



# STATE REPRESENTATIVE TAN PARKER

CAPITOL REPORT

DISTRICT 63

FALL 2011

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The State of Texas  
House of Representatives  
District 63

Dear fellow Texan:

We certainly are blessed to call the Lone Star State our home. Our state's economy continues to be the driving force behind bringing our nation out of this recession. While I understand that many hard-working Texans have felt the effect of this global economic downturn, Texas still continues to weather this storm better than most other states. Every day when I read articles talking about Texas' job growth or watch as more companies come to our state, such as the newly announced General Electric Manufacturing facility that will open in the southeast corner of Denton County, it makes me proud of the momentum we are building.

Our status today as a national leader in such areas as: annual job growth, gross domestic product and agricultural output is the result of our work ethic, our determination, and the direction our state has chosen to take. Since 2007, I have been honored to represent Denton County's views in support of that direction, and the recent work accomplished by your state legislature will continue to keep Texas the best state to live, work and raise a family.

Included in this newsletter you will find a summary of the overall outcomes of the 82nd Legislative Session, a look into the new laws that I authored as well as other interesting and useful information. While we cannot cover every issue in this newsletter, I am always ready to discuss any issue or idea that the residents of District 63 have to improve our way of life and the prosperity of this great state. Make no mistake, we faced very difficult budgetary challenges during the recently concluded 82nd Legislative Session, but in the end we did what was necessary to live within our means and remain the economic envy of the nation.

What makes Texas so unique is its hard working and engaged citizens. Our citizens are at the core of every accomplishment that Texas makes. Thank you for all that you do and for the honor of serving you in the Texas House of Representatives.

Best wishes,

Tan Parker  
State Representative



# Accomplishments of the 82nd Legislature

This recently concluded session of the legislature was filled with many accomplishments for Texas ranging from balancing our budget with no new taxes to securing the integrity of our election process and putting in place new laws that will help us strengthen our economic vitality. Below is a detailed summary of these and many more actions of your state legislature.

## State Budget

Arguably no task undertaken by your legislature is more important than crafting a two-year state spending plan. Every session this involves making careful, often difficult, decisions and understanding our priorities. Nothing embodied this process more than writing our current budget while facing a significant revenue shortfall.

The revenue that is available for Texas to spend can be separated into primarily two categories: state tax dollars that we collect and federal dollars that are sent to Texas to help fund such things as public education, transportation infrastructure and health and human services. While we did see a slight decrease in state tax revenue available for expenditure (2%), the federal funds that were bestowed to Texas for this budget cycle were significantly reduced (25%). In education funding alone, we received \$2.8 billion fewer federal dollars than in the previous budget cycle.

This circumstance forced state lawmakers to buckle down and focus on our core priorities. To make up for the lack of federal funds, spending cuts were made to non-essential programs so that we could increase the state's share of K-12 education spending by \$3 billion. In fact, our spending plan invests 57% of all state revenue in education, Texas' top funding priority. Additional cuts to non-essential programs allowed us to maintain or actually increase funding in such critical areas as border security, state supported living centers, veterans affairs, foster care, the state highway system, community mental health programs and economic development programs.

In its final product, our state budget cuts spending by over \$15 billion (8.1%) without raising taxes. It's a budget that we can be proud of because the process of writing this spending plan returned Texas to the core functions of government and invested more of our resources in those programs that are critical to our continued prosperity.



*Rep. Parker participates in key negotiations on the state budget.*

## Emergency Items

Governor Rick Perry started this legislative session by declaring five emergency items for the Texas legislature to immediately begin work on. Declaring an issue an emergency item is important for speeding up the timetable of the legislative process and ensuring that legislation is successfully enacted. Before the session was over, our Governor added additional legislation to the emergency items list and Texas ultimately ended up with new laws to protect and enhance our way of life.

### *Advocating for a Balanced Budget Amendment to the US Constitution*

The legislature acted quickly at our Governor's urging and passed a concurrent resolution that was sent to the U.S. Congress advocating that our federal government send a constitutional amendment to the 50 states for ratification that would require that we balance our national budget without engaging in debt spending practices. Texas benefits from having such a clause in our state constitution and the results can be measured in the fiscal success that we have long enjoyed. With two out of every five dollars the federal government spends being borrowed, Texas' efforts on this national issue helped propel the debate on fiscal conservatism to the federal level.

### *Election Integrity*

This session, Texas joined several other states in adopting a voter identification law that will affirm the identity of individuals wishing to vote in public elections. Under the Texas law, voters will now have their identity verified by showing a government issued photographic identification card at polling locations. Texas' voter identification law does include exemptions for disabled citizens and those who have had to recently endure a natural disaster. This new law will further secure the integrity of our election process by providing a proven tool for identifying those who attempt to illegally vote in Texas.

