

Capitol Update 2013



a newsletter from State Senator Craig Estes, Senate District 30



The Senate of The State of Texas

Senator Craig Estes

District 30

Fellow Texans,

The Texas Legislature meets regularly for 140 days from January to May every odd-numbered year in accordance with our state constitution. The 83rd regular meeting of the legislature, along with three special sessions, just wrapped up so I would like to update you on the critical issues we as lawmakers faced.

Several years ago, the state was in tough financial shape because of the bad economy, which forced lawmakers to make difficult choices in order to balance the budget. Since then, the economy in our state has turned around – in no small part because of our low taxes and common-sense regulations. This has allowed the legislature to once again balance the budget without raising taxes, invest in water and transportation infrastructure and provide an additional \$3.4 billion for our public schools. Yet, the legislature maintained a healthy balance of about \$7 billion in our Economic Stabilization Fund (also known as the Rainy Day Fund).

While the budget is a large and important part of what lawmakers must deal with every session, not everything is about money in Austin. Some things are more important than money – such as life – which is why I am proud to have sponsored House Bill 2. HB 2 prohibits abortions later than 20 weeks after conception, demands that all abortion clinic physicians have admitting privileges at a hospital within 30 miles of the abortion clinic, calls for each abortion clinic to meet the same standards as an ambulatory surgical center and requires that a physician be present for the administration of a medically induced abortion. The bill improves women's health care by ensuring they receive the proper care they deserve in a safe environment and prevents the killing of innocent life.

I 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, informative and educational on the wide range of issues addressed by the Texas Legislature.

As always, please feel free to contact me if you have any questions, concerns, or legislative ideas you would like me to consider. Your involvement helps me better represent you in the Texas Senate.

Each day I am honored to serve the residents of Senate District 30, and I thank you for your continued support and prayer. I look forward to seeing you in the district soon!

God Bless Texas,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Craig Estes".

Craig Estes
State Senator
District 30



Senator Estes speaks at a press conference in support of House Bill 2 alongside former United States Senator Rick Santorum.

President Pro Tempore

On May 27th, I was elected by my peers to serve as president pro tempore of the Texas Senate. As president pro tempore, I am second in line to act as governor. Should both Governor Perry and Lieutenant Governor Dewhurst be out of state or unable to perform their duties, I would be acting governor.

Such was the case in 2000, when then Governor George W. Bush was elected President of the United States and then Lieutenant Governor Rick Perry became Governor. Senate rules dictate that the president pro tempore assumes the duties of the lieutenant governor and is required to convene the Committee of the Whole Senate within 30 days after a vacancy so that the members of the Senate can elect a new lieutenant governor from among themselves.

I will hold this position throughout the entire 83rd Interim which ends in January of 2015.



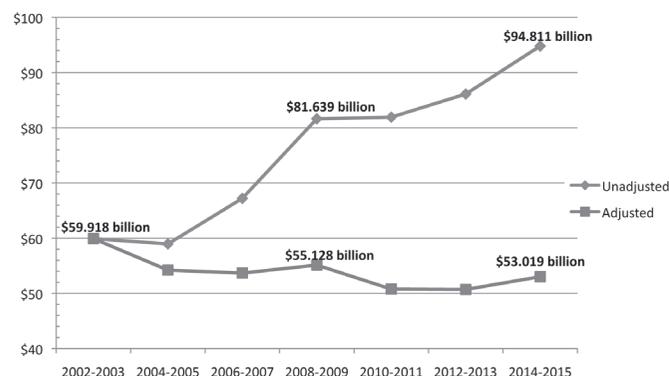
Lt. Governor Dewhurst swears in Senator Estes as President Pro Tempore of the Texas Senate, as his wife Jennifer looks on.

Budget

As a member of the Senate Committee on Finance – the committee that writes the budget – I am proud to report that lawmakers were able to balance the 2014-2015 budget without raising your taxes, make critical investments in water and transportation infrastructure, and provide an additional \$3.4 billion for our public schools.

The 2014-2015 budget starts on September 1, 2013 and will run until August 31, 2015. Overall, it authorizes spending \$197 billion in state and federal dollars (All Funds) and \$101.4 billion in just state dollars (general revenue). General revenue is the part of the budget over which legislators have the most control.

Adjusted for population growth, inflation, and property tax relief, the state of Texas is spending \$6.899 billion less or 11.5 percent less in general revenue than it spent 12 years ago.



Senator Estes with Pastor of the Day Joshua Richards of Cornerstone Community Church in Springtown, Texas.

