

# Senator Judith Zaffirini



## Reports to the Families of District 21

### Dear Friends:

The interim is one of my favorite times as a public servant. Removed from the demands of a legislative session, but before everyone begins thinking about campaigns and elections, the early part is a time to interact with families throughout the district, learn about issues, see old friends and make new ones.

Driving through Senate District 21, you can't help but notice our diversity. We are urban, rural and everything in between; we work in energy, manufacturing, trade, agriculture and technology; and our more than 800,000 residents look, speak and act—well, like Texas. It's only when you talk to people that you realize those differences are negligible. We have much, much more in common, especially our values.

We believe families are the bedrock of every community, and that those communities are only as strong as their weakest members. We believe in the dignity and respect owed to all persons. Most of all, we believe in our responsibility to the next generation: to educate them, nurture them and leave the world better for them than we received it.



**FAMILY FIRST:** What Senator Judith Zaffirini of Laredo works for and wishes for her beloved family is what she works for and wishes for all families of Senate District 21. She and Carlos Zaffirini Sr. relish their roles as “Ma Z” and “Pa Z” to Asher Maxwell (06/03/17) and George William (07/15/19), sons of Carlos Jr. and Audrey.

These are the values that form the basis of my service to you in the Texas Senate and are the reasons I have never missed a vote.

This newsletter serves as a nonpolitical reminder—equal parts progress report and call to action—that we must come together to turn those values into tangible change. As ever, I welcome your participation, whether by sharing your views, communicating about concerns or even sug-

gesting legislation. That perspective is particularly important and timely as we collaborate to address the myriad critical issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

My prayer is that the Lord will continue to bless us all with grace and good will, family and friendship, love and joy, and health and happiness as we collaborate to forge a better world for future generations.

May God bless Texas!

*Judith Zaffirini*

Judith Zaffirini, PhD

State Senator, District 21

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# Technology Enhances Constituent Outreach



**SOCIAL MEDIA** are an especially useful tool for disseminating information, scheduling events and sharing moments with constituents. Here (L-R) Miss and Little Miss Starr, sisters Elizabeth and Kendra Gonzalez, and Fred Lopez take a selfie with Senator Judith Zaffirini after she was honored by the Texas Library Association in Rio Grande City.

Unprecedented challenges require innovative solutions, and COVID-19 certainly motivated Senator Judith Zaffirini and her staff to get creative. Suddenly

working remotely to practice social distancing, the team's first task was clear: find a way to keep in touch with district residents.

The senator turned to videoconferencing platforms like Zoom not only to maintain contact, but also to find new means of collaboration. She began hosting regular virtual meetings to connect local leaders and advocates with experts on government transparency, judicial pro-

cedures and mental health. Attendance typically exceeded 100 participants, and one surpassed 1,500.

“Zoom technology really has improved our efforts,” the senator said. “It is now a regular part of our outreach.”

Despite the pandemic, Senator Zaffirini is keeping the same “open-door” policy that is a hallmark of her service—though virtually. To request assistance or schedule an appointment, constituents may call either the Capitol or Laredo office via 512/463-0121 or 956/722-2293, respectively, or email the senator via [judith.zaffirini@senate.texas.gov](mailto:judith.zaffirini@senate.texas.gov).



**DORA GONZALEZ**, La Salle County Tax Assessor-Collector, discusses local issues with Senator Judith Zaffirini via FaceTime.



**VIDEOCONFERENCING** via Zoom, Webex and GoToMeeting allows Senator Judith Zaffirini to continue her open-door policy and meet with constituents while they maintain social distancing. She particularly enjoys meeting with students such as (L-R) Isabella Garcia, Bexar County; Oscar Lopez and Cristina Mireles, Webb County; and Julie Durán and Sarah Rathmell, Zapata County.



**INSPIRING SD 21 YOUTH TO DREAM HIGH** is a commitment of Senator Judith Zaffirini. Flashing their favorite academic hand signs (left), members of the Tilden Future Farmers of America and their sponsor, Jim Harris, accept her proclamation honoring them. She welcomes opportunities to discuss issues with students, including (right) those at Luling High School and their teacher, Plutarco Castro.

