



Paul Bettencourt

From the Senator's Desk: To the Citizens of Texas Senate District 7



SENATOR PAUL BETTENCOURT
DISTRICT 7

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

Thank you for the privilege of serving as your State Senator in the 89th Texas Legislature, representing Senate District 7, from Montgomery County to Western Harris County, West Houston, and the Villages.

As a 25-year champion for property tax relief, my top priority continues to be protecting Texas taxpayers while delivering results that reflect your priorities and strengthens our communities to ensure Texas remains the best State in the Union to live, work, and raise a family.

During the 89th regular session, I was reappointed Chair of the Senate Committee on Local Government by Lt. Governor Dan Patrick and passed 69 bills as primary Senate author or sponsor and as joint author, co-author, or co-sponsor more than 53 additional bills, totaling 122 measures signed into law by Governor Greg Abbott!

Building on Texas' landmark Property Tax Reform and Transparency Act of 2019 and the largest property tax cut in U.S. History, \$22.7 BILLION in 2023, we delivered another \$10 BILLION in property tax relief this session! My SB 4 and SB 23 raises the homestead exemption from \$100,000 to \$140,000, saving the average homeowner \$484 a year, and \$60,000 more for Texas seniors and disabled, to a total \$200,000, saving them an additional \$907 on average a year and, if approved by the voters in November, a super majority of seniors will pay ZERO ISD taxes! And with HB 9, we are expanding the Business Personal Property exemption to provide all small businesses \$2,500 in annual savings! All these measures will be on your upcoming November 4th constitutional amendment ballot for the voters of Texas to make the final decision.

In the pages ahead, I've highlighted other Texas solutions passed, like housing affordability, ending the statewide squatters crisis, increased election transparency, expanded access to high-quality virtual education and special education resources regarded as transformational, and strengthened protections to keep predators out of schools by stopping the practice of "passing the trash"! We also expanded "Right-to-Try" access for life-threatening and rare disease patients, boosted research and development tax credits to ensure Texas' economy keeps pace with the demands of the 21st century, and much more! With a full list of upcoming constitutional amendments that will appear on your November 4th ballot, so keep reading!

Even with back to back sessions, "Team Bettencourt" never slowed down. We're already hard at work in a second called special session passing a flood warning siren system following the tragic July 4th Central Texas flood, a HUGE bill to replace the STAAR Test, more property tax relief, and bills making Harris County a safer place.

My commitment to you remains steadfast. It is an honor to serve Senate District 7 as your voice in the Texas Senate. Thank you for your trust and may God bless you and the great State of Texas!

Sincerely,

Senator Paul Bettencourt



Senator Paul Bettencourt (center), with Team Bettencourt celebrating a successful 89th Legislative Session on the Senate Chamber floor.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE 89th TEXAS LEGISLATURE

SB 1, A TAXPAYER-FIRST BUDGET

Texas' 2026–2027 budget totals \$338 billion, with \$157.3 billion in the state's general revenue staying under every state spending limit and growing at less than the rate of population growth plus inflation. We came \$15B below the general revenue spending limit, \$3.9B below what could be spent without borrowing, and \$10B below the constitutional limit. At the same time, 15% of the budget, \$51 BILLION, will go to property tax relief, 128% more than the previous budget! This will fund the record \$140,000 homestead exemption, \$200,000 for those seniors/disabled, and the \$125,000 business exemption, if voters approve them this November, and additional tax rate compression. Also, we secured historic funding for our priorities: \$75B for public education (with over \$4B for teacher/staff pay raises, \$1B for school choice, and \$430M for school safety), \$3B for border security, \$30B for roads, \$5B for the Texas Energy Fund, and billions more for healthcare, rural hospitals, dementia care, mental health, water infrastructure, and cybersecurity, thus proving Texas' reputation as a national leader in fiscal discipline, focused on delivering record tax relief, while investing on the priorities Texans care about most!

