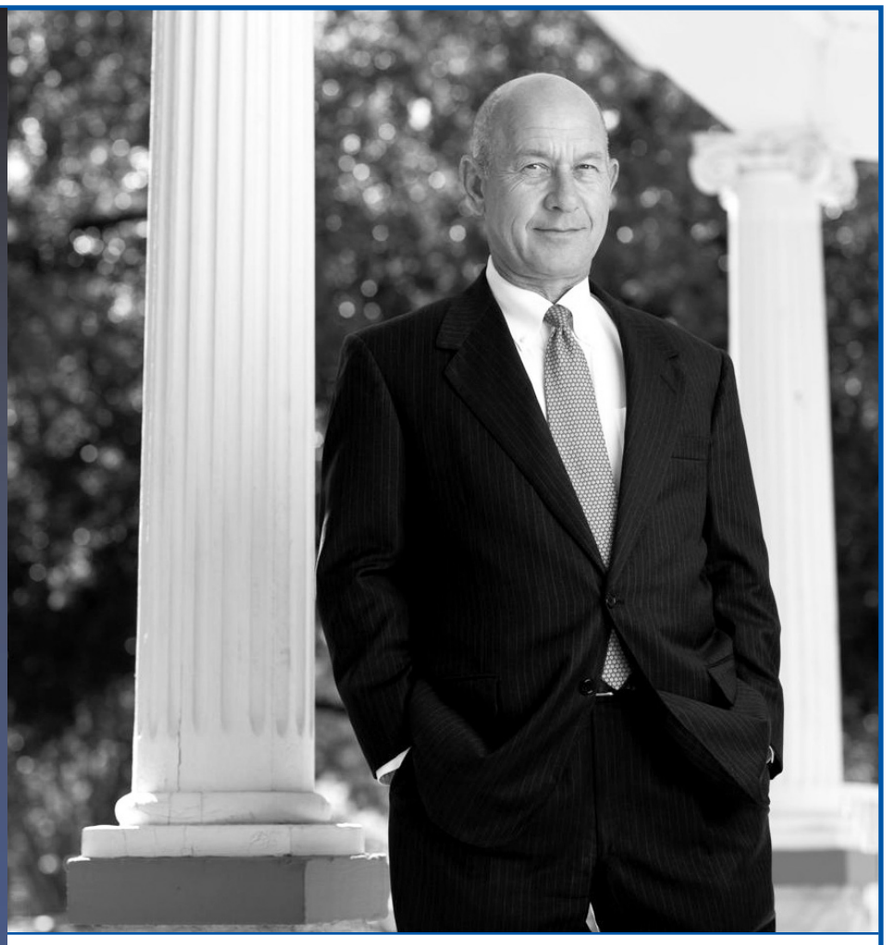
Senator John Whitmire

Senate District 15 • Capitol Report



Dear Friends and Neighbors,

2013 marked my 40th year in the Texas Legislature having first served in the House of Representatives from 1973 to 1983 followed by 30 years in the Texas Senate. I was humbled to be recognized by my Senate colleagues with a resolution and ceremony commemorating my legislative career. I am honored to be a public servant.

After a 140-day regular session and three special sessions, the 83rd Legislature officially ended in early August. While the regular legislative session was largely viewed as productive and harmonious, the special sessions brought gridlock, and in my opinion, disappointment in the passage of legislation harmful to women's health and reproductive rights.

The months we spend in Austin for legislative sessions are crucially important, but I have enjoyed being back in Houston and getting the chance to visit with the residents of Senate District 15.

As Chair of the Senate Criminal Justice Committee, I will continue to focus on reforming our adult and juvenile criminal justice systems and ensuring we have adequate resources for public safety. I also serve as a member of the Senate Administration Committee, Business and Commerce Committee and the Finance Committee.

As the longest serving member in the Texas Senate, I serve as Dean of the Texas Senate. I take my seniority and role as Dean very seriously and will continue to use my position to help bring the Senate together and foster compromise during times of intense debate and negotiations. It is important to me that partisan gridlock never control the Texas Senate.

It is my honor to represent Senate District 15 and to work on your behalf in Austin and in our community. I am pleased to provide an update on some of the important issues facing the State of Texas and the residents of Senate District 15.

