



# STATE REPRESENTATIVE ★ FOUR PRICE ★

CAPITOL REPORT

2015

Dear Panhandle Neighbors,

It is a privilege to passionately represent the Panhandle in the Texas House of Representatives. Panhandle values run deep in our veins. We are a hardy bunch, and throughout our region's history, we have had to find solutions for many difficulties from the early pioneers being in a remote wilderness to the present challenge of keeping our mostly rural region relevant in an ever-growing urban Texas.

You sent me to the Texas Capitol to tackle head-on the challenges confronting our region and state. As we in the Panhandle know, speeches are easy, but results are what matter. It takes hard work to achieve results. Talking never planted a crop, mended a fence, built a business, or put food on the kitchen table. By working together, we achieved much to be proud of during the 2015 Legislative Session – some of the highlights are in this Capitol Report.

I say “by working together, we achieved” because many of you were directly involved in the session by sharing your thoughts via numerous letters, emails and telephone calls. Many of you travelled to the Texas Capitol and visited with our office on numerous issues and testified in numerous committees on several bills. This included many educators and students, several Farm Bureau members, many realtors, small business owners, and a sizeable group of local leaders and chamber of commerce members during Panhandle Days at the Capitol.

One specific highlight was the pleasure of interacting with, and hosting for lunch, the Borger Youth Advisory Council and students from West Texas A&M University while they advocated for stronger laws against synthetic marijuana. The Borger students went to all 181 legislative offices urging for tougher laws while the student film crew from WT rolled footage as part of a documentary regarding the ills of synthetic drugs. Interestingly, their emphasis on this matter was in sync with my House Bill 1212, which passed into law and provides additional law enforcement tools to combat the scourge of synthetic drugs. Also, Amarillo drug prevention advocates LaViza Matthews and Roni Cannon offered compelling testimony in favor of H.B. 1212 before a legislative committee.

Another constituent highlight was the privilege of honoring Shanna Peeples, in person, with a resolution on the floor of the Texas House of Representatives. As many of you know, Ms. Peeples is an English teacher at Palo Duro High School who was named the National Teacher of the Year after first winning Texas Teacher of the Year. This national recognition has not been bestowed on a Texan since 1957.

This Capitol Report also highlights numerous legislative victories we achieved such as additional funding for mental health services, making sure that our rural hospitals are properly reimbursed by the state, and making sure that renewable wind energy development is not stopped. These are just a few of many bills that our office worked on during the session. I am also honored to serve our Panhandle area in a leadership role on the powerful House Appropriations Committee and by serving on the key House Committee on Calendars.

I will continue to advocate for the interests and principles of the hard-working people of the Texas Panhandle as “we work together” to make Texas’ future even brighter.

God Bless Texas!

Four Price  
State Representative

Appropriations Committee, Article II Subcommittee – Chair • Calendars Committee • Human Services Committee  
HHSC Transition Legislative Oversight Committee – Co-Chair • House Rural Caucus



## APPROPRIATIONS – KEY ROLE IN SHAPING TEXAS BUDGET



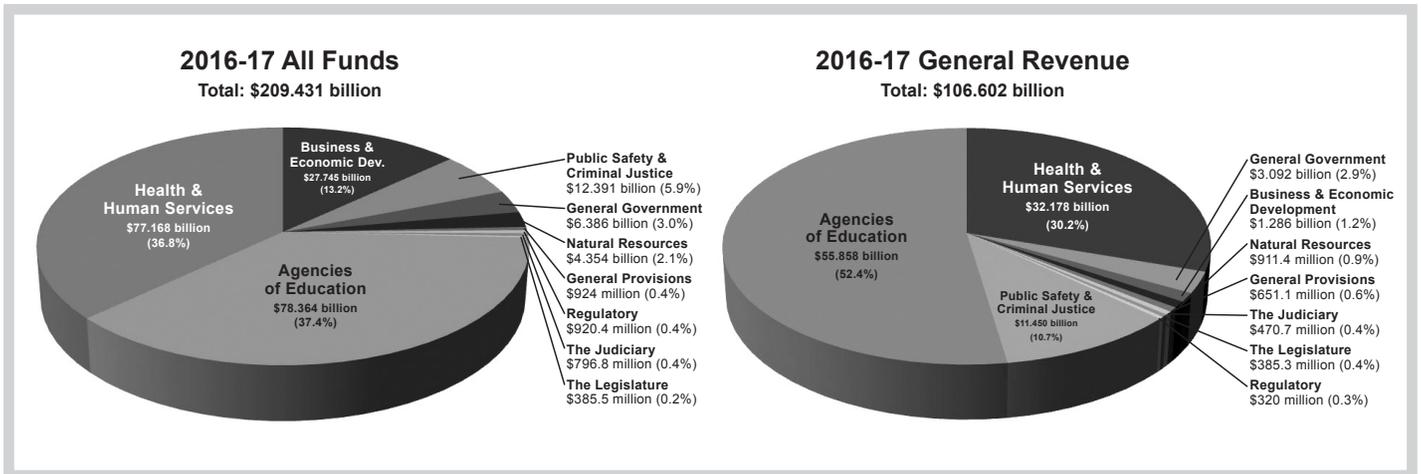
My having a seat on the powerful House Committee on Appropriations and as Chair of the Subcommittee on Article II, which is the health and human services portion of the budget, allows me to have a significant leadership role in crafting Texas' two year budget. The House Appropriations Committee and the Senate Finance Committee in large part determine where the money is spent in the budget - accounting for tax relief dollars and dollars 'appropriated' (sent to) state agencies to carry out state services for the next two years. The current state budget runs from September 1, 2015 to August 31, 2017. Thus, it is called a biennial budget.

