



STATE REPRESENTATIVE  
**BYRON COOK**  
HOUSE DISTRICT 8

The State of Texas  
House of Representatives



SUMMER 2014

**CAPITOL OFFICE**  
P.O. BOX 2910  
AUSTIN, TEXAS 78768

512-463-0730  
**800-643-7026**

**COMMITTEES:**  
STATE AFFAIRS, CHAIR  
CALENDARS

Dear Fellow Texans,

The Capitol has been full of activity during the interim, as legislators prepare for the 84th Legislative Session, which begins on January 13, 2015. Many lawmakers are working to develop fiscally sound solutions to the challenges encountered by our state, ensuring that our economy continues to grow -- creating new jobs and enabling hardworking families to succeed. As a public servant, I am committed to keeping Texas the best place to live, work and raise a family.

Between sessions, legislators study specific topics released by the Speaker of the House, called interim charges. These charges give legislators and committees the unique opportunity to thoroughly examine important matters confronting Texas. As we strive to continue meeting the demands of our rapidly growing population, the House Committee on State Affairs, which I chair, is tasked with holding public hearings to seek input on creating long-term solutions to our energy reliability, infrastructure strength and transportation needs.

Because voters have a right to know who is influencing our elections -- and transparency is a critical first step in restoring public confidence in the campaign finance system, on May 1, 2014, the committee held a public hearing to address the serious issue of campaign disclosure requirements. You can read more about this interim charge in this newsletter.

Interim charges have afforded the committee the opportunity to seek new ways of promoting efficiency and responsibility in our state government, to provide Texans with the best value. By exploring these issues in-depth, the committee has the ability to provide solid recommendations to the legislature in an effort to enact good public policy in the 84th Legislature.

As your state representative, I welcome your comments and concerns. It is a privilege to receive your telephone calls, letters, e-mails and office visits. Your participation in the legislative process is extremely valuable in helping me address the interests and concerns that face our communities and great state.

I hope you find this newsletter informative about our work and activities this interim. If you would take a minute to fill out and return the attached survey, this will help me stay informed on the matters most important to you. Your input is essential to ensure that the values and principles of rural Texans are represented in Austin.

Thank you for the distinct honor to serve and represent the citizens of House District 8.

Sincerely,

Byron Cook  
Texas State Representative



ANDERSON ★ FREESTONE ★ HILL ★ NAVARRO

## *Recovering \$523 Million for the State of Texas*

It was an honor to receive the True Texas Hero Award from Texas Comptroller Susan Combs. The award is for my authorship and passage of two pieces of landmark legislation, **which have helped the state collect more than \$523 million in tax revenue.**

Both bills, numbered House Bill 11, the first passing in 2007 and the other passing in 2011, required electronic reporting for all wholesale alcohol and tobacco sales. These laws made it easier for the Comptroller to identify and investigate retailers who either under-collected sales tax or collected sales tax, but failed to remit the proceeds to the state.

Comptroller Combs explained, "...preserving the state's financial resources has allowed the legislature to direct those savings to the critical needs of Texas."

HB 11 data, which has been collected since January 2008, allows the Comptroller to compare the purchases retailers have made of these products with the sales retailers are required to report. Because both sets of data are largely received electronically, discrepancies can be more easily and rapidly identified. Rapid identification is essential so that Comptroller auditors can begin their work to mitigate and recoup the revenue loss to the state. Since fiscal 2009, the Comptroller's office has identified more than \$523 million due to the state.

This legislation has proven to be an important step in recapturing funds **owed to the state** and allows us to better serve the needs of Texans.

## *Public Safety – Protecting Texas Citizens*

Accidents caused by uninsured drivers are extremely costly to Texans. This state has a growing population of non-citizens who are driving every day **WITHOUT** auto insurance. Taking action to prevent as many uninsured drivers on the road as possible and **protecting Texas citizens** is crucial.

