



# GENE WU

STATE REPRESENTATIVE ★ DISTRICT 137



Issue 5

## NEWSLETTER

June 2015

Dear Friends,

The 84th Legislative Session has finally concluded, and was a tough five months. As I reflect on my second session, I am pleased by what we accomplished. While every decision came with challenges, we can celebrate successes, recognize where we fell short, and continue our work in the interim.



In this issue we share highlights from the weeks leading up to final adjournment on June 1st, Sine Die (the last day of the 84th Legislature). At our upcoming **Post-Session Legislative Town Hall**, we will be discussing many of the issues we've touched on in these newsletters - and more. Please mark your calendars for **Saturday, July 18, 2015**. A separate invitation with the details will be going out later this month.

For those of you who are waiting on a reply, thank you for your patience. In the coming weeks, we will be responding to the many e-mails we received at the end of Session.

During the interim, I look forward to continuing our work, visiting with you in the District, and finding ways to improve our neighborhoods, our city, and the state of Texas.

Sincerely,

Gene

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## UPDATES FROM THE LEGE - FLOOR ACTION

Passing a two-year budget for the state is the number one priority every Legislative Session (and the only required by the Texas Constitution). The House and Senate each proposed a plan at the end of March, and then for weeks the budget was negotiated in conference committee. On May 29th we passed **HB 1**, the 2016-2017 General Appropriations Act, by a vote of 115-33. I voted for HB 1, a \$209.4 billion compromise budget, because it boosts funding for education, transportation, state parks, hospital trauma care, and mental health and substance abuse services. While the budget had the right priorities, I believe that the investments in our schools, roads, and health care systems did not go far enough. I will continue to advocate for more funding in these critical areas, because it will save our state more money in the long-run.

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Investing in early-childhood education was another key priority that we were able to address this Legislative Session. **HB 4**, the Pre-K bill, which I co-authored, was passed with overwhelming bipartisan support in both chambers and signed into law by Governor Abbott on May 28th. HB 4 will implement high-quality education standards for Texas Pre-K students, and incorporates many of the ideas we proposed in our own early-childhood education bill, **HB 296**.

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Gun rights were a major topic this Legislative Session. In the end, the legislature passed bills to allow those with Concealed Handgun Licenses to openly carry their weapon in public (**HB 910**), and bring them onto college campuses (**SB 11**). I am a gun owner and support our Second Amendment rights, but I strongly opposed both of these bills. These bills were vehemently opposed by law enforcement groups, the business community, and educators and students alike; and I join them in voicing condemnation of these new laws that decrease public safety so that a few people can walk around and brandish their firearms.

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We were able to achieve a number of substantial reforms for our criminal justice and judicial systems, but first I want to focus on a key juvenile justice reform on our legislative agenda that we did not pass.

Currently, Texas is one of a few remaining states where 17-year-olds are treated as adults in the criminal justice system. I filed **HB 330** in an effort to "raise the age" of juvenile jurisdiction to 18 years of age. When my bill stalled, I proposed it as an amendment to a bill by Senator Whitmire, **SB 1630**. The House supported it, but eventually the provision was removed from the bill in a conference committee compromise.

To discuss the issue, I held a press conference on Sunday, May 31st. I was joined by my colleagues Representative Sylvester Turner (D-Houston) and Representative James White (R-Woodville), and a coalition of nonpartisan policy advocates including the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition, and the Texas Public Policy Foundation.

We expressed our disappointment that the "raise the age" provision did not stay on the bill, but affirmed our ongoing commitment to



moving 17-year-olds out of adult criminal courts, jails, and prisons. I look forward to working with Senator Whitmire and Governor Abbott over the interim to get this done next Session.

Another major item we worked on this Session was de-criminalizing school truancy. Texas is one of two remaining states that files criminal charges on minors for missing school. Studies show that economically disadvantaged children, African-American and Hispanic students, and students with disabilities are disproportionately harmed by truancy policies and practices. I filed **HB 297** and **HB 1359** in an effort to stop criminalizing kids for missing school. There were a number of truancy bills this Session, but we ultimately passed **HB 2398** authored by Rep. James White (R-Woodville) by a vote of 118-27. I was proud to be recognized for my work on this issue by being appointed as one of the House conferees for the bill.

