6.9 billion by 2009. It also raises teachers' salaries by \$1,500 and implements a new broad-based business tax.

"Although I voted against all the tax bills, I voted for HB 1 because it will improve levels of equity between rich and poor schools and add \$1.4 billion to public schools," Senator Zaffirini said. "Nevertheless, I opposed sections of the new law, including its pro-

viding a less than meaningful pay raise of \$3,000 for teachers; failing to restore completely the teacher health care stipend; privatizing low-performing schools; and providing an ill-fated incentive program for teachers before they are paid adequately."

Senator Zaffirini added eight amendments to HB 1:

- Restoring the health care stipend for support personnel;
- Ensuring that accountability measures for students with limited English proficiency focus on dual language proficiency instead of English only;
- Providing free pre-kindergarten services to children of active duty members of the armed forces, members of the National Guard or Reserves or of armed services members who are killed or injured while serving;
- Allowing children to protect themselves from severe allergy attacks by self-administering anaphylaxis medication;
- Authorizing any student who lives in the same household as a student with special needs also to transfer to the same campus where the sibling will receive special education services;
- Extending the national free or reduced-price breakfast and lunch program to a greater number of eligible public school students;
- Improving the operation of the Texas School for the Deaf; and
- Maintaining the reporting of parental involvement programs at low-performing campuses.



SECOND AND THIRD GRADERS listen to Senator Judith Zaffirini read excerpts from *If Judy Pappas Can Do It, Anybody Can!* while Assistant Principal Isabel Valdez observes. The Laredo National Bank/BBVA Group published the gift edition of the inspirational story and contributed copies for targeted students.

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Senator Judith Zaffirini Champions



UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS LEADERS (L-R) President Bill Powers, Chancellor Mark Yudof and Regent Chair James Huffines honor Senator Judith Zaffirini at the Laredo Campus Extension of the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio. Their event focused on her successes in increasing funding for higher education in Texas.

The only senator with a PhD and experience at the public school, junior college and university levels, Senator Judith Zaffirini understands that education is the key to a better future.

Capital Funding Subcommittee

Recognized repeatedly as a champion of education in general and of higher education in particular, Senator Judith Zaffirini chairs the newly created Subcommittee on Capital Funding for Higher Education (SCCFHE).

During the 2006 Third Called Special Session she passed a \$1.9 billion tuition revenue bond (TRB) bill and developed an aggressive higher education legislative agenda that she will build upon during the 2007 legislative session.

As chair of the SCCFHE, Senator Zaffirini will lead the subcommittee as it reviews the process for funding construction, renovation and technology infrastructure on higher education campuses throughout the state.

"I am delighted that Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst named me to chair a subcommittee that will develop important policies related to higher education funding," said Senator Zaffirini, the fourth-highest ranking senator and the highest-ranking senator for Bexar County and the border region. "This subcommittee will play an important role in expanding higher education opportunities for all willing Texans."

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ABOVE: SD 21 COUNTY LEADERS honor Lt. Governor David Dewhurst leadership benefiting higher education in South Texas. They are Karnes County Sheriff David A. Jalufka, Live Oak County Judge Karnes County Judge Alger Kendall, Jr., Carrizo Springs CISD Judge Joe Luna, and former La Salle County Judge Leodoro Maldonado.

BELOW: SUBCOMMITTEE ON CAPITAL FUNDING for Higher Education Chair Judith Zaffirini, Senator Kyle Janek and ex-officio members Steve Ogden, Royce West, Robert Duncan, and Kyle Janek to discuss innovative ways to address capital needs of Texas colleges and universities.

Subcommittee members are Zaffirini, chair; Senators Robert Duncan, R-Lubbock; Kyle Janek, R-Houston; Steve Ogden, R-College Station; and Royce West, D-Dallas.

"Higher education is the key," Lt. Gov. Dewhurst said. "This subcommittee will play an important role in ensuring that our college campuses continue to grow and that they are able to meet the future demands of a growing student population."

\$1.9 Billion TRB Bill

Senator Zaffirini and her subcommittee played a critical role in securing \$1.9 billion for TRBs that will enable universities to build much needed classroom and research facilities. House Bill 153 by Rep. Geanie Morrison, R-Victoria, and Senator Zaffirini, provided 63 TRBs for 48 colleges and universities throughout Texas, including institutions in the systems of Texas A&M University, The University of Texas, University of Houston, Texas State University, University of North Texas and Texas Tech University. Independent universities receiving bond authority include Texas Woman's University, Midwestern State University, Stephen F. Austin State University, Texas Southern University and Texas State Technical College at Waco.