Issuing a Department of Public Safety certified driving permit to non-citizens, for the purpose of obtaining auto insurance, is a common-sense approach to safeguarding our citizens. **The permit would NOT resemble a Texas driver's license and it could NOT be used to vote or board a plane.** Auto insurance must be maintained for the permit to be valid.

In order to be eligible for this permit, the applicant must meet the following criteria:

- *Pass a driving test*
- *Prove that the applicant is a Texas resident*
- *Provide a full criminal history background check*
- *Pay an application fee of approximately \$150*
- *Permit holders MUST purchase and maintain automobile insurance*

**Without the ability to obtain auto insurance, non-citizens who are in this state put Texas citizens at tremendous risk.** This statutory change is one of my top priorities for the upcoming legislative session.



*Coach Denise Lincoln with Kerens Lady Cats Basketball Team at Rep. Cook's Desk on the House Floor*

## *Fiscal Responsibility*

A lawmaker's duty is to administer taxpayer dollars efficiently and resourcefully.

Currently, each legislator is allocated \$12,110 per month to hire staff and operate their Capitol and district offices and committee chairs are allocated additional funds to operate the committee to which they are appointed. Using those resources judiciously, I have been able to return a sizeable portion of those operating budgets back to the Texas Comptroller. Since

serving the first term as your state representative, **I have saved and returned approximately \$400,000 of taxpayer funds back to the Comptroller** -- which is apportioned to a pool of money used to estimate the next biennium budget.

The responsibility of managing state appropriations is one that is taken very seriously and I will continue to look for ways to save taxpayer money.

## *Increasing Transparency in Elections*

**Imagine this...** You receive a number of election mailers, from a group with a nice sounding name that you have never heard of, providing troubling facts about current issues facing the state and/or incumbent elected officials. Even after researching the group and information they provided on the Internet, you are still unclear about the source and funding of this effort. When it comes time to vote, you decide to cast your ballot, for or against, based on the information you were sent. Not long after the election, you are shocked to discover that the mailers you received were actually funded by an organization to which you are fundamentally opposed. Had you known this earlier, you would never have allowed them to sway your vote. *How would this make you feel?*

### **Voters have a right to know who is influencing elections.**

In the 2010 *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* case, the U.S. Supreme Court gave free reign for corporations and unions to make unlimited “independent expenditures” in elections. Some people discovered that, by obtaining tax-exempt status under Internal Revenue Code section 501(c)(4), all these independent political expenditures could be made without having to disclose the names of the persons or entities who funded them -- and this created an attractive option for some people to anonymously spend money to influence elections. Funds used to pay to influence an election that are not disclosed to the public are often referred to as “dark money.”

It is important to note, in that same case, Justice Kennedy reaffirmed the importance of disclosure requirements by stating the following: “The First Amendment protects political speech; and disclosure permits citizens and shareholders to react to the speech of corporate entities in a proper way. This transparency enables the electorate to make informed decisions and give proper weight to different speakers and messages.”

Additionally, in a recent campaign finance case, *McCutcheon v. FEC*, Chief Justice Roberts, stated, “Disclosure of contributions also reduces the potential for abuse of the campaign finance system...[and] may deter corruption by exposing large contributions and expenditures to the light of publicity.”

The *Citizens United* ruling has led many other states to pass legislation that seek to increase accountability and transparency in the campaign finance system. For instance, in Utah a recent special investigation was conducted exposing corruption of their election system by a state official. The investigation revealed that this official created a string of 501(c)(4) non-profits, making it difficult to trace the source of money spent for his campaign—much of it coming from industry sources with questionable business practices. This scandal, which is still being investigated



*Rep. Cook at the Front Mic During Legislative Debate*

by the FBI, cost the state of Utah eight months and four million dollars, resulting in stricter campaign finance laws passed by their state legislature in March 2014.

