

CAPITOL UPDATE 2015



a newsletter from State Senator Craig Estes, Senate District 30



The Senate of The State of Texas

Senator Craig Estes
District 30

Fellow Texans,

Another productive Legislative Session has come to an end, and I am proud to deliver some good news about what we were able to accomplish. As always, my top priority in the Texas Senate is to provide a strong voice for the citizens of Senate District 30. Our home in beautiful North Texas has unlimited potential for excellence, and I remain committed to standing up for my constituency to ensure the best possible quality of life for our families.

The Texas Legislature meets regularly for 140 days from January to May every odd-numbered year to address the growing challenges and opportunities facing our great state. This is a critical time for our legislators to come together and analyze proposed solutions, as well as create a strong budget for the upcoming biennium. As we convened for the first time in January, we were faced with a great deal of social and economic difficulties that many believed would pose a threat to the future prosperity of our state. But as your State Senator, I am very proud of the strong conservative solutions we provided to keep us moving in the right direction.

My office received frequent input from constituents of Senate District 30 throughout the Legislative Session, and I want to thank you all for being engaged in the legislative process. You've made representative democracy work here in Texas by making your voices heard. This great state is a wonderful place to live, work, and raise a family not because of what we lawmakers do in Austin, but because of what you do. Thank you for your involvement in our democracy – you make it work.

I also want to sincerely thank you for the privilege to represent you in the Texas Senate. Furthermore, I appreciate the time you take out of your busy schedule to read this newsletter. As you read it, I hope you will find it useful and educational on the wide range of issues addressed by the Texas Legislature. Your involvement helps me better represent you in the Texas Senate.

I will continue to do all that I can to be a guardian against legislation that I believe is wrong for our communities. Each day I am honored to serve the residents of Senate District 30, and I thank you for your continued support and prayers. What a privilege it is to serve you, the people of Senate District 30 in Austin! We live in the greatest country in the world - the United States of America. We also live in the greatest state of the union - Texas. I also think we live in the greatest part of Texas - North Texas! We are triply blessed. I hope you agree. As always, please feel free to contact me if you have any questions, concerns, or legislative ideas you would like me to consider. I look forward to seeing you in the district soon!

God Bless Texas,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Craig Estes".

Craig Estes
State Senator
District 30



Budget and Taxes

First and foremost, I am proud to report the legislature was able to provide a strong, balanced budget for the 2016-2017 biennium without raising your taxes, while providing crucial investments in education, transportation, and border security.

After a great deal of debate, we embraced a \$209.4 billion two-year budget, which provides \$1.2 billion in property tax relief and \$2.6 billion in franchise tax relief. While I have been a strong advocate for eliminating the franchise tax all together, I am pleased that we were able to take a step in the right direction this session.

We also passed a strong supplemental budget (House Bill 2), which provided additional funding to our current budget for the state’s health care plan for retired teachers, as well as our recent border security efforts. Fortunately, the Senate approved my request to provide reimbursement to Erath County for the Eddie Ray Routh trial. This funding is absolutely necessary, as the tragedy that occurred with the deaths of Chris Kyle and Chad Littlefield devastated the community and the costs associated with the trial would have been a tremendous burden on Erath County.

Overall, the Legislature provided a budget that will ensure Texas continues to operate in a fiscally conservative manner, while providing sufficient funds where we need them the most. As a fiscal conservative and former business owner, I live by the words of President Ronald Reagan who once said, “It’s time we reduced the government budget and left the family budget alone.”

Funding State Parks

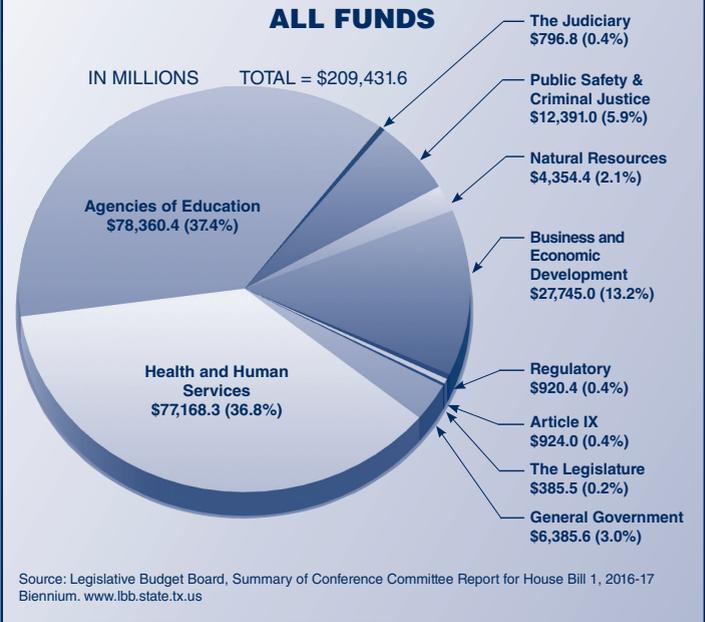
Currently, a portion of the sales tax revenue generated by sporting goods-related transactions is allocated to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department (TPWD) and to the Texas Historical Commission, but the amount received by these agencies is subject to legislative appropriation. The sporting goods sales tax is the most relevant connection in relation to park use, and surveys have shown a relationship between the purchase of sports equipment and state park visitation.

