Dear Friends,

A good leader is a good listener. Enclosed is both an overview of what our state government is doing for Texas families and seniors; and a mail-back issue questionnaire. I look forward to hearing from you.

When my last legislative update was issued, we had just wrapped up a legislative session that included historic investments in education, property tax relief, mental health, as well as state highway and road infrastructure. Our state economy was soaring amid an unprecedented 117 months of employment growth. People were flocking in droves for the jobs and opportunities we have here in Texas.

Little did we know that a virus that started in China would make its way to our country and turn everything upside down. Today, our federal, state, county and local governments are all hands on deck confronting COVID-19, helping families protect their lives and livelihoods.

As Chair of the Senate Finance Committee, I am making sure that Texas has what it needs to respond to the pandemic. This includes testing, lab equipment, Personal Protective Equipment, virtual learning technology for our schools and colleges, as well as disinfectant services for retirement centers, nursing homes, state living centers, hospitals and other facilities with fragile populations. We are also providing unemployment and food assistance for those who have lost their jobs. Most importantly, we strongly support our healthcare providers, first responders, grocers, teachers, and other front-line workers.

As a parent, grandparent, former public school teacher and small business owner—I recognize the devastating toll this virus is taking on our families and local jobs. Every day, I am listening to parents, school children, teachers, essential workers, business owners, seniors, first responders, local government officials and others to protect our health, get our children safely back in school and to restart our economy.

I hope you find this newsletter informative. I look forward to reading your responses on the enclosed mail-back survey. My State Senate office is here to help.

I am amazed by how Texans have come together in this time of need. Together we will get through this. We are Texans.

Very truly yours,

Senator Jane Nelson
CONFRONTING COVID-19 AND RE-OPENING TEXAS

My staff and I have been working day and night to help Texans get through the coronavirus pandemic. Since early February, we have been involved in discussions with leaders at the city, county, state and national level to ensure Texas is equipped to combat the virus and safely get Texans back to work.

Having experience as both a former public school teacher and small business owner, I recognize the economic struggles our families and businesses are facing. I also recognize the unique struggles on our seniors and children.

As Chair of the Senate State Finance Committee I am committed to ensuring our state agencies have sufficient resources to address our essential needs. Texans never back down from a challenge, and I am confident we will rebound and get the Lone Star State back open for business.

Having operated a manufacturing company, I recognize the struggles our businesses are facing — and how strongly they want to help their employees and customers. This has not been easy on individuals, families, or the Texas economy as a whole. I was appointed to the Senate Work Group on Economic Impact & Budgeting to help assess spending related to the coronavirus and ensure Texas is in the best position possible to reignite our economy.

We will make sure agencies have sufficient resources, but we must safeguard the purse strings to ensure we are meeting our needs, maximizing federal dollars and providing relief without creating new permanent entitlements. Texans never back down from a challenge, and I am confident we will revive the Texas miracle and get the Lone Star State back open for business.

As of early June, our state agencies and departments have reported COVID-19 expenditures totaling $10 billion with a projected $20 billion price tag. The majority of these expenditures are to pay for unemployment claims through the Texas Workforce Commission and to provide testing supplies and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to communities throughout Texas. It is estimated Texas will receive nearly $22 billion through 70 federal funding streams to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Expanding testing has been a key component of Texas’ public health strategy. Our state conducts tens of thousands of tests a day across hundreds of testing sites — with the service of over 3,300 National and State Guard members.

PPE is also a top priority. The Governor’s Supply Chain Task Force continues to obtain shipments of PPE, including masks, face shields, gloves as well as gowns — and is distributing these supplies to our healthcare workers and first responders. Working together, we are getting the job done in our battle against this pandemic.

Stay up to date on Texas’ fight against COVID-19 by visiting www.dshs.texas.gov/coronavirus.

Winning the battle against the coronavirus pandemic is our state’s top healthcare priority. Texas has seen hot spots in child daycare centers, retirement living facilities, nursing homes, and in essential workplaces. Tens of thousands of tests have been deployed to our correctional facilities, and all residents and staff in nursing homes and assisted living facilities including the Denton State Supported Living Center. I am committed to protecting our fragile Texans, and I am working with our local doctors and hospitals on many fronts to ensure that agencies have the resources needed to respond to COVID-19.

MENTAL HEALTH

Since becoming Chair of the Senate Finance Committee, I have worked to ensure mental health spending is strategic, coordinated and outcomes-focused. Texas is spending $8 billion across 23 state agencies for mental health over the next two years. I even shared the state’s “no wrong door” approach at a White House summit on behavioral health during the interin. You can watch a replay of the White House Mental Health Summit at www.c-span.org.