Last session, the Texas Legislature passed Senate Bill 346, which required 501(c)(4) non-profits and other groups that spend more than \$25,000 in a calendar year on direct political expenditures to disclose the identity of donors whose contributions exceeded \$1,000. This bill would have ensured that voters are aware of who is funding a political campaign. Unfortunately, that bill was vetoed by the governor.

The House Committee on State Affairs, which I chair, recently held a hearing to examine the influx of money from anonymous donors and its troubling effect on the election process. Eight invited witnesses, with experience related to campaign finance, provided testimony on disclosure of contributions by 501(c)(4) non-profits. The hearing and additional research should ultimately enable the committee to provide solid recommendations for the legislature to explore additional solutions to the loophole found in existing law.

A lack of transparency and accountability fortifies public mistrust in government. If we fail to act, we allow a few to control our elections, which undermines the democratic process.

In the upcoming legislative session, I will continue to work closely with my colleagues in the legislature to close the loophole found in existing law and protect the integrity of our elections.

# CONSTITUENT SURVEY

RESPONDENT 1  RESPONDENT 2

*Please complete the survey, refold, stamp and return.*

1. Do you favor or oppose allowing concealed handgun licensees to carry their concealed firearms on state college campuses?  
  Favor  
  Oppose  
  Undecided

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2. Do you favor or oppose making it illegal to send text messages while driving?  
  Favor  
  Oppose  
  Undecided

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3. Accidents caused by uninsured drivers, many of whom are non-citizens, leaves Texans at tremendous risk. With this in mind, do you favor or oppose making it possible for non-citizen drivers to purchase auto insurance, if they meet the necessary qualifications?  
  Favor  
  Oppose  
  Undecided

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4. How would you rate the overall quality of education in your local public schools?  
  Excellent   Good  
  Average   Fair  
  Poor

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5. In order to help raise additional revenue for state government, would you favor or oppose legalizing casino gambling in Texas?  
  Favor  
  Oppose  
  Undecided

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6. Do you favor or oppose preserving our Second Amendment rights, which allows all citizens to keep and bear arms?  
  Favor  
  Oppose  
  Undecided

---

7. Do you favor or oppose allowing handgun licensees to openly carry their guns in public?  
  Favor  
  Oppose  
  Undecided

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8. Would you support requiring 501(c)(4) non-profits that make indirect campaign expenditures to disclose the sources of their political campaign funding?  
  Yes, they SHOULD be required  
  No, they should NOT be required  
  Undecided

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9. Which of the following best describes your position on illegal immigration? (*You may mark more than one response.*)  
  Allow illegal immigrants currently working in the US (and who have no criminal arrests) to register for temporary work visas and apply for US citizenship unless they apply through their country of origin.  
  Allow illegal immigrants currently working in the US (and who have no criminal arrests) to pay a fine and register for renewable work visas, but not for citizenship unless they apply through their country of origin.  
  Deport all illegal immigrants back to their countries of origin before they may apply for legal guest worker permits and/or US citizenship.  
  Undecided  
  Other position: \_\_\_\_\_



*Wortham High School Student Council Visiting with Rep. Cook*

# INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE – TEXAS WATER

Due to extreme drought and extraordinary population growth, over half of the state is projected to lack an adequate supply of water by 2060. Recognizing the dire situation, last session policymakers passed landmark legislation, House Bill 4, to ensure that Texans would have a sufficient supply of water for the next 50 years through conservation and investment in our most precious resource.

This legislation created a revolving fund to help communities afford essential water planning and conservation strategies. In order to enable this legislation, it required a change to the Texas Constitution, which took the form of Proposition 6 set on the ballot last November. It passed overwhelmingly with 73% of voter approval, resulting in an investment in the Texas economy by ensuring water reliability for future generations.

