



State Representative Four Price

CAPITOL REPORT

SESSION 2011

Dear Neighbors,

We live in challenging times. Today's 24 hour news cycle is a constant reminder of the various demands and pressures which exist at all levels, locally, nationally, and globally. This year, we encountered one of the most severe droughts on record, endured wildfires statewide, and continued to deal with a struggling national economy that is limiting the full potential of both our state and local communities. However, despite current challenges, I still fully believe in the grit and determination that is part of the heritage and resiliency of hardworking Texans, statewide and especially here in the Texas Panhandle.

This was certainly an interesting year to start as your new state representative in the Texas Legislature. Before the legislative session even started, the widely held view was that there would be significantly less tax revenue available in shaping the state's 2012-2013 two-year budget. The state comptroller confirmed this view in her biennial revenue estimate issued on January 10, 2011. Further, the comptroller reported that the then current two-year budget ending on August 31, 2011, would come up short by a projected \$4.3 billion. The next day, we were sworn-in.

This newsletter provides you with a snapshot of how we dealt with our state's budgetary challenges as well as some of the other major challenges we tackled head-on during this year's regular and special legislative sessions, which lasted from January 11 to June 29, for a total of 170 days. Also, you have the right to know how I voted and why; thus, this newsletter details votes on some key legislative issues. While this newsletter also spotlights certain major policy areas, such as education, water, energy, and economic development, unfortunately its length does not allow for a discussion of every important issue. Please contact me if you would like to discuss any legislative issue or any matter of interest.

In closing, I want to express appreciation and heart-felt thanks to the many of you who, during the legislative sessions, shared your thoughts, ideas, and possible solutions to the challenges at hand; to the many of you who traveled to Austin and visited with me at the Capitol during the sessions; to the many of you who testified before House and Senate committees; and to the many of you who took the time to communicate your encouragement and prayers. These actions are a testament to the resiliency of our shared faith in a better tomorrow.

It is a privilege to serve you in the Texas House of Representatives.

God Bless You and God Bless Texas,

Four Price
State Representative

COMMITTEES: NATURAL RESOURCES; CULTURE RECREATION & TOURISM

For more information, visit Rep. Four Price's official House of Representatives website at:
www.house.state.tx.us/members/member-page/?district=87



STATE BUDGET BALANCED WITH PRIORITY ON EDUCATION



When visiting and speaking with constituents, one question is always on the mind of at least one person. What are your legislative priorities? Well, there are actually five and they are mostly intertwined and dependent on each other. They can best be stated as: “Ensuring **fiscal sanity in state budgeting** by prioritizing limited tax dollars; Providing for the **solid public education of our children**; Providing for the **public safety of our citizens**; and Encouraging **sound economic development and growth** through a sensible, predictable, and limited tax and regulatory environment; while **Protecting our finite water resources.**”



majority of tax dollars were dedicated to public and higher education. It is important to note that nearly 60 cents of every tax dollar collected by the state has been budgeted for education.

2012-2013 State Budget

Reality: The historic \$27 billion shortfall in revenue due to a very poor national economy and due to no stimulus funds being available for this session required us to tighten the budget - just like families and small businesses have to do - by cutting spending, establishing priorities, and using a portion of our savings, the Rainy Day Fund, to cover our previous 2010 -2011 budget shortfall.

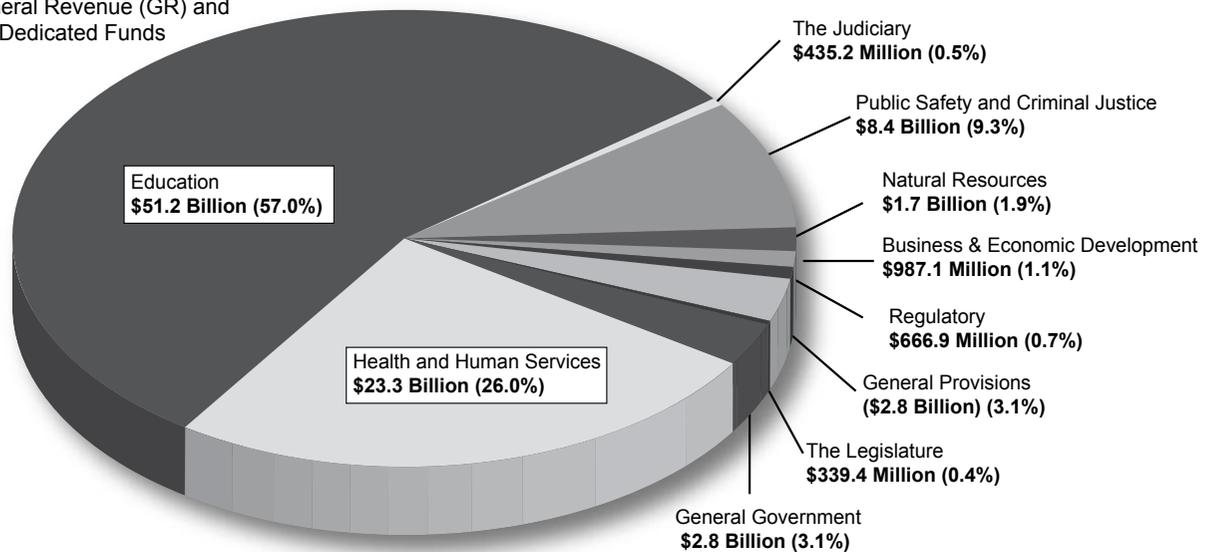
Action Taken: The 2012-2013 state budget is:

- Balanced and cuts spending by over 8 percent (\$15.2 billion) from prior budget;
- Requires no new taxes and no additional use of the Rainy Day Fund;
- Makes education the key legislative priority;
- Preserves our state’s AAA credit rating.

Without question, the money we invest in education is a wise use of our limited tax dollars. Whether supporting white-collar professionals or blue-collar skilled craftsmen or more often a great combination of the two, a talented workforce means far less demand on welfare or other social services and fewer criminal acts being committed. Economic stability is also a good promoter for family stability. As the pie chart clearly indicates, the

Where Your State Tax Dollars Go

TOTAL: \$87 BILLION
General Revenue (GR) and
GR Dedicated Funds



Priorities Established:

Education #1 budget priority: we provided \$1.6 billion more in state funding from general revenue to our public schools. State tax dollars dedicated to education total \$51 billion (57 percent of state general revenue).

Higher Education: funding was made a priority at the community college level in that none of the community colleges originally slated for closure were actually closed.

Border Security: funding to state law enforcement was increased by \$110 million for border security.

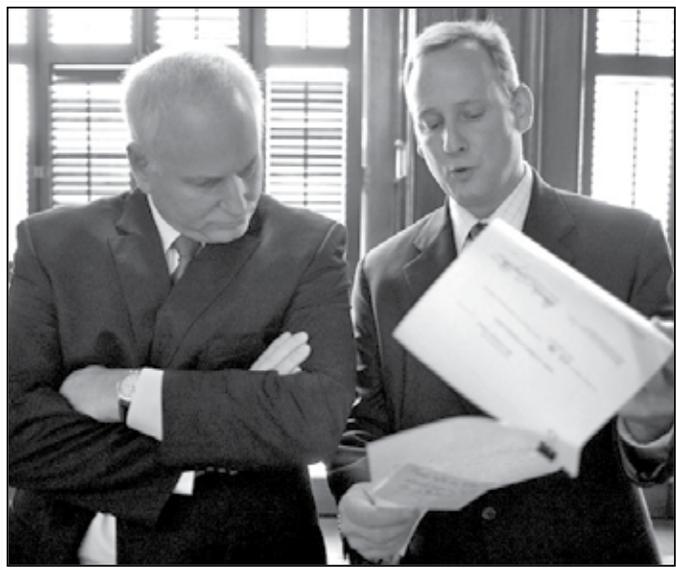
State-supported living centers: fully funded.

Foster Care Caseloads: funding preserved at prior budget levels.

Mental Health: service levels for community mental health programs and bed capacity at state mental health hospitals were maintained.

Small Businesses: maintained the small business tax exemption so these job creators will be able to survive the national economy and keep people employed.

Rainy Day Fund: substantially preserved over \$5 billion of the fund in the event, as is forecast, the national economy fails to improve substantially.



Discussing water legislation with Chairman Ritter

I will devote significant time and study this interim on two main water issues: 1. determining what aspects our future state water plan and policies should include, and 2. what we can do to improve Texas' drought preparedness.



Texas Tourism Generates Jobs

During this legislative term, I also serve on the House Culture, Recreation and Tourism Committee. This committee's key roles include the oversight of the Texas Parks & Wildlife Department and the Commission on the Arts. Both recreation and the arts are major draws for promoting economic development and tourism in our state. A little known fact is how important tourism is to Texas and Carson, Moore, Sherman and Potter counties. For instance, tourism directly supports over half a million Texas jobs, including over 7,000 local jobs. Tourism also generates both state and local sales tax revenues – approximately \$12 million in annual local sales tax revenue.



Texas Water Equals Life

I was very pleased to have secured an appointment to the House Natural Resources Committee. Being appointed to Natural Resources is coveted by many state representatives because this committee has jurisdiction and oversight over all matters pertaining to the state's water policies. Given the critical need to develop additional water infrastructure across Texas due to our rapidly growing population and given the exceptional drought we are experiencing statewide, it is vitally important that the Panhandle have a strong voice on this committee. I am pleased to be that voice.

