



# STATE REPRESENTATIVE

# ★ FOUR PRICE ★

CAPITOL UPDATE

INTERIM 2012

Dear Panhandle Neighbors,

As those of us who are parents were reminded recently during graduation ceremonies, time passes far too quickly. Along those same lines, it has been a little over a year since the 2011 Texas Legislative Session concluded. Thus, I am providing you with this Capitol Update which provides key information regarding preparations for the 2013 Legislative Session as well as a snapshot of legislative work throughout our House District 87. This work involves visiting with numerous individuals and entities that make the Panhandle a great place to call home.

One of the great things about our community is the presence of dedicated teachers, students, and parents from elementary school through college. Recently, when speaking with the 7th grade Texas history students and teachers of Travis Middle School, the students were very well-prepared and eager to ask questions about their state government. Also, this year, I had the opportunity to visit, at length, with President Paul Matney of Amarillo College and his dedicated professional team regarding higher education matters. These are just two examples of the many conversations and discussions on a variety of topics I am having with constituents so that together we can craft common sense solutions to meet Texas' public policy challenges.

It is also a busy year at your State Capitol. The committees on which I serve are conducting numerous hearings on various public policy matters impacting Texas' future. These hearings include discussions on our state water policy, drought preparedness, and the state's water plan. Additionally, I was honored to be appointed to serve on the Sunset Advisory Commission, a governmental body comprised of five state representatives, five state senators, and two public members, responsible for reviewing the effectiveness of state agencies. This key leadership role increases my ability to continue to vigorously advocate that taxpayer dollars should be wisely spent and only on vital public functions.

Please continue to share your thoughts on how we can make Texas an even better place to grow businesses, increase jobs, and raise our families. It is truly an honor and privilege to serve you as your state representative and may God Bless Texas!

Respectfully,

Four Price  
State Representative

Member: Sunset Advisory Commission • House Rural Caucus • Energy Council  
House Committees: Natural Resources • Culture, Recreation & Tourism



# WORK CONTINUES BETWEEN SESSIONS



*Representative Price speaking to constituents.*

When speaking before groups or visiting with constituents individually, many often ask what the work of a legislator is when not in session. The question is a good one.

Unlike the United States Congress, which meets continuously except for recesses, the founders of Texas envisioned a citizens' legislature whereby elected representatives constitutionally meet once every two years at the State Capitol and then go home to work and live as citizens under the laws that they passed.

The time between sessions, referred to as the interim, allows legislative committees to study a number of public policy issues in preparation for the next session. It also allows legislators to spend more time visiting with constituents back home. My focus, in addition to attending committee meetings, has centered on:

- Informing constituents of the accomplishments during the previous session and the work that remains ahead;
- Listening to and working with constituents regarding potential legislative solutions; and,
- Helping constituents with issues involving state agencies.

Regarding interim committee work, I am taking an active role by attending numerous committee hearings, studying policy issues in depth, asking key questions, and working with constituents, fellow committee members, and staff in crafting preferable common sense and workable solutions.

This interim, my legislative focus is primarily concentrated on education, water, energy and transportation – policy areas impacting Texas' future success.

## EDUCATION UPDATE:

Having an education system that fully prepares students to enter the workforce is an absolute necessity for both national and global competitiveness. Thus, this interim my staff and I are closely following the work of various education committees, including the

committee studying public school finance, having discussions with education professionals on the best way to devise a clear school finance method that is fair to all, and working with colleges and universities on issues impacting higher education.

## WATER UPDATE:

Having a reliable and sustainable water supply is essential to Texas' future, especially given our growing population. Water is essential to life and is also vital to the economic life of every community. This interim, those of us on the House Natural Resources Committee are dedicating much time to determining how Texas can best increase future water supplies by fully exploring various water development alternatives, such as turning brackish groundwater into fresh water.

## ENERGY UPDATE:

Having reliable and affordable power is vital to Texas' future economic growth and also for jobs in the energy sector. This interim the Natural Resources Committee conducted two days of joint hearings with the Energy Resources Committee. Also, our work on the Sunset Advisory Commission provides an opportunity to examine the Public Utility Commission which regulates electrical utilities and the Railroad Commission which oversees oil and gas matters.

## TRANSPORTATION UPDATE:

Having a transportation system that continues to timely move people and freight via road, rail, water, and air is vital to Texans in terms of both convenience and economic opportunity. In addition to closely tracking Transportation Committee hearings, our work on the Sunset Advisory Commission includes reviewing the functions of the Port of Houston Authority which administers one of the world's busiest ports and the second largest exporting port in the USA – in 2011, for the tenth year in a row, Texas was ranked as the number one state by export revenues. A 2012 study notes that ship channel related businesses contribute over one million jobs throughout Texas.