"This significant investment is not only equitable for our citizens, it also will improve their accountability," Senator Zaffirini said. "Higher education is my passion, it truly is to work with Lt. Gov. Dewhurst, Rep. Morrison and other legislators to build education facilities in Texas and across the state."

HB 153 included \$37.5 million for the A&M International University, \$25 million for the Student Center at the University of Texas at Dallas, \$7.6 million for the Loop Water Loop and \$4.9 million for the Fine and Performing Arts Center at the University of Texas at Dallas.

The University of Texas at San Antonio received bond authority for a new building to construct a satellite campus in San Antonio. What's more, Senator Zaffirini helped secure \$40 million for Texas Tech University in San Antonio, \$74,250,000 for a new building at the University of Texas at San Antonio and \$60 million for a new Research Facility at the University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio.

Senator Zaffirini also included funding for the citrus center building at Texas A&M University in Kingsville. V

ons Higher Education for All Texans



Governor David Dewhurst (BACK) and Senator Judith Zaffirini for Texas. They are (L-R) Freer ISD Superintendent Edgar Camacho, County Judge Jim Huff, Crystal City Mayor Norma Hernandez, Springs CISD Superintendent Dr. Cecilia Moreno, Zavala County Leodoro Martinez, Jr.

TEXAS A&M LEADERS (L-R) Chancellor Robert McTeer, and members of the Board of Regents Bill Jones, vice chair; John White, chair; and Wendy Gramm, Ida "Weisie" Clement Steen and Lupe Fraga honor Senator Judith Zaffirini for her leadership and support. Interacting with officials from all higher education systems, colleges and universities helps Senator Zaffirini understand the needs and priorities of students, faculty and staff.

MEETING for Higher Education members (L-R) Senator Steve Ogden, officio member Senator Florence Shapiro meet during the interim of Texas colleges and universities.

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available for our universities, but
their accountability and acces-
Zaffirini said. "Because higher
passion, it truly was a pleasure
Gov. Dewhurst, my Senate col-
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the Student Success Center,
the Loop Road and Chill
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Senator Zaffirini worked to
n for Texas A&M University
4,250,000 for an engineering
University of Texas at San
million for the South Texas
at the University of Texas
center at San Antonio.
ni also included \$8,480,000
ter building at Texas A&M
ngsville. What's more, the

\$33,800,000 for a Science and Technology Learning Center, and Texas A&M University at Corpus Christi received \$40 million for a nursing, health and kinesiology facility.

Higher Ed Priorities

Several priority higher education bills passed by Senator Zaffirini during the 2005 session are reforming higher education in Texas significantly.

She continues to focus not only on increasing opportunities for student success, but also on expanding access to college. HB 1172 by Senator Zaffirini and Rep. Fred Brown, R-College Station, for example, implemented uniform grade-point average and timely graduation requirements for state financial aid programs. SB 34 by Senator Zaffirini and Rep. Morrison provides a university student with a \$1,000 rebate for completing studies timely.

In addition to encouraging more timely graduation, SB 34 allows students to serve as non-voting members of boards of regents of university systems.

"The student regent will not only provide valuable insight and information, but also will serve as a liaison between students and regents," said Senator Zaffirini.

University of Texas at Brownsville received

Her legislative priorities for 2007 include providing tax-free textbooks for college students, expanding the state work-study financial aid program to allow students to serve as peer tutors and mentors, improving the transferability of community college students, expanding dual-credit programs that allow high school students to earn college credit and increasing math and science participation, especially among female and minority students.

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CITY OF ROMA OFFICIALS (L-R) Commissioner Rogelio Ybarra, Mayor Fernando Peña, and Commissioner Victor M. Ramirez join Senator Judith Zaffirini in welcoming Starr County's newest attraction, the Roma Bluffs World Birding Center. The center is part of the natural preservation network that runs along the Lower Rio Grande Valley wildlife corridor from Falcon Dam to the Gulf of Mexico.



