2026-2027 • Austin, Texas

Senator Judith Zaffirini

Reports to the Families of District 21

Dear Friends:

What I work for and hope for my children and grandchildren is what I work for and hope for yours. The future we want for them will not emerge by chance. We must create it through preparation and collaboration. That work begins long before the Texas Legislature gavels into session.

DEAN SENATOR JUDITH ZAFFIRINI, PhD, remains committed to responsive constituent service, thoughtful policymaking and working with local and state leaders to strengthen communities throughout Senate District 21.

Although legislators meet in regular session for only 140 days every other year, the work of building this future never stops. The interim at hand offers a valuable opportunity to listen to experts and stakeholders from all walks of life, study emerging challenges, evaluate existing policies and develop thoughtful solutions to meet Texans' evolving needs before legislators convene anew.

This responsibility is especially important throughout Senate District 21, which comprises Caldwell, Dimmit, Duval, Jim Hogg, Karnes, La Salle, Live Oak, McMullen, Starr, Webb, Wilson and Zapata counties; as well as portions of Bexar, Guadalupe, Hays and Travis counties. Their needs may differ, but they certainly share common aspirations.

Preparation allows legislators to confront concerns before they become crises. Whether helping constituents navigate state agencies, protecting agricultural communities from New World Screwworm, ensuring data centers pay their fair share of infrastructure costs, safeguarding consumers from disproportionate utility and emergency ambulance bills, or strengthening public education through increased classroom funding, we must understand not only what Texans need today, but also what will help them prosper tomorrow.

Participation makes preparation more effective. Constituents who write, call, visit or share their experiences help identify problems, introduce or improve potential legislation and illustrate how state policies affect everyday life.

This newsletter reflects our shared work and invites you to help shape the priorities I will champion during the next legislative session. My staff and I have an open door policy, welcoming every opportunity to meet with constituents and to respond to every letter, email and telephone call; stand ready to assist you with state matters; and welcome your ideas, questions and concerns as valued partners.

My prayer is that the Lord will grant us the wisdom to prepare thoughtfully, the perseverance to meet every challenge and the compassion to build a future worthy of our children and grandchildren with health, happiness and peace for every family in Texas.

May God bless Texas!

Judith Zaffirini

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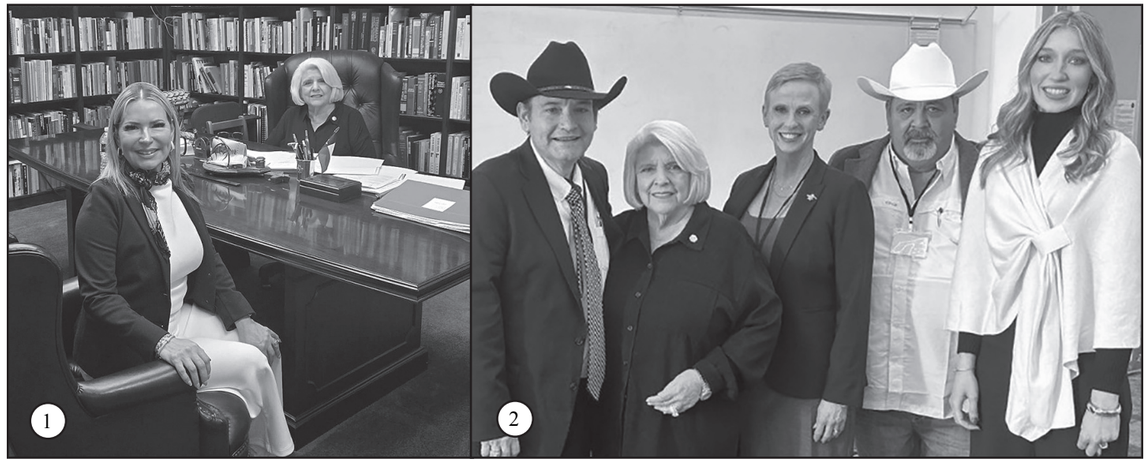


LOCAL LEADERS HELP DEAN SENATOR JUDITH ZAFFIRINI SHAPE PRIORITIES. They include (1) Dr. Frances Perez of Freer ISD, who visited the Laredo District Office to discuss education initiatives in Duval County; and (2) George West Mayor Andrew Garza, Live Oak County Treasurer Kitley Wasicek, County Commissioner Lucio Morin and Cyley Smith, assistant to County Judge James Liska. These local leaders attended the South Texas Community Summit at the State Capitol. Conversations with constituents help strengthen partnerships and help inform legislative policy.

