

T E X A S S E N A T O R

ROYCE WEST

2000 REPORT FROM SENATOR WEST

Dear Friends:

This last year has given me the chance to bring people together at community meetings in order to hear their concerns on a variety of issues facing our neighborhoods, schools and businesses. My goal was to bring government closer to the people by holding a series of town hall meetings in order for you to ask questions of your state and local officials on issues ranging from environmental safety to criminal justice to code enforcement. Community response has been tremendous this past year. I hope you will continue to participate by voicing your concerns either by letter, by telephone, by attending town hall meetings, or by visiting your local Senate Office. My staff or I will assist you in every way possible.

The forecast for Texas has never looked better, although there is still



Senator Royce West

much work to be accomplished. Education test scores continue to improve, our neighborhoods are safer, and college education is becoming a reality for more and more students. However, during the next session of the legislature, we still have much work to do. Although the new millennium has brought prosperity for many in our communities, many Texans still

struggle to obtain health care, make a living wage, and keep their families fed and clothed.

I look forward to serving you again in the upcoming legislative session and representing the constituents of the 23rd Senatorial District .

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Royce West". The signature is written in dark ink on a white background.

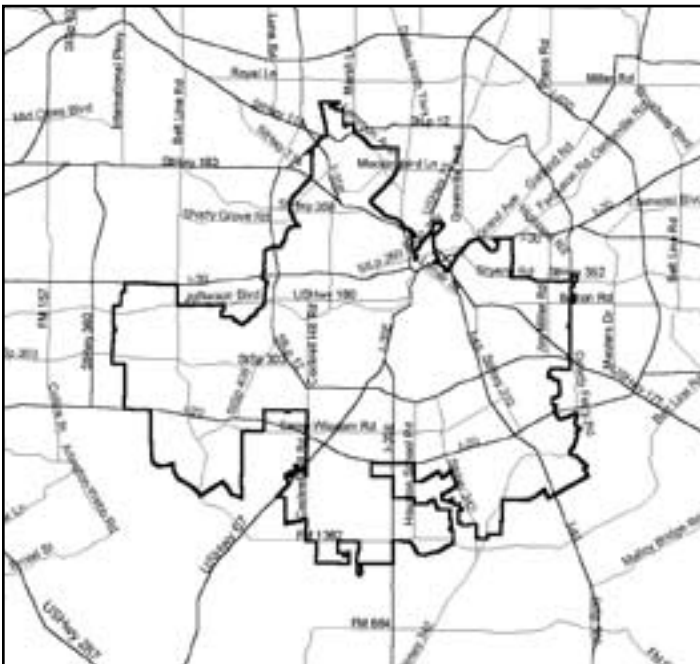
Royce West

ISSUES FACING THE 77th TEXAS LEGISLATURE

Redistricting

The overriding issue of the 77th Legislature will be the redistricting, or redrawing, of state house and senate boundary lines. The Texas Constitution requires the legislature to redistrict every ten years following publication of the United States Census. The basic purpose of redistricting is to equalize populations in each respective district. According to the most recent projections, the current total population of Texas is approximately 20.45 million; if that projection is accurate, state senate districts will have to increase to include approximately 660,000 people in each district and state house districts will increase to 136,400 each.

Senate District 23



Senate District 23 Boundary lines.

Public Education Teacher Issues

Teacher issues will dominate the education arena. Addressing teacher attrition, shortages, and state-paid health insurance for school employees that is comparable in cost and benefits to the state employee program will be at the forefront.

In addition, programs to improve teacher education and preparedness will be prominent issues as well.

Public Education Curriculum

Improvement of public school curriculum continued to attract attention this interim, especially the recommended high school curriculum. Public support grew for making it the default curriculum for all high school freshmen, but teacher shortages in math and science may limit implementation of this program. Bilingual and limited-English-proficient programs will

be targeted to improve learning and assess students' progress. Early childhood development proposals include requiring kindergarten for five-year olds.

Public School Finance

School finance issues will include funding of facilities for fast-growth districts, increasing funding for the existing instructional-facilities bonds, helping small/sparse districts, compensating districts with sharp declines in enrollment, and revising or eliminating recapture from property-wealthy districts. Any revisions to the current method of school finance must be within the parameters set by the Texas Supreme Court and Legislative Budget Board guidelines. Management of the Permanent School Fund will also be under review.