### *Tort Reform*

For years now Texas has led the way in ending frivolous lawsuits that unfairly reward meritless claims at the expense of maintaining a vibrant economy. Additional critical steps were taken this session when Governor Perry declared this issue to be an emergency item. The result was a "loser pays" law that requires a plaintiff to pay a defendant's legal fees in the event that their lawsuit was found meritless by a judge or if the amount of damages they are awarded by a jury is equal to or less than what the defendant had offered to settle out of court. This bill will discourage the filing of frivolous lawsuits in Texas, further safeguarding our economy while also removing their burden from our judicial system.

## *Strengthening Private Property Rights*

Understanding that private property ownership is an essential freedom that we must protect for all Texans, the state legislature passed a monumental private property protection law that returns the process of eminent domain back to its original purpose. Specifically, this new law limits eminent domain for a public use only, requires a governmental entity to first make a good faith offer for the property before implementing the eminent domain procedure, allows individuals to repurchase their old property after 10 years if it is not being used for its intended purpose and adds a number of additional protections.

## *Protecting the Life of Unborn Children*

Early in session, our Governor made the protection of life a top priority. The result was several accomplishments, including the enactment of our state's first sonogram law. Under this new law, a woman seeking to have an abortion will first have to have a sonogram procedure performed. This addition to our informed consent process will guarantee that Texans faced with this situation are provided with complete information before making such a decision.

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# Additional Accomplishments

In addition to the items that our Governor declared an emergency for this legislative session, your legislature delivered on many other key measures.

## *Effectively Managing Urban Drilling*

Through two new laws that I was privileged to joint-author, the Texas legislature took significant steps to improve natural gas production in Texas by increasing transparency and giving us more tools to carefully monitor and quickly address any potential effects that gas drilling may have on our environment.

**House Bill 3328** is the first bill in the nation that will require companies who use the hydraulic fracturing process to disclose the ingredients that comprise their fracking fluid. This innovative legislation adds a layer of transparency that increases safety, further protects our natural resources in Texas and enables us to continue to have a strong energy component to our state's economy. Likewise, **Senate Bill 527** will be a valuable tool for protecting our environment by funding an additional 20 air quality monitors in the Barnett Shale region.

## *Redistricting*

During the recent regular and special session the Texas Legislature undertook the redistricting process, which is a once every ten year task of readjusting our state and federal districts in order to accommodate population trends that took place over the last decade. Redistricting was a very important issue for Denton County as a fast growth part of the state.

Denton County saw the least change in our State Board of Education map by remaining intact and a part of the 14th district. Our tremendous population growth meant that our 26th Congressional District lost areas outside of our county, effectively making a Denton County only seat. Likewise, our growth meant that we undertook a beneficial change in our senate districts. Instead of being diluted through three senate districts, Denton county is now a large part of just two districts, with Highway 380 generally serving as the dividing line.



*Rep. Parker visits with a colleague on the floor of the House about Texas' new Voter ID law.*

Unmistakably the most dramatic change in Denton County lies in our Texas House of Representatives districts. Because of our ten-year population growth, Denton County gained an extra seat in the state's lower chamber. This means that instead of three State Representatives working on behalf of our county, we will soon have four.

## *Other Topics*

- Understanding that most job creation happens at the small business level, the \$1 million small business exemption to the franchise tax was reauthorized.
- Our second amendment rights were strengthened by a new law that allows properly licensed individuals to keep their concealed handguns safely stored and locked in their vehicles while at work.
- The legislature created a "Choose Life" license plate program where individuals can purchase this new license plate, with the proceeds going to fund programs that educate women with unplanned pregnancies on the alternatives to abortion.
- Steps were taken to include a performance measure based on graduation rates into higher education funding so that in the future more of our tax dollars will be utilized by universities that excel at graduating students.
- Texas' election law was updated to more efficiently facilitate the cancellation of voter registrations for individuals who are either deceased or not eligible to vote. We also adjusted all relevant election dates to ensure that overseas military personnel are afforded the opportunity to cast their ballots by mail.
- Changes to current law were made to allow the surviving spouses of totally disabled veterans to continue to receive their property tax exemption after the veteran's passing.

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# New Laws Authored By Representative Parker

This session I was fortunate enough to author a bill package that reflects our shared priorities for Texas' future. Here are a few highlights.

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## Protecting our Children

Possibly the highest honor I had this session was to sponsor legislation that will better equip teachers and other school employees with the tools necessary to better detect and prevent all forms of child abuse. **Senate Bill 471** sets the national model for other states to follow in preventing reoccurring child abuse. **House Bill 434** will give statutory guidance to day care facilities that will ensure proper care of children with special medical needs.

