

The Laubenberg Letter

September 2007

Dear Friends,

Over 6000 bills were filed over the course of the 80th Legislative Session. Approximately 1600 of these passed through both chambers. These bills covered a multiple of issues across the spectrum.

Please find below a brief overview of the session, which I hope will give you insight into what I have pursued as your representative, and what the 80th Legislature accomplished as a whole.

I hope that you find this information helpful. If you would like more information or have any questions on this or other legislation, my staff and I stand ready to assist you. I can be reached in the District at 972.772.8525 (Rockwall County) 972.468.4189 (Collin County), or in Austin at 512.463.0186.

Best wishes,



State Representative, District 89



Jodie Laubenberg

District 89



Accomplishments of the 80th Legislature: An Overview

Family Values

Healthy Marriages

The Legislature established incentives for couples to engage in premarital education courses. Premarital courses have been shown to dramatically decrease the divorce rates.

Bible Education

This law ensures that Texas school districts are able to offer a constitutionally-protected course relating to academic study of the Bible for the purpose of educating American children the contributions of the Bible to American history, literature and values.

Texas Pledge

The Texas Pledge of Allegiance will be reworded adding the words "under God..." This addition acknowledges that the presence and influence of God has been intrinsically associated with the political and social culture of the United States.

Conservation

Water Conservation

This session, the Legislature passed the first significant piece of water legislation since 1997. A primary provision of this bill allows North Texas to actively pursue the construction of water reservoirs. It also establishes conservation and environmental protection measures while continuing to promote economic growth.

State Parks

This law restores the sporting goods tax to its original purpose - to fund state parks - ending the fiscally-irresponsible practice of siphoning off of parks funding for other purposes. The new funding is expected to dramatically improve the parks' long-term viability and fund much-needed maintenance at many facilities.



Bill Signing for the Retired Teachers' Thirteenth Check

Budget and Taxes

Elimination of Outdated Taxes

The Legislature abolished an outdated tax by eliminating the Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund (TIF), which had completed its purpose of funding electronic infrastructure upgrades for public facilities. The TIF Tax will be abolished by 2008, three years before its original ending date.

Additional Franchise Tax Exemptions

Legislation passed this session increases the revenue exemption from the Franchise Tax, which passed in 2005 and was implemented in 2007. This exemption is a small start to reducing the burden the new Franchise Tax has placed on small businesses. The Legislature must pursue more solutions in upcoming years to reward small businesses, rather than penalize them.

Government Transparency

The Legislature required the creation of a searchable, publicly-available online database of state spending. This system overhaul will facilitate access to information about how state government is allocating its budget, improving Texans' ability to hold its government accountable.

Indigent Health Care

Initiation of Reform

During the interim period, Dallas Metroplex elected leaders and hospital officials will engage in a study of the challenge of providing indigent health care in North Texas. The conventional "box" thinking is expanding the tax base. This study will explore how counties can work together to address these problems within existing fiscal boundaries.

Education

Retired Teachers

The Legislature stabilized the TRS fund and authorized the Texas Teacher Retirement System to issue a thirteenth check for Texas' retired teachers.

TAKS Phase-Out

The Legislature is phasing out TAKS and replacing it with end of course exams in the four core subject areas in grades 9-12. This legislation is the first step to eliminating the TAKS, and thus address the concern of "teaching to the TAKS" in Texas schools.

Tax Exemptions for Public Education

The Legislature exempted fast-growth school districts from being assessed high fees, called impact fees, for the construction of new schools. The elimination of this fee will save schools and taxpayers millions of dollars.

Criminal Justice

Jessica's Law

The Legislature toughened judicial recourse against child predators, imposing a minimum sentence of 25 years for sexually violent offenses against a child younger than 14 and eliminating the parole option for certain offenders. A second such conviction will result in the death penalty.

Texas Youth Commission (TYC)

The Legislature reformed the TYC by establishing Offices to establish investigations and confidential reporting. It also increases training and job requirements for TYC employees.



Representative Laubenberg discusses state matters with her colleagues on the House Floor.