

SENATOR JOAN HUFFMAN

CAPITOL UPDATE

THE 81ST INTERIM



The Senate of The State of Texas

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JOAN HUFFMAN
DISTRICT 17

Dear Friends & Neighbors,

Thank you for the continued honor of representing you in the Texas Senate. The upcoming 82nd Texas Legislature will be presented with numerous challenges and opportunities when it reconvenes in January of 2011. I am currently working with constituents, community leaders, and other stakeholders to develop proactive solutions to address the concerns and needs of Senate District 17. Inside this Capitol Update you will find information on issues affecting citizens in our communities and across the state.

Some of the most difficult and pressing issues we will face in the next legislative session are balancing the budget, redistricting, and improving government efficiency. The demands from our growing population, required participation in federal programs, and the impact from the current economic situation continue to increase the strain on our state's limited resources. Our district is a dynamic region that encompasses one-third of the Texas coast, including many major businesses, schools, hospitals, and neighborhoods that will be directly affected by the choices made in Austin.

Decisions made next year will have a lasting impact throughout this new decade. I will work with my colleagues to ensure our decisions enable Texas to grow and remain strong. The safety of our borders and the protection of our neighborhoods from threats, natural and otherwise, continues to be a priority.

In January, Lieutenant Governor David Dewhurst released interim charges for each Senate committee to examine, review, and make legislative recommendations for consideration next session. During the remainder of the interim, committees will continue to hold interim hearings around the state to study interim charges and prepare in advance of the 2011 legislative session. I encourage each of you to actively participate in our governmental process.

I appreciate all of you who have called, e-mailed, and written to my office during the interim. Discussions with local leaders and correspondence from you continue to be the most important way for me to gather information about what matters most at home. As your voice in the Texas Senate, I will confront the challenges ahead by listening, gathering the facts, and standing firm on issues that affect the families and businesses of Senate District 17. It is my hope you will find the information in this update helpful. Again, thank you for the opportunity to serve you in the Texas Senate. Please feel free to contact me should you need my assistance.

Sincerely,

Joan Huffman
Senator Joan Huffman



Inside . . .

- **USEFUL WEBSITES**
- **HURRICANE PREPAREDNESS INFO**
- **IMPORTANT STATE CONTACTS**

Fiscal Responsibility



Senator Huffman was asked to participate during the Senate Finance Committee hearing regarding budget oversight of the University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, the Texas General Land Office, and other state agencies that received state and federal funding as a result of Hurricane Ike damage.

Through the hard work and tough choices made by all Texans, our state is weathering the economic storm better than most. As families continue to trim their personal budgets, the state too is looking at ways to stay ahead of forecasted budget challenges. Comptroller Susan Combs noted in her economic update that revenues have “weakened substantially as the national recession began exerting its full influence on Texas.” I am working with my colleagues to protect services for vulnerable Texans, while remaining prudent in determining the use of every tax-dollar.

Texas is one of 21 states which operates exclusively on a two-year, rather than a one-year budget cycle. Between sessions, legislative leaders monitor budget implementation and evaluate state agencies’ success in achieving performance measures. State agencies have begun to reduce their current operating budgets by five percent, while maintaining essential services, in order to adjust for budgetary limitations. Agencies have also been directed to prepare for a 10 percent reduction for the next budget cycle.

Voters have approved provisions to the Texas Constitution limiting the growth of state spending and prohibiting spending beyond the amount of revenue the comptroller estimates will be available during the two-year budget period. The comptroller’s biennial revenue estimate, which will be released in January, will define budgetary boundaries and limits on state spending through August 2013.

For additional information on state spending and updated revenue estimates visit the Comptroller of Public Accounts website at: www.window.state.tx.us.

Securing the Border

Texas shares a 1,254 mile border with Mexico providing opportunities and challenges for national and international trade and security. Criminal enterprises are exploiting the border, requiring Texans to remain proactive in securing our border.

State law enforcement continues to increase its presence and resources along the border to combat the threat of spillover violence. Texas Military Forces have deployed helicopters to the Texas-Mexico border to increase aerial surveillance and to relay important intelligence back to local, state, and federal law enforcement on the ground to ensure the safety of our citizens.