The Legislature has only appropriated 40 percent of these funds to TPWD in recent years, leaving the rest of the funding in General Revenue to be spent on items



Sen. Estes & Rep. King with Parker County constituents.

Summary of Conference Committee Report House Bill 1, 2016-17



not germane to parks. This diversion of funding has caused great concern due to the high cost and dire need of maintenance for our parks in Texas.

To ensure that our state parks in Texas are adequately funded, I authored legislation to dedicate 100 percent of sporting goods sales tax revenue exclusively for parks and historical sites. House Bill 158 (identical to my Senate Bill 248) will keep a promise to taxpayers that their tax dollars will be spent for their intended purpose, and will increase transparency in our budgeting process.

Education

The Legislature made vital improvements to our pre-K programs, which the state currently funds for students in low-income, military, and foster families. We passed H.B. 4, which establishes a high-quality, state funded pre-K program that school districts can choose to participate in, provided they meet the program’s requirements.

I was also excited to work on a bill that removed the limit on dual credit courses a high school student may take. House Bill 505 will prohibit the Texas Education Coordinating Board from adopting a rule to limit the number of dual credit courses a student may take in a semester or academic year. I believe our high school students should be able to challenge themselves and enroll in as many of these courses as they and their parent sees fit. This legislation will encourage students to continue their education in a cost effective manner.

Additionally, I was proud to support House Bill 100, which authorized the issuance of revenue bonds to fund capital projects at public institutions of higher education. This legislation will fund construction projects at 64 college campuses in Texas, including Tarleton State University. I was very excited that Tarleton State was granted this opportunity to expand their campus.

TSU will have \$54 million for an applied sciences building and \$40 million for a “southwest metroplex” building in Tarrant County. The success and continuous growth of the university is not only important for its students, it will also have a tremendous impact on the community. My hope is that with the support of the Legislature, we can continue to make improvements that will be beneficial to future students and educators

Defending Second Amendment Rights

I spent this last session working to defend our Second Amendment rights by passing licensed open carry. I sponsored House Bill 910, authored by Representative Phillips, which was signed into law by Governor Abbott on June 13, 2015. This legislation will allow licensed open carry of holstered modern handguns in Texas. As your State Senator, an avid sportsman, second amendment enthusiast, and proud Texan, our constitutional right to keep and bear arms has always been a top priority of mine in Austin.



Sen. Estes & Rep. Phillips with Gov. Abbott at Open Carry Bill signing.

The new license to carry created by this bill will replace the existing concealed handgun license. Applicants will have to meet the same requirements that they currently do to get a concealed handgun license. Those who already have concealed handgun licenses will not have to re-apply; their licenses will automatically allow open carry after the effective date of the bill. This law will be effective beginning in January 2016.

I spent a great deal of time working hard to balance the concerns of law enforcement officials with the clear need to strengthen our Second Amendment Rights. Our state legislature has not made such a substantial change to our gun policy in more than 20 years, when former Senator Jerry Patterson passed licensed concealed carry, and I was truly honored to carry this landmark legislation.

Additionally, I was proud to support Senate Bill 11, authored by Senator Birdwell, which authorizes the licensed carry of concealed handguns on the college campuses. This bill was also signed by Governor Abbott on June 13, 2015, and it will be effective in August 2016. Age and license restrictions will still apply to anyone who wishes to carry a handgun on campus.



Sen. Estes with DPS personnel guarding the border.

Improving Border Security

Border security was an important topic for the Legislature this session due to the recent surge in illegal immigration. I was proud to author Senate Concurrent Resolution 5 to express the 84th Texas Legislature’s dissatisfaction with the federal government’s failed efforts to maintain security at the border. The resolution urges Congress to reimburse the State of Texas for bearing the financial burden of securing our border.

The federal government’s failure to enforce current law has placed an undue burden on the taxpayers of Texas to keep our border secure. The United States Constitution clearly delegates the power to regulate immigration and naturalization to the federal government. However, due to consistent inability to fulfill this duty, the responsibility to secure the Texas-Mexico border has unfortunately fallen to the State of Texas.

