



Dear Friends:

As the countdown begins toward adjournment of the 81st Regular Legislative Session, I can assure you that much more work will be done during this critical period at the Capitol.

I believe the capstone of this legislative session will be the birth of the first public law school in Dallas, Texas. Senate Bill 956 has passed both chambers and we have turned our focus to the appropriation of funds necessary for classes to begin in the fall of 2010. This occurs almost simultaneously with the ascent of the University of North Texas - Dallas into the ranks of full, stand-alone status. Many hours of labor and years of perseverance have turned this hope and dream into a reality.

This is a tremendous achievement for all of us who have worked to see it happen. The University of North Texas, the City of Dallas and civic leaders across our region should share in this celebration. I thank all of you for your help.

This is only one of 120 pieces of legislation I have filed this session. Not one of these bills were introduced without full consideration of their affect on the people who live in District 23. At this point in the session it is hard to project the number which will pass, but I want to share the prospect that I anticipate that this will be a successful legislative session.

For some time I have been working on legislation which would require the state to extend financial support to grandparents, or other family members, who accept guardianship of children.

This support would be made available for the care of children which would otherwise be placed in foster homes. I filed the Kinship Bill (Senate Bill 1411) for this purpose.



As always, I enjoy hearing from my constituents and I encourage you to stay involved and connected. I certainly appreciate all your input. My staff and I are always prepared to respond to your inquiries and suggestions. On behalf of my wife Carol and our entire family, thank you for continuing to allow me to represent you in the Texas Senate.

Sincerely Yours,

Twin Tracks of Opportunity

The grand scheme was complex and began with but a dream. It was the possibility of a stand-alone, four-year, public university with graduate programs. The dream was of a quality higher education venue at the core of a dynamic regional economy. In this dream, opportunity was accessible to anyone willing to take the challenge.

UNT at Dallas The Parent School Gets Its Legs

The University of North Texas at Dallas," said Senator West. "I can use that term now because just last month, the venue that we have nourished from its embryonic stages was authorized to become a full-time, four-year, free-standing public university."

Spring 2009 enrollment was certified at more than 1,000 full-time students, the number required before the UNT Dallas Campus could become a free-standing university and function as the city's first and only public university.



Senator West, the author of the original legislation which created the new university added, "the certification was a victory for the people of Dallas and the North Central Texas and Best Southwest regions."

The goal for UNT at Dallas is to establish local undergraduate and graduate programs of study under the administration of the new university. The first of these will be a College of Law and in the near future, there are plans for a school of Pharmacy.

"Today, we surpassed a monumental milestone in the fulfillment of the establishment of the University of North Texas at Dallas," West said. "Now, we will have our first independent, state-supported, comprehensive university."

"This has been a ten-year-plus odyssey, and it's not over yet." said Senator West.

The Birth of a Law School

Senate Bill 956, by West, would create the first-ever, publicly-supported law school in Dallas.

The bill authorizes the law school to be operated by the University of North Texas System until a permanent four-year Dallas campus is established and has existed for five years. Then it will become part of UNT-Dallas.

The legislative journey hasn't been easy over the last several sessions. Twice, the measure was passed by the Senate, only to fail passage in the House.

Numerous pieces must fall in place in order to achieve the dream of a public law school in Dallas.

The University of North Texas announced its intention to establish and sustain the emerging school four years ago. The City of Dallas took a role by securing and rehabilitating the site of the law school at "Old City Hall" in downtown Dallas.

Funding must now be secured to begin operation of the law school. As a member of the powerful Budget Conference Committee, Senator West is well-positioned to get it.



Plans call for the law school to be located in downtown Dallas in the Old Municipal Building at 106 S. Harwood St. through an agreement with the City of Dallas.

Other Bills of Interest from the 81st Legislative Session

Senate Bill 1715 - Requires apartments to install special smoke alarms for the deaf and hearing-impaired.

Tyrus Burks and his mother, Ms. Betty Burks, traveled from our district twice to testify before the House and Senate committees which heard SB 1715 by West. They shared the tragic story of how they lost half of their family in a 2005 apartment fire.

It was heart-rending testimony which left no doubt in the minds of committee members that action to extend the early warning of smoke alarms to the deaf community is long overdue.

The bill passed both committees without objection. The Senate has approved the bill and it is now ready for a vote by the House. The bill has been named to honor the memory of Tyrus' late wife, Sephra Burks.

Senate Bill 227 - Increases funding to the Texas Grant Program by assessing a prize fee on certain lottery prizes.

The Texas Grant Program is a scholarship program for students attending Texas public colleges and universities, who are experiencing financial hardship in paying for their education. It has been underfunded since its inception, leaving many otherwise qualified Texans unable to attend our colleges and universities.

Currently, the state collects a 5% prize fee on all Bingo Prizes. SB 227 is similar in that it requires the Texas Lottery Commission to collect a three percent fee on lottery prizes winnings of \$600 or more. This fee will generate about \$13 million each year for the next 3 years. SB 227, if passed, will provide scholarships to about 12,000 college students by 2012.

Senate Bill 1707 - Uses proceeds from criminal asset forfeiture to provide college scholarships to children of peace officers killed in the line of duty.

Currently, state law allows law enforcement agencies to use proceeds from criminal asset forfeiture for salaries, overtime pay for officers, officer training, equipment and supplies.

SB 1707, gives law enforcement agencies the option to use up to 10% of these funds for scholarships to be awarded to children of officers killed in the line of duty.

Senate Bill 1411 - Creates the Permanency Care Assistance Program at the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS).

This program provides notification to relatives of the removal of a child from a home. It also offers training and support to eligible relatives who undertake care for the child.

Additionally, this program extends support for children up to the age of 21 if that child remains enrolled in educational or occupational training.