Sincerely,

JOHN WHITMIRE

P.S. If you would like to join the *Dean's List* to receive news, legislative updates, and other items of interest, please subscribe at www.whitmire.senate.state.tx.us

ELECTION DAY 2014

Offices up for election in 2014 include U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, Governor, Lieutenant Governor, Attorney General, all other statewide elected positions, our Senate District 15 and your State Representative. There are also many local and judicial positions on the ballot.

Don't forget you must now show an approved photo ID in order to vote in the upcoming elections. For information on acceptable forms of identification, how to obtain an election identification card, and other important election information, please visit www.votetexas.gov.

Register to vote by requesting an application from the Harris County Tax Office by calling 713-368-VOTE (8683) or by stopping by any of the Harris County area tax offices or any public library. Applications can be downloaded from Harris County at www.hctax.net/voter/registration.

Voters can cast their vote prior to election day at several early voting locations. If you wait until election day, you must vote at your precinct voting poll location. Precincts are listed on your voter registration card or you can find early voting locations and precinct polling information by contacting the Harris County Clerk's Office at 713-755-6965 or www.harrisvotes.com.

Senator Whitmire and Representatives Thompson and Turner attend the Acres Home Chamber for Business & Economic Development Awards Banquet.

Important Election Dates

February 3, 2014
Last Day to Register to Vote in Primary Election

February 18-28, 2014
Early Voting for Primary Election

March 4, 2014
Primary Election Day

October 6, 2014
Last Day to Register to Vote in General Election

October 20-31, 2014
Early Voting for General Election

November 4, 2014
General Election Day

Senator Whitmire congratulates newly named Texas Parks and Wildlife Lieutenant Kevin Malonson and his uncle, Roy Malonson

REGULATING PAYDAY AND AUTO TITLE LENDERS

During session, Senator Whitmire helped block legislation which would have created a weak, ineffective statewide regulation against payday and auto title lenders. The legislation would have prevented cities from adopting strong ordinances to protect their citizens from predatory practices common in this industry.

Eight other Texas cities have adopted ordinances regulating payday and auto title lenders and the legislation would have wiped out these ordinances and prevented the City of Houston from adopting its own ordinance going beyond the less stringent statewide law.

With the lack of local regulation, Houston is the hub of payday and auto title lending. Houston has more than 550 payday and auto title loan storefronts. To put that in perspective, for every McDonald's in Houston, there are two payday and auto title loan storefronts, and every week, 140 cars are repossessed from Houstonians by auto title lenders.

Senator Whitmire joined with his colleagues Senator Rodney Ellis and Senator Sylvia Garcia urging the City of Houston to join with the other Texas cities to adopt a strong ordinance regulating payday and auto title lending companies. Recently, the City of Houston has announced it is in the process of developing an ordinance that will increase protections for consumers who rely on these types of loans in emergency situations while limiting the industry's most egregious and predatory tactics.

"I commend Mayor Parker and the City for joining other Texas cities to protect our citizens from predatory lenders," stated Senator Whitmire. "This sends a strong message to the industry that we will not stand for weak regulations and will hopefully allow us to pass strong statewide regulations next session so that all Texans are protected."

As Chairman of the Senate Criminal Justice Committee, Senator Whitmire is committed to improving our criminal justice system while enhancing public safety.

"Through years of hard work, Texas has become the national model on reforming criminal justice systems," stated Whitmire. "After decades of building expensive prisons, Texas is actually closing prisons and focusing more on rehabilitation and treatment of non-violent offenders. I am proud of the work we have done."

With the continued success of treatment and rehabilitation programs, Senator Whitmire and his colleagues were able to focus on other areas of our criminal justice system that have long needed attention.

Senator Whitmire and his colleagues celebrate the signing of the Michael Morton Act.

A FAIRER SYSTEM OF JUSTICE

Texas, a state well known for being tough on crime, is now becoming a leader in innocence reform. Through the work of the Indigent Defense Commission, the Forensics Science Commission, the Innocence Project of Texas, and the recent passage of several pieces of legislation, Texas has taken great steps in creating a fairer system of justice.

