

SENATOR NATHAN JOHNSON

Senate District 16 • Capitol Report



Friends and Neighbors of Senate District 16 –

A journalist I know who writes about politics and culture recently moved to Texas. “Why Texas?” his friends asked him. “Because,” he explained, “anywhere in the world you go, you feel the influence of the United States; and anywhere in the United States you go, you feel the influence of Texas. Texas is at the center of everything.”

He’s right, of course. What we do here matters.

The 30 million of us who make our homes here are indeed fortunate. Possessed of vast natural resources, unlimited financial capital, and an indomitable spirit, Texas has the 9th largest economy on Earth, and grows in strength and diversity in every respect, every day.

Yet Texas is a state of contradictions: vast wealth and persistent poverty, premier healthcare and millions of people who lack access to it, top-tier universities and low educational attainment, boundless opportunity and formidable barriers, to name only a few.

It is the Legislature’s great challenge to make policy and build institutions that not only ensure that Texans continue to benefit from our good fortune, but that also help us to overcome and outgrow the undesirable sides of those contradictions.

The pages that follow present summaries of bills that became law, and of some that didn’t, revealing a few specific ways that the Legislature – including ways that I in particular – strove to meet that great challenge during the 88th Texas Legislative Session.

It is a wonderful privilege and an awesome responsibility to serve as your state senator. I hope that you will share with me the benefit of your thoughts and perspectives, patience and goodwill, as we work together to realize the best future for Senate District 16 and for our great state.

Sincerely,

OVERVIEW OF THE 88TH TEXAS LEGISLATURE

INVESTMENTS IN PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The Electric Grid. Considering the complexities of energy generation in Texas – threats of extreme weather and deliberate sabotage, rising population, growth in energy-intensive industries, the abundance of natural gas along with the nation’s leading renewable energy fleet, a unique private energy market, and new technologies in development and early stages of deployment – “fixing” the Texas grid is no simple task. Legislators, energy experts, industry, and consumer advocates all debated and disagreed and worked to reach consensus. An array of significant legislation passed. Some involve spending part of the budget surplus on the grid, including more than \$7B for loans and grants to incentivize the private construction of new gas-fueled power plants; \$1B in grants for the modernization and improved resiliency of facilities outside of ERCOT; and almost \$2B to develop and procure backup power systems for essential community services like water, fuel, law enforcement, and assisted living centers. Voters will have the choice to approve these appropriations at the ballot box this fall.

Other legislation gives the grid operator (ERCOT) more operating tools, requires greater reliability assurances from renewable generators, and establishes parameters for some promising new modes of energy generation. At the same time (and after much debate), the Legislature rejected bills that would restrict the deployment of new renewable installations or impose burdensome regulatory requirements on wind and solar power facilities.

Broadband, water and state parks. The Legislature created three new funds for historic investments in vital state infrastructure: water, broadband, and parks. A total of \$1.5B was appropriated to expand internet access to areas that currently lack service; \$1B to develop new water sources and repair aging water infrastructure; and \$1B to improve existing state parks and purchase land for new parks. This fall, voters will cast ballots to approve or to not approve these important investments in the future quality of life in Texas.



Discussing legislation on the chamber floor with Senator Nichols.

THE BORDER: COMPLEX, CONTENTIOUS, AND COSTLY

In response to the surge of unauthorized migration at the U.S.-Mexico border that began during the Trump administration and peaked during the Biden administration, the Texas Legislature increased spending of state tax dollars on border operations by almost 500% – spending \$4.5B since 2021 and committing another \$5.1B through 2025. The money runs through Operation Lone Star (“OLS”), funding the deployment of thousands of Texas National Guard members and DPS officers, the arrest and incarceration of suspected migrants under state laws (e.g., trespassing), and the construction of physical barriers, among other actions.

As with other policy areas, money alone will not resolve the challenges at our southern border. Arriving at sound policy will require an honest evaluation of changing circumstances, the efficacy of state spending, humanitarian concerns, current and proposed federal policy, threats from organized border crime and measures to counter it, and the effects of migration on labor markets and state resources.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

At the time of this writing, the most significant education policy changes have yet to be passed into law. House Bill 100 from the regular session was a bipartisan school finance bill that contained a host of useful improvements to our education system, including teacher pay raises and increased school funding. But the broad support of HB 100 collapsed late in session as it became the vehicle for one of the more contentious policy battles: school vouchers.

Despite the delay of the more significant investments and policy reforms proposed in HB 100, the Legislature did pass a few noteworthy measures for public schools. The budget appropriated funds for projected enrollment growth and mandatory school safety measures, retired teachers received a cost-of-living adjustment, and new scholarship programs were created for students and teachers, among other issues. Much remains to be done. Legislators will return for a special session this fall to address funding levels, teacher benefits, and possibly the use of public dollars to pay tuition in private schools.