I am proud to have helped Texas become the first state in the nation to provide health care advocacy services for veterans. I authored a grant program to support veterans and their families — who are key to helping our veterans overcome depression, substance abuse or post-traumatic stress. My legislation also created a peer counseling program.

*Senator Nelson visits regularly with local doctors, nurses, and hospitals to ensure our healthcare system is meeting patient needs.*

*Senator Nelson speaking as a panelist at the White House Summit on Mental Health.*

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*Eyes on You*: A childhood mental health campaign, at Vickery Elementary in Flower Mound, with the Harlem Globetrotters, Thirty-One Gifts and the Nationwide Children's Hospital.

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program, because veterans open up more to other veterans, and I have pledged to pursue similar programs for our police officers.

This last session, I spearheaded and passed legislation, SB 11, which created the Texas Child Mental Health Care Consortium to promote early mental health intervention for children at risk of substance abuse or becoming a danger to themselves or others.

A crucial step in this effort involves the new Child Psychiatry Access Network (CPAN), which offers consultation and training to pediatricians and primary care physicians so they can work directly with parents and be the center of care for their adolescent patients with mental health needs. This network launched this summer and continues to promote the service to medical providers.

In addition, the Consortium is working hard to get another effort off the ground: the Texas Child Health Access Through Telemedicine (TCHAT) program, which will partner with school districts to improve access to mental health services. With the extra stress Texas children may be experiencing during the coronavirus, these programs could not have arrived at a time more needed.

With the coronavirus impacting the economy and state budgets across the country, several states are reducing education spending. Texas held districts harmless for daily attendance requirements, and districts received their full funding entitlement. In addition, the state made hundreds of millions in federal funding available to help cover their COVID costs, and plans are in motion for additional funding to deploy virtual education technology that will help students with remote learning the upcoming school year.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

Like most Americans, I am a strong supporter of our local law enforcement but have been deeply disturbed by cases where officers use excessive force. Every death is a tragic reminder of the need to continue reforming our justice system and to ensure all Americans receive equal treatment under the law.

I have written budgets that include funding for body cameras, surveillance equipment for our jails and juvenile facilities, education materials about appropriate use of force for law enforcement, and jail diversion programs that offer low-level offenders treatment as an alternative to incarceration.

I have also supported bills aimed at reducing racial profiling and providing greater transparency in our police departments.

PROPERTY TAX REFORM

After leading the fight in the Legislature last session to provide $5 billion in property tax relief and reforms, I also addressed the need for property tax appraisal reforms. Having sponsored legislation to significantly reduce franchise and property taxes over the years, I believe local appraisals are oftentimes unfair. We must continue our efforts to make the appraisal process more transparent and accountable to taxpayers.

Acting in response to testimony shared at a Senate Finance Committee hearing in February, I asked our local appraisal districts to investigate the reasons for significant increases, which seem out of line with market conditions.

HAVE LEGISLATIVE IDEAS?

My staff and I are always here to listen. Please send your ideas to jane.nelson@senate.texas.gov.
Budgets have been affected by this pandemic at every level — from individuals to businesses to the budget of the State of Texas.

The budget has suffered from steep declines in sales tax revenue and a worldwide slow-down in energy production, a major contributor to Texas’ economic engine.

Sales tax serves as the largest source of revenue for the state budget. April, May and June combined, saw a 9.7 percent drop in collections compared to last year.

Having served on the Senate Finance Committee through previous multi-billion dollar budget shortfalls, I understand the tough decisions that lie ahead. I will scrub the budget, looking for efficiencies and re-establishing the state’s priorities.

State agencies have been asked to reduce current biennium spending by five percent. Every dollar saved in the current budget will help manage the fiscal challenges that lie ahead.

Additionally, state agencies have been put on notice. When the Senate Finance Committee begins writing the budget this fall, I will start from zero and every expenditure that is continued or added to the budget must be justified.

Prior to the pandemic, the Texas economy was performing at an extremely high level with 117 consecutive months of employment growth. When the pandemic hit, we saw record-high unemployment, however there is good news on the horizon: unemployment is now declining as businesses reopen and as consumer confidence gets stronger. U.S. retail sales are climbing, and Texas retail sales will follow suit as long as more businesses are able reopen safely.

Like every business and household budget, the state must live within its means and adhere to the principles of fiscal restraint that put Texas in a much stronger position than other states to navigate the challenges ahead.

The Legislature left $2.89 billion unspent in the Treasury last session with an estimated $9.35 billion in the Rainy Day Fund. I will be considering all available resources as we write the next balanced budget for the State of Texas.
District Survey

Aside from your concerns about the coronavirus, please rank the following state issues in order of importance to you and your family.