HISTORIC PROPERTY TAX RELIEF & THE "EIGHT PACK" REFORMS

Building on the largest property tax cut in U.S. history, \$22.7 BILLION in 2023, we delivered another \$10 BILLION in property tax relief this session with my SB 4, SB 23, and HB 9 (which I sponsored in the Senate). SB 4 increases the ISD homestead exemption from \$100,000 to \$140,000, saving the average homeowner \$484 a year. SB 23 increases the senior and disabled exemption to \$60,000, for a total of \$200,000, saving them an additional \$907 on average a year and, if approved by the voters in November, a super-majority of seniors will pay zero ISD taxes! HB 9 increases the Business Personal Property (BPP) exemption from \$25,000 to \$125,000, saving businesses \$2,500 annually! These record-setting exemptions will go before voters as constitutional amendments on this November's ballot, to provide statewide property tax relief for 5.7 million homeowners, 2.08 million seniors/disabled, and all business owners with a BPP. Combined with last session's cuts, Texans will see thousands in annual savings! But wait, we're not done yet!



Sen. Bettencourt with Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick & full Senate, presenting the \$10 billion property tax relief package (SB 4, SB 23, and HB 9) which will appear on the Nov. 2025 constitutional amendment election ballot.

On top of BIG tax cuts, my bipartisan "Eight Pack" of property tax reforms passed this session, modernizing appraisals, strengthening truth-in-taxation, and protecting seniors, disabled homeowners, and disaster victims. Effective immediately, all bond ballots must clearly display "THIS IS A TAX INCREASE" (SB 1025) so you know exactly what you are voting on, and starting next year, taxing entities must publish their tax rate calculations online with easy-to-access live links (SB 1023). For disaster-related tax hikes we made sure they are limited to actual unreimbursed costs (HB 30), and homes destroyed by fire can qualify for fair value adjustments if voters approve (SJR 84), while ensuring seniors and disabled Texans' tax freezes lock in at the lowest rate from the past two years (SB 2520). Other measures cap debt service rates to repay bonds unless supermajority-

approved (SB 1453), streamlined over-due appraisal protests notices and procedures (HB 1533), and stopped excessive fees and interests to taxpayers when tax offices are unexpectedly closed (HB 1392). These eight reforms build on the 2019 Texas Property Tax Reform and Transparency Act to make our system more accurate, accessible, and accountable to the taxpayers it serves, with a clear view of where their tax dollars go!

HOUSING AFFORDABILITY & DEFENDING PROPERTY RIGHTS

"Squatters can't occupy what they don't own or rent. Period," I said after listening to months of harrowing "squatter" testimonies in our Local Government committee. From a \$6,000 dental bill after one squatter dropped a refrigerator on a woman, to over \$130,000 in legal fees just to reclaim their property, Texas was becoming 2nd in the nation with squatting issues, leaving property owners facing financial devastation and dangerous confrontations from squatters! Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick asked the committee to tackle this head-on, and we did! With the passage of SB 38, along with SB 1333 by Sen. Hughes, which focused on unauthorized occupant entry, we closed dangerous loopholes in the civil eviction process to require eviction cases be heard within 10–21 days, while cracking down on frivolous appeals to ensure law enforcement can act quickly in the removal of unlawful occupants, restoring property to its rightful owners with less reliance on lengthy court battles. Starting in 2026, these laws protect property rights and fairness for tenants.



Sen. Bettencourt joins Gov. Abbott, Speaker Borrows, and Sen. Hughes at the bill signing to address Texas' squatters crisis.

