



SENATOR NATHAN JOHNSON

Senate District 16 • Capitol Report



Friends and Neighbors of Senate District 16 –

I compose this letter to you at a time of great political uncertainty and anxiety. It goes almost without saying that the 89th Legislature's ability to meet the needs of 30 million diverse people living in a gigantic state with a dynamic \$3 trillion economy, was hindered by the forces driving that uncertainty and anxiety. Despite the challenging political atmosphere, much good and important work continues in government. This newsletter provides a select view of the results of the Legislative Session, highlighting both progress and a few areas of disappointment that await the good work of future legislatures.

It is an honor and a privilege to serve as your state senator, and a responsibility I have never taken lightly. I hope you will continue to share your thoughts and perspectives as we work together to guide the state toward our best possible future.

Please note, this newsletter is a state publication. It is neither intended nor permitted to be partisan, and I have no influence over the subset of residents to whom it is mailed.

Sincerely,

OVERVIEW OF THE 89TH TEXAS LEGISLATURE

EDUCATION

K-12 funding. Senate Bill 2 (SB 2) passed during the 89th regular session to create a statewide private school voucher program that gives \$10,000 of taxpayer money to students who attend private schools, and \$2,000 to students who are homeschooled. Over the next two years, \$1 billion is allocated to serve approximately 100,000 students statewide through the new voucher program. Although only \$1 billion was allocated over the next two years, the program is estimated to cost \$4 billion by 2030.

Another education bill, House Bill 2 (HB 2), passed out of the House during the final days of session to increase education funding for the remaining 5.5 million students in the state in a time of record inflation and the continued need to address COVID-19 learning loss. This bill is an \$8.3 billion school finance package that includes teacher pay raises (between \$2,500 and \$8,000 depending on school district size and years of experience), improvements to teacher training, special education reforms, increased support for career and technical education, and early childhood literacy and numeracy.

Public education and religion. With the passage of SB 10, every public school must now prominently display the Ten Commandments in every classroom. The constitutionality of the bill remains in question. A similar law in Louisiana has been struck down as an unconstitutional violation of the principle of separation of church and state. In a similar vein, but one that may not infringe as heavily on individual student beliefs, the Legislature passed SB 11, which gives individual school districts the option to require that each of their campuses hold a daily, voluntary period of prayer and reading of religious text.

Higher education. Public institutions of higher education were on the defensive this session, as the Legislature ventured into spaces that historically have been left to the schools. SB 37 requires that institutions of higher education create an advisory committee to recommend the consolidation or elimination of any minor degree or certificate that does not have specific industry data to substantiate workforce demands (despite

the constancy and rapidity of workforce demands). SB 2615 requires full-time university employees to work on-site, thus removing institutional discretion over employment policies.

Research: dementia. The Legislature appropriated \$3 billion in this biennial budget for the creation of the “Dementia Prevention and Research Institute of Texas”, which will coordinate and fund research on dementia, including Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s, and related cerebral diseases of advancing age.

THE HOUSING SHORTAGE

With the median price of a house now at \$350,000, and rent having risen steeply since 2020, many Texans are strained by the cost of housing. This session, somewhat belatedly, legislators filed some 200 bills to alleviate this cost-of-living challenge by addressing the housing shortage. Most bills aimed at reforms to zoning and construction regulations that inhibit new housing construction. In an effort to improve density in new neighborhoods, SB 15 sets a “maximum minimum” lot size for housing developments in new suburbs and exurbs. SB 785 requires cities to allow construction and sale of certain types of manufactured homes (including du-, tri-, and quad-plexes), as these tend to be more affordable for new homeowners and renters, and to utilize space more efficiently. Legislation also passed that may facilitate the conversion of office buildings into mixed-use business/residential buildings. One benefit of the latter may be revitalization of downtown corridors that have gone unused since the pandemic.

Time will tell whether these reforms are sufficient to accommodate the housing needs of current residents and of the anticipated 10 million new residents projected to move to Texas by 2050. For bills that I filed and passed to help develop more housing, see more in the next section.

BUSINESS AND COMMERCE

Spurring innovation. To maintain the economic vigor of Texas requires continuous innovation. From energy to artificial intelligence, from cybersecurity to quantum computing, the Legislature looked ahead to advancing technologies that are likely to profoundly affect the Texas economy and the financial future of all Texans.