CAROLYN AND JOHN NEVELS receive the first Certificate of Birth Resulting in Stillbirth from Senator Judith Zaffirini, author of SB 271. She holds a photograph of Bump, their child. Her bill authorized the state certificates. Also attending the presentation is (left) Geraldine Harris, director of the Texas Vital Statistics Bureau.

Initiatives improve health, public safety, economic opportunities

Senator Judith Zaffirini has passed 515 bills since 1987, including 58 bills during the 2005 legislative session.

With Rep. Lon Burnam, D-Ft. Worth, she passed Senate Bill 271—the “Texas Missing Angels” bill, which allows parents of a stillborn child to secure a certificate signifying that the birth resulted in stillbirth. Previously, there was no official recognition that a stillborn child was born, and parents received only a certificate of fetal death.

Senator Zaffirini also worked closely with transplant physicians and organ recipients while authorizing legislation to create an organ donor registry. House Bill 120 by Rep. Glenda Dawson, R-Pearland, and Senator Zaffirini will help connect willing organ donors with the more than 5,600 Texans waiting for lifesaving transplants. Every 13 minutes, a new name is added

to the national transplant waiting list. An average of 17 persons die every day while waiting for an organ.

To improve organ donation, the Donor Education Awareness and Registry (DEAR) will be online by Sept. 1. In addition to listing persons who are willing to donate their organs, DEAR will create educational and awareness activities.

A champion of improving the health and economic infrastructure of *colonias* along the Texas-Mexico border, Senator Zaffirini and Rep. Ryan Guillen, D-Rio Grande City, passed SB 827,

which creates a system for tracking the progress of state-funded projects that benefit colonias. Since September, 2005, representatives from eight state agencies and Senator Zaffirini’s staff have been working diligently to develop a classification system to rate the health risks of each colonia in the state and to assess the types of state projects funded for each colonia.

“By identifying the colonias with the least resources, we can prioritize funding to construct roads, build housing and improve infrastructure in the communities that have the most critical need,” Senator Zaffirini said.

HB 1058 by Rep. Joe Pickett, D-El Paso, and Senator Zaffirini allows school districts to issue a high school diploma to honorably discharged veterans who served in World War II, Korea or Vietnam and were scheduled to be graduated from high school between 1940 and 1975.



FRIO COUNTY OFFICIALS participate in a ribbon-cutting ceremony for affordable housing for residents in Pearsall. Joining Senator Judith Zaffirini are (L-R) José Treviño, city manager; Representative Tracy King, D-Batesville; Commissioner Ruben Maldonado; Linda McMahan, Chase Bank; City Council Member Abel Nieto; Diana McIver, DMA Development Company; Drew Foster, CharterMac Capital; City Council Member Conrad Carrasco; and Pearsall Mayor George Cabasos.

Sister Judith: Senator Zaffirini Named Honorary Nun

After being named “Mister” South Texas in 1999, Senator Judith Zaffirini was named “Sister Judith” by the Sisters of Mercy and Mercy Ministries. They made the senator an honorary nun for her outstanding public service and commitment to improving health and wellness for Texas families.

“I am proud to be ‘Sister Judith’ and share this recognition with the many groups and persons, including the Sisters of Mercy and Mercy Ministries, who unite to promote, champion and improve health and human services, particularly for the needy,” Senator Zaffirini said.

Mercy Ministries provides primary healthcare, healthcare education and social services and acts as a safe haven for victims of domestic violence. The organization aims to address the needs of all persons, especially those who are economically poor and marginal.

“Because I grew up with nuns and always have worked

with them, I learned not only to prioritize faith, but also to collaborate in achieving our mutual goals,” Senator Zaffirini said. “From them I learned the truth of the (translated) words of Luciano de Crescenzo: ‘We are all angels with only one wing, and only by embracing each other can we fly.’”

As vice chair of the Senate Finance Committee and chair of the Appropriations Conference Committee Article II Workgroup for Health and Human Services during the 2005 legislative

session, Senator Zaffirini restored mental health, chiropractic, hospice, podiatry, hearing aid and vision benefits to both the Children Health Insurance Program and Medicaid.

A long-time advocate for persons with disabilities, Senator Zaffirini fought to reduce waiting lists for persons waiting to receive community-based services, some of whom have been on the lists for more than 10 years. In the state budget for fiscal year 2006-07, Senator Zaffirini secured \$162.9 million to move 11,789 persons from waiting lists to programs.