*Representative Price hearing testimony with House colleagues.*



# SUNSET ADVISORY COMMISSION



As a member of the Sunset Advisory Commission, I have the important role of reviewing the functions and operational effectiveness of several state agencies that are up for “Sunset” review.

The Sunset process is an excellent tool in examining whether an agency should continue to exist, and if so, what efficiencies and best practices can be implemented to make the agency more cost effective, transparent, and accountable to the public. Optimal agency operation is always important when it comes to the expenditure of tax dollars and is especially essential in these times of state budget constraints.

Specifically, the Sunset Advisory Commission reviews the mission, scope, and function of each state agency at least every twelve years or sooner. The Commission, in public hearings, examines the operations of each agency undergoing review. Testimony is heard from agency directors and interested stakeholders, including members of the public concerned about a certain agency. The need for the agency to continue its existence is thoroughly examined along with a comprehensive

review of all of the functions performed and programs administered by that agency. The review consists of determining if the functions and programs are still needed, if the functions and programs are duplicated by another state agency, and if the agency is operating as efficiently as Texans expect and deserve.

During this Sunset process, the Commission provides specific recommendations to the Texas Legislature regarding each agency undergoing review. In the upcoming 2013 Legislative Session, the Legislature will consider the Sunset Commission’s recommendations.

A total of 24 agencies are being reviewed this cycle. Some of the larger agencies slated for review this year include the Texas Education Agency and the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. For a complete list, please see [www.sunset.state.tx.us/2013.htm](http://www.sunset.state.tx.us/2013.htm).

I would very much like to hear from you regarding any agency undergoing Sunset review this cycle. Your comments are valuable to my service on the Commission.



## Follow the Legislature

- Texas Legislature Online . . . . . [www.capitol.state.tx.us](http://www.capitol.state.tx.us)
- Texas House Committees . . [www.house.state.tx.us/committees](http://www.house.state.tx.us/committees)
- Representative Four Price. . . [www.house.state.tx.us/members](http://www.house.state.tx.us/members)



# HOW TEXAS LAWS ARE MADE



During the interim, the time between sessions, House and Senate committees meet to work on “Interim Charges.” The charges directly relate to the key policy issues and matters facing our state. The specific “charges” are assigned to each committee by the chamber’s presiding officer. For instance, the Speaker of the House has asked the House Natural Resources Committee, on which I serve, to thoroughly examine and study various water policy issues. These include examining the nexus between water use and energy production, studying ways to enhance incentives for water conservation in agricultural irrigation, and evaluating the use of desalination projects in Texas. Often work performed by the various committees on the interim charges results in legislation being introduced in the upcoming session.

Legislation called “bills” can be introduced in the House or the Senate. Sometimes the same bill is introduced in both the House and Senate; these bills are called “companion” bills. Once a bill is introduced, it is assigned a number and then referred to the appropriate committee. A bill’s progress can be tracked by going to [www.capitol.state.tx.us](http://www.capitol.state.tx.us).

Each House committee chair determines whether a bill is heard in committee. If a committee hears a bill, any person may testify for or against the bill. Committees publicly post when bills will be heard. After a bill is heard, a committee may decide to vote the bill out of committee and refer it to a procedural “calendar” committee which decides if the bill will be scheduled for House floor debate. If the bill passes the House, it is then sent to the Senate where it begins the same process. A bill must pass both chambers before it is sent to the Governor, who can veto the bill or allow it to become law. Proposed constitutional amendments are introduced as joint resolutions and follow a similar process with the difference being that they are approved or rejected at the ballot box by the voters.

Pursuant to our state’s constitution, the Texas Legislature meets in regular session every two years for 140 consecutive days. The next session of the Legislature will begin on January 8, 2013.



# TEXAS ECONOMY



The United States economy continues to sputter along without any real certainty of a significant bounce out of the prolonged national recession; however, this is clearly not the case in Texas. From all across the United States, people and companies are attracted to Texas. Thus, it is no surprise that *Newsweek* ranked five Texas cities in the top 20 “Can Do” US cities, including the number one spot. Further, just this summer, CNBC named Texas as “America’s Top State For Business.” Quite simply, Texas remains the leader in job creation and job opportunity.

Being an attractive place to create jobs and find employment is no accident. There are several reasons for Texas’ entrepreneurial job growth environment. Some of these factors include:

- We are a low tax state without a personal state income tax.
- We are a right-to-work state with a reasonable state regulatory environment.
- Our state constitution requires a balanced state budget.

Our success was recently recognized by *Site Selection* magazine. In ranking our business climate first among all states for 2011, *Site Selection* noted, “If the path being beaten to Texas’ front door is any indication, there’s a better way to do things in the Lone Star State. Giving businesses some certainty with which to risk investment capital and expand their enterprises has been central to the state’s economic success.”

