



SENATOR JOSÉ RODRÍGUEZ  
DISTRICT 29

## PRESS RELEASE



CAPITOL OFFICE  
P.O. Box 12068  
AUSTIN, TEXAS 78711  
512/463-0129  
FAX 512/463-7100

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

June 1, 2015

**CONTACT:** Sito Negrón

512-463-0129 (o) / 915-227-0360 (m)

# State Sen. José Rodríguez's statement on accomplishments of the 84th Legislature

Austin - The Texas Legislature's 84th Regular Session has adjourned sine die. State Sen. José Rodríguez released the following statement:

*We'll have plenty of time to take stock of the 84th Texas Legislature, which passed about 1,400 bills out of more than 6,600 filed. Some laws will be obvious in their impact immediately, while others will take more time to assess.*

*As the primary author or sponsor, **I passed 71 bills and concurrent resolutions this session**, as well as amended several additional measures onto other members' bills. The legislation:*

- *allows for the maintenance and expansion of successful dual language education programs statewide;*
- *improves parent and teacher input on services for students in special education programs;*
- *helps the City of El Paso's economic development efforts to attract new downtown convention center hotels;*
- *saves counties and the state tens of millions of dollars by ensuring non-violent offenders are not unnecessarily incarcerated in county and state jails;*
- *closes a gap in Medicaid and CHIP benefits for children exiting the juvenile justice system;*
- *ensures those who are wrongly convicted have expedient access to legal representation;*
- *allows victims of sexual assault to be reimbursed for certain medical expenses;*
- *improves the process by which victims of family violence, sexual assault, and human trafficking can apply for protective orders;*
- *makes state job opportunities more accessible to veterans, expands a successful state veteran entrepreneur program, and increases sources of revenue for a state grant program benefitting veterans and their families;*
- *expands the ability of voters to receive an automatic mail-in ballot;*

- *expands university students' access to valuable mental health and suicide prevention information;*
- *promotes installation of renewable energy devices, renewable power for water desalination projects, and statewide study of better sustainable resource management practices;*
- *streamlines rules hindering non-profit low-income homebuilders;*
- *eases administrative burdens for small co-operative farmers, and encourages school-based aquaponics programs;*
- *advances important new State Bar of Texas-endorsed laws for trust and probate administration;*
- *improves and streamlines family law court proceedings, which saves families time, resources, and hassle, and minimizes opportunities for inter-family conflict; and*
- *improves laws relating to child custody, better ensuring children are not exposed to family violence, and their physical health and emotional development are provided for.*

**I also helped secure funding for Senate District 29 priority items, including:**

- *\$3.4 million for the long-awaited Franklin Mountain State Park Visitors Center in the budget;*
- *\$70 million in tuition revenue bonds for an interdisciplinary research facility and \$7 million for the pharmacy program at the University of Texas at El Paso;*
- *\$75.52 million in tuition revenue bonds for the Medical Science Building 2 at the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center-El Paso;*
- *\$30 million for military cities; and*
- *more than \$3 million for the Eighth Court of Appeals.*

*While I believe that this legislative session began and ended with a focus on the wrong priorities—**tax breaks and guns instead of education and health care**—we were able to stop some extremely bad proposals altogether, while working with the majority to improve other measures.*

*As Chairman of the Senate Hispanic Caucus, I worked with my colleagues to **stop anti-immigrant proposals** that would have:*

- *forced local police into immigration enforcement roles; and*
- *eliminated the ability of Texas DREAMERS, college-age state residents brought here as unauthorized immigrant children, to attend university and pay the same rate as other Texas residents.*

*We also worked to **stop education proposals** that would have:*

- *diverted more public school funds to private schools via vouchers; and*
- *targeted teacher unions and other state employee unions by forbidding automatic payroll deduction for dues, making it more difficult for members to support the organizations that advocate for them.*

*While some "school reform" proposals passed, we were able to work with the majority to make the bills better without significantly damaging our underfunded public school system.*

Further, while we were not successful in sending a measure to voters to repeal the same-sex marriage constitutional ban, we were able to **stop measures that would have discriminated against LGBTQ Texans** in new ways.

Unfortunately, we were not able to stop:

- **attacks on local control**, such as the law that stops cities from addressing such major issues as fracking next to neighborhoods;
- legislation that **limited citizen appeals** to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality; and
- **"open carry" and "campus carry" legislation**, although we were able to make the latter better by giving campus presidents the ability to request from their boards of regents that certain areas and events remain off limits to guns.

Meanwhile, the Legislature as a whole failed to:

- fully fund our **unconstitutional public education system**; or
- expand **access to health care**, whether under the Affordable Care Act or through a hybrid "Texas Way."

While this was not unexpected, it was disappointing. These are missed opportunities. We have the means, and we have the needs. However, state leadership prioritized tax breaks over our schools, and in the one area where we addressed a major need, transportation, we did so in a way that **limits the new funding to road-building**, ignoring the growing demand for mass transit in both urban and rural communities.

We also committed nearly \$1 billion in General Revenue funds to the Department of Public Safety in the name of "border security," a nebulous concept that successfully has driven political campaigns but has little hard data behind it to justify the enormous amounts of **funding and paramilitary buildup in border communities**.

These **missed opportunities and misplaced priorities** are especially disappointing because they show a failure to recognize how Texas is evolving. As California last year became a Latino-majority state for the first time, so too will Texas become a Latino-majority state.

This is an opportunity to build on what always has made Texas unique. It is a frontier state in a global economy, and the richness of its resources, the vastness of its territory, and the growth of its diversity should be celebrated, not with tax cuts and mean-spirited laws, but with tolerance for our differences, and prudent and targeted investment from a Legislature that knows it is good business to **embrace the New Texas**.

\*\*\*

José Rodríguez represents Texas Senate District 29, which includes the counties of El Paso, Hudspeth, Culberson, Jeff Davis, and Presidio. He represents both urban and rural constituencies, and more than 350 miles of the Texas-Mexico border. Senator Rodríguez currently serves as the Chairman of the Senate Hispanic Caucus, and is a member of the Senate Committees on Education; Health and Human Services; Veteran Affairs and Military Installations; Nominations; and Agriculture, Water, and Rural Affairs.