**HB 2398** decriminalizes truancy by moving truancy courts out of criminal jurisdiction and into the civil realm; it focuses efforts on truancy prevention programs; and looks at the underlying issues behind truancy — like homelessness, chronic illness or unidentified special education needs. This is an important victory for our kids and families. Instead of funneling students into the school-to-prison pipeline, **HB 2398** encourages school districts to take common-sense steps to address truancy problems, enhance school attendance, and keep kids on track to graduate.

We also passed **HB 2150**, an important reform that improves impartiality and trust in our grand jury system; banning the longstanding "pick-a-pal" method. Texas is currently the only state remaining where judge-appointed commissioners nominate prospective jurors, rather than picking from randomly selected residents. I was a Joint Author for this bills, and it successfully passed by a 86-57 vote.

**HB 329** is a criminal records reform that we worked on last Session that didn't make it through the process. **HB 329** helps low-level, fine-only offenders (citations) move beyond a one-off mistake. This time, even though the bill stalled, we were successful in amending our proposal onto **HB 3579**, which passed by a vote of 142-3. At the time of writing this article, the bill is still awaiting Governor Abbott's signature; we hope that he understands the necessity of allowing people a second chance, especially on trivial offenses.

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I am also proud to announce the passage of many of the bills we highlighted in previous e-newsletters. Here are the bills we successfully passed: **HB 326**, which modernizes Texas law allowing law enforcement to request a search warrant from a magistrate via phone or email; **HB 331**, which allows for electronically filed Texas Child Protective Services (CPS) documents and records to be sealed in the same manner as physical ones; **HB 418**, which protects our kids by allowing law enforcement and CPS to immediately take suspected child human trafficking victims into protective custody and place them into care; **HB 1264**, allows law enforcement to dispose of unnecessary toxicological material, like blood and urine samples from concluded intoxication-related cases; and **HB 1265** which clarifies the Texas Deceptive Trade Practices Act, empowering the Office of the Attorney General to prosecute businesses that try to swindle money by mailing deceptive solicitations.

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As a member of the House Energy Resources Committee, I worked on legislation that helps provide revenue to the state and jobs for Texans, but also considers the environmental impact of energy production. Texas is number one in the country in crude oil and natural gas production, and in renewable energy for wind and biodiesel production. Not only is Texas the top energy producing state in the country, we are also a global leader in the industry. The energy industry is an important economic driving force for Texas, but we must also strive to carefully balance economic development with public health and safety.

We passed **HB 497**, a bill that I authored to help get more overweight trucks off of roads and improve transportation safety. This legislation builds on the success of a bill I sponsored last Session, SB 514. These bills allow for the installation of pipelines along public right-of-ways to transport water and waste water for oil and gas production; reducing the number of heavy tanker trucks needed to haul water on our overcrowded roadways. The use of these pipelines will result in a cleaner environment and improved public safety.

**HB 40** was an energy bill that received a lot of attention this Session. HB 40 re-asserts the state's control over oil and gas production, prohibiting cities from completely banning oil and gas operations, but allowing them to regulate above-ground activities. I had serious reservations about the introduced version of this bill, and opposed it. However, through our negotiations the bill was re-drafted with improvements. We addressed local control concerns voiced by the City of Houston and the Texas Municipal League (a statewide association that advocates on municipal issues), and they were unopposed to the final compromise version of the bill. I voted for HB 40 because it provides a balance that protects communities and respects property rights, while ensuring the future prosperity of Texas. HB 40 was passed by a vote of 125-20 and signed into law on May 18th, effective immediately. If this legislation, when implemented, does trample too much on local control, then we will be back next Session to remedy it.