Additional resources ready for rapid deployment have been placed on standby, including the Texas Department of Public Safety SWAT Teams, Trooper Strike Teams, and Ranger Reconnaissance Teams.

One Person, One Vote

The State of Texas has experienced rapid population growth since the 2000 Census, when the Texas population count was almost 21 million. The United States Census Bureau estimated in 2009 the Texas population was nearing 25 million, an increase of 18.8 percent. In comparison, the population of the United States is estimated to have grown by 9.1 percent over the same period.

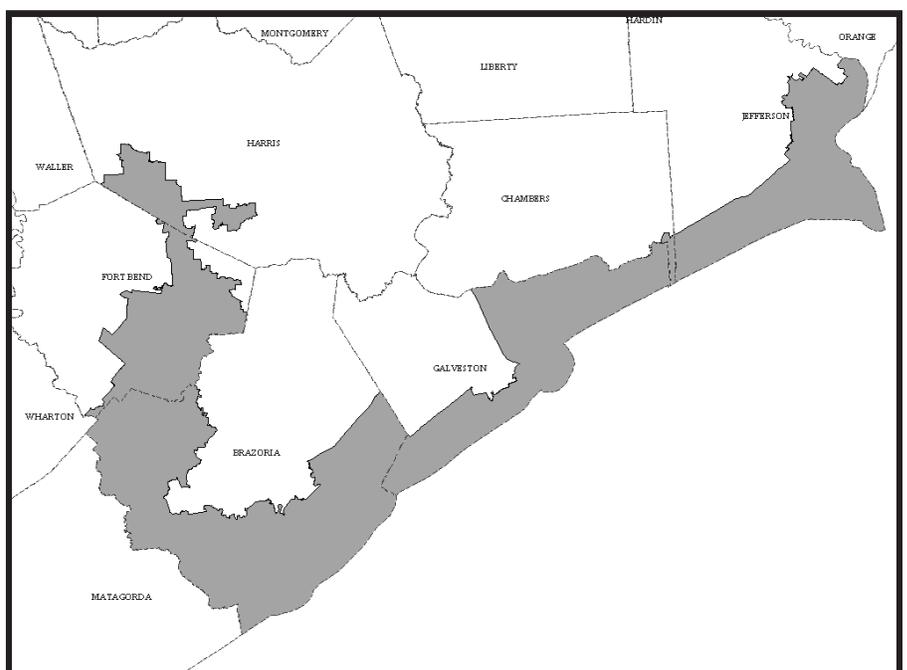
In spite of the state’s total increase in population, growth has not been uniform across the state. Current estimates suggest that 57 percent of that growth occurred in the I-35 corridor, 39 percent occurred in the eastern region of the state, and 4 percent occurred in the western region. Demographers indicate 25 of the fastest-growing United States counties are in Texas. Senate District 17’s six counties represent some of the largest and fastest growing counties in Texas.

Figures from the decennial census help determine the number of congressional seats apportioned to each state. The data is also used to update and adjust the boundaries for state legislative districts and many local government districts.

In order to preserve the “one person, one vote” principle, congressional districts must have populations that are as equal as practicable within each state. The Texas Legislative Council projects that the ideal Texas House district population will rise from 139,012 in 2001 to almost 165,000 in 2011. The ideal Texas Senate district population in 2001 was 672,639, in 2011 the projected district may have up to 784,000.

For detailed information on Texas Redistricting visit the Texas Legislative Council’s website at: <http://www.tlc.state.tx.us/redist/redist.html>.

Senate District 17 encompasses all or part of 34 cities and 29 school districts in Brazoria, Chambers, Fort Bend, Galveston, Harris and Jefferson counties.



Taxpayer Transparency

A new state website, www.TexasTransparency.org, launched this year to provide citizens with direct access to data on how Texas dollars are spent at virtually all levels of government. The site has user friendly tools, including “Where the Money Goes” that explains state spending, a new “Where the Money Comes From” feature to show state revenues, an Open Data Center for direct access to Comptroller data, information about the state budget process, and examples of transparency efforts at the local government level.

Visitors to the site may also search for spending information on individual state agencies, local municipalities, and may find information about federal stimulus dollars and Texas investments. This is an invaluable tool for Texans who want to educate themselves on how money is collected and spent by state officials as well as county, city and school district budget writers.