Senate Bill 1611, the "Michael Morton Act," sponsored by Senator Rodney Ellis and Representative Senfronia Thompson, revamps the state's discovery statute to increase transparency and accountability in criminal cases. The new law, named after Michael Morton who spent nearly 25 years in prison for a murder he did not commit, aims to reduce prosecutorial misconduct by ensuring the defense has access to all relevant evidence.

Senate Bill 825, sponsored by Senator Whitmire and Representative Thompson, also stems from the wrongful conviction of Michael Morton. The new law reforms the rules for disciplining prosecutors who fail to divulge evidence and starts the statute of limitations upon release from prison instead of at the time the violation was discovered.

Senator Whitmire and Senator Ellis on the Senate floor.

"As Chair of the Senate Criminal Justice Committee, I was honored to work with my colleagues, Michael Morton, and others in negotiating this legislation," stated Senator Whitmire. "Michael Morton is an amazing individual who turned an egregious wrong committed against him into new laws that will help countless others."

Senate Bill 344, sponsored by Senator Whitmire and Representatives Sylvester Turner and Gene Wu, ensures access to the courts for defendants convicted on faulty or so-called "junk science."

Faulty forensic or medical evidence is one of the leading reasons behind wrongful convictions and innocent people have spent years in jail based on such evidence.

"Texas is again at the forefront in criminal justice policy and I am proud of the work we did to pass Senate Bill 344," commented Chairman Whitmire. "If there is any possibility we have a wrongfully convicted person in prison based on faulty or outdated science, we have a moral duty to review the case."

Texas is the first state to grant habeas corpus relief in junk science cases and since the new law went into effect in September, hundreds of cases are being reviewed and several innocent people have been released from prison.

"These new laws are crucial in our efforts to create a more just system in Texas," stated Chairman Whitmire. "While we celebrate these victories, we still have work to do to ensure everyone has access to a fair system of justice."

SCHOOL DISCIPLINE

Often referred to as the school-to-prison pipeline, Senator Whitmire continues his focus on public school discipline. School districts are hiring police departments, issuing tickets, requiring families to go to court, and creating the first encounter with our justice system for our students. Too often, those students are cited for behavior that while disruptive to the classroom are not grounds for citation, expulsion, or a criminal record.

Senator Whitmire was successful in passing Senate Bill 1114 to address ticketing in public schools. The bill establishes a complaint process for all offenses occurring on school grounds. The new law mandates that a student may not be arrested after their 17th birthday for a violation of the education code. Children under 12 will no longer receive citations or complaints for offenses occurring on school grounds.

Senator Whitmire also passed legislation which would have diverted truancy cases away from the courts, reduced first time offender fines, and disallowed the withdrawal of a student if they were present on school property. Unfortunately, Governor Perry vetoed the bill.

"Too many of our students are ending up in the criminal justice system for behavior that used to result in being sent to the back of the classroom or the principal's office," commented Senator Whitmire. "While I was disappointed in the veto of the truancy bill, we are making progress and I will continue to push for additional reforms to our school discipline policies."

83RD LEGISLATURE HIGHLIGHTS

STATE BUDGET

As a member of the Senate Finance Committee, Senator Whitmire focused on restoring the devastating cuts made in the previous session especially in the areas of health and human services and education.

The 2014-2015 budget increases public education funding by $3.9 billion including full funding for enrollment growth, funding for teacher retirement system benefits, and restoration of funding for pre-K grants, tutoring, and Communities in Schools.

Senator Garcia and Senator Whitmire discuss legislation on the Senate Floor.

The two-year budget also increases critical funding for health and human services including $1.7 billion in Medicaid growth, foster care and nursing home rate increases, $298 million for mental health services, and restoration of funding for women's health services and family planning. In light of the harmful legislation passed that limits access to family planning services, this funding is critically needed by Texas women and families.

The budget includes $2 billion for much needed water infrastructure which was approved by the voters in November 2013. And, if approved by the voters in November 2014, an additional $1 billion will be available annually for improvements to our roads and highways.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

In addition to increased funding for public education, the 83rd Legislature made significant improvements in education policy.

Standardized testing was a top concern this legislative session and in response to concerns that teachers were being forced to teach to the tests, end-of-course exams in high school were reduced from fifteen to five.

