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Senator José Rodríguez Sworn in for 86th Legislature

Austin - Sen. José Rodríguez was sworn in as Texas State Senator for Senate District 29 (SD 29) as the 86th Texas Legislature convened today. This is the Senator's fifth regular legislative session.

"I am energized by the positive change we see all around us, and eager to get to work in my fifth session," Rodríguez said. "We have a chance to do great things not only now but in the future."

Rodríguez has proven himself an effective voice for SD 29, passing more than 200 bills during the past four regular sessions in the Texas Senate. This includes legislation addressing education, health care, economic development, renewable energy, criminal justice reform, public safety and the courts, ethics and government transparency, and veterans.

Rodríguez was first elected to serve the people of SD 29 in November 2010, when the district was only part of El Paso County. Since redistricting in 2011, SD 29 includes all of El Paso, Hudspeth, Culberson, Jeff Davis and Presidio Counties, making it one of the largest and most diverse in the state.

The Senator already has filed 61 Senate Bills and Joint Resolutions for consideration during the 140-day legislative session; the bills include topics such as access to health care, equality, workers' rights, criminal and civil justice, with public education always being the foremost priority.

"As it relates to education, my legislative priorities echo what's been outlined in the Commission on Public School Finance's report and the Texas Supreme Court's direction to the legislature. I believe that we are in a unique position this session to provide Texas students with the kind of investment, innovation and transformational leadership that they deserve and have long been denied," Rodríguez said. "Texas has one of the youngest populations in the country, with the workforce of the future. What some people see as a challenge - educating students who speak

Spanish - I see as a great opportunity to lead the nation in a bi-literate, 21st Century, globally competitive workforce.

"We are in the midst of an oil and gas boom that will not last forever. It's just common sense to use some of that bounty to invest in proven bilingual education programs, and overall, commit to the promise of the Texas Constitution, a system of efficient and equitable free public education that will contribute to future prosperity. My legislative agenda seeks to spark dialogue about what an equitable, accessible, fiscally-sound system would look like for Texans."

SD 29 includes the City of El Paso, part of the largest binational community in the world - more than 2 million people live in the Paso del Norte valley, bisected by the Rio Grande - and its neighboring towns of Anthony, Vinton, Horizon City, Socorro, Fabens, Clint, San Elizario, and Fort Hancock. It also includes Marfa, an internationally well-known arts destination, as well as the historic Trans-Pecos towns of Presidio, Fort Davis, Sierra Blanca, and Van Horn. El Paso is not only adjacent to the Mexican city of Juarez and state of Chihuahua, but also adjacent to Southern New Mexico, making it a three-state, two-nation region.

The district also includes Fort Bliss, one of the largest military installations in the United States; the University of Texas at El Paso, which boasts enrollment of about 24,000 students; and Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center El Paso, the only one on the U.S.-Mexico border.

During the swearing in ceremony, Rodríguez was joined on the Senate floor by his wife Carmen, his daughter Laura, and his grandsons, Santi and Diego.

Prior to being elected to the Texas Senate, Rodríguez served as the El Paso County Attorney for 17 years. He received his bachelor's degree from Pan American University in Edinburg and law degree from George Washington University's National Law Center. Upon graduation from GWU, Rodríguez began his legal career as a staff attorney with the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development in Washington, D.C. He practiced law with the firm of Rodriguez, Lewis & Collins and worked for 10 years as a staff attorney and director of the farm worker program of Texas Rural Legal Aid, Inc., a statewide legal services program.

Rodríguez is a lifelong Texan, born in Alice and raised in the small farming community of Alamo, Texas. He and his wife Carmen have two children and two grandsons.

SENATOR RODRÍGUEZ'S STAFF FOR THE 85TH LEGISLATURE

Capitol Office Staff

Sushma Jasti Smith will continue as Rodríguez's Chief of Staff and Legislative Director. Sushma has worked for Rodríguez since he took office in January 2011. She staffs the Senator on health care, criminal justice, LGBTQ, veterans, immigration, and local governance issues. Prior to her tenure in Rodríguez's office, she served as General Counsel to former State Sen. Eliot Shapleigh, Legislative Fellow for State Rep. Garnet Coleman, and as a judicial intern in a U.S. District Court and the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals. In addition to her work in the legislature, she has done extensive work as a freelance science editor and has been published in

several scientific journals. Sushma received a bachelor's degree from the University of Texas at Austin and earned her J.D. at the University of Houston Law Center, where she was the Editor in Chief of the *Houston Journal of Health Law and Policy*.