Zaffirini Connects Texans to State Services

Helping constituents navigate state government and access state services are some of the most important services Dean Senator Judith Zaffirini provides. Whether assisting with state agencies, answering questions about the legislative process or helping Texans make their voices heard, she is committed to connecting constituents with the resources they need and ensuring they receive timely, responsive assistance.

Constituent services extend far beyond the legislative process. Staff liaisons from the Capitol and District offices help constituents work with state agencies and understand available programs and services. Although they cannot overturn agency decisions or provide legal advice, staff members can help constituents identify appropriate agencies, explain available processes and facilitate communication when assistance is needed.

Navigating state government and dealing with policies, regulations and processes is challenging. Constituents with questions about unemployment benefits, Medicaid and other health programs, birth and death certificates, occupational licensing, consumer concerns and other state services are encouraged to contact Dean Senator Zaffirini's office for assistance.

"Every constituent deserves timely, responsive assistance."

Those seeking assistance for matters involving the Texas Workforce Commission, Health and Human Services Commission, Department of State Health Services, Department of Public Safety or another state agency can receive guidance from staff members who facilitate introductions to persons with resources and facilitate communication with agency contacts when necessary.

When the 2027 Legislative Session convenes on Jan. 12, constituents are encouraged to follow legislation that may affect their families, communities and businesses by visiting the Texas Legislature Online (TLO) website to view bills, co-sponsored bills and those referred to committees.

Register for email alerts to receive updates about specific bills, committee hearings or other legislative activity. These online resources make it easier for Texans to stay informed and engaged throughout the legislative session.

To facilitate transparency and accessibility, senators and representatives hold committee hearings in public and make them available online, either live (https://senate.texas.gov/av-live.php) or via archive searches (https://senate.texas.gov/av-archive.php).

Lawmakers Must Consider Rural Impact

A tireless commitment to bringing economic opportunity to Senate District (SD) 21 and relentlessly protecting the livelihoods and needs of our rural communities are among Dean Senator Judith Zaffirini's priorities.

"The grounded values and diligent work ethics of rural Texans are vital parts of what makes our state great, so it is imperative we shape legislation that benefits local families and small businesses," she said. "The cost of economic growth must be borne by the industries pursuing their development, not by everyday Texans."

As Artificial Intelligence (AI) data center companies seek to build in rural Texas counties at unprecedented levels, legislative protections for families and communities are paramount.

Accordingly, Dean Zaffirini is working with local leaders, grassroots organizations, Public Utility Commission of Texas (PUCT) and Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT) to develop commonsense regulations and safeguards. Her priorities include requiring data centers to provide their own electricity and water; address sustainability, environmental and noise issues; and be located in communities where they are welcomed.

"Families should not subsidize data center development via increased utility bills," she said. "Responsible development should strengthen rural economies without compromising affordability, natural resources or residents' quality of life.

"We also are working with the Texas Water Development Board to require water use reporting for data centers while fostering transparent communication between it and ERCOT. This will ensure the state's water plan is based on accurate information and targets state funding for water infrastructure where it is needed most—in rural, drought-stricken communities such as those in our district."

Relatedly, the Dean will continue working to expand the eligible uses of the agency's Economically Distressed Areas Program (EDAP) by allowing funds to help cover platting costs needed before connecting rural neighborhoods to public water and sewer systems. These preliminary legal and engineering steps are often a barrier to infrastructure improvements, particularly in historic colonias and other economically distressed areas that were part of this region long before modern subdivision regulations existed.

Many colonia communities continue to face challenges, and expanded EDAP funding could accelerate water infrastructure projects. This change could better prepare eligible neighborhoods for utility improvements, helping bring safe drinking water and reliable wastewater service to Texans.