federal entitlements, otherwise portions of federal taxes would not be returned to the states.



*Chairman Price discussing the healthcare portion of the state budget on the House floor.*

Regarding the budget, one of the smartest investments we can make, as Texans, is in educating our population from kindergarten to adult learner to training exceptional craftsmen and technicians to raising-up entrepreneurs, scientists, and healthcare professionals. This is what will keep Texas relevant in an ever-increasing globally competitive world and keep us among the top states in which to do business, find employment, and raise a family. Thus, in my role in leading a House Committee on Appropriations' subcommittee that made



Looking at the Texas state budget as a pie, the total of the All Funds (state tax dollar receipts + federal tax dollars returned to Texas) appropriated (given) to the various state agencies and programs can be divided into three pieces:

- *Slightly over 1/3 or 37.4 % to pay for Public & Higher Education;*
- *Slightly over 1/3 or 36.8 % to pay for Health & Human Services (includes Medicaid); and*
- *Less than 1/3 or 25.8% to pay for in state roads, state law enforcement including border security, state courts and prisons, regulatory such as licensing trades and professions, economic development, state parks, and everything else that is a state function.*

From the above-stated percentages and as shown on the pie chart in this newsletter, there is one threat to Texas education and other portions of the budget - the increased percentage spending on Health & Human Services. This portion includes "federal entitlements" such as Medicaid. States are required to provide these

recommendations on a large portion of overall budget, I strove to thoroughly understand and help make decisions that primarily fund the most vital healthcare services to the most vulnerable among us while insisting that the health and human services state agencies are effective in delivering these services with efficiencies and with as little bureaucracy as possible.



*Chairman Price discussing state budget matters with Chairman Turner of Houston.*



## SUNSET – STAGE SET FOR IMPROVING HHSC VIA REORGANIZATION



It was my privilege during the 2015 legislative session to be the House sponsor of three key bills that will vastly improve the way our state health and human services agencies will operate. The concepts of these bills were largely developed in 2014 as part of my extensive work as Vice-Chair of the Sunset Advisory Commission, a legislative body comprised of five representatives, five senators and two appointed public members. The three historic bills are:



*Bill signing ceremony with Governor Abbott and Senator Nelson.*

### **Senate Bill 200 (Nelson/Price)**

Background: The state's health and human services enterprise is a massive operation employing over 50,000 state employees and impacting the lives of every person living in Texas. The Texas Health & Human Services Commission (HHSC) and its four sister agencies - DSHS (handles all state public health matters, including operating 11 state psychiatric hospitals, prevention and response to infectious diseases, natural and man-made disaster response, inspection of food manufacturing, inspection of healthcare facilities, state vital health statistics, etc.), DFPS (child and adult protective services), DARS (rehabilitation and disability services), and DADS (inspection of nursing homes, assisted living centers and group homes, and operation of 13 state supported living centers for people with various disabilities) - comprise the state's health and human services enterprise.

Bill: Implements a number of the Sunset Advisory Commission (SAC) recommendations to reorganize and in part consolidate the state's health and human services enterprise into a more nimble, more responsive, and more streamlined enterprise by reducing duplication and increasing efficiencies that will achieve better delivery of services for the Texans who need them.