The quantum future. HB 4751 creates the “Texas Quantum Initiative” to incentivize research, investment, and development in quantum computing in Texas. The application of quantum physics principles to technology is not new. In fact, it is foundational to many technologies we take for granted today and recent advances in quantum computing capabilities portend a startling expansion of capabilities and applications across almost all fields.

Insurance. One of the more complex issues that affects Texans directly is the rising cost of auto and property insurance. While solutions are frustratingly elusive, the Legislature did pass a suite of consumer protection laws in the insurance space. SB 1238 prohibits rate increases for widowed spouses, SB 213 prohibits mandatory bundling of home and auto policies, SB 1644 requires insurers to review and update all insured credit reports every three years, and HB 2067 requires insurance companies to disclose to consumers why



Debating legislation on the Senate chamber floor.

OVERVIEW OF THE 89TH TEXAS LEGISLATURE (CONTINUED)



Senator Johnson questions a witness during a Business & Commerce Committee public hearing.

they cancel, decline to cover, or don't renew a policy. HB 3689 restructured the funding mechanism for the coastal insurance program TWIA, the insurance of last resort for weather-related claims.

Energy and the electric grid. The number and scale of data centers and crypto mining facilities moving to Texas exceeds even the highest previous expectation. Categorized as "large loads" for their immense power consumption, accommodating their presence on the grid required regulatory changes. The Legislature responded by passing SB 6, which, among many other substantial changes, mandates that substantial energy users contribute to the costs of building new infrastructure, and grants ERCOT the authority and ability to disconnect large consumers from the grid during power emergencies. HB 14 aims to spur growth in nuclear energy generation. It creates the "Texas Advanced Nuclear Energy Program", which is authorized to award grants of up to \$200 million to support the development of next-stage nuclear energy projects in Texas.

HEMP-DERIVED THC REGULATION

In 2019, the Legislature legalized industrial hemp cultivation, production, manufacture, and sale in Texas. The purpose was to create an industrial hemp market, but six years later, the market for consumable hemp-derived THC products and beverages has boomed, generating more than \$300 million in sales taxes.

The hemp-THC market, however, is largely unregulated. The absence of serious regulation has resulted in risk and harm to the health of both adults

and children, and even degradation of the market itself. At the time of this writing there are no age restrictions, no standardizing testing, no legal parameters for marketing and packaging, and no state agency with the necessary THC expertise to be able update industry standards, rules, and regulations over time.

Believing that the state has the ability to regulate the THC industry while also keeping Texans safe, I filed SB 53 and SB 54 during the first called special session to both regulate hemp-derived THC and decriminalize recreational use of marijuana.



Joined by Senator Molly Cook and veteran Shaun Salvaje, Senator Johnson unveils his comprehensive cannabis reform package.

AI & CYBERSECURITY

The rapid advancement of artificial intelligence brings great promise and great potential for misuse. The 89th Legislature introduced 67 bills related to AI, 12 of which were signed into law. Three main themes emerged during session, 1) a regulatory framework of AI in the private and public sectors, 2) criminalization of sexually explicit AI-generated media and deep fake technology, and 3) regulation of AI in healthcare. HB 149 and SB 1964 ambitiously set parameters for the responsible use of AI in the private and public sector by, among other things, defining AI and prohibiting the use of AI for certain purposes, such as social scoring and manipulating human behavior. SB 441 creates legal recourse for victims of artificially generated sexually explicit material and HB 1092 prohibits the production and distribution of sexually explicit images or videos using deep fake technology. In the healthcare space, SB 815 prohibits the use of AI when denying insurance coverage for a healthcare service.

SENATOR JOHNSON'S 2025 LEGISLATIVE HIGHLIGHTS

WORKFORCE HOUSING

Despite the housing crisis being a high priority for legislators this session, few pieces of legislation received a hearing that would have committed state resources to incentivize the construction of new housing of any kind. I introduced SB 960 to do just that. SB 960 would have allocated \$1 billion to finance the construction of middle- and lower-income, multi-family workforce housing through low-interest mezzanine loans. Implementation could have prompted the construction of nearly 300,000 new units in dense urban metros, like Dallas, as well as areas like Midland-Odessa, where housing stock has lagged over the past two decades. SB 960 was not given a hearing.