Additionally, **House Bill 240** sets a new industry standard that will ensure that home septic systems are designed with "child proof" lids that cannot be accessed by anyone except the septic system's owner or a licensed maintenance provider. Also, in an effort to protect a foster child's continuity, I passed **House Bill 807** which requires CPS to provide 48 hours notice before they move a foster child from their current foster home. This will ensure that foster children and families will have the ability to say an appropriate goodbye and preserve the only parental relationships that some foster children will have in life. This ultimately will help Texas attract more high quality foster parents to take care of thousands of young Texans in our foster care system. Finally, **House Bill 2367** establishes an advisory panel to study child custody laws in Texas and see if improvements can be made to ensure that a child's well being and the interests of their parents are not put in jeopardy.

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## Public Safety

This session was a tremendous victory for lake recreational safety. I was privileged to author multiple bills that will better prepare lake enthusiasts with the knowledge necessary to safely enjoy our public waterways. **House Bill 1395** will implement a slow phase-in approach to boat operator education by requiring an education component for all operators born after September 1, 1993. This phase-in approach mirrors Texas' system of hunter education, which drastically decreased the number of accidents and deaths in this outdoor activity.

**House Bill 596** prohibits the dangerous maneuver of boats circling vulnerable water-skiers, which has led to fatalities on our public waters. Additionally, **House Bill 673** will provide students with a broad understanding of lake safety by including its instruction in drivers education curriculum.

Finally, **House Bill 200** will require the Texas Department of Criminal Justice to notify local law enforcement agencies in real time of the release of an inmate back to their jurisdiction. Ending the outdated paper and stamp system of delivering this important notification will improve the speed, safety and efficiency of the process and provide significant taxpayer savings.



*Governor Rick Perry signs into law a bill authored by Rep. Parker to protect children from child abuse.*



*Rep. Parker talks about the need for additional lake safety measures with a fellow member of the Texas House.*

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## Transportation and Additional Topics

- Authorized the Department of Transportation to enter into a comprehensive development agreement to expand capacity on I-35 E from north Dallas to the city of Denton. This 28 mile expansion of I-35 E will create significant economic activity, grow jobs, ease congestion, improve air quality and most importantly improve safety for all citizens who utilize this central transportation artery in North Texas.
- Ended the bounty system of paying voter registrars a set amount for every voter registration card they turn in. This pay for performance model led to much of the recent voter registration fraud that Texas and the nation have experienced in recent elections.
- Effective in 2012, moved Texas' sales tax holiday weekend to earlier in August so that families can enjoy this tax saving tool without postponing their back to school shopping to the weekend before school starts.
- Authored legislation in other areas, including authorizing additional economic development projects in Denton County.

# Denton County

## A Strong Presence At Our State's Capitol

Since first taking office in 2007, I have had the absolute honor of hosting countless Denton County residents at the State Capitol. Seeing our residents come to Austin reminds me of how our county's representation is truly the collective work of countless citizens who are working on Denton County's behalf to advocate our views on critical issues and share the heritage that makes our area the best place to live, work and raise a family.

Several young students have taken part in the Texas House of Representative's Page for a Day Program, which provides the opportunity to be on the House floor while lawmakers are in session. Additionally, local organizations such as drill teams and school choirs have come to Austin to perform inside our State Capitol. Many engaged citizens from our area have attended legislative hearings to testify on matters important to them.



*Constituent Conley Robinson participates in the Page for a Day Program and meets Rangers owner Nolan Ryan and Team Manager Ron Washington.*



*Denton County elected officials meet with Governor Perry to discuss issues important to our area.*

Our locally elected officials are frequently here advocating on our behalf, and, of course, many families are always stopping in for a tour of our Capitol building.

Our county's rich heritage has helped to shape the face of this great state and our impact in Austin will only get stronger as our county continues to grow and prosper. If ever your family wants to tour the Capitol, your child wishes to be a page for the day or you would like to make your voice heard before a legislative committee, please do not hesitate to contact my Capitol office at 512.463.0688 so that my staff can help facilitate your request.



*Members of the Roanoke Elementary Choir perform on the south steps of the State Capitol.*



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

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STATE REPRESENTATIVE

**TAN PARKER**

**LEGISLATIVE  
REPORT**



*Representative Tan Parker with his wife, Beth,  
and two daughters, Lauren and Ashley.*

*My door is always open to  
your thoughts and feedback.  
If you ever wish to visit with  
me in person, please contact  
my district office and I will be  
happy to schedule a meeting  
with you.*