Additional noteworthy items regarding the Texas economy are:

- Texas employers have added back all of the 427,600 jobs lost in the recession while nationally, through June, only 44 percent of the jobs lost in the national recession have been recovered.
- Texas businesses continue to lead the way by adding jobs. From May 2011 to May 2012, Texas employers added 237,100 nonfarm jobs, an increase of 2.3 percent, while nationally the increase was only 1.4 percent. The U.S. unemployment rate for May was at 8.2 percent compared to Texas at 6.9 percent and Amarillo at 4.8 percent.
- In 2011, Texas’ real gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 2.4 percent compared with only 1.6 percent GDP growth for the entire nation. If Texas was a nation, our economy would rank as the 14th-largest in the world ahead of the Netherlands and South Korea.

Remaining at the top requires constant effort because other states are trying to copy our business climate. Thus, Texas’ public policies must continue to encourage job growth in the private sector and our future state budget must continue to prioritize state spending on those items that will ensure future competitiveness with other states and the world.



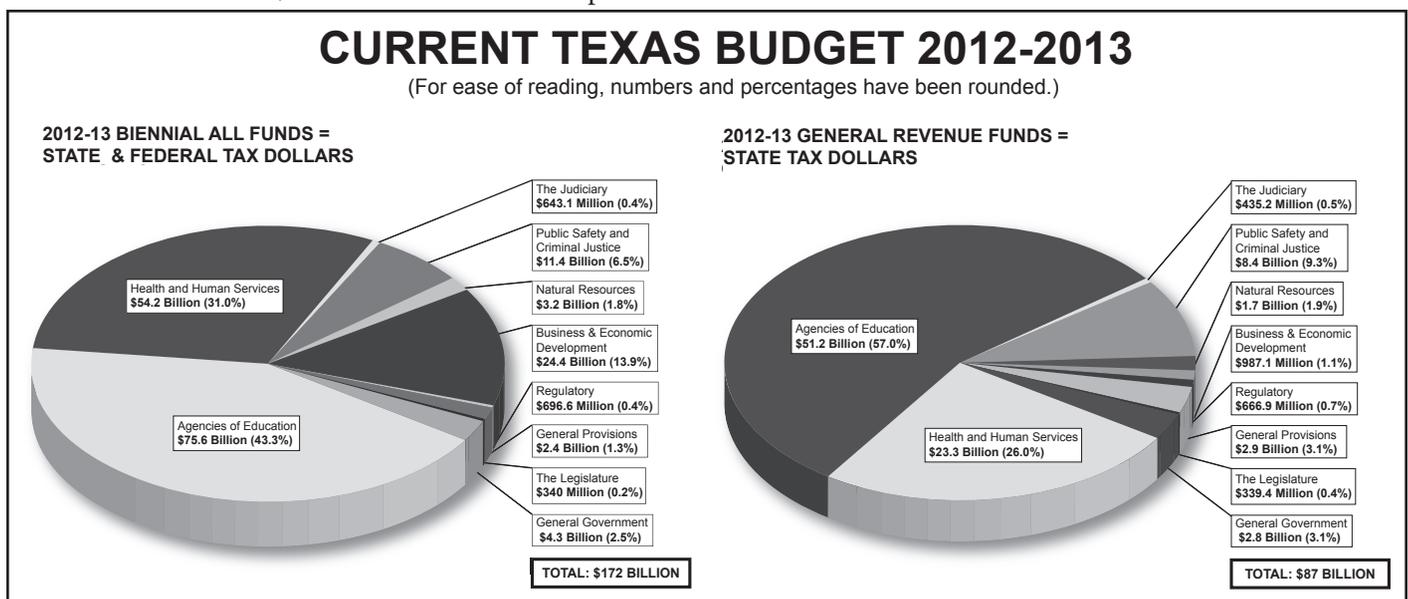
## STATE BUDGET OUTLOOK



There are many opinions regarding how much tax revenue will be on hand next January in order to shape our state’s 2013-2014 budget. While no one can predict the future, forecasting is an important tool in planning – this is particularly true for state budgetary planning.

For fiscal 2011, the Comptroller reports that state sales tax receipts were 9.4 percent higher than for fiscal 2010. Further, Texas sales tax receipts for

June 2012 were 15.2 percent higher than for June 2011 – state sales tax collections have increased for 27 consecutive months (year-over-year). This is very significant because state sales tax collection is one of the two primary revenue streams for shaping our state budget – the other is the portion of our federal tax dollars sent to Washington, D.C., and returned to Texas by the U.S. Congress.