A former chair and current member of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee, Senator Zaffirini’s legislative successes include passing bills to immunize all Texas children; facilitate independent living for persons with disabilities; and reform Medicaid, indigent health care, welfare, nursing homes, adoption and child support.



“SISTER JUDITH” is the new title bestowed on Senator Judith Zaffirini by Sister Mary de Lellis Treviño, a member of the Sisters of Mercy. They named her an honorary nun for her leadership in health and welfare legislation, her personal commitment to its expansion and provision to all people and for her collaborative efforts dedicated toward enhancing health and human services for all Texas families.

Interim Presents Opportunity to Develop Local Bills

The interim at hand is an opportune time to develop legislation for the forthcoming session, especially for bills that impact SD 21 communities directly.

Examples of local bills include legislation to create or affect a water district, hospital district, local court or juvenile board.

Because securing and demonstrating local support is imperative, the senator requires resolutions in support of local bills to be adopted by impacted county judges and commissioners

courts, mayors and city councils, and local organizations and residents.

Equally important, the hometown senator and representative should agree to sponsor identical bills. Without the leadership of both local legislators, local bills will fail. Accordingly, supporters of local bills must work with both or risk failure.

Legislators must comply with Texas Constitutional requirements in filing local bills timely. To file a bill on Jan. 14, for instance, legislators must

attach a publisher’s affidavit that the bill’s caption was published in a local newspaper by Dec. 14. Without at least a 30-day advance public notice, a local bill cannot be filed. The procedure for publication is provided by statute (Chapter 313, Government Code) and can be accessed via the Internet at <http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/statutes/gv.toc.htm>.

Persons interested in developing legislation should contact Senator Zaffirini or her legislative staff via 512/463-0121.



Senator Zaffirini Honored for Leadership, Communications

Senator Judith Zaffirini will begin her 20th year in the Texas Senate in 2007. This is a memorable achievement for the first Hispanic woman ever to be elected to the body and to serve as President Pro Tempore and Governor for a Day.

Named one of *Texas Monthly's* "10 Best Legislators" for 1997, 2001 and 2005, Senator Zaffirini is distinguished by her flawless voting record and legendary work ethic. She recently was named an honorary nun by the Sisters of Mercy, and her legislative successes in diverse

areas including higher education and health and human services have been recognized by many organizations.

The senator has won more than 555 awards for her professional and public service work, including more than 90 for communication projects. Awards received during this interim include the Texas Advocacy Award from the American Cancer Society, the Texas Hospital Advocacy Tribute from the Texas Hospital Association and special recognition from the Mid Río Grande Border Area Health Education Center for her countless legislative contributions



CONTINUING THE BURNT ORANGE tradition, Senator Judith Zaffirini celebrates Carlos Jr.'s 2006 graduation from The University of Texas School of Law with her husband, Carlos Zaffirini Sr. She was the graduation speaker.

benefiting health and education programs in South Texas.

Senator Zaffirini also received numerous awards in a wide array of media categories from the Press Women of Texas and the Communicator Awards.

Since 1987 she has maintained a 100 percent perfect attendance record in the Texas Senate, except for breaking quorum deliberately in 2005 to prevent an untimely redistricting effort that hurt her district. In June, 2006, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that this same redistricting effort violated the Voting Rights Act and dis-

enfranchised voters living in SD 21. From 1987 through the 2006 special sessions she maintained her 100 percent voting record, casting more than 34,000 consecutive votes. She has sponsored and passed 515 bills and 51 substantive resolutions and co-sponsored and passed another 253 bills.

Senator Zaffirini and her family carry on a proud tradition as Texas Exes who bleed burnt orange. At UT she honed her resolute work ethic to earn B.S., M.A. and PhD degrees, each with a 3.9 GPA. Hard work, de-

termination and devotion to studies are words of advice Senator Zaffirini has given to thousands of students at college and high school commencement ceremonies and events.

She has been married to Carlos Zaffirini, a graduate of UT Law School, for more than 40 years. Together they share an office in Laredo where he practices law, and she owns an award-winning communications firm, Zaffirini Communications. Their son, Carlos Jr., is a graduate of the UT McCombs School of Business and a 2006 graduate of the UT School of Law.