We passed **SCR 32**—the Senate companion to **HCR 63**, the companion resolution I authored—to urge our U.S. Congress to expedite Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) exports in light of the current permitting rules and regulations, which hinder international trade and the United States' economic growth. This would promote faster permitting of LNG exports, Texas' largest and most important commodity. These exports will help spur our economy and reduce global carbon emissions.

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June 21st is the last day Governor Abbott can sign or veto bills passed during Session. If you would like more information about specific legislation, please visit [www.legis.state.tx.us](http://www.legis.state.tx.us), or feel free to contact our office with your inquiries.

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## UPDATES FROM THE LEGE - RESOLUTIONS AND RECOGNITIONS



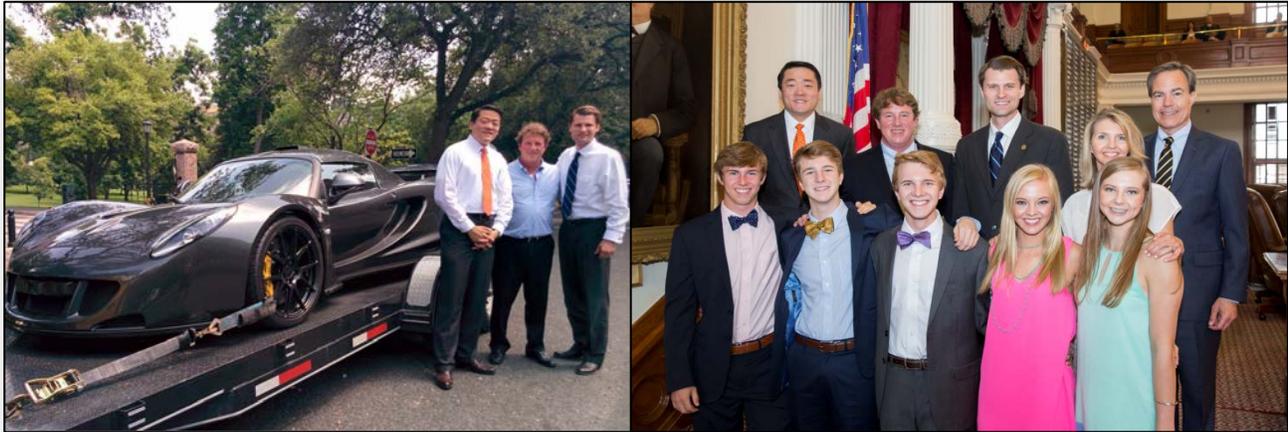
We had an extremely talented crew of interns who were an integral part of our success this Session. Each one of them worked with policy advocates, industry lobbyists, and constituents as they learned about the legislative process, and the issues facing Texans across the state.

Mariah Berry is a recent University of Houston graduate and joined our staff through their Hobby Fellows internship program; she will begin her first year at UT Law this fall. Katrina Wilkinson and Nishiki Maredia are both current undergraduates at the University of Texas. Elie Wu is a recent UT graduate; she will apply for law school this fall. Harrison Humphreys is a current undergraduate at Baylor University and joined our staff through the Texas Legislative Internship Program, sponsored by Senator

Rodney Ellis. Caitlyn Wan is pursuing a master's degree from the LBJ School of Public Affairs at UT; she will begin her final year at LBJ this fall. Andi Gentile received her Masters in Public Policy from the LBJ School this May, during Session; she will remain with our office to assist with criminal and juvenile justice issues. Phoebe Schirmer-Franklin is a current undergraduate at St. Edward's University.

We couldn't have accomplished even a fraction of what we did without these intelligent and dedicated individuals. I am satisfied knowing that these individuals will be our leaders of tomorrow. We wish them the best of luck on their future endeavors!

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On May 20th we adopted **HCR 121** congratulating the Texas-based company, Hennessey Performance on setting the world speed record for a production car with its Venom GT.

The Venom GT currently holds the Guinness World Record for standing-start acceleration, and in February 2014, it shattered the record for the highest speed ever reached by a production car by clocking in at 270.49 miles per hour at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida.