My SB 2835, however, has become law, and is set to increase housing stock. By updating codes to reject outdated international housing code provisions, SB 2835 allows cities to permit single stairway apartment buildings. These structures utilize modern construction techniques and architectural designs to build safe and beautiful housing in previously unusable places. They also allow for more interior light and air in each apartment, improve fire safety, and are cheaper to build than the traditional Texas donut-shaped apartment complexes. Not only will this option add unique character to neighborhoods, it can bring down the cost of housing for families.

SENATOR JOHNSON'S 2025 LEGISLATIVE HIGHLIGHTS (CONTINUED)



Senator Johnson with the City of Balch Springs delegation, Rep. Rose, and Rep. Bowers.

Cherished for historical, educational, and economic value, these three institutions together attract more than 300,000 visitors annually from around the world. In 2023, they contributed more than \$329 million to the state's gross domestic product and supported over 3,160 jobs. I filed and passed HB 5616 to establish the "Texas Presidential Library Promotion Program" to expand public awareness of and interest in the presidential libraries, and, importantly, to develop a mobile exhibit that travels around the state. With the United States's 250th anniversary fast approaching, promoting Texas's presidential libraries serves as a reminder of this state's great contributions to the nation.

EDUCATION

Three of my policy priorities to improve the education system in Texas passed as amendments to HB 2, the omnibus school finance bill. SB 237 allows teachers to enroll their children in the state's free pre-K program; SB 555 partially reimburses schools for the cost of providing initial special education evaluations; and SB 557 increases the funding for P-TECH programs, a high school model that provides high school, college, and work experience, from \$50 to \$150 per student.

A portion of SB 237 that I was unable to pass or add to another bill would have provided teachers with paid parental leave. The desire to have a family should not deter good people from becoming teachers or from continuing to teach.

HEALTHCARE

Healthcare in schools. Asthma attacks are among the most common emergencies in Texas public schools. I addressed this problem by putting together a respiratory distress response package, which enables schools to partner with medical non-profits to assist students suffering from an asthma attack. Schools can now be equipped with the necessary medication and training to respond to respiratory distress emergencies and keep students in the classroom instead of the emergency room.



Senator Johnson welcomes the City of Mesquite delegation, Mesquite ISD, and Leadership Mesquite to the Texas Capitol for Mesquite Day.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Building upon the work done during the 88th Legislative Session regarding data brokers and data privacy, I passed SB 1343 and SB 2121. The bills require data brokers to provide information to consumers regarding their data privacy rights and redefine the meaning of "data broker" to close loopholes in data privacy laws that were being exploited by bad actors. The 89th Legislature's emphasis on AI led to bipartisan support for my SB 2373. The new law protects Texans from AI-generated scams by establishing a civil cause of action for AI financial scams. The bill also introduces civil penalties for offenders, provides confidential identity protection for victims of AI scams, and creates an appropriately tiered criminal offense, ranging from a Class B misdemeanor to a first-degree felony based on the amount exploited.

MEETING DEMAND THROUGH CONSERVATION

Recycling. Texas recycling facilities have a problem: they can't collect enough used plastic, aluminum, and glass to produce the state's demand for recycled beverage containers. Texans purchase 24 billion beverage containers annually and only recycle 5 billion. The remaining 19 billion containers end up in our landfills or are discarded as litter and end up in our waterways. I filed SB 728 to create a beverage container deposit program to address both environmental concerns and to support industry growth. Similar programs have been adopted in other U.S. cities and around the world. The bill was given a hearing in the Senate but was not brought up for a vote.

Energy efficiency. One of the most complicated and time-consuming issues I worked on this session was how to reduce unnecessary energy use. In SB 2994, we sought to better align financial incentives for conservation with actual customer use. Though we passed the bill out of the Senate, consensus eluded us, and we could not find a workable solution before the session clock ran out. We succeeded, however, in advancing previously stalled conversations on the subject, learned quite a bit, and will start next session in a better place to help Texans conserve more energy.

REMEMBERING OUR HISTORY

Texas has more presidential libraries – three – than any other state, honoring the legacies of Presidents Lyndon B. Johnson, George H. W. Bush, and George W. Bush.