On housing, we closed a \$5 BILLION loophole that let out-of-jurisdiction Housing Finance Corporations "HFCs" grab 99-year tax exemptions without lowering rents, costing Texans billions in lost property value from tax rolls without voter approval. HB 21 ends that abuse by requiring voter approval with at least 50% affordable housing units, rent cuts equal half the tax savings, and annual audits. Recognizing Texas' need for over 300,000 housing units, and the average homeowner age at 54, we passed my SB 15 to prevent a California-style housing crisis, by eliminating outdated city lot-size mandates over 3,000 sq. ft., unlocking more starter homes and townhomes. Houston proved it works, more townhomes went up, prices went down, and real housing demand was met. Alongside SB 15, and a half-dozen other bills passed, like my SB 2477, which converts underutilized commercial office



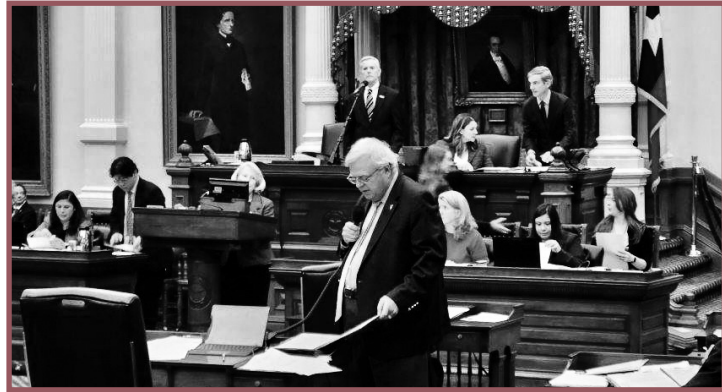
Sen. Bettencourt & Texas A&M student leaders, celebrating SB 1567 passage, expanding housing options for Texans statewide!

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE 89th TEXAS LEGISLATURE

buildings into residential home stock in record time, and my SB 1567 which removes outdated occupancy caps in cities like College Station, opening affordable options for over a million students, young professionals, and essential workers. Texas is making housing affordable again by slashing red tape, expanding supply, and giving families a real shot at the American Dream. Also, the Texas Supreme Court upheld my SB 2038 from 2023, so now over 400,000 Texans in ETJs can disannex from cities without a vote, A MAJOR win for property rights and the rule of law!

TRANSFORMATIONAL PUBLIC EDUCATION FUNDING

"An old saying 'iron sharpens iron', and so too shall school choice sharpen the entire Texas education system," I said after the passage of the Texas Education Act, creating a full universal Education Savings Accounts (ESA) program. With strong anti-fraud protections, this law will give 100,000+ students and their families the freedom to choose the educational environment that best meets their needs! A proposal passed out of the Senate six times since 2015! Now, Texas joins 32 other states that have successfully implemented similar programs. At the same time, I co-sponsored and co-authored legislation delivering the largest public education funding and teacher pay increase in Texas history— a record \$8+ BILLION, over four times the national average, quite literally a rising tide that will lift all boats! It includes \$4.2B on permanent teacher and staff pay raises, \$1.3B for the Allotment for Basic Costs (ABC), \$2B for updating Special Education (SPED) formulas, expanding full-day Pre-K, early learning interventions, and Career & Technical Education (CTE), along with hundreds of millions for public school safety, too! Importantly, we also worked tirelessly on a transformational bill to replace the STAAR test with three supportive exams and restore the A-F accountability system to guarantee yearly release of Texas school ratings that better reflect student learning and progress. As of this writing, the Senate has already passed it and we now await final approval in the House.