## Students Inspire Senator Zaffirini's Agenda

“Students inspire me,” Senator Judith Zaffirini often says. “Every student deserves an opportunity to succeed at the highest level possible.” A former educator who serves on the Senate Committees on Education and Higher Education, she emphasizes access to affordable, world-class pre-K, schools, colleges and universities for all Texans.

The COVID-19 pandemic rapidly has changed the educational environment, forcing students and teachers to adapt. In low-income or rural areas, however, lack of access to broadband internet could mean their being left behind. “How can we expect a student to thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century without access to the internet at home?” Senator Zaffirini asks. “We must prioritize broadband access for rural and low-income families.”

The senator favors a broad, student-oriented rethinking of affordable, excellent higher education. “We shouldn't ask students to lease their futures for opportunities to excel in academia and beyond,” she said. Reflecting this belief, Senator

Zaffirini continues to work tirelessly to modernize financial aid; eliminate barriers to college; and reduce the crushing burden of student loan debt on generations of Texans. She also supports policies that reflect appreciation for teachers before, during and after their service years with tuition assistance, appropriate pay, grants to help with student loans and improved retirement benefits.

Among Senator Zaffirini's favorite activities is meeting with students to discuss their futures and the value of lifelong learning—or simply what they've been reading lately. Her “Promoting Literacy Program” is a

staple of her public service. Children who visit her office receive a complimentary book of their choosing.

“I love to read, so I share that passion whenever I can,” she said, before warning parents: “If you escort your children to my office, they're going to be my focus—sorry!”



**ATTENDING COMMUNITY EVENTS** allows Senator Judith Zaffirini to meet with constituents of all ages. She joined students at Del Valle High School (top) to celebrate the new school year and leaders in San Marcos (bottom) to open a youth community center.

# No issue too big or too small: Senator Judith Zaffirini Prepares for 2021 Legislative Session

Legislative sessions at the Texas Capitol can be, to put it lightly, chaotic. For a mere five months senators and representatives consider thousands of issues, balance the competing interests of Texans regarding virtually every subject and establish the state's budget for the next two years. Senator Judith Zaffirini, who has passed a state-record 1,160 bills during her career, traditionally not only files the first bills, but also passes the most.

## Talking with Constituents

What is the secret to her success? "Preparation," she answers. "Knowing the priorities of constituents before session starts lets me focus on collaborating with my colleagues to get things done."

Developing Senator Zaffirini's legislative agenda begins at home. "My priorities reflect values we share in Senate District 21," she explains. "We identify ideas that will improve our schools, make



**HONORING OUR BELOVED MILITARY SERVICE MEMBERS AND VETERANS** for their patriotism, courage, commitment and sacrifice is an expression of our gratitude, admiration, respect and support. Three Rivers Mayor Felipe Martinez (left) and Senator Judith Zaffirini thank local veterans before the annual Live Oak County Fair Parade. They are (L-R) Rodolfo Peña, Cassandra and John Cochran, Dennis Zamzow, Commander Mark Dobbins and Quartermaster Michael and Nancy Coquat.

higher education more affordable, increase health care access, protect the environment, create jobs and ensure equal protection under the law."

Many of the senator's specific policy proposals also come from her constituents. She regularly consults with local officials, business owners, faith leaders and other citizens to discuss their concerns and suggestions, always stressing that she shares their priorities.

"Some of my best bills have come from constituents who encounter problems they cannot solve alone," she said. "I am

delighted to help, and there's no issue too big or too small for my staff and me to address."

## Hearing from Experts

During the 18-month interim between sessions, legislative committees meet to consider expert testimony regarding timely and important topics. As a member of seven committees—Administration, Business and Commerce, Education, Higher Education, Mass Violence Prevention and Community Safety, Natural Resources and Economic Develop-

ment, and State Affairs—Senator Zaffirini is well-positioned to investigate issues important to her constituents.

She also serves as a member of the Texas Judicial Council and the Texas Access to Justice Commission, thanks to appointments by Lt. Governor Dan Patrick. Texas Supreme Court Chief Justice Nathan Hecht, Chair, appointed her to important committees overseeing civil justice, public trust and confidence in the judiciary and the strategic vision of the judicial branch.

"Whether discussing water quality in colonias, rural health care, landfill

permitting or access to justice, it is my duty to engage with colleagues, witnesses and the public to find solutions," said the senator. "I take that responsibility very seriously."