Higher Education Funding

Formula funding for Texas colleges and universities will be another big issue. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board has already recommended a 16 percent (\$925 million) increase in funding for all institutions of higher education (IHEs).

In addition, continued funding and possible increased funding for the TEXAS Grant Program will be discussed. The TEXAS Grant Program provides a monthly grant to eligible students to attend public, private and independent institutions of higher education in Texas.

The initial amount appropriated was \$100 million. Increasing funding, as well as expanding eligibility requirements for the TEXAS Grant Program will be a priority next session.

If you are interested in learning more about funds for college, please contact the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

The TEXAS Grant Program

In 1999, the Texas Legislature established the TEXAS Grant Program which allowed students who demonstrated financial need and completed the recommended course work in high school to have their college tuition and fees paid, as long as they maintain a 2.5 Grade Point Average. In order to apply, students are required to fill out the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). For more information on TEXAS Grants, as well as other financial aid opportunities, call toll-free at (877) 782-7322, or go to <http://www.adventuresineducation.org/>



Residents of West Dallas attend a Town Hall meeting sponsored by Senator West.

Access to Higher Education

Access to higher education will be a central issue. Possible steps to increase access may include:

- expanding and refining “TEXAS” and “Teach for Texas” grant programs;
- increasing financial aid and making college more affordable;
- integrating the public education and higher education systems;
- improving minority- and low-income student recruitment and retention;
- closing the gaps in achievement, enrollment and graduation; and
- distance learning.

Medical Privacy

Reviewing who should have access to personal medical information will be discussed next session. Specific medical privacy issues likely to be considered by the 77th Legislature include using health information in employment practices, using medical information for pharmaceutical research, the extent to which a patient must consent to releasing medical information, managing who has access to large medical databases, and relying on personal medical records to track certain diseases.

Long Term Care

Nursing home issues will include limits on punitive damages, liability insurance premiums, bankruptcy rates, and increasing the rate of Medicaid reimbursements for these facilities. The legislature is also likely to address expand-

ing the Medicaid program to include preventive dental services for nursing home residents.

Children’s Health Issues

The legislature will continue to monitor the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) by seeking to provide more opportunities to enroll eligible children in the program. It will also focus on child immunization issues in discussing the relationship between private health providers and the state in promoting enrollment and participation in the Vaccines for Children (VCF) program.

Children’s Human Services Issues

Children’s issues include revising the Medicaid eligibility qualifications for children with special health care needs, examining the state’s child care regulatory authority, improving the foster care system, and adopting a 12-month continuous eligibility for children’s Medicaid. The legislature is also likely to address the issue of the Department of Human Services eliminating face-to-face interview requirements when assessing children’s Medicaid eligibility.

Affordable Housing

Affordable housing is an issue of great concern to everyone as Texas continues to grow exponentially. The 77th Legislature will concentrate on improving the state’s ability to meet the growing demand for public housing.

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District 23 Constituents listen as a representative from the EPA testifies before the Senate Natural Resources Committee.

Environment

Health issues related to soil contamination in various parts of the state will receive attention next session. Also, areas in Texas designated as “non-attainment” must comply with the Federal Clean Air Act by 2007, or risk federal sanctions. This year the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission (TNRCC) approved recommended changes to the State Implementation Plan (SIP) for both the Dallas and Houston metropolitan areas which included a proposed ban on the use of heavy-duty construction equipment from 6 a.m. to 12 noon between April and October, proposed speed limit reductions, and the 88- to 90-percent reduction in nitrogen oxide emissions from major industrial point source emissions. The use of alternative fuels will also be considered as one way to improve air quality.

Payday Lending

The Texas Senate’s Economic Development Committee and the Sunset Advisory Commission have called for a new law to broaden the definition of a loan to include sale-lease-back agreements. This issue will center around whether or not these types of arrangements should fall under state law regulating loans.

Transportation

Recognizing the worsening nature of traffic congestion, the 77th Legislature is expected to consider innovative ideas to improve Texans’ quality of life. Discussion will likely include a variety of funding and road construction options to get the traffic moving, including bonds, toll roads, design-build projects, and pavement

warranties.