Elisa Tamayo is Rodríguez's Scheduler and Capitol Office Manager. She was raised in Chihuahua, Mexico, and moved to El Paso to start college in 2010. She is a graduate of the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP), where she earned a bachelor's degree in Business Administration and Economics. Elisa has worked on several political campaigns, including one for the El Paso Firefighters Union Local 51 to support a new contract with the City of El Paso. She then worked for the Texas House of Representatives for three years before starting in the Senator's District Office, and in December moved to the Capitol office. Prior to that move, she was active in the El Paso community, serving on the board of Project BRAVO and as President of the Young El Paso Democrats, and continues to manage El Paso rental property for her family's home-sharing business. She enjoys traveling and has studied abroad in Denmark, Germany and China.

Stella Savage serves as Deputy Legislative Director for Rodríguez. She staffs the Senator on public education, higher education, transportation, and economic development issues. Previously, Stella served as Senior Policy Analyst to former Sen. Sylvia Garcia in the 85th legislative session, as Director of Constituent Services for Rep. Donna Howard in the 84th session, and as a legislative intern for a San Antonio-based transportation policy firm in the 83rd. In addition to her work in the Legislature, Stella has done extensive work as in the nonprofit space, primarily helping organizations in their start-up stage get connect with mission-aligned funding. She received a bachelor's degree from the University of Texas at San Antonio in History with a minor in Business Administration, and is a native of Dallas.

Stephen M. Foster is the Senator's General Counsel and a native El Pasoan. Steve will staff the Senator on natural resources, water, environment, energy, elections, civil jurisprudence and housing issues. Steve's first legislative session in the Texas Capitol was in 1999 as a Senate Committee Director and General Counsel. He held this position for the Committees on Natural Resources & Economic Development, Criminal Justice and Jurisprudence. Steve also served as General Counsel for the Joint Committee on Redistricting in 2000 and lobbied for a law firm for two sessions as well. Away from the Capitol, Steve has a sports talk radio show on ESPN San Antonio, is on a broadcast crew that does college football games on ESPN+ and has been calling high school football games for Austin teams that included Super Bowl MVP Nick Foles, Heisman winner and NFL Number-one pick Baker Mayfield and others. Steve was an All-District & All-City running back at Eastwood High School and started in the backfield with Dallas Cowboys head coach Jason Garrett in college. Steve earned an AB degree from Princeton University in Economics and his law degree from the University of Nebraska College of Law. During law school, Steve was a graduate assistant coach with the Cornhusker football team that won three conference titles and a National Championship.

Ana Ramon serves as a Policy Analyst for Rodríguez and as the Executive Director of the Texas Senate Democratic Caucus. She is a native San Antonian and graduate of St. Mary's University. Ana began her state legislative career with Rep. Joe Farias of San Antonio. Starting as a district aide she eventually became his Chief of staff and served two session working on behalf of Texas

House District 118 and its constituents. Afterwards, she went on to run the Texas House Democratic Campaign Committee and worked with allied organizations to elect more Democratic members to the Texas House of Representatives. Ana had the privilege to lead the Texas Legislative Study Group, where she managed a team of 10 Masters of Social Work students to analyze legislation and its impact on Texas working families. Prior to joining the staff of the Senator and the SDC, Ana was the Texas Grassroots Manager for the American Cancer Society, where she sought to empower those touched by cancer to fight for proactive policies on the local, state, and federal levels of government.

Analia Bañales joins Rodríguez's staff as the Senate Hispanic Research Council Luna Scholar for the 86th Legislature. Analia spent the past year as an AmeriCorps VISTA service member working on issues regarding food insecurity in and around El Paso County. She previously interned for Rodríguez at his El Paso office while enrolled at the University of Texas at El Paso, where she earned her bachelor's degree in Political Science, with concentrations in Criminal Justice and Intelligence & National Security Studies. She looks forward to learning about policy issue areas affecting the constituents of Senate District 29 and all Texans.