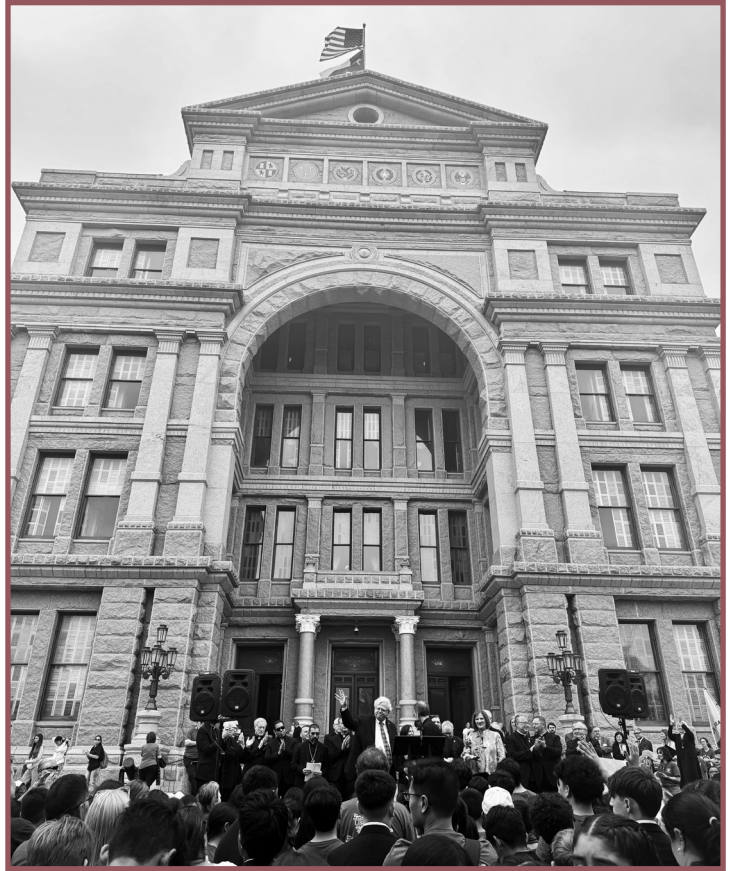


Sen. Bettencourt on the Senate Floor echoing his long support of SB 2, the Educational Savings Account (ESA's) program.

SUPPORTING SPECIAL EDUCATION & HIGH-QUALITY VIRTUAL LEARNING

As I always say: *"What gets measured, gets fixed!"* and as a decade-long advocate for students with disabilities and their families, I am proud that my SB 568 replaces a decades-old, placement-based funding model with the first-ever intensity-based model, ensuring 775,000 students with disabilities receive resources tailored to their specific needs starting in the 2026-2027 school year. This reform, already earning national recognition, builds on key recommendations from the Texas Commission on Special Education Funding and the input of educators, parents, legislators, and advocacy groups. With this change, every child will have a clearer pathway to succeed, just as it did for my colleague, Sen. Hagenbuch, who has dyslexia, and for the 25% of American CEOs today who do too! For many other Texas families, virtual learning isn't just an option—it's a lifeline. That's why my SB 569, effective immediately, modernizes our state's virtual learning framework for the 62,000 students currently enrolled, with projections to double by 2028. The law includes expanding access to high-quality digital and hybrid instruction for all

current 5.5 million Texas public school students. Whether its helping foster youth succeed at Trinity Charter Schools or giving students the flexibility to earn college credit while pursuing career training, SB 569 proves that when done right, virtual learning, whether in the classroom, online, or both, can change lives!



In April, Sen. Bettencourt joined 4,000 advocates & faith leaders on the south Capitol steps highlighting the ESA's impact on Texas families!

PROTECTING TEXAS STUDENTS

No more 'passing the trash'! My "Educator Misconduct" bill, SB 571, effective immediately, closes a dangerous loophole in the State's "Do Not Hire" registry after a contractor with a history of misconduct was found working around students in Austin. Building on my bipartisan efforts in 2017 and 2019, all individuals who provide services to an educational entity including contractors, subcontractors, or volunteers, must undergo the same rigorous background checks and reporting standards as certified educators. To further protect children, HB 4623, effective Sept. 1st, makes public schools and the offending employee jointly and severally liable when they fail to act on sexual misconduct or abuse. Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick said it best, "There's no excuse now, we are watching" as he directed TEA Commissioner Morath to deliver these laws directly to every ISD superintendent and principle in Texas.