The budget for 2002-2003 spent \$59.9 billion of general revenue. Comparing that year to 2014-2015 may seem like state government has increased spending significantly. Nothing could be further from the truth. When adjusted for population growth, inflation, and property tax relief the 2014-2015 budget spends \$53 billion. This means that state government is actually spending \$6.9 billion or 11.5 percent less of your hard-earned dollars than a decade ago.

This past session I worked vigorously to keep your taxes low and government spending in check, and I remain committed to doing the same in the future. 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."

Education: Restoring Cuts and Reducing Tests

It was a good session for education. With the significant improvement of the Texas economy, lawmakers were able to invest an additional \$3.4 billion in our public schools. Legislators also reduced the number of end-of-course exams from 15 to five, which means students will spend more time learning and less time testing. I am confident that the restoration of funding and the reduction in testing is a strong step towards ensuring that our students receive the world class education they deserve.

School Safety

In the wake of the tragic school shooting at Newtown, Connecticut last December I fought hard as Chairman of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Rural Affairs and Homeland Security to make our public schools safer for students and teachers. To begin exploring ways to improve the safety of Texas public schools, I called a joint hearing to discuss the issue.

At the hearing, we heard from experts in law enforcement, educators, and members of the public. The overwhelming consensus was that local school districts must determine what is best for their community, but that public school employees need training programs that will give them the skills necessary to respond to an active shooter. Without any training, experts testified, our teachers are left with little or no options to better equip themselves to protect their classrooms.

With this in mind, I authored Senate Bill 1857. The bill creates a program for Concealed Handgun License (CHL) instructors to be certified by the Department of Public Safety in basic defensive tactics they can then use to train anyone employed by a school district or open-enrollment

charter school. This is a commonsense approach that uses infrastructure already in place to provide a comprehensive training program to teachers without costing the state of Texas a dime.

The bill in no way forces school districts to allow teachers to carry a weapon – that remains a choice for individual school districts to make. With this training, however, any teacher possessing a CHL license and allowed by their school district to carry a weapon on campus would be better prepared to:

- Protect the lives of students;
- Interact and coordinate with police to stop the shooter;
- Employ tactics designed to deny a shooter entry into a classroom or school facility; and
- Accurately discharge a firearm, if appropriate, while under duress.

We all hope that Newtown never happens again, but hope is no substitute for action and preparation. With the training provided by SB 1857, our teachers and administrators will be better prepared to take action in the event of school shooting. And with teachers prepared to take action our schools and our children are safer and more secure.



Senator Estes asking witnesses questions at his Joint Committee Hearing on school safety alongside Senator Patrick (R-Houston).

2nd Amendment

When the 83rd Legislative Session began, the country was engaged in a national conversation about guns. Like the conversations before it, anti-gun politicians lectured us Texans about how dangerous guns are, how there is no need for them, and how we are unable to use them responsibly. They are just plain wrong on all counts. I spent this last session tirelessly working to protect and defend our Second Amendment rights.

Sometime before session started, I found out that some Texans were being forced to travel more than 150 miles to an “approved facility” to get their fingerprints taken for a concealed handgun license. Many of you told me that driving such distances often required taking off a full day of work. That isn’t right – you shouldn’t have to take off work to exercise your constitutional right to bear arms. That is why I sponsored House Bill 698, which requires the Department of Public Safety to establish new procedures for submitting fingerprints for a concealed handgun application for people who live more than 25 miles from an approved facility. This will save the time, money and the effort of rural Texans – making it easier for you to exercise your constitutional rights.

Another bill I authored and passed this session, Senate Bill 299, addressed a concern that an unintentional display of a weapon (such as the wind blowing open your jacket) could result in unwarranted criminal charges for concealed



Senator Estes welcomes Collin County officials to the Senate Floor along with Senator Ken Paxton (R-McKinney) and Lt. Governor Dewhurst.

carry license holders. SB 299 takes care of this problem by clarifying that failure to conceal a handgun is only illegal when the gun is displayed in plain view of another person, in a public place, and not for self-defense.

Lastly, I sponsored House Concurrent Resolution 89 requesting that the Lieutenant Governor and the Speaker of the House create a committee to look at how the legislature can best recruit firearm and ammunition manufactures – and the good-paying jobs that come with them – to Texas. Bringing more gun manufacturing and good-paying jobs to Texas is a win-win for our great state.

The Second Amendment of the United States Constitution makes it clear that our right to possess and use firearms shall not be infringed. As your state senator, an avid sportsman, second amendment enthusiast, and proud Texan, our constitutional right to keep and bear arms is important to me and I work hard in Austin to protect and defend it because I believe the Constitution is clear, plain and simple.