Zainab Ghwari begins this session as the Texas Legislative Internship Program fellow for Rodríguez. Zainab is a graduate student at the University of Texas' LBJ School specializing in urban policy. Prior, she pursued graduate studies in education at Rice University and her undergraduate studies in linguistics at the University of Houston. She taught high school English for several years, then worked on the political campaigns of former Sheriff Adrian Garcia, Steve Brown, and current Judge Rabeea Collier. In addition to her work in education and politics, she worked extensively on civically engaging and organizing various communities in her hometown of Houston.

Rosavelly (Rose) Huerta is currently in her last semester at UT Austin where she is majoring in Government and minoring in History. Previously she worked with a local fundraising consulting firm assisting with FEC/TEC finance compliance for local candidates. She also previously interned during the interim in Senator Watson's office. Rosavelly is originally from Houston.

District Office Staff

Luis “Sito” Negrón is the Senator's District and Communications Director. He has a broad knowledge of media platforms and public policy informed by 20 years of award-winning, professional hard news and culture reporting and editing in daily newspapers, television, radio, weekly and monthly news magazines and periodicals, and Internet publishing. Sito started his career at the El Paso Times as a news assistant, where he worked as a reporter and Assistant City Editor for almost 10 years. Since, he has worked in both corporate and independent media environments, has freelanced for outlets ranging from Reuters to Texas Monthly, and has consulted on messaging, outreach, and web development for professional and organizational clients who use websites, electronic newsletters, social media, and other digital communication. In addition to his work in the Senator's office, Negrón is active in local issues, advocating for transparent government, respect for cultural and historic community assets, and neighborhood quality-of-life. He is president of the Sunset Heights Neighborhood Improvement Association, a

graduate of the University of Texas at El Paso, and will be working his fourth legislative session for the Senator.

Xochitl Rodriguez is Director of Constituent Services. She was born and raised in El Paso. After receiving a BFA from the University of Texas at El Paso, Rodriguez accepted an invitation from the Prince of Bhutan to serve as the country's first ever visiting artist in residence. It was in Bhutan, through youth outreach and public art education programming in the capitol city's government housing complex that Rodriguez discovered the potential to marry her public art practice with research, public service and meaningful policy reform and changes. Rodriguez is a co-founder of the Caldo Collective, a non-profit that aims to create meaningful bridges between that engages border residents and leverages public/private partnerships to fund impactful programming. Rodriguez and her five-year-old daughter recently travelled across the state of Texas as ambassadors for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation to advocate for the wild spaces and places in Texas.

Samantha Romero is Office Administrator and Special Projects Coordinator. She was born and raised in El Paso, uses the pronouns she/her, is a fierce, queer, Latina leader with a soft Pisces heart. She obtained her undergraduate degree at Randolph College (founded as Randolph Macon Women's College in 1891) in Lynchburg, Virginia. She studied Global Studies with a focus in Human Rights and minored in International Economics. After graduating, she taught English abroad for six months, using her spare time to volunteer at a non-profit that helped immigrants in Istanbul, Turkey. Upon returning to the U.S., she was inspired by Wendy Davis in 2013 to share her abortion story, which eventually brought her to the world of activism and community organizing. She worked as a Field Organizer to promote civic engagement in her home state, stationed out of East Texas. Since joining #TeamJose in 2015, Sam gets to fuse her love for her El Paso community, with government and advocacy. If you have questions on how to get involved, she's your go-to-human. When not working, Sam can be found at coffee shops or dog parks with a good playlist and/or her puppy Pepino.

José Rodríguez represents Texas Senate District 29, which includes the counties of El Paso, Hudspeth, Culberson, Jeff Davis, and Presidio. He represents both urban and rural constituencies, and more than 350 miles of the Texas-Mexico border. Senator Rodríguez currently serves as the Chairman of the Texas Senate Democratic Caucus, and is a member of the Senate Committees on Education; Health and Human Services; Veteran Affairs and Military Installations; Nominations; and Agriculture, Water, and Rural Affairs.