### **Senate Bill 202 (Nelson/Price)**

Background: As shown above, DSHS has, over the years, become a catch-all agency. This development over time has reduced DSHS' ability to concentrate on its core mission of safeguarding the public health of Texans.

Bill: Transfers a number of occupational regulatory programs from DSHS to other state agencies better suited to license and regulate those occupations (e.g. regulation of radiological technicians and respiratory therapists is moving to the Texas Medical Board); also a number of activities and occupations were deregulated (e.g. no overriding public safety need to continue to regulate bottled and vended water, personal emergency response systems, bedding, indoor air quality in state buildings, and rendering).

### **Senate Bill 219 (Schwertner/Price)**

Background: As part of the Sunset review process in 2013-14, it was determined by SAC staff and legislative attorneys that

numerous laws pertaining to health and human services were still in the statutes and codes although they had been rendered obsolete by subsequently enacted laws. Further, a number of statutes used archaic terms, others were contradictory, and others referenced agencies which no longer exist. Thus, an effort was undertaken to update the statutes and codes so that law is accurate, readable and understandable to all.

Bill: Provides clarification of conflicting laws and of the roles of the affected agencies. It modernizes many chapters of law and makes them more understandable and transparent.



*Chairman Price as presiding officer during a House floor debate.*



## SELECT KEY ISSUES OF THE 2015 SESSION



ISSUE	WHY I VOTED YES
<b>Pass Fiscally Sound State Budget – HB 1</b> No new taxes and below constitutional spending cap.	<b>YES!</b> The state budget prioritizes spending on vital state services without raising taxes and limits growth in spending to less than population growth and inflation.
<b>Cut Taxes – HB 32</b> Franchise Tax reduced by 25% to spur reinvestment especially by small businesses on Main Street, Texas.	<b>YES!</b> Over \$2 billion in the hands of Texas businessmen and women will cause private sector expansion = more jobs.
<b>Cut More Taxes – HB 7 and SB 752</b> Eliminated numerous taxes including yearly ‘Occupations Tax’ and ‘Death Tax’ on inheritances.	<b>YES!</b> At every opportunity we should eliminate any tax that is unnecessary or unfair so that Texans can keep more of their money.
<b>Cut Sales Tax – HB 31</b> Would have lowered sales tax rate from 6.25% to 5.95%; House passed bill but not taken up by Senate.	<b>YES!</b> A decrease in the sales tax would have benefited all consumers.
<b>Maintain Healthy ‘Rainy Day’ Fund – HB 1</b> Rainy Day Fund balance approx. \$8.5 billion.	<b>YES!</b> The state must maintain a healthy emergency savings account to prepare for unforeseen natural disasters or any projected shortfall in state sales tax revenue.
<b>Preserve Texas’ AAA Credit Rating – HB 1</b> Highest possible rating from Fitch, Moody’s, and Standard & Poor’s.	<b>YES!</b> Allows the state to get best bond rates for major infrastructure projects such as for road construction.
<b>Increase Spending on Border Security – HB 1</b>	<b>YES!</b> Provides \$840 million for border security and allows for hiring hundreds of new DPS Troopers.
<b>Toughen Law on Human Trafficking – HB 11 and HB 188</b>	<b>YES!</b> Coauthored HB 11 and joint authored HB 188. We must end the evil of human slavery.
<b>Prioritize Public Education Funding – HB 1</b> Fully funds classroom enrollment growth and adds an additional \$1.5 billion.	<b>YES!</b> Among the best investments we can make to empower self-reliance, build an educated workforce to sustain economic development, and reduce crime.
<b>Prioritize Behavioral Health Funding – HB 1</b> \$244 million increase in general revenue funding for mental health and substance abuse treatment.	<b>YES!</b> State and local mental health intervention will better the lives of individuals, families and communities. Also includes veteran services.
<b>Value Life – HB 1, HB 416, HB 3374 and HB 3994</b> Enhance protections for the unborn.	<b>YES!</b> Rights of the unborn are worth defending.
<b>Protect Religious Freedom – SB 2065</b> Cosponsored bill referred to as ‘Pastor Protection’ bill. Coauthored House version.	<b>YES!</b> Houses of worship and clergy should not be required to act contrary to their religious beliefs and values.
<b>Advance Gun Rights – HB 910 and SB 11</b> Cosponsored House Bill 910 and supported Senate Bill 11.	<b>YES!</b> Expands the rights of CHL holders.
<b>Convention for Federal Balanced Budget – HJR 77</b> Passed House; not taken up by full Senate.	<b>YES!</b> Texas Constitution requires fiscal restraint. Amending U.S. Constitution to require such on the Federal level would help our nation’s debt crisis.