The Legislature revised graduation requirements by creating a new foundation high school program. The new graduation program will allow students to earn endorsements for graduation in five different areas of study. The endorsement areas are science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM); business and industry; public services; arts and humanities; and multidisciplinary studies. The new requirements will apply to students entering ninth grade beginning with the 2014-15 school year and will give students the flexibility to select a graduation plan that fits their interests and goals.

PROTECTING THE CAPITOL COMPLEX

After learning of proposed development within the capitol complex, Senator Whitmire filed and passed Senate Bill 894 requiring legislative approval before any property in the capitol complex could be commercially developed.

The new law is a direct result of the over-zealous actions taken by the Texas Facilities Commission and private interests to develop commercial projects surrounding the State Capitol. Included in the development proposals is a 40-plus story condominium towering over the Bob Bullock State History Museum.

"The State Capitol and Capitol Complex belong to all Texans and should be protected for generations to come," commented Whitmire. "I will not allow our grand State Capitol and the home of our State government to become surrounded by towering buildings, condominiums, and commercial enterprise."

PORT OF HOUSTON

In 2011, Senator Whitmire was successful in placing the Port of Houston Authority under sunset review due to numerous concerns regarding Port operations. This session, Senator Whitmire sponsored and passed House Bill 1642 which requires the Port to carry out those Sunset recommendations.

House Bill 1642 establishes term limits for Port Commissioners. It applies standard best practices to promote good governance and ethics for the Commission and staff. It also requires a standard internal audit function and clarifies the Harris County Auditor's authority to conduct risk-based financial audits.

The new law requires the development of strategic and capital plans and provides public access to planning information. Finally, the law requires detailed policies and public reports about expenditures from the Promotion and Development Fund.

"The Sunset review process is one of the best government reviews in existence and I am pleased that the resulting recommendations will lead to better governance, accountability, and transparency at the Port of Houston Authority," stated Senator Whitmire.

Senator Whitmire discusses women's health with Senators Davis, Ellis, Van de Putte, and Rodriguez.

ABOUT SENATOR JOHN WHITMIRE

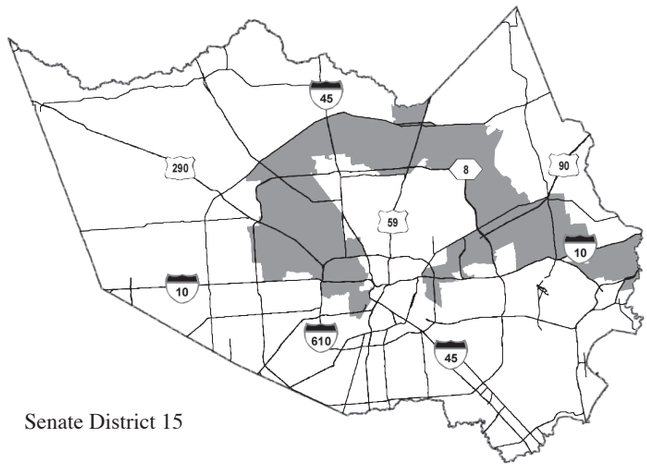
Senator John Whitmire is a native Texan. Originally from Hillsboro, Senator Whitmire moved to Houston where he graduated from Waltrip High School. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Houston and attended the Bates College of Law. He was admitted to the Texas State Bar in 1981 and is attorney of counsel to the law firm Locke Lord LLP.

Senator Whitmire was elected to the Texas House of Representatives in 1972 when he was 22 years old. After serving 10 years as a State Representative, he was elected to the Texas Senate in 1982 and has represented the 15th Senatorial District for the past 30 years. Senator Whitmire ranks first in seniority and is the "Dean of the Texas Senate."

Senator Whitmire serves as Chair of the Senate Criminal Justice Committee and works to bring about needed changes to the adult and juvenile criminal justice systems. He is also a member of the Senate Administration Committee and the Senate Business and Commerce Committee. In addition, he serves as a member of the Senate Finance Committee where he is committed to finding appropriate solutions for funding the state's many agencies and programs.

In addition to his leadership in criminal justice and public safety, Senator Whitmire is a passionate advocate for quality public education, affordable higher education, minority and women's rights, access to quality affordable health care and mental health services, and sound business and economic development policies.