Last year, 936,201 Texas public school students were chronically absent, missing more than 10% of school. When this happens, a student is 7 times more likely to drop out. That is not just a statistic, that is a future at risk. My SB 991 fixes this by identifying at-risk students earlier and requiring schools to report and support them, so no more kids fall through the cracks. We can't fix what we don't track! For adults who had to put their education on hold, like working parents or veterans, my SB 1490 supports a new pathway for non-traditional students to return to the classroom, earn their diploma, and pursue better-paying jobs, career promotions, or higher education. As for Texas' higher education, it's time to recognize the obvious: The Faculty Senate is not the Texas Senate! I co-authored SB 37, to make it clear Faculty Senates are advisory, not governing bodies. Regents, Chancellors, and Presidents are responsible for leading our universities and colleges, not their senates. According to research by the Texas Public Policy Foundation, only 17% of conservative faculty and 40% of students at Texas universities feel they can speak freely on campuses. SB 37 clarifies that faculty senates are intended to represent academic freedom for all.

NOVEMBER 4, 2025 CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT PROPOSITIONS

★ 1. Technical College & Workforce Training

Creates new state funds to improve technical college facilities and expand workforce education programs.

★ 2. No State Capital Gains Tax

Prohibits any state tax on realized or unrealized capital gains.

★ 3. Expanded Bail Denials

Allows judges to deny bail for more serious felony offenses.

★ 4. Water Infrastructure Funding

Directs a portion of state sales tax revenue to the Texas Water Fund for supply and infrastructure projects.

★ 5. Animal Feed Tax Exemption

Removes property taxes on retail inventory of animal feed.

★ 6. Prohibits Taxes on Securities Transactions

Prohibits an imposed occupation tax on a registered securities market operator or a securities transaction tax.

★ 7. Veterans' Spouse Tax Exemption

Expands property tax exemptions for surviving spouses of certain service-connected veterans.

★ 8. No "Death Taxes"

Prohibits estate, inheritance, and gift taxes in Texas.

★ 9. Business Property Tax Relief

Exempts part of the value of certain income-producing personal property from taxation.

★ 10. Fire-Damaged Home Tax Relief

Provides temporary tax exemptions for homes destroyed by fire.

★ 11. Higher Senior & Disabled Exemption

Increases school district property tax exemptions for elderly and disabled homeowners.

★ 12. Judicial Misconduct Reform

Strengthens oversight and disciplinary authority for judges.

★ 13. Property Tax Relief Homestead Exemption

Increases the school district homestead exemption from \$100,000 to \$140,000.

★ 14. Dementia Research Fund

Creates a \$3 billion fund for dementia, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's, and related research and treatment.

★ 15. Parental Rights

Affirms that parents are the primary decision-makers for their children.

★ 16. Voter Citizenship Requirement

Clarifies that only U.S. citizens may vote in Texas elections.

★ 17. Border Security Tax Exemption

Provides property tax exemptions for landowners who add security infrastructure in border counties.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT "AT - A - GLANCE"

As Chair, we led the Senate in productivity, ranking as the #1 committee for bills heard and bills voted out, hearing 290 bills, and voting out 254 of the 494 referred to us. We delivered landmark reforms, some of which I've shared throughout this newsletter. Other key measures passed out of committee and are now becoming law include making Harris County safer by securing Harris County's contract deputy program, which will prevent funding cuts to county sheriffs and constables (HB 26), while supporting our community by clarifying the Houston Rodeo be tax exempt (HB 23). At the same time, we strengthened open meetings and open records laws so citizens can track decisions, safeguarded property rights with fair appraisal processes and eminent domain protections, and cut more red tape to improve housing affordability!

Now cities must give notice before increasing impact fees that can raise housing prices by as much as 25% (SB 1883), end construction moratorium "rolling bans" beyond 180 days that stalled housing projects (HB 2559), allow multifamily housing in certain commercial zones (SB 840), and eliminate the so-called "tyrant's veto" that blocks zoning changes (HB 24). These laws modernize permitting, improve transparency in local infrastructure funding, and reduce regulatory burdens on businesses and property owners statewide. The scope of our committee's work was vast, with every effort focused on ensuring Texans have fair, open, and efficient local governments that empower communities and protect taxpayers. I'd need a few more pages to cover it all!