I'm a big car enthusiast, so I invited founder John Hennessey for a recognition at the Capitol. John was joined by his family along with the Venom GT!

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There were a number of Texas House members who announced their retirement at the end of this legislative session.

After 26 years of service, we will truly miss the knowledge and experience of Representative Sylvester Turner (D - Houston).

Representatives Jimmie Don Aycock (R - Killeen), Joe Farias (D - San Antonio), Patricia Harless (R - Spring), and Allen Fletcher (R - Cypress) have also announced they will not return for another Session.



## DISTRICT NEWS & COMMUNITY ANNOUNCEMENTS

In the last week of May, while I was at work in Austin, Southwest Houston was devastated by two severe weather events. After the tornado and floodwaters hit, Governor Abbott declared a state of disaster in Harris County. My office visited the Rockport Apartments to offer support and checked on the families who were staying at the temporary Red Cross shelter in the Chinese Community Center.



For more than a week, the Chinese Community Center provided shelter for these displaced families, putting their normal activities and programs on hold. We are very grateful for their generosity and hospitality. We also owe many thanks to our first responders, the City of Houston Health Human Services Department, and all of the volunteers who stepped up during this crisis.

With the help of funds granted by President Obama through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), federal aid will supplement state and local recovery efforts. Individuals and business owners who sustained losses can apply for assistance by registering online at [www.DisasterAssistance.gov](http://www.DisasterAssistance.gov) or by calling 1-800-621-FEMA (3362). Assistance can include grants for temporary housing and home repairs, low-cost loans to cover uninsured property losses, and other programs to help individuals and business owners recover from the effects of the disaster. Please visit [www.houstonrecovers.org](http://www.houstonrecovers.org) for information about local recovery efforts.

Linking YOU to the World

### FREE EDUCATION EXPO DAY

Saturday, June 13, 2015 | 10:30 AM – 2 PM

**Southwest Multi-Service Center Auditorium**  
6400 High Star, 77074 | 832-393-2660

**Great for the family!**  
Enjoy fun performances, crafts, prizes, and meet great organizations. An excellent opportunity to learn about multicultural arts, world heritage language programs, summer programs, after school programs, healthcare support, charter schools, and much more!

**Presented by:**  
Houston Public Library  
Walter Neighborhood Library  
WFL, Eastern-Southeast  
SW Community Organizations

Events are free and open to the public. Events subject to change.

Linking YOU to the World  
[www.YouToTheWorld.org](http://www.YouToTheWorld.org)

### FREE Community Events Saturday, June 13

**What:** EDUCATION EXPO DAY  
**When:** 10:30AM–2:00PM  
**Where:** Southwest Multi-Service Center,  
6400 High Star, 77074



**What:** WORLD REFUGEE DAY HOUSTON  
**When:** 1:00PM–4:00PM  
**Where:** University of St. Thomas,  
3909 Graustark, 77006



THE HOUSTON REFUGEE CONSORTIUM

## WORLD REFUGEE DAY HOUSTON

SATURDAY JUNE 13, 2015 1:00 PM - 4:00 PM

**FREE FAMILY EVENT**

**KIDS ZONE**  
CULTURAL PERFORMANCES  
EDUCATIONAL EXHIBITS  
CULTURAL FOOD

**PROUD SUPPORTERS**

**UNHCR**  
The UN Refugee Agency

**UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS**  
3909 GRAUSTARK ST  
HOUSTON, TEXAS 77006

We want to congratulate all of our Class of 2015 graduating seniors in Southwest Houston. The following students were named as the top two scholars from their schools.