Since 2012, Texas has spent more than \$689 million to fill the significant gaps in federal efforts to secure the border, and the 2016-2017 budget includes \$811 million in border security funding. We have deployed airplanes and helicopters, watercraft, and Ranger Recon surveillance teams to quickly respond in remote areas of the border region where illegal activity is expected.

Until the federal government acts on this critical issue, Texas will continue to fund our border security efforts. Taking a responsible, proactive approach will ultimately reduce the amount of violence and crime along the Texas-Mexico border. While I will continue pressuring Congress to act on this issue, additional state funding was certainly needed for border security. Protecting Texas families will always be my top priority as a State Senator.

Protecting Natural Resources

The severe drought we have experienced in recent years took an unfortunate toll on our state’s water supply. While we were blessed with record rainfall this spring, it was crucial for the Legislature to take action this session to ensure we are managing our water supply responsibly.

It is always important to take a proactive approach when planning for our state’s future water needs. That’s why I was happy to author and pass Senate Bill 1410 this session, which designates the site of the proposed Ringgold Reservoir as having unique ecological value



Sen. Estes Presides over the Senate.



for the construction of a reservoir. The Ringgold Reservoir is vital for meeting future water needs of Wichita Falls and surrounding areas in Senate District 30, and it will be located in Clay County northeast of Henrietta.

I also sponsored legislation to provide a study regarding the quality and quantity of groundwater in confined and unconfined aquifers in the state of Texas. Groundwater is a major source of water in Texas, providing about 60 percent of the 16.1 million acre-feet of water used in Texas, but no map currently exists to identify the quality and quantity of groundwater in our aquifers. House Bill 1232 addresses this issue by requiring the Texas Water Development Board to conduct a study and map all confined and unconfined aquifers in the state, specifically focusing on salinity of these aquifers, to better manage the state’s water resources.

The recent drought in Senate District 30 also left a great deal of farmland extremely vulnerable to wildfire, and many landowners have expressed concerns with fireworks being used at state-owned rest areas near their land. In response, I authored and passed Senate Bill 570 to allow a county commissioners court to prohibit or restrict the use of fireworks at a state highway rest area in their county. This will provide more local control and protect agricultural land from wildfire in times of severe drought.

Transportation

Highway funding was another important item on the agenda this session. To ensure our state highways are adequately funded, the Legislature passed Senate Joint Resolution 5 (Proposition 7) to propose a constitutional amendment that will dedicate a portion of future motor vehicle sales taxes to the highway fund beginning in 2019. The state will transfer 35 percent of this revenue stream’s growth beyond \$5 billion beginning in 2020. If approved, this amendment would also dedicate \$2.5 billion of the general sales tax to the highway fund beginning in 2017. You will have an opportunity to vote on Proposition 7 on November 3, 2015.

We also significantly reduced tax diversions this session to ensure your taxes are being used for their intended purpose. Currently, not all of the 20-cent state gas tax that Texans pay is spent on roads. With the huge population increase we have seen over the last decade, our roads, highways and bridges are in dire need of

repair and maintenance. To remedy this, we ended about \$1.3 billion in gas tax diversions in order to provide additional funding for transportation projects.

Pastor Protection

I authored and passed the Pastor Protection Act (Senate Bill 2065) this session to protect clergy members. It came to my attention that there have been some unfortunate situations recently where pastors have been threatened with discrimination lawsuits for refusing to marry same-sex couples. To prevent similar situations from occurring in Texas in the future, I filed a bill to clarify that clergy members are not required to perform marriages that would violate their sincerely-held religious beliefs. It is my firm belief that this legislation was needed to protect religious freedom in this matter, and I am very happy that we were able to pass it this session.

I was disappointed to learn that the United States Supreme Court decided to add a right to same-sex marriage to our Constitution in their decision on Obergefell v. Hodges. For the reasons discussed eloquently by the dissenters to the Court’s opinion, I believe the Court greatly exceeded its authority. The issue of whether to allow same-sex marriage was reserved to the states by the Tenth Amendment. Alternatively, if a supermajority of Americans really believed it belonged in the Constitution, the proper way to put it there was through an amendment, not judicial activism.

I promise to do my utmost to ensure that Church and State remain separate and that the implied right to same-sex marriage the Supreme Court has created will not overpower the freedom of expression our First Amendment has protected for over two hundred years.



Sen. Estes offers invocation before the Senate.

What’s on the November 5, 2015 constitutional amendment ballot?

The following proposed amendments to the Texas Constitution will be decided by voters in the upcoming election on November 3, 2015.