Save Energy, Save Money

This past year, Texas and much of the nation experienced one of the coldest winters in recent history. Texans were forced to keep heaters on for extended periods in order to stay warm, which caused our state to shatter previous winter electricity usage records. As temperatures dropped and the demand for energy increased, Texans experienced higher than usual electric bills.

As we approach the end of the summer months and the beginning of winter, simple energy conservation efforts can help alleviate rising energy bills. The Public Utility Commission provides useful tips to help lower electric bills, and links customers to more affordable plans by comparing companies’ rates and services for your area. For money and energy savings tips visit: www.thepowertochoose.org.

Shedding Light on Sunset

As a member of the Sunset Advisory Commission, which reviews effectiveness and necessity of state agencies, I will be judicious in determining how we may improve state government. The Sunset Advisory Commission was established in 1977 to review the policies and programs of more than 150 government agencies. After seeking public input, the Commission will adopt recommendations on how to improve each agency’s operations.

The current review includes comprehensive evaluations of almost 30 agencies including: the Texas Department of Transportation, the Railroad Commission, the Texas Public Utility Commission, the Department of Insurance, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, and others.

For the Sunset process to reach its full potential, each Texan must be able to fully and equally participate in every phase of the Sunset review. When the public participates in the review process it provides valuable information to the Sunset Commission about how well or poorly an agency performs its functions.

Information and reports on the Sunset Advisory Commission and process can be accessed at: www.sunset.state.tx.us.



Senator Huffman and Senator Nichols discuss possible agency efficiencies at a recent Sunset Advisory Commission hearing.

Be Prepared



Senator Huffman, former Galveston Mayor Lyda Ann Thomas, and Texas Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson joined with area representatives at the Galveston Seawall to announce funding for coastal protection projects.

All Senate District 17 residents should prepare an emergency preparedness plan in advance of any potential storms. Knowing what actions to take when facing impacts from a natural disaster can be life-saving. The Texas Department of Public Safety has released the State Hurricane Plan and officials continue to improve protocols for evacuating and sheltering Texans with special needs, providing mass care and shelter hubs, evacuation tracking, disaster communications, hospital evacuations, donations management, animals in disasters, and re-entry operations. Information concerning the State Hurricane Plan can be found at the Texas Department of Public Safety’s Division of Emergency Management website at: www.txdps.state.tx.us/dem.

Coastal residents should take simple steps to protect their families and homes prior to a storm threatening the Texas coast. Citizens with special needs can register as needing special evacuation assistance by dialing 211 from a landline phone.

SIMPLE STEPS FOR PREPARING FOR A STORM:

- ★ Creating a plan for your family
- ★ Having an emergency kit
- ★ Prepare your home and vehicle before evacuation
- ★ Knowing your evacuation routes

These tips and other helpful preparedness resources can be found at: <http://www.texasonline.com/portal/tol/en/emergency/hurricane>.



Senator Joan Huffman

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Senator Huffman and her husband, Keith, join son Luke in December 2008 for Huffman's Oath of Office ceremony.

Senator Joan Huffman

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About Senator Joan Huffman

Sen. Huffman took office in December 2008 after winning a special election to fill the vacated office of Senate District 17. Prior to serving in the Senate, Huffman was twice elected Judge to the 183rd Criminal District Court. She earned a reputation as a fair and tough enforcer of the law. The Houston Police Officer's Union recognized Huffman as the "Criminal District Judge of the Year" in 2000. Senator Huffman earned her undergraduate degree from Louisiana State University. After graduation, she moved to Houston embarking upon a distinguished career with the Harris County District Attorney's Office. As a secretary, Huffman was inspired by the dedication of Harris County prosecutors and decided to attend law school. She took night classes at South Texas School of Law while serving as a legal intern and secretary. Upon earning her law degree, Huffman was hired as a prosecutor and advanced from misdemeanor court to Chief Felony Prosecutor, Special Crimes Gang Prosecutor, and Legal Counsel to the Organized Crime Narcotics Task Force. She served as lead prosecutor in over 100 jury trials, including murders, sexual assaults, aggravated robberies, and sexual assaults of children.



Following with Senate tradition, Senator Huffman is supported by the other women legislators of the Texas Senate while laying out her first bill in the Senate Chamber.