Senator Whitmire is the proud father of two daughters and an adorable baby grandson.



Senate District 15

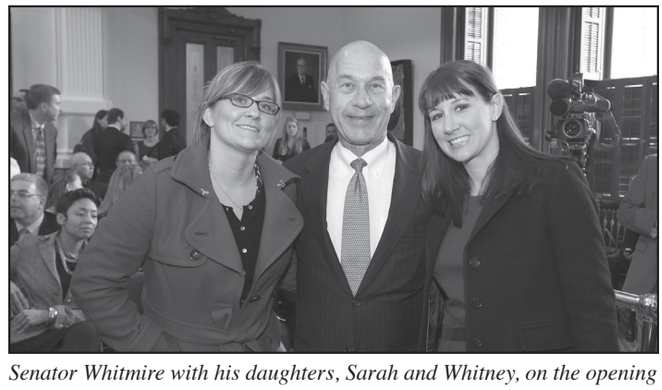
Capitol Office
P.O. Box 12068
Austin, Texas 78711
(512) 463-0115
FAX: (512) 475-3737

District Office
803 Yale Street
Houston, Texas 77007
(713) 864-8701
FAX: (713) 864-5287

Senate Criminal Justice Committee
P.O. Box 12068
Austin, Texas 78711
(512) 463-0345
FAX: (512) 475-2015

Email
john.whitmire@senate.state.tx.us

Website
www.whitmire.senate.state.tx.us



Senator Whitmire with his daughters, Sarah and Whitney, on the opening day of session.

HELPFUL TOLL FREE NUMBERS

Abuse Hotline (children, elderly, disabled)	800-252-5400
Children's Health Insurance (CHIP)	800-647-6558
Child Support Enforcement	800-252-8014
Consumer Protection	800-621-0508
Consumer Credit Helpline	800-538-1579
Crime Victims Compensation	800-983-9933
Crime Stoppers	800-252-8477
Emergency Roadside Assistance	800-525-5555
Environmental Complaints	888-777-3186
Governor's Constituent Communication	800-843-5789
Insurance Information and Assistance	800-252-3439
Legal Referral	800-252-9690
Medicaid Hotline	800-252-8263
Runaway Hotline	888-580-4357
Student Financial Aid	877-782-7322
Comptroller's Taxpayer Assistance	800-252-5555
Voter Registration and Elections	800-252-8683
Youth Hotline	800-210-2278

Helpful .gov Web Sites

www.texas.gov

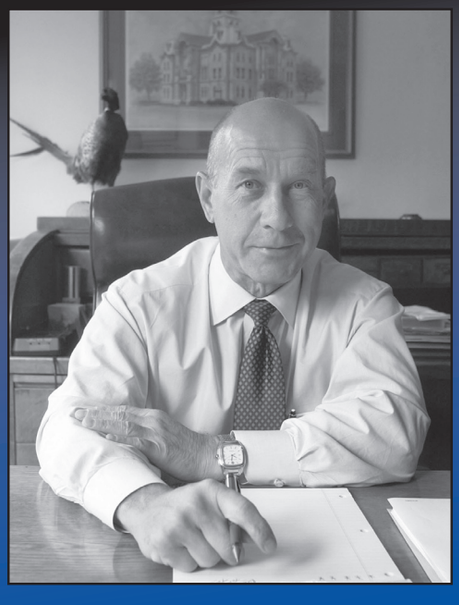
- Vehicle Registration Renewal
- Professional Licenses
- Birth and Death Records
- Marriage and Divorce Records
- Business Sales Tax Payments
- Driver's License Renewal
- Driver Records
- eFile Court Documents
- Concealed Handgun License
- Hunting and Fishing Licenses

www.workintexas.gov

- Post Available Jobs
- Search Resumes
- Check Labor Availability
- Access Recruitment Tools
- Search Available Jobs
- Find State Jobs
- Find Jobs for Veterans
- Access Career Tools

Senator John Whitmire
Dean of the Texas Senate
P.O. Box 12068 Austin, Texas 78711

PRSRT STD
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 2468
Austin, Texas



Senator John Whitmire
Senate District 15

Capitol Report

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.