Dear Friend:

Thank you for the honor and privilege of serving you in the Texas State Senate. Since taking the oath of office in January, I have worked hard to be a strong, effective voice for the people of El Paso. During the 82nd Legislative Session and the 1st Called Session, I fought to protect funding for our public schools and to ensure access to health care in the face of a historic budget deficit.

While much of the focus during the 82nd Legislative Session and the 1st Called Special Session was on the multi-billion dollar budget shortfall, I worked hard to ensure that numerous pieces of legislation benefitting the people of El Paso and the state as a whole passed and were signed into law.

Although I was successful in passing forty-one pieces of legislation, many outcomes from the two sessions will have negative impacts on our community. During the budget process, cuts were made that will have far reaching implications on our state for years to come. The two sessions were marred by divisive attacks on teachers, schools, immigrants, family planning services, and those in most need of state services. These cuts will likely mean that more people will have a greater need for fewer available services.

This report provides you with information on the positive changes I was able to accomplish for our community during these two legislative sessions. During the interim, my office will continue to engage the community on different issues in preparation for the 2013 Legislative Session.

Please know that the most important part of my job is to serve the people of Senate District 29, and I will do all in my power to ensure you receive the help that you and your family may need.

Sincerely,

José Rodríguez

Estimado Amigo(a):

Gracias por el honor y privilegio de servirlos en el Senado del Estado de Texas. Desde que preste juramento en enero, he trabajado para ser una voz fuerte y eficaz para la gente de El Paso. Durante la 82va Sesión Legislativa y la Primera Sesión Especial, batalle arduamente para proteger los fondos para nuestras escuelas públicas y para asegurar acceso a cuidado médico aun estando en estos tiempos de un déficit presupuestario histórico.

Durante la 82va Sesión Legislativa y la Primera Sesión Especial se centro gran parte en la atención del llamado déficit presupuestario de miles de millones de dólares, he trabajado constantemente para asegurarme que las leyes que se promulguen beneficien a nuestra gente en El Paso y en el Estado en su conjunto.

Aunque tuve éxito en hacer aprobar cuarenta y un proyectos de ley, muchos de los resultados de ambas sesiones tendrán impactos negativos en nuestra comunidad. Durante el proceso presupuestario, se realizaron numerosos recortes que tendrán amplias implicaciones para nuestro estado durante varios años. Estos recortes trae como consecuencia que aumenten las personas que requieran de estos servicios.

Este informe le provee información sobre los cambios posítivos que logre cumplir para nuestra comunidad durante estas dos sesiones legislativas. Durante este tiempo en el que la legislatura no está en sesión, mi oficina continuara a entablar conversaciones sobre diferentes asuntos para, así, prepararnos para la Sesión Legislativa del 2013.

Tenga siempre presente que la parte más importante de mi trabajo es servir a la gente del Distrito Senatorial 29 y que hare todo lo que esté a mi alcance para asegurarme que usted y su familia reciban la atención que necesiten.

Sincerely,

José Rodríguez
The Even Start Program, run by non-profits such as Avance, focuses on early childhood development, parenting and adult literacy. House Bill 3051* ensures that Avance – which serves nearly 1,400 parents and their children at 17 sites in El Paso – and other organizations, will continue to be able to provide this critical program.

Increasing and Saving Revenue for the City of El Paso
Late last year, it was discovered that state law prevented the City of El Paso from receiving its portion of sales tax revenue collected at Ft. Bliss’ Freedom Crossing shopping center and other retail businesses on the base – tax revenue many of the businesses had been collecting. House Bill 205* made a change to the law in order for the City of El Paso to be able to collect sales tax revenue from Ft. Bliss retailers. It is estimated that the City will receive several millions of dollars per year that can be used to provide services for El Pasoans.

Protecting Workers from Wage Theft
Each year, thousands of Texas workers, primarily construction workers and day laborers, are not paid in full for the work they have performed. Senator Rodríguez’s Senate Bill 1024 will make it easier for law enforcement to go after employers who don’t pay workers for all of the work that they have done.

Senator Rodríguez worked hard to ensure that numerous pieces of legislation benefitting the people of El Paso and the state were passed and signed into law.

Increasing El Paso’s Health Care Providers
In 2010, El Paso County had only 116.5 direct care physicians and 28 dentists per 100,000 residents, falling far short of the statewide average of 162.3 physicians and 45 dentists per 100,000. Senator Rodríguez passed several key pieces of legislation aimed at addressing this shortage in El Paso.

Current law limits which hospital districts may directly hire physicians, dentists, and other health care professionals. Senate Bill 860 allows the El Paso County Hospital District to directly hire needed medical professionals, which will attract more health care workers to the area.

With only three dental schools in the state and a dire need for more dentists in El Paso, Senator Rodríguez passed Senate Bill 1020, which requires the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board to study the feasibility of opening a dental school in El Paso. The long-term goal is to help recruit and train more dentists to serve our community and expand the Medical Center of the Americas.

Due to state rules, many international medical graduates choose to practice in neighboring states. House Bill 1380* helps address our local physician shortage by allowing these international medical graduates to apply for a medical license after completing two years of residency instead of three years.