## Preparing for Session

There is more to legislating than hearing from experts. After identifying potential legislation, the real work begins: a lengthy review process that includes detailed research, extensive vetting and, ultimately, drafting the bill.

The senator credits this process as a key to her success, citing the importance of collecting facts and engaging interested parties early.

She and her staff began preparing for the 2021 session even before the 2019 session adjourned. They re-evaluated bills and amendments that failed or were vetoed by the governor and researched proposals that came to their attention too late.

When asked how her constituents could participate in state governance, the senator replied, "Get involved. Let us know how we can help. We are here to serve and always will do our best to assist."



**STRONG COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP TAKES MANY FORMS.** Senator Judith Zaffirini joins Duval County Judge Gilbert Saenz (left) at the dedication of the Pete Salinas Memorial Trail. She and State Representative Ryan Guillen passed House Bill 4762, naming the road for the popular electrical worker who was killed in a tragic workplace accident. She presents a Senate proclamation (center) celebrating 50 years of excellence and devotion by the Seguin Martin Luther King Jr. Planning Committee, including (L-R) Darren Dunn, Joe Patterson Sr., Melanie Boone, Jewel Lewis, Katherine Garcia, Linda Redix, Mary Crunk, Early Moseley and James Crunk. Senator Zaffirini embraces (right) Paige Burselon and talks with her parents, Tammy and Corky, during the 31<sup>st</sup> Annual Sutherland Springs Old Town Days celebration.



COLLABORATING CONTINUALLY WITH LOCAL LEADERS is key to Senator Judith Zaffirini's legislative success. In San Patricio County, for example, she interacts regularly with (clockwise) Port of Corpus Christi Commissioner Wes Hoskins, State Representative J.M. Lozano, Rick Ritter, Becky Gallagher, Foster Edwards, County Judge David Krebs, Portland Mayor Pro Tempore John Green, Portland City Council Member Tom Yardley, Ingleside on the Bay Mayor Jo Ann Ehmann and Commissioner Howard Gillespie.

## Zaffirini: Environmental Issues are Top Priority

*Hablando se entiende la gente* (Through communication, we understand each other) exemplifies Senator Judith Zaffirini's approach to addressing community issues. Although she and her staff receive inquiries about a multitude of subjects, many of the most pressing ones involve projects that threaten a community's air, water or soil quality.



LOCAL TRADITIONS such as the Hebrbronville Annual Vaquero Festival reflect the rich diversity of 18 counties in Senate District 21. Senator Judith Zaffirini admires the intelligence and poise of the young pageant royalty who honor our vaquero heritage proudly.

Responding to constituent requests, for example, she regularly prevails upon the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality to hold public meetings regarding proposed development permits, including this year in SD 21's Caldwell, Hays, San Patricio and Travis counties. "Texans with concerns about a landfill, pipeline or wastewater project should be allowed to express and to share them," the senator said, "and we have a duty to listen and to address them."

Similarly, she has facilitated discussions among area residents and local and state officials regarding dam failures and the potential draining of the prized Guadalupe Lakes. "We are at our best collaborating to find effective solutions for our communities," Senator Zaffirini said.

## Local Traditions Enrich District 21 Counties

Even with its articles about issues, priorities and legislation, this newsletter sometimes reads like a travel log, a heartwarming reminder of the places I've been and the people I've met throughout Senate District 21. After each legislative session I typically go on the road to visit our 18 counties. I had nearly reached that goal this year, but the COVID-19 pandemic caused me to cancel scheduled visits to the last two counties.

It was wonderful to meet with families and groups while also participating in local traditions including the Floresville Peanut Festival and the Hebrbronville Vaquero Festival, riding in parades in 10 counties and celebrating milestone anniversaries for storied small businesses like the Texas Café in Rio Grande City. Of course, nothing is more satisfying than interacting with students, as I did in Del Valle, Luling, Seguin and Lar-

edo. What could possibly give a person more hope for the future?