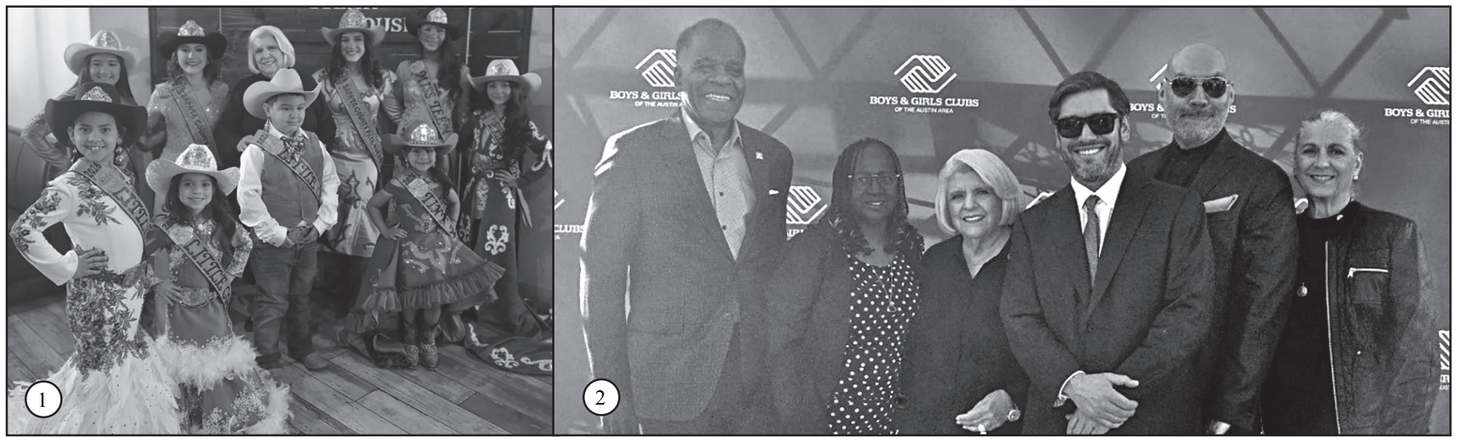
RURAL TEXANS FACE CHALLENGES REQUIRING THOUGHTFUL COLLABORATION AND SOLUTIONS. Dean Senator Judith Zaffirini welcomes opportunities to discuss issues with constituents, including (1) Kenedy City Council Member Felipe Leal of Karnes County and his wife, Georgia; (2) Jeb Hogan, Nueces River Authority Board member from McMullen County; and (3) Guadalupe County Democratic Chair Glenda Henry.

Zaffirini Sets Legislative Priorities to Address Texans' Evolving Needs

As the 2027 Regular Legislative Session approaches, policymakers will address issues affecting families, businesses and communities across the state. Dean Senator Judith Zaffirini's legislative agenda centers on a commitment to strengthening public institutions, protecting consumers and expanding opportunities for Texans.

Constituent participation and research conducted during the legislative interim help identify immediate concerns and long-term needs. Effective policymaking also requires collaboration among state leaders, local officials, stakeholders and the Texans they serve.

Such coordination helps address growing demands on state systems and services while promoting fiscally responsible, forward-looking solutions responsive to the diverse needs of urban, rural and border regions.



OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG TEXANS TAKE CENTER STAGE as Dean Senator Judith Zaffirini participates (1) in the 2026 Zapata County Fair and meets with Queen Dalia Carissa González, runner-up Andrea J'llie Montoya and junior royalty Rebecca Cantú, Aarón Torres, Lillian Pacheco, Delilah Verdiguel, Jamielyn Arroyo, Lyanna Garcilazo and Melanie Pérez; and (2) at the ribbon-cutting of the South Austin mini-soccer pitch named in her honor by the U.S. Soccer Foundation and funded by one of its members, her son. Celebrants included President and CEO Ed Foster-Simeon, Rep. Sheryl Cole, Carlos Zaffirini Jr., Dove Springs Proud President Ricardo Zavala and Rep. Lulu Flores.

Funding State Priorities

As a member of the Senate Finance Committee, Dean Senator Zaffirini will pursue investments in public education, health care, transportation, water infrastructure and public safety; and support funding for local institutions. These priorities strengthen South Texas' economy and improve opportunities for families and communities.

Education is one of the state's most important investments. Policy efforts include expanding access to higher education, supporting competitive teacher compensation and strengthening Texas public schools so students have opportunities to succeed.

Access to health care also is essential to Texas' future. Priorities include expanding Medicaid access, reducing waiver interest lists and improving access for Texans with disabilities and medical needs. Strengthening community-based services and reducing delays for families seeking critical assistance will help improve health outcomes and help Texans receive care closer to home.

Protecting Texas Consumers

As Texas grows, its water and energy infrastructure must keep pace with increasing residential and industrial demands. Population growth, prolonged drought and expanding enterprise place unprecedented pressure on the state's water resources, and energy-intensive facilities require new generating capacity and transmission infrastructure.

Planned actions include ensuring the State Water Plan reflects Texas' changing needs, promoting responsible stewardship of water and examining ways to protect residential and small-business ratepayers from bearing disproportionate electricity costs associated with industrial growth. Balancing economic development with the long-term needs of Texans ensures continued access to reliable and affordable utilities.