STRENGTHENING TEXAS' ELECTIONS

One of the 1st major election integrity bills to become law this session, backed by election officials statewide, was my SB 985, which fixes last session's unintended mandate that forced over 90 counties to double polling sites and workers overnight, despite no increase in voters. To allow counties, under strict limits, to combine low-turnout precincts, to prevent staffing shortages and wasteful spending without compromising voter ballot access. It gives counties the clarity and cost-efficiency needed ahead of the next major election cycle.

Even so, election integrity isn't just about securing ballots, it's about ensuring the process itself is protected, accountable, and trustworthy. That's why we passed my SB 506, creating a review process to ensure ballot propositions meet constitutional standards before going to voters, and HB 1661, which I co-sponsored, to increase penalties and add new offenses for those who mishandle election supplies. Additionally, my SB 510 holds voter registrars financially accountable if they fail to follow registration laws, while SB 1540 safeguards personal information of election officials, employees, and party chairs, protecting those who serve on the front lines of Texas democracy. Together, these reforms strengthen our election process and help ensure Texas elections remain secure, transparent, and reflective of the will of the people.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE 89th TEXAS LEGISLATURE

ADDITIONAL LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

The coolest thing you can do as a legislator is pass a bill that saves lives! According to the Goldwater Institute, 95% of rare diseases, over 7,000 conditions, have no FDA-approved treatment. Patients with ultra-rare, life-threatening, or severely debilitating conditions often cannot qualify for clinical trials because of limited patient populations. Building on my past work, when Texas became the first state to enact individualized “Right to Try” protections, that later inspired the federal Right to Try Act and a model law adopted nationwide, my SB 984 is “Right to Try 2.0.” Once again, Texas is leading the nation in fighting for our most vulnerable patients, giving them access to cutting-edge, individualized treatments tailored to their unique genetic profile and the right to fight for their lives with every scientific tool available.

We also ensured Texas’ economy keeps pace with the demands of the 21st century. My SB 2206 raises the Research & Development (R&D) franchise tax credit from 5% to 8.722%, and up to 10.903% for partnerships with Texas universities and colleges. For every \$1 invested, Texas gains \$12.47 in Gross State Product (GSP) over 20 years—creating more than 6,000 new jobs each year, \$445 million in labor income, and \$748 million in annual GSP growth. This keeps Texas a national leader in research, high-tech innovation, advanced manufacturing, and job creation. In addition, we protected the free market for taxpayers by cracking down on bid rigging and anti-competitive practices, while also strengthening Texas Lottery Commission oversight to improve compliance, fairness, and consumer protection.

Finally, in the last days of the regular session, I was proud to see major bail reforms passed that I co-authored and co-sponsored that crack down on the release of repeat offenders to limit magistrates’ authority to set bail and clarify the appeals process to help keep dangerous repeat criminals off the streets while upholding Texans’ constitutional rights. Also passed was my SB 293 to raise judicial pay and help Texas attract and retain top legal talent, and HB 4205 to address law enforcement pay disparities across the state, strengthening both our courts and our front-line officers. But wait! We’re still not done yet! We are in a 2nd called special session passing critical bills focused on disaster preparedness & recovery, redistricting, public education and more!

Highlights of the 89th Special Session(s) Bills Passed –

Flooding, Education, Property Taxes & More!

Special sessions 1 and 2, called by Governor Greg Abbott, delivered major progress on key issues, with several of my measures moving closer to becoming law—one being a life-saving bill to install outdoor warning siren systems in flash flood-prone areas to protect Texans in high-risk communities. In the Senate, we passed my HUGE bill to replace the STAAR Test with three supported exams and strengthened Texas’ public school A–F accountability rating system, ensuring more accurate measures of student progress, a standard recently upheld in key court victories (awaiting House approval). My SB 10, to reduce city and county tax bills, requiring voter approval before local governments can raise them, and my SB 19 to ban political fundraising while in special session, just as in regular sessions, and to reduce quorum breaks passed the Senate but failed final passage. In the coming days, the 89th Legislature will deliver additional priorities critical to disaster mitigation, redistricting, public safety, and much more!