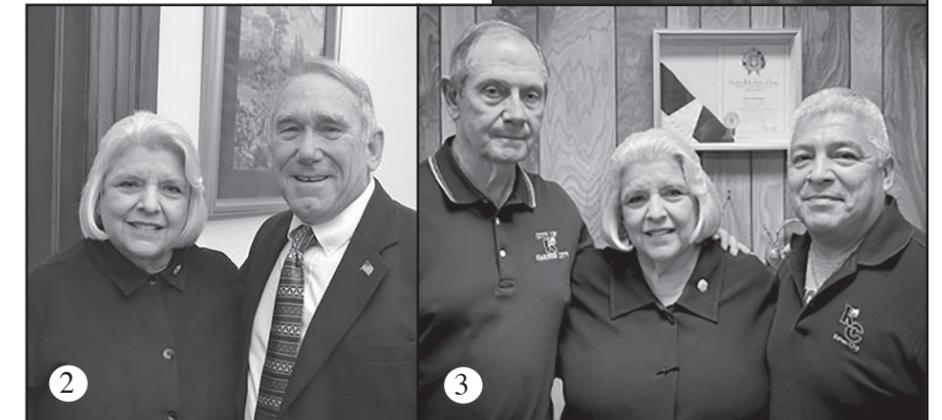
In February I attended "A Night to Shine," a joyous, promising celebration for persons with disabilities hosted by the Tim Tebow Foundation. It was a blast—truly unforgettable!

Only a few weeks prior were two equally memorable events, albeit more solemn ones. I was honored to attend vigils in Guadalupe and Wilson counties for victims and survivors of domestic violence. Witnessing the strength of the attendees and their families was incredibly inspiring.

I cherish the memories of these visits and am excited about the next ones. It's a big district, however, so please let me know the places to visit and traditions to observe together next!



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DIVERSE ISSUES AND ACTIVITIES ARE A HALLMARK of our district. Senator Judith Zaffirini learns from constituents including (1) Will Galloway at Galloway and Sons' 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary in Beeville; (2) Weldon Riggs of Atascosa County, whom she sponsored for the Evergreen Underground Water Conservation District Board; (3) Mayor Leroy Skloss and Mayor Pro Tempore Jimmy Loya Sr. at Karnes City Hall; and (4) business and elected leaders such as those at the groundbreaking for the Seguin structural plastics center.

# Senator Judith Zaffirini: Service as a Way of Life

Growing up in Laredo, Senator Judith Zaffirini adopted the motto learned from the Ursuline nuns, *Serviam* (I will serve), as a way of life. This inspires her devotion to the families of Senate District 21 and to her family—Carlos Sr.; Carlos Jr. and Audrey; and two grandsons, Asher Maxwell and George William.

What she works for and wishes for her family is what she works

for and wishes for all families in our district and beyond.

“We don’t want our children and grandchildren to be like us; we want them to be better,” she stresses at every opportunity. “We don’t want them to match our accomplishments; we want them to surpass them.”

Known for her work ethic and discipline, the senator has cast 64,330 consecutive votes—a “re-

cord that will never be broken,” according to Lt. Governor Dan Patrick.

“Continuing to be motivated, persistent and passionate in public service is easy because I know the power it has to benefit those whom I represent,” she explains.

Many persons and organizations have recognized Senator Zaffirini’s devoted service. Of the more than 1,100 awards she has

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received, she is especially proud of being inducted into the Texas Women’s Hall of Fame by Governor Greg Abbott; named an Honorary Nun, “Sister Judith,” by the Sisters of Mercy and Mercy Ministries; and designated “Godmother of Texas Children” by Teaching and Mentoring Communities.

She and her staff lead by example, welcoming every opportunity to make a difference for others. That service begins with being accessible, responsive and

compassionate; and continues with disseminating timely, helpful



**CHILDREN’S ISSUES** are a loving priority for Senator Judith Zaffirini, especially because of her two darling grandsons, Asher Maxwell (06/30/17) and George William (07/15/19).

and relevant information. They communicate by every means possible, inviting constituents to call or email them; to subscribe to her eNewsletter via [zaffirini.senate.texas.gov](http://zaffirini.senate.texas.gov); or to check her daily informative postings via Facebook, [facebook.com/judithzaffirini.senator](http://facebook.com/judithzaffirini.senator).

“Our goal, first and foremost, is to respond to the needs of the persons we represent,” she said. “We cannot promise we will always succeed, but we will always try.”