A. Public Education
B. Illegal Immigration and Border Security
C. Reducing Property Taxes
D. Health Care and Health Insurance Costs
E. Jobs and the Economy
F. Crime and Drugs
G. Traffic Mobility
H. Race Relations and Police Reform
I. Something else: ____________________________________________

Please circle your response to the following questions:

1. Until a coronavirus vaccine is available, how should decisions about wearing face masks be made?
   a. Mandated by the state
   b. Determined at the local level
   c. Individual choice

2. Do you favor or oppose the effort to defund the police?
   a. Favor     b. Oppose     c. Undecided

3. Do you agree or disagree that most police departments are in need of reform, training and better transparency in the way they train and review officer conduct?
   a. Favor     b. Oppose     c. Undecided

4. What best describes your view on abortion?
   a. Allow abortions under all circumstances
   b. Allow abortions only in cases of rape, incest, or danger to the mother
   c. Do not allow any abortions at all

5. Should all confederate statues and memorials on public property be removed?
   a. Favor     b. Oppose     c. Undecided

6. Do you favor or oppose the Second Amendment right to keep and bear arms?
   a. Favor     b. Oppose     c. Undecided

7. Do you favor or oppose additional background checks to purchase a fire arm?
   a. Favor     b. Oppose     c. Undecided

8. Do you favor or oppose allowing casino gambling in Texas to raise revenue for the state?
   a. Favor     b. Oppose     c. Undecided

9. Do you favor or oppose allowing online sports betting to raise revenue for the state?
   a. Favor     b. Oppose     c. Undecided

10. Do you favor or oppose legalizing marijuana for recreational use?
    a. Favor     b. Oppose     c. Undecided

11. Do you favor or oppose building a wall along the United States-Mexico border?
     a. Favor     b. Oppose     c. Undecided

12. Other issues important to you:

TO MAIL QUESTIONNAIRE PLEASE CUT ALONG DOTTED LINE, FOLD, TAPE AND PLACE POSTAGE STAMP.
Please return your completed survey, along with any additional comments, to State Senator Jane Nelson, P.O. Box 12068, Austin, TX 78711. Or by email to: jane.nelson@senate.texas.gov

Name (s) ________________________________________________
Address ________________________________________________
City ____________________________ TX Zip ________________
Primary Phone ____________________________
Email: _________________________________________________
Texas State Government Toll-Free Numbers

STATE SENATOR
JANE NELSON
CAPITOL UPDATE  FALL 2020
P.O. BOX 12068
AUSTIN, TEXAS 78711

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Texas Health & Human Services Commission
WIC
1-800-942-3678
Mental Health Consumer Rights
Disaster Assistance
1-800-252-8154
1-800-582-5233
Medicaid Hotline
1-800-252-8263
Children’s Health Insurance Plan (CHIP)
Substance Abuse Services
1-877-543-7669
1-866-378-8440

Texas Department of Criminal Justice
Victim Services Division
Offender Status Line
Offender Parole Review Status Line
1-800-848-4284
1-844-512-0461

Texas Commission on Environmental Quality
Hotline
1-888-777-3186

Texas Department of Insurance
Consumer Help Line
Division of Workers’ Compensation
Injured Worker Hotline
Safety Violations Hotline
1-800-252-3439
1-800-252-7031
1-800-452-9595

Texas Department of Public Safety
Driver License Customer Service
Vehicle Inspection
Emergency Roadside Assistance
Texas Crime Stoppers Hotline
1-800-252-TIPS
1-888-748-8477
512-424-2600
512-424-7293
1-800-525-5555

Texas Department of Family & Protective Services
Texas Abuse/Neglect Hotline
Texas Youth Hotline
1-800-252-5400
1-800-989-6884

Office of Attorney General
Child Support
Consumer Protection Hotline
Crime Victims Compensation
1-800-201-9353
1-800-621-0508
1-800-983-9933

Office of the Governor
Information and Referral Hotline
Texas Health & Human Services Commission

Useful state Government toll-free numbers

Office of Consumer Affairs
Hotline
Family and Community Services
Foster Care & Adoption Inquiry Hotline
1-800-720-7777
1-800-422-2956
1-800-233-3405

Texas Health & Human Services Commission

Office of Consumer Credit Commissioner
Consumer Helpline
Consumer Protection Division
1-800-538-1579
1-888-782-8477

Texas Department of Family & Protective Services

Office of the Consumer
Hotline

Office of the Governor
Information and Referral Hotline
Texas Health & Human Services Commission

Texas Department of Public Safety
Driver License Customer Service
Vehicle Inspection
Emergency Roadside Assistance
Texas Crime Stoppers Hotline
1-800-252-TIPS
1-888-748-8477
512-424-2600
512-424-7293
1-800-525-5555