HONORING A TEXAS LEADER

The Texas Senate paid tribute to Dave Welch, a respected SD 7 community leader and founder of the U.S. and Texas Pastor Council with Senator Bettencourt presenting a formal resolution to his wife, Valerie, at his funeral in Houston, recognizing his lifelong dedication to Texas, faith, family, and public service.



SD 7 Youth Leadership & Public Safety

Sen. Bettencourt (right) joined Houston Mayor Whitmire (center), Rep. Mano DeAyala (left), and Crime Stoppers of Houston at this year’s West Houston Teen Leadership Summit, engaging with several hundred students on the importance of civic leadership, community service, and public safety.

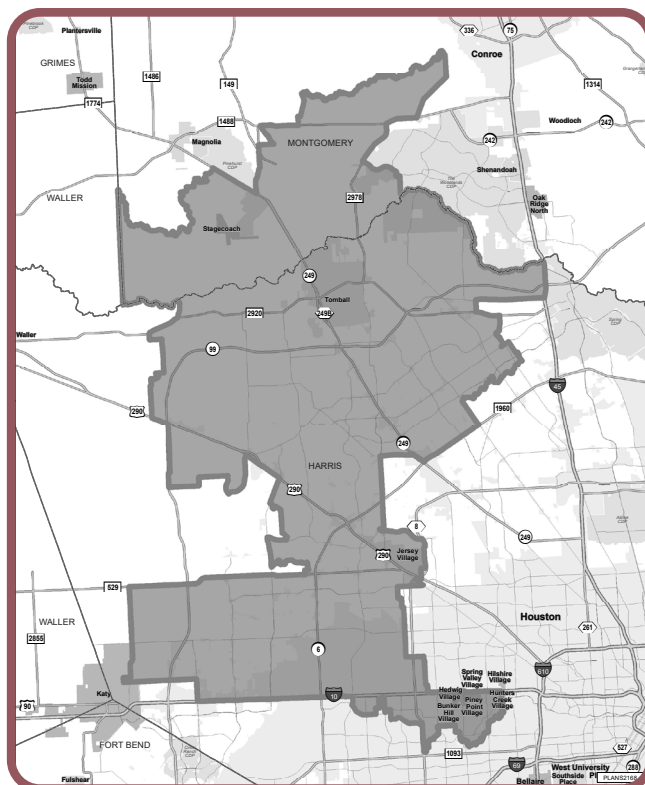


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If you are interested in having Senator Bettencourt speak to your group or organization, please contact his Capitol Office at (512) 463-0107. He is available to provide legislative updates or speak on specific issues, like his favorite - property taxes.

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— ABOUT SENATOR BETTENCOURT —

First elected to the Senate in 2014, Senator Paul Bettencourt represents Senate District 7, which encompasses most of West Harris County and nine precincts in Montgomery County. Senator Bettencourt is the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Local Government and currently serves on the Senate Finance, Education, State Affairs, and Transportation committees, including Select Committee on Disaster Preparedness and Flooding. He previously served ten years as the Harris County Tax Assessor-Collector and is well known with the nickname of the “Taxman” for his outspoken efforts to cut property taxes. He is also a radio and television personality. A Bachelor of Science graduate of Texas A&M University in industrial distribution, Senator Bettencourt and his wife, Susan, are small business owners in Houston. They are also active members of Saint John Vianney Catholic Church, where Senator Bettencourt is a fourth-degree Knight of Columbus. They have two adult children.



Sen. Bettencourt and his wife Susan on the Texas Senate Floor.