One of the key provisions of the bill was the creation of the State Water Implementation Fund for Texas (SWIFT). SWIFT provides financial assistance to local and regional communities to implement water projects -- putting rural Texas in a better position to protect and conserve its water resources. The projects funded by SWIFT seek to meet the state's water demands for the next 50 years. In 2015, lawmakers will continue to work on the implementation of all aspects of House Bill 4, including a greater focus on groundwater issues.

**If you would like more information on how to help plan water initiatives in your community, you can visit the Texas Water Development Board website at [www.twdb.texas.gov](http://www.twdb.texas.gov), or directly contact their Agricultural and Rural Ombudsman, Doug Shaw at (512) 463-1711.**

**You can make the difference!** Each individual, in all areas of this state, can play a fundamental and vital role in keeping the Texas economy strong by ensuring that Texans have an ample supply of water for generations to come. Please take the time to get involved in your community water planning endeavors.



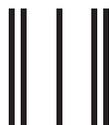
*Rep. Cook Delivering Navarro College Commencement Speech*



Austin, Texas 78768-2910  
P.O. Box 2910

**BYRON COOK**  
STATE REPRESENTATIVE

HERE  
STAMP  
PLACE





*Byron reading to his grandson*

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 512-463-0730 • FAX 512-463-2506  
**800-643-7026**

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**BYRON COOK**  
 P.O. Box 2910  
 Austin, Texas 78768-2910



**Useful Contact Information**

**Aging and Disability Services,  
 Texas Department of (DADS)**  
[www.dads.state.tx.us](http://www.dads.state.tx.us)  
 Consumer Rights and Services: 800-458-9858  
 Long-term Care Ombudsman: 800-252-2412

**Agriculture, Texas Department of**  
[www.texasagriculture.gov](http://www.texasagriculture.gov)  
 800-835-5832

**Attorney General, Office of the**  
[www.oag.state.tx.us](http://www.oag.state.tx.us)  
 Child Support State Office: 512-460-6000  
 Consumer Protection: 800-621-0508

**Family and Protective Service,  
 Texas Department of (DFPS)**  
[www.dfps.state.tx.us](http://www.dfps.state.tx.us)  
 To Report Abuse or Neglect: 800-252-5400  
 Office of Consumer Affairs: 800-720-7777

**Health and Human Services Commission  
 of Texas (HHSC)**  
[www.hhs.state.tx.us](http://www.hhs.state.tx.us)  
 Local Health and Human Services: 2-1-1  
 Ombudsman: 877-787-8999

**Insurance, Texas Department of**  
[www.tdi.state.tx.us](http://www.tdi.state.tx.us)  
 Customer Services: 800-252-3439

**Motor Vehicles, Texas Department of**  
[www.txdmv.gov](http://www.txdmv.gov)  
 Titles and Registrations: 888-368-4689

**Office of Public Utility Counsel, Texas**  
[www.opc.state.tx.us](http://www.opc.state.tx.us)  
 877-839-0363

**Public Safety, Texas Department of**  
[www.txdps.state.tx.us](http://www.txdps.state.tx.us)  
 Driver's License: 512-424-2600  
 Crime Stoppers: 800-252-8477

**Comptroller of Public Accounts**  
[www.window.state.tx.us](http://www.window.state.tx.us)  
 800-252-5555

**Education Agency, Texas**  
[www.tea.state.tx.us](http://www.tea.state.tx.us)  
 512-463-9734

**Environmental Quality,  
 Texas Commission on (TCEQ)**  
[www.tceq.state.tx.us](http://www.tceq.state.tx.us)  
 512-239-1000

**Parks and Wildlife Department, Texas**  
[www.tpwd.state.tx.us](http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us)  
 800-792-1112  
 Operation Game Thief: 800-792-4263

**Water Development Board, Texas**  
[www.twdb.texas.gov](http://www.twdb.texas.gov)  
 512-463-7847  
 Agricultural and Rural Ombudsman: 512-463-1711

**Workforce Commission, Texas**  
[www.twc.state.tx.us](http://www.twc.state.tx.us)  
 800-832-2829