Economic Growth, Job Creation, and Tax Cuts

When adjusted for population growth, inflation, and property tax relief, the state of Texas spends 11.5 percent less of your hard-earned dollars than it did ten years ago. This has allowed legislators in Austin to keep taxes low and regulations reasonable. As a result, Texas businesses have created more than 500,000 jobs since November 2011 and our economy is growing nearly 50 percent faster than the rest of the country. Additionally, the cost of living in our state remains one of the lowest in the country.

Wanting the economic growth, job creation, and low cost of living to continue, the legislature chose to cut taxes on businesses and consumers by approximately \$1.2 billion over the next two years. House Bill 500 cut around \$715 from the business tax by reducing the tax rate by 2.5 percent in 2014 and then 5 percent in 2015. Another notable tax relief bill was one I sponsored, House Bill 1133. It provides a \$50 million per year tax cut for companies that invest in critical telecommunications infrastructure in our state and is expected to create 6,000 new jobs, pay \$250 million in annual salaries, and generate \$1.4 billion in additional economic activity.

The economic success we have experienced in Texas over the last ten years is no accident – it is a direct byproduct of responsible spending, low taxes and minimal regulations. When the government doesn’t spend too much, tax too much or regulate too much, the economy grows, businesses expand, jobs are created, and hard-working people prosper. That is why legislators in Austin once again chose to cut taxes on Texas businesses and consumers – so the people of our great state can continue to prosper.

Statewide Water Supply

Texas is now in its third year of drought, and the state’s climatologist recently warned that this drought could be worse than the drought of record, which occurred in the 1950s. As conditions stand now, 98 percent of the state is in a drought and 25 percent is experiencing extreme drought. Making matters worse, experts estimate that Texas’ population will increase 82 percent by 2060 to 46.3 million people.

Recognizing a crisis on the very near horizon, the legislature responded by creating the State Water Implementation Fund (SWIFT). SWIFT is a state bank account that will make loans to local water authorities to build water infrastructure projects, such as reservoirs, that are included in the state’s water plan. SWIFT will be funded with a one-time transfer of \$2 billion from the Rainy Day Fund.

While the creation of SWIFT and the \$2 billion appropriation to fund it have been approved by the legislature, both must also be approved by Texas voters in the form of a constitutional amendment this November as Proposition 6.

Adequate future water supplies are critically important to Texas businesses, farmers and residents. The current drought and booming population point to an unavoidable conclusion -- failing to secure future water supplies will stifle investment and limit future economic growth. It was absolutely necessary that the legislature develop a plan for statewide water supply to ensure that the next ten years in Texas are as prosperous as the last ten.

Transportation

Texas has experienced tremendous population and economic growth over the last ten years. This has placed a severe strain on the state’s roads, highways, and bridges. So much so that the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) estimates that if additional funding is not secured the agency will be forced to cease construction of new projects and will only be able to maintain existing roads. This is why I helped pass Senate Joint Resolution 1 (SJR 1) and House Bill 1 (HB 1) – a legislative package that will increase transportation funding by more than \$1 billion per year without raising your taxes or adding to our debt. It is a commonsense and conservative approach to ensuring that the future of our great state is as bright as its past. Here’s how it works.

SJR 1 is a constitutional amendment that will appear on the November 2014 ballot. It will need to be approved by the voters to become law. If approved, it will take 50 percent of oil and gas severance tax revenues currently going to the Rainy Day Fund and instead send them to the State Highway Fund to be used for the construction and maintenance of Texas highways, roads and bridges. Any oil and gas severance tax revenue transferred to the State Highway Fund as a result of SJR 1 cannot be used to finance toll roads or to pay for old or new transportation-related debt.

House Bill 1 requires a safe minimum balance be set for the Rainy Day Fund by a select committee to be chosen by the Speaker of the House and the Lieutenant Governor. Both chambers of the legislature must then either approve or amend the minimum balance chosen by the committee before the 45th day of each regular legislative session. If a safe minimum balance is not set or is not approved by the legislature then no oil and gas severance tax revenue will go to the State Highway Fund.

By securing additional funding, SJR1 and HB 1 inject new life into our ailing transportation infrastructure and ensure a bright future for our great state.

Senate Committee on Agriculture, Rural Affairs and Homeland Security

In October 2012, Lieutenant Governor David Dewhurst entrusted my former Senate Committee on Agriculture and Rural Affairs with the added responsibility of overseeing the state’s homeland security efforts. The new Senate Committee on Agriculture, Rural Affairs and Homeland Security carefully considered several homeland security-related issues during the regular session, and the following are a few examples of bills I authored that became law.