While agriculture is a cornerstone of Texas' economy and heritage, rural communities continue to face significant challenges. Policy initiatives will emphasize strengthening biosecurity, supporting agricultural producers and ensuring rural communities have a strong voice in legislative decisions. These efforts will promote sustainable economic growth throughout Texas.

Ensuring Judicial Excellence

Expanding access to justice remains the foundation of a fair legal system. Policy measures include strengthening Texas courts, improving the judiciary and ensuring every Texan has meaningful access to justice regardless of income or circumstance.

They also include prioritizing judicial excellence while addressing corruption, incompetence and cronyism whenever they undermine public confidence in the courts.

As a member of the Senate State Affairs Committee, Dean Senator Zaffirini will continue to author and support legislation ensuring justice for all, not only for some; and strengthening judicial standards, including for associate and visiting judges.

COMMEMORATING MILESTONES AND TRADITIONS CREATE OPPORTUNITIES TO LISTEN, LEARN AND CONNECT. Dean Senator Judith Zaffirini celebrates with (1) Police Chief Anthony Flores during the Floresville Peanut Festival Grand Parade in Wilson County; (2) Chet Robbins at the Caldwell County Community and Evacuation Center grand opening in Luling; (3) María Isabella Salazar and Erasmo Alarcón III of Mariachi Celestial at the Jim Hogg County Courthouse celebration of her becoming the first woman Dean of the Texas Senate; (4) La Salle County Deputy Sheriff Eddie De León, Security Deputy Richard Maldonado and Veteran Service Officer Rickey Galván at the county's Veterans Day ceremony; and (5) folklórico dancers from the Asociación de Charros de San Antonio during Bexar County's City of Elmendorf Annual Christmas in the Park Parade.

Texas Strengthens Screwworm Response

Dean Senator Judith Zaffirini is at the forefront of efforts to protect Texas agriculture by proactively briefing and collaborating with Senate District 21 constituents about New World Screwworm (NWS) prevention.

She has joined experts from Texas Animal Health Commission, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and Texas A&M AgriLife Extension to inform stakeholders, especially ranchers and producers, by participating in educational meetings in Jim Hogg, Karnes, La Salle, McMullen, Webb and Zapata counties.

Following the Texas Legislature's passage of House Concurrent Resolution 13 by Rep. Ryan Guillen (R-Rio Grande City) and Senator Charles Perry (R-Lubbock), Texas secured $750 million in federal funds to help construct a Sterile Fly Production Facility in Edinburg. The facility will produce 300 million of the 500 million sterile flies needed each week, ultimately doubling USDA's current production capacity. These sterile flies are being released at infested zones within 24 hours of a reported infestation.

"Fortunately, no animals in Texas have died from New World Screwworm, and infestations are highly treatable when detected early," Dean Senator Zaffirini said. "We eradicated it once, and, because we are better prepared to confront this threat than in previous decades, we will eradicate it again."

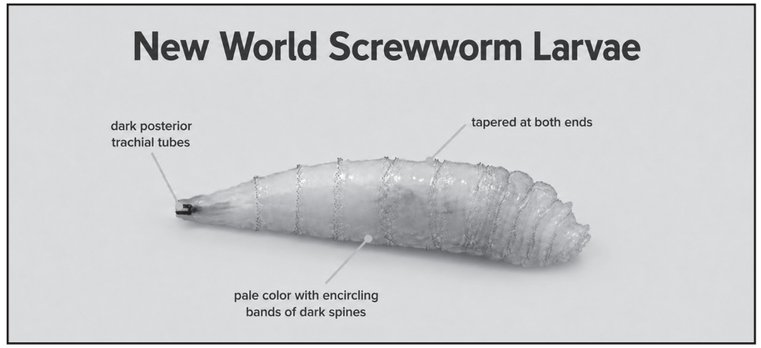
Continued success depends on strong partnerships among local, state and federal agencies, as well as close collaboration with neighboring communities in Mexico. Monitoring, timely reporting and education remain important for limiting the spread of the pest.

Suspected infestations should be reported promptly to the proper authority: livestock and domestic animals to the Texas Animal Health Commission and Veterinarian on Call via 1-800-550-8242; wildlife, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, 512/389-4505; and persons, Texas Department of State Health Services and personal physicians.

Property owners should remove anything that could cause animals to be wounded and at risk of infestation if not treated.

Dean Senator Zaffirini also urges constituents to correct misinformation. Some persons wrongly believe, for example, that only livestock can be infected and that we don't need to worry about other animals, including domestic animals and wildlife; that infested animals need to be put down because there is no cure for infestations; and that healthy animals cannot be transported beyond infestation zones.