District 29 Legislative Participation Program
With the goal of getting more constituents involved in shaping our community’s legislative agenda, Senator Rodríguez established the District 29 Legislative Participation Program. Participants give their opinions regarding what laws need to change to better our community. If you would like to get involved, please call 915-351-3500 today.

Saving Our School Districts Money and Providing Education Opportunities for All
With school districts facing severe budget cuts, House Bill 1254* requires school districts in El Paso County to determine whether or not consolidating school district police departments would save money. This may help free up money to save teachers’ jobs.

Increasing and Saving Revenue for the City of El Paso
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Cities, such as El Paso, which ban cell phone use while driving, were required to post signs in school zones, which was redundant and cost the City hundreds of thousands of dollars. The passage of House Bill 1899* will ensure that El Paso will no longer be required to post signs in school zones, saving local taxpayers close to half a million dollars.

*Rodríguez was responsible for passing the House Bill in the Senate.
Improving Our Environment and El Paso’s Quality of Life

With a greater need for renewable energy sources, more El Pasoans are turning to solar power in their homes and small businesses. Senate Bill 1910 gives El Paso Electric Company residential and small business customers the option of net metering, which will likely increase solar power usage, and bring more solar providers and companies to El Paso.

The Castner Range in El Paso, which encompasses 7,000 acres of undeveloped desert and foothills, is one of the most rugged and pristine landscapes in Texas. The passage of Senate Resolution 506 supports the conservation of the Castner Range to help ensure that it remains undeveloped for the enjoyment of local residents and visitors.

State Highway 20, which includes Alameda Avenue, has been a great source of history and pride for El Paso. However, during the past few decades, the area has become run down and less desirable for businesses. In order to increase pride in the community, and with the goal of increasing economic development, House Bill 1866 passed, designating Alameda Avenue a Texas historic highway. If federal funds for highway improvement become available, the state will be able to apply for these funds for our community.

In order to keep our communities safe with more public safety officers patrolling the streets, Senate Bill 604 allows jailers to execute warrants, subpoenas, and various writs. As a result, constables and other law enforcement officers will not be taken off the streets to serve an inmate already being held in the county jail.

El Paso’s Eighth Court of Appeals was one of only two in the state of Texas without an appellate judicial system. Senate Bill 605 created such a system, which will help increase the Court’s effectiveness and efficiency.

In order to streamline jury duty, Senate Bill 1195 restructures the administration of jury duty and standardizes the jury service postponement process in El Paso County.

A Regional Park System for El Paso (Proposition #7)

On November 8th, Senator Rodríguez’s SJR 28 will allow voters to decide whether or not to amend the Texas Constitution to create a regional park district in El Paso County. Passage of Prop. 7 is projected to lead to increased parkland and a better quality of life for El Pasoans.

On November 8, 2011, Texans will vote on proposed amendments to the Texas Constitution. For more information about the ten proposed amendments, call Senator Rodríguez’s Capitol or El Paso office.

Improving Our Public Safety and Our Courts

To better protect hospital and clinic patients, visitors, and hospital faculty and staff, Senate Bill 601 allows the El Paso County Hospital District to hire peace officers.
Budget
The Texas Legislature was faced with an unprecedented budgetary challenge in the 82nd Legislative Session. A slowing economy coupled with the failure of the state’s business tax combined to create a shortfall of about $27 billion. Roughly $10 billion of this deficit could be attributed to previous legislative action. In 2006, in an effort to lower property taxes, lawmakers drafted a revised business tax, known as the franchise tax, that was intended to fill a gap created by lowering taxes. Instead, the tax failed to meet projections and left the state with a $10 billion per biennium structural deficit.

Unfortunately, during the 82nd Legislative Session, the cause of the deficit was ignored and no new significant streams of revenue were created. As a result, nearly $4 billion was cut from public schools, and funding for health and human services programs was reduced by $11 billion — cuts Senator Rodríguez strongly opposed!

Education
Ensuring that El Pasoans have access to education is critical for the future of our community. This means providing adequate funding for our public schools and access to affordable higher education for all. Unfortunately, drastic cuts to both public and higher education will limit the ability for many in El Paso to gain the tools needed to succeed in today’s workforce.

Of the $4 billion in statewide cuts, El Paso County school districts will lose an estimated $113 million in funding over the next two years.

The budget cuts went beyond public schools and into our college classrooms. Texas universities will lose $670 million in funding during the next two years. In addition, an estimated 29,000 students will not have access to financial aid through the TEXAS Grants program. At UTEP, budget cuts will result in more than $24 million in less funding and an estimated 1,300 students could lose their financial aid. El Paso Community College also suffered devastating cuts, losing an estimated $2.7 million over the next two years.

These cuts will result in Texas taking a huge step backward when it comes to improving our economy and quality of life in our community. Reducing access to higher education will ultimately reduce access to better jobs and higher wages, affecting our economy for years to come.