- Senate Bill 987 (by Senator Hegar, R-Katy) and my own SB 1400 ensured that Texans’ second amendment rights were protected. SB 987 allows the Attorney General to seek an injunction against a county or municipality that attempts to place restrictions on firearms or ammunition. SB 1400 prevents local jurisdictions from overregulating air guns.
- Senate Bills 1393 and 1394 streamlined homeland security planning processes, and SB 1814 improved homeland security communications by ensuring that Department of Public Safety (DPS) personnel are able to share classified information with commissioners overseeing the department.
- HB 1931 protected personal property rights by allowing local counties and municipalities to use seized funds to compensate property owners whose property was damaged during a pursuit involving law enforcement.
- SB 1857 enhances school safety by creating a process for Concealed Handgun License instructors to be certified by the DPS in basic defensive tactics that they could then use to train anyone employed by a school district or open-enrollment charter school. This bill is outlined in greater detail on Pages 2-3.



Senator Estes with Congressman Sam Johnson.

Border Tour

Shortly after my committee was given the added responsibility of homeland security, I joined Department of Public Safety (DPS) Director Steve McCraw for a tour of the Texas-Mexico border. This allowed me to view first-hand the resources provided by the Legislature over the past few sessions to strengthen security along the border, including additional personnel, vehicles, technology, tactical boats and helicopters.

After seeing the men and women of law enforcement in action along the border, I gained a great appreciation for the work they do every day. I am grateful for their willingness to put their lives on the line to protect our great state, risking their own safety so that we may enjoy ours.

I witnessed an example of agencies working together to address border security at the Joint Operations Intelligence Center, one of six along the border. At this center, representatives from many local, state and federal agencies, including the local police department and sheriff’s office, DPS officers, Texas Parks and Wildlife Game Wardens, and Border Patrol, all work side-by-side to combat the threat posed by a porous Texas-Mexico border.

I also rode in one of the six boats provided by the Legislature last session to be used by the newly-formed DPS Tactical Marine Unit. These boats are equipped with night vision capabilities, ballistic shielding, and multiple automatic weapons. They provide DPS the ability to quickly respond to smuggling activity along the Rio Grande River. In fact, a Texas Rangers’ boat responded to a “shots fired” call by the U.S. Border Patrol on the Rio Grande River earlier this year. After arriving at the scene, the Rangers observed that the Border Patrol agents had taken cover inside their boat while pointing across the



Senator Estes participating in a typical patrol of the Rio Grande River with Department of Public Safety officers during his tour to the Texas-Mexico border.

river toward individuals on the Mexico side believed to be responsible for the shots fired. Rangers then launched tear gas rounds in the direction of the individuals in Mexico, who vacated the area.

One of the other key assets employed by DPS I was able to experience is a fleet of helicopters that provide operational surveillance and support for ground personnel. These helicopters help to locate suspects, direct ground units during pursuits, and transport quick response teams when officers call for assistance.

While Texas has taken significant steps to secure the international border with Mexico, there is more to be done to protect our state from violent cartels and transnational gangs.

What’s on the November 5, 2013 constitutional amendment ballot?

The following proposed amendments to the Texas Constitution will be decided by voters in the upcoming election on November 5, 2013.

Proposition 1 (H.J.R. 62) authorizes the legislature to provide a property tax exemption for all or part of the market value of the residence homestead of the surviving spouse of a member of the armed services of the United States who is killed in action.

Proposition 2 (H.J.R. 79) eliminates the requirement for a State Medical Education Board and a State Medical Education Fund, neither of which have been in operation for the past 25 years.

Proposition 3 (H.J.R. 133) authorizes a political subdivision of the state of Texas to extend the number of days aircraft parts are exempt from local property taxes.

Proposition 4 (H.J.R. 24) authorizes the legislature to provide a property tax exemption for part of the market value of the residence homestead donated by a charity to a partially disabled veteran or the surviving spouse of a partially disabled veteran.

Proposition 5 (S.J.R. 18) permits homeowners age 62 or older to use a reverse mortgage loan for the purchase of a homestead property.

Proposition 6 (S.J.R. 1) appropriates \$2 billion from the Economic Stabilization Fund to create the State Water Implementation Fund and the State Water Implementation Revenue fund to finance prioritized water infrastructure projects included in the state water plan.

Proposition 7 (H.J.R. 87) authorizes a home-rule municipality to provide in its charter the procedure to fill a vacancy on its governing body for which the unexpired term is 12 months or less.

Proposition 8 (H.J.R. 147) repeals the constitutional provision authorizing the creation of a hospital district in Hidalgo County.