Regularly inspecting livestock, pets and wildlife for wounds or unusual behavior and reporting suspected infestations immediately can make the difference between rapid treatment and further spread.



SCREWWORM LARVAE (maggots) burrow into a wound, feeding as they go like a screw driving into wood. The maggots cause extensive damage by tearing at the hosts' tissue with sharp mouth hooks. The wound becomes deeper and larger as more maggots hatch and feed on living tissue.

CARRIZO SPRINGS CELEBRATES 160 YEARS. Dean Senator Judith Zaffirini congratulates City Council Member Anika Santana, Mayor Mario Ruiz, City Council Member Noel Galván, City Council Member Estanislado Z. Martínez and Mayor Pro Tempore Sofía Morones.

LIFELONG LEARNING BEGINS WITH ACCESS TO EDUCATION. (1) Dolores Gómez, Library Director Norma Fultz and Frank Fultz welcome Dean Senator Judith Zaffirini to the Rio Grande City Public Library in Starr County and recognize her support for public libraries; and (2) Dr. Bryan Mann and Dr. Mary Brennan celebrate her founding membership in the Phi Beta Kappa Nu Chapter at Texas State University in Hays County.

Zaffirini Champions Education Affordability

A strong public education system is the foundation of a strong future, making it one of the Texas Legislature's most important responsibilities. Each legislative session lawmakers consider education funding and policies that shape opportunities for Texas students.

In 2025 legislators passed House Bill (HB) 2, an $8.5 billion investment in public education that included well-deserved teacher pay raises, significant funding for special education and increased support for campus operational expenses. These measures represent the largest single increase in public education funding in Texas history.

In addition to supporting K-12 public education, Dean Senator Judith Zaffirini prioritizes making higher education more affordable. Everyday Texas families, especially the most vulnerable families, face difficult decisions when determining how to pay for a student's tuition and basic living expenses.

To make higher education more accessible, Dean Senator Zaffirini is working to create the Texas Promise Grant program. This program would ensure free tuition and fees at all public higher education institutions for students with household incomes below $100,000 and offer scaled benefits for those with incomes between $100,000 and $150,000. It would benefit almost 80 percent of Texas households.

Created in 2003, the Texas B-On-Time Loan program provided zero-interest loans that could be forgiven if the student graduated "on time" with at least a 3.0 GPA. It was the only state-supported financial aid program designed to incentivize timely graduation and proved highly effective as a cost-saving program for students and families, universities and the state.

Despite these important benefits, the program was discontinued in 2015. Dean Senator Zaffirini continues to work to reestablish the B-On-Time Loan program. Her highest priorities always have and always will include advancing education-related legislation to create opportunities for Texas students.

We're here to help you and your family. Please contact us if we can be of assistance.

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Zaffirini: A Record of Legislative Success

A tireless advocate for the families of Senate District 21 and all Texans, Dean Senator Judith Zaffirini has won 1,300+ state and national awards for legislative, professional and public service, including 600+ in communication.

Since the 2025 legislative session adjourned, she has received six legislative awards and 18 state and national communication awards. These include being named a Legislative Champion by the Texas Council for Developmental Disabilities; and receiving the Vanguard Award from the Texas Ambulance Association, the Outstanding Legislator Award from the Texas Land Title Association and the Texas Friend of the Family Award from the American Association of Family & Consumer Sciences.

What's more, notable namesake institutions and programs include the Dean Senator Judith Zaffirini Justice Center, the only local courthouse in Texas named for a woman; the student success center at Texas A&M International University; a library at Laredo College; an elementary school, park, road and soccer mini-pitch in Laredo; a hospital patient suite and soccer mini-pitch in Austin; six scholarships and a teacher-student grant program; and an access to justice initiative at UT Law.

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The first Hispanic woman elected to the Texas Senate and first woman Dean of the Senate, she has passed 1,524 bills, more than any other legislator in Texas history; and cast 76,843 consecutive votes, a record Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick has said "will never be broken."

In a Republican-dominated Legislature, Dean Senator Zaffirini has been the highest bill-passer for six straight sessions. The award-winning communication specialist, educator and businesswoman holds B.S., M.A. and PhD degrees—each with a 3.9 grade-point average—from The University of Texas at Austin.

Above all, Dean Senator Zaffirini is inspired by the families of Senate District 21 and by her own family—her husband, Carlos Sr.; their son, Carlos Jr., and his wife, Audrey; and their two grandsons, Asher Maxwell (9) and George William (7).

FAMILY IS THE HEART OF SERVICE. Dean Senator Judith Zaffirini shares a loving moment with her grandsons, Asher, 9, and George, 7.