PROPOSITION 1 (SJR 1) increases the amount of the residence homestead exemption from ad valorem taxation for public school purposes from \$15,000 to \$25,000, providing for a reduction of the limitation on the total amount of ad valorem taxes that may be imposed for those purposes on the homestead of an elderly or disabled person to reflect the increased exemption amount, authorizing the legislature to prohibit a political subdivision that has adopted an optional residence homestead exemption from ad valorem taxation from reducing the amount of or repealing the exemption, and prohibiting the enactment of a law that imposes a transfer tax on a transaction that conveys fee simple title to real property.

PROPOSITION 2 (HJR 75) authorizes the legislature to provide for an exemption from ad valorem taxation of all or part of the market value of the residence homestead of the surviving spouse of a 100 percent or totally disabled veteran who died before the law authorizing a residence homestead exemption for such a veteran took effect.

PROPOSITION 3 (SJR 52) repeals the requirement that state officers elected by voters statewide reside in the state capital.

PROPOSITION 4 (HJR 73) authorizes the legislature to permit professional sports team charitable foundations to conduct charitable raffles.

PROPOSITION 5 (SJR 17) authorizes counties with a population of 7,500 or less to perform private road construction and maintenance.

PROPOSITION 6 (SJR 22) recognizes the right of the people to hunt, fish, and harvest wildlife subject to laws that promote wildlife conservation.

PROPOSITION 7 (SJR 5) dedicates certain sales and use tax revenue and motor vehicle sales, use, and rental tax revenue to the state highway fund to provide funding for non-tolled roads and the reduction of certain transportation-related debt.

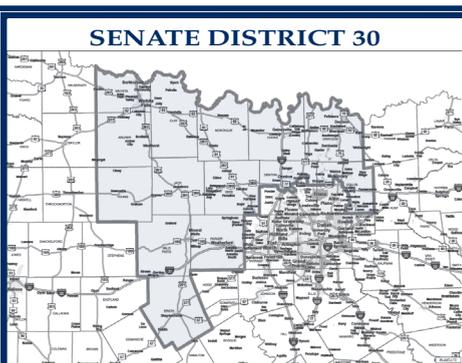
Constituent Services

Texas Senate Honorary Page Program: The Honorary Page Program gives students ages 8-18 an inside look at Texas government and the lawmaking process. Students travel to their state capitol and work under the supervision of a senate messenger for a half-day. Duties include assisting Senators on the floor of the Senate, making office deliveries, attending legislative committee hearings, and many other miscellaneous projects that expose students to the process and procedures of the Texas Legislature. Contact my capitol office to arrange a date and time for your child to take advantage of this unique opportunity.

Certificates and Proclamations of Recognition: A congratulatory document signed by Senator Estes can be provided in recognition of special events such as birthdays, graduations, weddings, anniversaries, Eagle Scouts’ Court of Honor, etc. Call our capitol office for more details.

Pastor of the Day: Each day during the session, the Texas Senate begins with a prayer, and clergy members from all across Texans are invited to participate. Please contact my office if you’re an ordained minister and would like to participate.

Order a Texas Flag: A Texas flag can be flown over the State Capitol on a specified future date and a personalized certificate will be created for the recipient of the flag. Call our Capitol Office for more details and pricing information.



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<p>Family and Community Services(800) 422-2956 Mental Health Consumer Rights.....(800) 252-8154</p>	<p>Texas Department of Criminal Justice Crime Victim Clearinghouse.....(800) 848-4284 Offender Status Line.....(800) 535-0283 Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs Hotline.....(800) 792-1119 Citizen's Opinion Helpline.....(800) 252-9600 Public Utility Commission.....(512)936-7000</p>	<p>State Bar of Texas Grievance Information.....(800) 932-1900 Lawyer Referral Service.....(800) 252-9690 Texas Commission for Civil Rights(888) 452-4778</p>
<p>Area Agencies on Aging(800) 252-9240 Consumer Rights/Services(800) 458-9858 Complaint and Intake Management ..(800) 458-9858 Texas Department of Insurance Information and Assistance.....(800) 252-3439 Division of Workers' Compensation Injured Worker Helpline.....(800) 252-7031 Safety Violations Helpline.....(800) 452-9595</p>	<p>Texas Department of Public Safety Emergency Roadside Assistance(800) 525-5555 Missing Persons Clearinghouse.....(800) 346-3243 Texas Crime Stoppers Helpline(800) 252-TIPS Texas Medical Board Consumer Complaint Helpline(800) 201-9353</p>	<p>Texas Veterans Commission Veterans Helpline.....(800) 252-VETS Texas Workforce Commission Unemployment Insurance Helpline(800) 558-832</p>

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