Criminal Justice

Criminal justice issues will include DNA testing, life without parole, indigent defense, hate crimes and racial profiling. The Senate Interim Committee on Criminal Justice has been studying a variety of issues during the past year including improvement of the parole process in Texas, review of reintegration programs for parolees and their families, examining working conditions of parole officers, and evaluating better methods to reduce recidivism among parolees. The committee has also been examining ways to improve the relationship between the mental health system and the criminal justice system in order to ensure our prisons do not become an alternative placement for individuals with mental health needs.



Senator West, along with other elected officials at a Grand Prairie Town Hall

Focus on Environmental Safety

During the past several months, Senator West has sponsored a series of Town Hall Meetings to address community concerns over possible lead contamination in West Dallas. Senator West will continue to work on addressing this issue because residents of West Dallas have made it clear that there remain many environmental and health-related problems.

At the request of Senator West, the Senate Natural Resources Committee held a public hearing in Dallas on November 28th to hear the concerns of this community. Chaired by Senator J.E. "Buster" Brown, the committee listened to compelling testimony at the hearing which was attended by more than 400 local residents.

Coordination with the Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission and the Texas Department of Health to address these issues will be a primary part of Senator West's agenda when the legislature convenes in January 2001.

University Of North Texas System Center at Dallas Now a Reality

In the Spring of 1997, Senator West and many concerned citizens and elected officials envisioned the creation of a public institution of higher education in the southern sector of Dallas County. The groundbreaking ceremony for the project was held on September 9, 1999 and 104 days later, the vision became a reality when the doors to the University of North Texas System Center at Dallas opened. The Center is the first step toward the establishment of the first four-year, state-supported university located in the City of Dallas. Upper-division undergraduate and graduate courses are offered at the 78,239 square foot facility located at 8915 South Hampton Road, approximately three blocks south of I-20. Bachelor's and master's degrees are offered. Additional certification programs have been added with on-going plans to add more degrees.

The project was moved forward by the initial state appropriation of \$4.2 million. Area municipalities, businesses and corporations, and individuals have stepped up to the task of financially supporting the project to the tune of \$2.5 million. This includes funds raised/pledged by the cities of Cedar Hill, Dallas, DeSoto, Duncanville, Glenn Heights, Hutchins, Lancaster, and Waxahachie. A gala hosted by



UNT System Center at Dallas ribbon-cutting.

the Best Southwest Chamber Partnership raised more than \$250,000. In addition, the City of Dallas approved a resolution that allows up to \$3 million to be spent for the purchase of land or infrastructure for the permanent campus.

During the upcoming session, Senator West will move forward to statutorily establish the University of North Texas at Dallas, as well as obtain increased state funding.

Dr. Emmett J. Conrad Leadership Program

For the past eight years, Senator West has extended a "hand-up" to college students from District 23 through the Dr. Emmett J. Conrad Leadership Program. Some 870 intern placements have been made since the program began in 1993.

These young people have been afforded the opportunity to secure paid employment in their fields of study, participate in character building workshops/seminars, network with professionals and provide community services to their neighborhoods.

Applications are available by calling 214-467-0123. The application deadline is January 16, 2001. Late applications are accepted on a case-by-case basis.

Senator Royce West

District 23

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THE TEXAS SENATE IS AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER AND DOES NOT DISCRIMINATE ON THE BASIS OF RACE, COLOR, NATIONAL ORIGIN, SEX, RELIGION, AGE OR DISABILITY IN EMPLOYMENT OR THE PROVISION OF SERVICES.

HELPFUL TOLL-FREE NUMBERS

Texas Performance Review Hotline.....	1-800-531-5441
Runaway Hotline	1-800-392-3352
Child Find / Missing Children	1-800-426-5678
Abuse Hotline (Children, Elderly, Disabled)	1-800-252-5400
Voter Registration, Elections Information	1-800-252-8683
Drug Abuse Hotline.....	1-800-662-4357
AIDS Hotline	1-800-299-2437
State Sales Tax Information.....	1-800-252-5555
Suicide Prevention / Crisis Intervention.....	1-800-643-1102
Governor's Assistance Line	1-800-843-5789
Assistance for the Blind.....	1-800-252-5204
Child Support Enforcement.....	1-800-252-8014
Governor's Crime Victim Clearinghouse	1-800-252-3423
Texas Crime Stoppers	1-800-252-8477