# FOCUS ON HOUSE DISTRICT 87



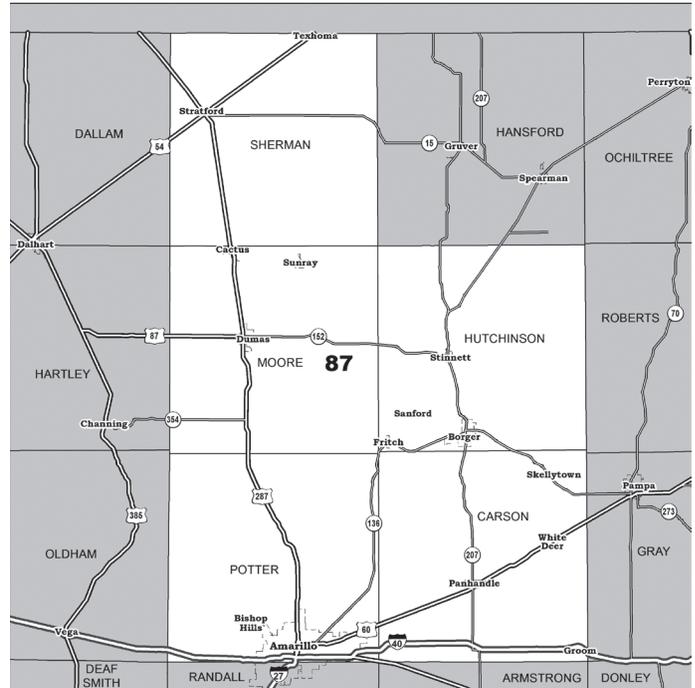
One of the highlights in serving as your state representative is the privilege of interacting with numerous constituents. The interaction includes speaking before community and civic organizations, office meetings regarding constituent concerns, and site visits to schools, businesses and non-profit organizations. These experiences provide valuable constituent feedback, as well as additional insight and understanding, useful in analyzing and crafting sensible public policy solutions. Below are just a few snapshots of some of the interactions this year to date, including spotlighting some of the talented persons who make the Panhandle a special place.

## ★ High Plains Education

This year, my staff and I met with leadership of Amarillo College, West Texas A&M University, and Frank Phillips College. We also spoke with many school district officials as well as students from middle school through college regarding the legislative process and state government. We toured the Amarillo campus of Texas Tech University Health Science Center and visited with administrators and faculty regarding the funding needs for expansion of this strategic asset as well as the vital need to educate more health professionals. On each of these occasions, we were impressed with the passion exhibited by the professional educators. We are proud of the following constituent achievements: Amarillo College's Associate Degree of Nursing Program being awarded unconditional continuing accreditation by the National League for Nursing Accrediting Commission; the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board's Recognition of Excellence of Dr. Kathryn Wetzels, Amarillo College's Department Chair of Mathematics, Sciences, and Engineering; and to the dedicated students who competed in the regional and state UIL competitions and their faculty sponsors and supportive parents.

## ★ High Plains Healthcare

In addition to having meaningful discussions with the deans of the schools that comprise Amarillo's Texas Tech University Health Science Center, my staff and I have had conversations with several healthcare professionals across all healthcare disciplines on a host of health policy issues. We are continuing our policy discussions which include Texas' rural healthcare infrastructure, expanding telemedicine capabilities, educating more Texas doctors and nurses, and future funding needs for



### New House District 87

*Federal Court panel kept HD 87 as drawn by Texas Legislature.* additional graduate medical education positions at Texas hospitals. In addition to this work, I am pleased to have been of assistance to Moore County Hospital District in its successful attempt to bring a dialysis provider to Dumas. In working on healthcare issues, the guiding principle is to protect the sanctity of the doctor-patient relationship from government interference.

## ★ High Plains Water & Agriculture

The High Plains focus on water conservation was clearly on display at the water symposium held in Amarillo this year. It was a privilege to take part in the program attended by hundreds of area residents. Such water education programs are critical to us meeting the target set forth in the state water plan – conservation will account for 86 percent of our region's 2060 water supply. Thanks to the Panhandle Groundwater Conservation District for helping organize the symposium. Congratulations are also in order for the North Plains GCD for being awarded the Texas Environmental Excellence Award for Agriculture by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality for its "Reduced Irrigation on Corn Demonstration Project." Both districts host programs educating school children about our precious water resource. Their efforts are commendable and appreciated.



## PLANNING TO VISIT YOUR CAPITOL • LET US HELP



As Texans, we have every reason to be proud of our 1888 Capitol building which is the largest state capitol in total size and almost 15 feet taller than the U.S. Capitol. Each year many families, school children, and scouting troops explore the Capitol and the grounds, which contain many historic monuments. Within easy walking distance is the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum, which wonderfully tells the "Story of Texas." For more information regarding tours and activities, you are welcome to call my Capitol Office at 512-463-0470.



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