SENATOR JOHNSON'S 2025 LEGISLATIVE HIGHLIGHTS (CONTINUED)

Mental health. On the mental health front, HB 2809 requires the Texas Department of Family & Protective Services to include in their yearly report the number of foster children that attempt suicide, and to notify the parents of suicide attempts. Research shows that the most predictive factor of a suicide is a previous suicide attempt. Collection of this data may help us save foster children's lives.

FIREARM SAFETY

Despite passing the House chamber by a vote of 140-0, my nonpartisan gun safety legislation did not receive a hearing in the Senate. HB 865 would have increased the number of gun safe storage locations by clarifying that store owners are not liable for any acts committed by gun owners. The ambiguity in current state law leaves store owners open to lawsuits if they return a gun to a gun owner and the gun is then used to commit a crime. This lack of clarity disincentivizes store owners from providing safe storage and reduces the options gun owners have to protect themselves and their families.

SENATOR NATHAN JOHNSON'S 89TH LEGISLATIVE SESSION REVIEW:

 \$90 MILLION in research grants to The University of Texas at Dallas (HB 1)	UNDER THE DOME:  4,488 VOTES TAKEN ON FLOOR
 \$2.1 MILLION for infrastructure improvements to Campion Park (HB 500)	 135 BILLS AUTHORED
 \$100 MILLION toward the new Dallas State Hospital to support mental health services (HB 500)	 35 BILLS BECAME LAW
ON THE GROUND: 10,199 Correspondence Received  129 Casework Closed 	35 RESOLUTIONS & CEREMONIAL CERTIFICATES PRESENTED 
138 Media & Interviews  468 Meetings & Events 	

*These estimates are based on data collected between January 1, 2025 and July 31, 2025.

FROM AUSTIN TO DALLAS

LOCAL LEGISLATION

Representative Rafael Anchia and I teamed up to pass SB 1494 – a priority bill for the City of Dallas. Across the state, voter turnout in May municipal elections is very, very low, often in the single digits. To address the problem, Dallas passed Proposition D last year to move city elections from May to November in odd-numbered years. SB 1494 is the final step in making that a reality for Dallas, and for any Texas city that changes their charter before December 31st of this year.

AROUND THE DISTRICT

As a state senator, I have the honor to acknowledge extraordinary achievements of Texas individuals and organizations who enrich our communities. This past Legislative Session, I recognized the civic contributions and accomplishments of (to name a few): Friends of the Dallas Public Library; Builders of Hope; United Way of Metropolitan Dallas; The Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Garden; the Texas Small Business Development Center Network; Texas arts advocacy organizations; and the cities and respective delegations of Dallas, Mesquite, Balch Springs, Richardson, and Grand Prairie. I also joined my Senate colleagues in designating March 18, 2025, as COFA Day in Texas, commemorating the Compacts of Free Association.

These recognitions reflect the commitment, service, and transformative contributions of individuals and organizations who help shape a stronger, more vibrant Texas for all.



Helping serve families at the Community Does It Christmas Celebration in Pleasant Grove.



At the Dallas Arboretum and Botanical Garden, Senator Johnson presents a resolution celebrating the 40th Annual Dallas Blooms event.

THE CAPITOL REPORT

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GOVERNMENT RESOURCES ONLINE

HELPFUL TOLL-FREE NUMBERS

General Help & Services	2 - 1 - 1	Texas Senate	www.senate.texas.gov
Cancer Information Service	(800) 4-CANCER	Texas House of Representatives	www.house.texas.gov
Child Support Hotline	(800) 252-8014	Secretary of State	www.sos.texas.gov
Consumer Protection Hotline	(800) 621-0508	Elections Division	Texas Comptroller
Governor's Assist. Hotline	(800) 843-5789	Social Security Administration	www.comptroller.texas.gov
Govt. Referral Service	(800) 252-9690	Crime Victim Clearinghouse	Texas Legislature Online
Immunization Hotline	(800) 848-4284	Immunitization Hotline	www.capitol.texas.gov
Medicaid Helpline	(800) 335-8957	WIC Hotline	Texas Governor
Nursing Home Complaints	(800) 942-3678	Rehabilitative Services	www.governor.texas.gov
Injured Worker Hotline	(800) 458-9858	Child Care Information	www.texasagriculture.gov
Unemployment Hotline	(800) 862-5252	Child Care Information	Texas Department of Agriculture
Suicide and Crisis Helpline	(800) 939-6631	Texas General Land Office	www.glo.texas.gov

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