Proposition 9 (S.J.R. 42) expands the types of sanctions that may be assessed against a judge or justice following a formal proceeding by the State Commission on Judicial Conduct.



The Senate of The State of Texas
 Patsy Spaw
 Secretary of the Senate
 August 9, 2013

The Honorable Craig Estes
 State Capitol, Room 1E.9
 Austin, Texas 78701

Dear Senator Estes:

The Senate has completed its official records for the 83rd Legislature, Regular Session, pertaining to attendance and record votes. During the session you were present for 98.5 percent of the roll calls taken for attendance. Missing only two record votes, you maintained a 99.9 percent voting record for the 3,939 record votes taken.

You are to be commended for your excellent record. Your attendance and voting record demonstrate your dedication and remarkable commitment to your duties as a State Senator and the people of Senatorial District 30. Congratulations on your exceptional record of achievement.

Sincerely,

 Patsy Spaw
 Secretary of the Senate

P.O. Box 12068 • Austin, Texas 78711 • 512/463-0100 • Dial 711 for Relay Calls

USEFUL STATE GOVERNMENT TOLL-FREE NUMBERS

Office of Consumer Credit Commissioner

Consumer Credit Helpline(800) 538-1579
Consumer Protection Division.....(888)782-8477
Texas No Call List Registration..... (866) TXNOCAL
Social Security Administration (800) 772-1213

Office of the Attorney General

Child Support.....(800)252-8014
Consumer Protection Hotline(800) 621-0508
Crime Victim's Compensation.....(800) 983-9933
Public Information and Assistance.(800) 252-8011

Office of the Governor

Citizen's Assistance Hotline.....(800) 843-5789
Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services
General Information..... (800) 628-5115

Texas Department of Family and Protective Services

Texas Abuse/Neglect Hotline.....(800) 252-5400
Office of Consumer Affairs Hotline ..(800) 233-3405
Foster Care and Adoption Inquiry Hotline (800) 233-3405

Texas Department of State Health Services

Substance Abuse Services.....(866) 378-8440
WIC.....(800)942-3678

Family and Community Services(800) 422-2956
Mental Health Consumer Rights.....(800) 252-8154

Texas Health and Human Services Commission

24-Hour Information and Referral Network 211
Disaster Assistance(800) 582-5233
Medicaid Hotline(800) 252-8263

Medicaid Eligibility for Elderly & Disabled

SSI-related Food Stamp Benefits.....(800) 248-1078

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 Hotline.....(800) 252-9600
Public Utility Commission.....(512)936-7000

State Bar of Texas

Grievance Information.....(800) 932-1900
Lawyer Referral Service.....(800) 252-9690
Texas Commission for Civil Rights(888) 452-4778

Texas Commission on Environmental Quality

Hotline.....(888) 777-3186

Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services
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 Hotline.....(800) 252-7031
Safety Violations Hotline.....(800) 452-9595

Texas Department of Public Safety

Emergency Roadside Assistance(800) 525-5555
Missing Persons Clearinghouse.....(800) 346-3243
Texas Crime Stoppers Hotline(800) 252-TIPS

Texas Medical Board

Consumer Complaint Hotline(800) 201-9353

Texas Veterans Commission

Veterans Hotline..... (800) 252-VETS

Texas Workforce Commission

Unemployment Insurance Hotline(800) 558-832

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.



Senator Craig Estes
District 30
P.O. BOX 12068
AUSTIN, TEXAS 78711

PRSR STD
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 2468
AUSTIN, TEXAS

SENATOR CRAIG ESTES CONTACT INFORMATION

Austin Capitol Office

The Honorable Craig Estes
State Capitol, Room 1E.9
P.O. Box 12068
Capitol Station
Austin, Texas 78711
(512) 463-0130 • Fax: (512) 463-8874

Denton District Office

4401 N. I-H 35, #202
Denton, Texas 76207
(940) 898-0331 • Fax: (940) 898-0926

Wichita Falls District Office

2525 Kell Blvd., Suite 302
Wichita Falls, Texas 76308
(940) 689-0191
Fax: (940) 689-0194

Sherman Regional Office

1117 Gallagher Dr., Ste. 340
Sherman, Texas 75090
(903) 868-2347 • Fax: (903) 868-9666

Committee on Agriculture and Rural Affairs:

455 Sam Houston Building
Austin, Texas 78711
512-463-0340 • Fax 512-463-2293

E-mail: craig.estes@senate.state.tx.us

To sign up for my e-newsletter or follow updates, please visit my website:
<http://www.senate.state.tx.us/75r/Senate/members/dist30/dist30.htm>