While others were working to take money out of our education system, Senator Rodríguez fought for measures to improve our universities, including allowing UTEP access to the Competitive Knowledge Fund to help the university achieve “Top Tier” status. Additionally, Senator Rodríguez strongly supported a measure to establish tuition revenue bonds, which would have given UTEP and Texas Tech funding for new buildings, and an amendment giving UTEP access to its tobacco endowment funds for biomedical research. Unfortunately, none of these measures were successful, but will be at the forefront of Senator Rodríguez’s agenda going into the next legislative session in January 2013.

Health Care
Health and Human Services is Texas’ second-largest budget item after education. As with education, health and human services programs suffered devastating budget cuts, including decreased funding for mental health services; rate cuts for Medicaid providers, including doctors and dentists; and cuts to community-based, long-term care services for disabled Texans.

For the Medicaid program, funding is estimated to be $5 billion short of the level needed to pay for current services, and as a result, in 2013 an emergency appropriations bill will be required to meet the program’s needs. Due to provider cuts, the El Paso County Hospital District will lose more than $20 million in Medicaid funds.

Much like education, there is a great need to ensure that health care is funded and that people have access to health care services. Decreasing funds will decrease availability, which will likely lead to people resorting to the emergency room, straining a system that is already bursting at the seams.
In El Paso, we have added hardship due to a lack of health care providers, especially physicians and dentists, who serve our community. In order to address the health care professional shortage, Senator Rodríguez authored and passed numerous pieces of legislation aimed at increasing the number of medical professionals.

Even before the cuts to health and human services programs, one out of three El Pasosans did not have health insurance. This is the highest rate of uninsured for any large city in the country. With these cuts, it is likely to get worse.

**Immigration/Border Security**

Senator Rodríguez led the fight against anti-immigrant legislation, including the ban on so-called “sanctuary cities,” a measure which failed after several attempts. During both legislative sessions, dozens from El Paso came to testify against the anti-immigrant measures, which would have created a division between immigrant communities and local law enforcement. In the end, over 100 pieces of anti-immigrant legislation failed to pass, in large part due to the outrage from our community and thousands of others from across our state.

**Legal Aid**

After several months of fighting to fund legal aid and indigent defense services, Senator Rodríguez was successful in persuading Senate leadership to find $25 million to fund these critical programs. Of the $25 million appropriated in Senate Bill 2, $17.5 million will be used for legal aid and $7.6 million for indigent defense during the 2012-13 biennium.

**Military/Veterans**

As a member of the Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs and Military Installations, Senator Rodríguez is working hard on behalf of our veterans and active duty military. He successfully sponsored a measure that will allow deferred payment of certain Texas Driver Responsibility Program surcharges for up to three years for members of the military who are on active duty overseas and who oftentimes do not receive bills while being deployed or are unaware they owe money.

He also co-authored legislation allowing the surviving spouse of a 100% disabled veteran to be exempted from property taxes, or ad valorem taxes, on their home. This was a top priority for veterans organizations from across the state of Texas and will appear as a proposition on the November 8, 2011 Constitutional Amendment election ballot.

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*Senator Rodríguez, Sheriff Richard Wiles, and other law enforcement leaders speaking at a press conference in opposition of the so-called “sanctuary cities” legislation.*

*Senator Rodríguez with Senator Leticia Van de Putte, Chair of the Veterans Affairs and Military Installations Committee, and members of the Texas National Guard.*
District 29: Helpful Numbers & Information

Senator José Rodríguez
Contact Numbers

Capitol Office
Room E1.712
P.O. Box 12068
Austin, Texas 78711
(512) 463-0129
(800) 544-1990 Toll Free

District Office
100 N. Ochoa St.
Suite A
El Paso, Texas 79901
(915) 351-3500
(915) 351-3579 Fax

El Paso Important Numbers
City of El Paso ................................................................. 915-541-4000
El Paso County ................................................................. 915-546-2000
El Paso County Appraisal District ......................... 915-780-2000
Ft. Bliss ................................................................. 915-568-2121

General Information
Texas 2-1-1 ................................................................. 2-1-1
Travel Conditions ................................................................. 1-800-452-9292

Family
Medicare ................................................................. 1-800-633-4227
Medicaid Hotline ................................................................. 1-800-252-8263
TexCare’s Member Services Dept. Medicaid/CHIP .......... 1-800-647-6558
Child Support Division, Attorney General .................. 1-800-252-8014
Texas Health & Human Services Comm. (Food Stamps) .... 1-800-448-3927

Consumers
Consumer Protection Hotline, Attorney General .......... 1-800-337-3928
Injured Employees Hotline ................................................................. 1-800-252-7031

Victim’s Assistance
Elder/Child Abuse Hotline ................................................................. 1-800-252-5400
Crime Victim’s Clearinghouse ................................................................. 1-800-848-4284

Legal
Free Legal Service/Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid .......... 1-888-988-9996
Lawyer Referral Service ................................................................. 1-800-252-9690
Family Violence Legal Line ................................................................. 1-800-374-4673

Si usted desea recibir un boletín en español, favor de llamar a la oficina del Senador Rodríguez en El Paso 915-351-3500.

For additional online government services visit: texasonline.state.tx.us

Legislation
If you would like a list of the forty-one pieces of legislation Senator Rodríguez passed into law, please contact his district or Capitol office.