*Chairman Price strategizing with Chairman Frullo of Lubbock.*



*Hosting National Teacher of the Year, Shanna Peebles, Principal Sandy Whitlow and Superintendent Rod Schroder at the Capitol.*



It is much easier to defeat a bill than it is to pass one. Also, there is no such thing as an easy House bill. For a bill to become law, it travels a long road - must pass out of a substantive committee, then pass out of a procedural calendars committee, then House floor debate, receive a majority vote in favor, then repeat the process in the other chamber and then not be vetoed by the governor. During the 2015 Legislative Session, there were 4207 House bills filed, 819 passed, and 34 vetoed. Thus, only 785 House bills, less than 20% of those filed, actually became law.

Many of the bills I authored and sponsored were signed into law. A few of our latest legislative successes are summarized below:

**Combating the Scourge of Synthetic Drugs:** Authored HB 1212 providing the state with the ability to target abusable synthetic substances at all times by authorizing the DSHS commissioner, in coordination with DPS, to emergency schedule a substance as a hazardous synthetic substance when the legislature is not in session.



Price hosting high school and college students at the Capitol.

**Raising College Mental Health Awareness:** Authored HB 197 requiring public universities and colleges to create a web page on their campus website dedicated solely to information regarding the mental health resources available to students at the institution.

**Strengthening Children's Advocacy Centers:** Sponsored SB 60 (authored companion HB 851) clarifying the law regarding the custody of a video recording made by a child advocacy center.

**Helping Promote Local Tourism:** Authored HB 978 designating Route 66 as a Historic Corridor. Thank you to Dan Quandt of Amarillo and Larry Clontz of Shamrock for testifying for this bill at the Texas Capitol.

**Reforming Contracting Practices of State Agencies:** Sponsored SB 20 (authored companion HB 3241) reforming state agency contracting practices by clarifying accountability, increasing transparency, and ensuring a fair competitive process.

**Honoring Gold Star Mothers:** Authored HB 194 creating an annual Texas holiday in recognition and in

honor of Gold Star Mothers, who lost military sons or daughters. It will be the last Sunday in September of each year from now on.

**Securing School Funding:** Authored HB 2593 addressing funding concerns of uniquely situated Texhoma ISD which serves K-4 Texas and Oklahoma students. Thank you to Texhoma Superintendent Steve Lentz and Mike Jackson for working with me on this bill and testifying before the House Education Committee.

**Providing Infrastructure Expansion in Amarillo by Texas Tech and WT:** Authored HB 3251 and HB 3261 which were in part included in HB 100 by Representative Zerwas. The law authorizes the issuance of bonds in the sums \$5,715,000 for construction of Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center's Amarillo Panhandle Clinical/Hospital Simulation facility and \$7,200,000 for renovation of West Texas A&M's downtown Amarillo Center.

**Improving Texas Public Health:** Authored HB 2510 reforming the state's public health system, including improving the state's mental hospital system, vital statistics record keeping, and emergency medical services regulation; improving collaboration with community behavioral health programs; and deregulating certain occupations while transferring other occupations to better suited state agencies. After nearly six hours of debate, HB 2510 ran into procedural hurdles. Subsequently all of the major provisions of HB 2510 passed when the language was added to other bills that passed. Thus, Texas Public Health delivery is vastly improved for all Texans.

**Requiring Local Input on Refugee Resettlement:** Sponsored SB 1928 requiring HHSC to provide governmental entities and officials with related refugee information and be afforded the opportunity for input.

**Providing Parental Rights to a Child's Remains:** Authored HB 635 ensuring that parents have the right to a respectful burial in the event of a miscarriage; requires a hospital to release the remains of an unintended, intrauterine fetal death on the request of a parent of the unborn child. Thank you to Joshua and Erica Raef of Amarillo for helping champion this bill.



House Bill 635 signing ceremony.



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Did you know that your Texas Capitol is the largest state capitol in total size and is also 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, including the most recent - the Texas Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Within easy walking distances are the Bob Bullock Texas State History Museum, which wonderfully tells the “Story of Texas” and the Governor’s Mansion (for tours, reservation required). For more information regarding Capitol tours and Austin activities, you are welcome to call my Capitol Office at 512-463-0470.

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