One of the significant water bills that passed this session was SB 332, which removed any question that a landowner owns the water beneath his/her land. Passage of SB 332 was critical to the protection of property rights and especially essential to the future viability of Texas agriculture. I was also pleased to author and sponsor the passage of several bills relating to water policy.



Texas Energy Fueling America

Living in a Texas energy producing region, we fully understand how important oil and gas and renewable energy production is to our state's economic engine. For instance, our House District 87 produced nearly 900,000 barrels of oil in 2010. Thus, I was delighted to have been appointed to serve on The Energy Council, a legislative energy policy organization comprised of eleven United States energy-producing states and five Canadian provinces. The Council provides a forum for discussing energy policies and exchanging ideas regarding energy production. Serving in this capacity provides me the opportunity to work on significant economic and national security issues related to America becoming less dependent on foreign fuel.



REDISTRICTING

House members from the Panhandle and West Texas worked together tirelessly to ensure that our region could retain as many house seats as possible given the explosive population growth in the suburban counties near the DFW, Austin/San Antonio, and Houston triangle. We did very well in that we only lost one seat when two or more seats were in jeopardy. Under the map as passed into law by the Legislature, our House District 87 would still consist of Carson, Moore, Sherman, and Potter counties. The new map adds Hutchinson county to District 87.



Working on redistricting with West Texas delegation



SELECT KEY ISSUES OF THE 2011 SESSION



Issue	How I Voted and Why
Pass a conservative and constitutionally balanced 2012-2013 state budget by setting priorities. (HB 1, Regular Session, passed)	Yes! We prioritized state services by requiring state government to live within its means just like families and businesses have to do.
Reduce All Funds spending by over \$15 billion in the new budget from the prior budget. (HB 1, Regular Session, passed, and other finance related bills passed in the special session)	Yes! The new two year state budget cuts state spending by over eight percent. Unlike the federal government, the state cannot print money and that is a good thing. <u>We cannot tax ourselves into prosperity.</u>
Preserve funds for the next session in the State's Economic Stabilization Fund, more commonly referred to as the Texas Rainy Day Fund, in the event we have another shortfall in sales tax revenue next session. (HB 1, Regular Session, passed)	Yes! <u>We cannot spend ourselves into prosperity</u> , neither on a state or federal level. The national economy continues to be very weak with no improvement in sight; in turn, our state's economy is negatively impacted by Washington's policies. On the state level we had to act prudently by preserving our state's savings account because more rainy days likely lay ahead.
Protect our most precious resource, our children, by aggressively targeting, prosecuting, and locking up child pornographers who prey on our kids. (HB 3746, Regular Session, passed)	Yes! We provided law enforcement with additional tools to hunt down child predators who seek to sexually exploit children online - <u>Coauthor of the bill</u>
Provide expectant mothers contemplating abortions with a sonogram procedure so that they have complete medical information to make the most informed decisions. (HB 15, Regular Session, passed)	Yes! I believe that we have the obligation to speak for those who cannot defend themselves including the unborn. A woman is entitled to all medical information when contemplating such life decisions - <u>Coauthor of the bill</u>
Strengthen the laws against those who traffic human beings as either economic and/or sexual slaves. (SB 24, Regular Session, passed)	Yes! We eliminate modern day slavery by aggressively targeting those who prey on the poor, the vulnerable, and children - <u>Cosponsor of the bill</u>
Increase state funding for border security to combat drug and human trafficking. (HB 1, Regular Session, passed)	Yes! Texas has the right to protect its state sovereignty and its citizens.
Protect the integrity of elections by requiring voters to present photo identification. Those who cannot afford an ID will be provided one at no cost. (SB 14, Regular Session, passed)	Yes! As citizens, we have the right to have confidence in the outcome of our elections. The sacred right to vote by eligible citizens must be protected from voter fraud - <u>Cosponsor of the bill</u>
Protect the voting rights of military personnel. (SB 100, Regular Session, passed)	Yes! The votes of brave men and women in the military are to be counted; anything less would be a disgrace.
Protect the dignity of military funerals. (HB 718, Regular Session, passed)	Yes! Mourning family members of our fallen military heroes should not have to endure the total lack of decency exhibited by certain protests - <u>Coauthor of the bill.</u>
Pass stronger private property protections against government eminent domain takings. (SB 18, Regular Session, passed)	Yes! <u>Private property rights are essential to our American freedoms.</u> We provided additional property right protections including that landowners can buy their property back if it is not used for the public purpose within a certain time.
Protect private property rights by clearly defining that groundwater belongs to the landowner. (SB 332, Regular Session, passed; also voted for the bill in the House Natural Resources Committee)	Yes! The bill provides <u>legal certainty to landowners that they own the groundwater beneath their land as real property.</u> This is vital to the future survival of our Texas ranchers and farmers and to our food supply.
Permit concealed handgun licensees to keep their handguns stowed in their automobiles on their employer's parking lot. (SB 321, Regular Session, as passed)	Yes! <u>I strongly support our Second Amendment rights.</u> Lawful citizens should be allowed to protect themselves from criminals - <u>Coauthor of the House companion bill</u>
Curb frivolous lawsuits against individuals and businesses by making losers of lawsuits pay the costs of the prevailing party when certain circumstances occur during the lawsuit. (HB 274, Regular Session, passed)	Yes! Those who file meritless lawsuits clog the courts and delay justice for those who have valid legal claims. Frivolous lawsuits also cause emotional and economic strain. Irresponsible parties should pay for the havoc they inflict - <u>Coauthor of the bill</u>
Provide state penalties for cities that act as "sanctuaries" for those who are in Texas unlawfully. (HB 12, Regular Session, <u>passed in the Texas House</u> but failed to pass in the Texas Senate)	Yes! Those who are in our state and country unlawfully are not entitled to be harbored and provided with benefits paid for by taxpayer dollars.
Provide an additional monthly annuity payment to our retired public school teachers based on TRS investment performance. (HB 3542, Regular Session, <u>passed in the Texas House</u> but failed to pass in the Texas Senate)	Yes! Retired teachers who typically do not receive a federal social security check depend primarily on their TRS annuity; if the TRS fund performs at a certain level retirees should receive an additional monthly annuity - <u>Coauthor of the bill</u>
Provide schools with greater flexibility over human resources and the ability to keep the best teachers regardless of seniority (SB 8, Special Session, passed)	Yes! We should have confidence in our local school boards, superintendents, and principals when it comes to local personnel decisions and not micromanage from Austin. The best teachers should always be kept on staff. <u>Local control is key.</u>