**Lee High School**  
 Dashuang and Xiao-Shuang Liang  
 Co-Valedictorians

**Sharpstown High School**  
 Pedro Portillo, Valedictorian  
 Michael Julian, Salutatorian

**Sharpstown International School**  
 Emir Zamudio, Valedictorian  
 Maduabuchi Akoma, Salutatorian



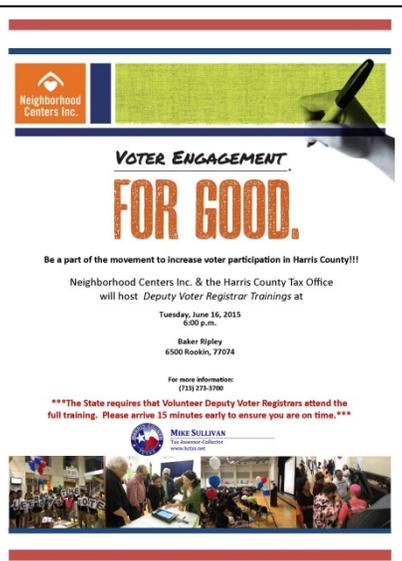
### Deputy Voter Registrar Training

Hosted by  
 Neighborhood Centers Inc. &  
 the Harris County Tax Office

Tuesday, June 16th  
 6:00pm

Baker Ripley  
 6500 Rookin, 77074

For more information:  
 713-273-3700



### CONNECTING WITH YOUR ADOLESCENT

A SUMMER WORKSHOP SERIES FOR PARENTS

**June 16<sup>th</sup>**  
 6:00-8:00 pm **ADOLESCENCE DOESN'T HAVE TO BE A ROLLERCOASTER: Understanding and Communicating with YOUR Adolescent**  
 Dr. Luis Torres, Graduate School of Social Work, UH (Spanish)  
 Dr. Roberta Leal, Graduate School of Social Work, UH (English)  
 Ms. Tamara Al-Rawwad, Graduate School of Social Work, UH (Arabic)

**July 21<sup>st</sup>**  
 6:00-8:00 pm **TALKING HEALTH WITH YOUR TEEN: A Doctor's Guide to Moodiness, Acne and Cell Phones (English/Spanish)**  
 Dr. LaCindy Delvalle, Legacy Health

**August 18<sup>th</sup>**  
 6:00-8:00 pm **GEARING UP 4 SUCCESS IN 6<sup>th</sup> GRADE: Practical Tips for Parents**  
 Patty Schrabie, YWCA

Classes will be held at St. Luke's United Methodist Church, 6856 Bellaire Blvd, Houston 77074 in Canterbury Hall. 7s | Miria Lopez, 832-404-7725



**CONNECT@6800 BELLAIRE**

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Tuesday, June 16th  
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St. Luke's United Methodist Church, Canterbury Hall  
 6856 Bellaire Blvd, 77074

### ADOLESCENCE DOESN'T HAVE TO BE A ROLLERCOASTER: Understanding and Communicating with YOUR Adolescent

Dr. Luis Torres, Graduate School of Social Work, UH (Spanish)

Dr. Roberta Leal, Graduate School of Social Work, UH (English)

Ms. Tamara Al-Rawwad, Graduate School of Social Work, UH (Arabic)

JOIN US AT THESE UPCOMING MEETINGS  
TO SHARE YOUR IDEAS FOR THE

# HOUSTON BIKEPLAN

TO HELP MAKE HOUSTON A SAFER,  
HEALTHIER, MORE BIKE-FRIENDLY CITY



Icons created by Oliver Gault, Paul Phipps, Jennifer Brown, Chris  
Sanderson, Jeff Anderson, and Blake Topp for the Houston Bike Plan

The City and the Houston region have made great strides in improving people’s ability to bike to more destinations. New trails are being built along our bayous, new protected bikeways have been installed, and more people are riding all over the City. For more information, visit [www.HoustonBikePlan.org](http://www.HoustonBikePlan.org).

There will be a public meeting in Southwest Houston where the Houston Bike Plan team will present on the plan and gather your ideas for how to improve cycling in Houston. The meeting takes place on **Tuesday, June 23rd from 6:00 - 8:00pm** at the Baker-Ripley Neighborhood Center, 6500 Rookin, Houston, TX 77074. I encourage you to attend!



State Rep. Gene Wu  
District 137

**SAVE THE DATE**

Post-Session Legislative Town Hall in Southwest Houston

**Saturday, July 18, 2015**

Details coming soon!