PRICE LEGISLATION: A SUCCESSFUL FIRST SESSION



Press conference on legislation

I am proud that many of the bills I authored, coauthored, and sponsored were signed into law. A few are summarized below.

Protecting Kids from Brain Injuries: [HB 2038](#) directs public and charter schools to establish a concussion protocol to ad-

dress student athlete concussions in order to protect students from sustaining potentially life altering disabilities.

Cutting Government Waste: [HB 1781](#) requires state agencies to eliminate reports no longer necessary, redundant, or obsolete, thus saving taxpayers thousands of dollars and allowing agencies to dedicate limited resources to core functions.

Significant Groundwater Legislation: [SB 313](#) relates to ground water management procedures; [SB 693](#) relates to groundwater permit applications; and [SB 737](#) relates to groundwater management by conservation districts.

Streamlining Local Elections: [SB 729](#) allows Amarillo ISD to hold elections on the same date as Amarillo College. This is common sense because both AISD and Amarillo College elections pertain to education and local property taxes.

Moore County Hospital District: [HB 1293](#) modernizes the law that created MCHD.



AROUND THE DISTRICT



Our Texas forefathers got it right when they constitutionally required the Texas Legislature to meet every other year for a limited number of days because this ensures that very few bills will pass and state government, as a result, will be more limited. As a result of the Texas Constitution, state representatives and state senators are truly citizen legislators in that we come home to live and work under the laws we created.



Visiting with constituents following the session

Since the conclusion of the legislative sessions, I have participated in town hall meetings and spoken to numerous civic and church groups, and professional associations, such as retired teachers. In speaking and visiting with constituents, it is clear you are paying attention to what happens at the State Capitol and that is very much appreciated. If you wish for me to speak to your organization, please contact Liza Shelton, District Director, at 806-374-8787.



EDUCATION - TEACH LOCALLY BY THINKING GLOBALLY



The future success of Texas and our nation depends on an educated citizenry. Countries that were known as third world countries in the not too distant past like China, India, and some old Soviet Bloc countries have clearly recognized that in order to be economic powers, education must be emphasized at all societal levels – family, school, industry, and government.

Economic powerhouses around the globe have long emphasized a highly-skilled and technically competent workforce. Over the years, our nation has seemingly lost its focus on the rigors required to attain a solid education, and we have paid a price for it. Parents have complained that there is too much homework. We have cheered more for sports teams than science and math teams. Teachers became frustrated at having to teach to a standardized test. And government

has often been viewed via skeptical lenses by school administrators. All of us can and must do better. Our children's future and that of our nation is at stake.

Fortunately, there is a paradigm shift underway. The stark realities of our teetering national economy coupled with global competition have caused many Americans to rethink the status quo on education. We must place a renewed emphasis on educational excellence. Our children not only compete with their American peers but must be educated to effectively compete with students around the globe. Many of us firmly believe that if all of us will put our differences aside and work toward the pursuit of educational excellence we will all benefit. Call me an optimist, but I remain bullish on Texas and our nation.



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