Senator Johnson questions a witness during a Business & Commerce Committee public hearing.

INVESTMENTS IN SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Higher education funding. Based on the recommendation of the Texas Commission on Community College Finance, the Legislature re-designed the community college funding model. The change received full support from leaders in education, business, and public policy. The redesign emphasizes educational attainment, as well as affordability and accessibility, particularly for communities that have historically lacked a connection to higher education.

OVERVIEW OF THE 88TH TEXAS LEGISLATURE (CONTINUED)

TAX REDUCTIONS

Unable to agree during the regular session as to how to reduce property taxes, after two special sessions the House and Senate settled on a package that included significant property tax reductions for homeowners and small businesses. Both will see tax savings from “rate compression”, i.e., the use of state dollars to buy down local school district property tax rates. Homeowners will also benefit from a large increase in the homestead exemption – from \$40,000 to \$100,000. Small businesses will benefit from (i) a temporary 20% appraisal cap on non-homestead property with values under \$5 million, and (ii) the elimination of margins tax liability and filing requirements for nearly 40% of small businesses. The package did not include direct support for individuals and families who do not own homes, i.e., renters.

The scale of tax relief is remarkable and, as mentioned, will provide significant tax savings. At the same time, however, it creates a concern over the longer term and even the near term: how to pay for it in the future. All these tax reduction measures create large continuing state financial obligations. The package was funded in this budget cycle with a budget surplus fueled in large part by sources that won’t be present in the next budget cycle.

SOCIAL WARS

This session the Legislature continued down the path of taking a more active role in personal and cultural matters. Passionate debate tied up both chambers for hours, as the Legislature involved itself in, among other things, higher education (banning diversity programs in faculty hiring), university sports (banning



Gratefully receiving the Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE) Region 10’s 2023 Legislator of the Year award.

transgender participation – even in intramural sports and clubs), gender dysphoria (banning medical care for youth irrespective of parental choice and physician advice), and public schools (banning some traditional library books and imposing a new rating system, requiring that the Ten Commandments be displayed in classrooms, and substituting chaplains for school counselors, among others). Some proposals passed and some didn’t. All underwent significant changes throughout the legislative process and those that passed introduce uncertainties that will confront students, parents, institutions, and political parties for years to come.

Significantly, the 2021 abortion ban was modified to provide physicians with a defense to prosecution for performing an abortion, if they can demonstrate that the purpose was to save the mother’s life.

SENATOR JOHNSON’S 2023 LEGISLATIVE HIGHLIGHTS

ENERGY & THE ELECTRIC GRID

Winter Storm Uri left millions of Texans without power and took down vital community resources and systems, like water and food, fuel, law enforcement, and urgent healthcare. This was not the fault of any regulator; the problem was and is structural, and it must be fixed. During the interim, I worked with grid experts to develop a plan for a statewide set of small-scale backup power systems designed to ensure (i) that these vital community resources maintain power even during an extended grid failure, and (ii) that no Texan would lose power for an extended number of hours. The resulting legislation was Senate Bill 2112, “The Texas Power Promise”. The bill passed, albeit in pieces (as often happens in the legislative process, SB 2112 was split in two and incorporated into two other important grid-related bills). This November, Texans will vote on whether to approve the proposed \$1.8B to implement my plan for vital facility backup power and a more flexible and manageable grid during extended outages.

Other bills passed include Senate Bill 1699, which will facilitate the aggregation of small generation sources, like residential rooftop solar, into groups that can participate in the energy market; and Senate Bill 1929, which will give ERCOT access to information it needs to manage the massive power consumption of cryptocurrency miners.

DATA PRIVACY

The rising frequency and sophistication of attacks on electronically stored personal information made data privacy a legislative priority this session. I passed three bills to protect personal information in commercial spaces. Senate Bill 2105 deals specifically with companies that acquire and sell personal information, requiring them to implement a broad set of security standards for the handling of data, to register with the Secretary of State, and to post online the types of data they collect. House Bill 2545 requires genetic data testing companies to obtain a customer’s consent before sharing deidentified genetic data; and

to store and use genetic data only in deidentified form. The new law also clarifies that consumers have exclusive rights to their own genetic data.

Finally, Senate Bill 1495 prevents the inadvertent disclosure of personal information and trip data collected at airport parking facilities (including DFW International Airport) by exempting that information from requests under the Texas Public Information Act.

GOOD GOVERNMENT

Your government should work well. The Texas Department of Information Resources (“DIR”) provides essential technology services and leveraged buying power for state agencies and even for local governments, in areas ranging from data security to contract procurement. House Bill 4553 removes some regulatory obstacles to DIR providing these services. Senate Bill 271 enlists local governments in the broader battle against cyber attacks, including the menace of ransomware. Animals, too, will benefit from the services of DIR. Senate Bill 1414 pairs DIR and the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation to assist the Texas Board of Veterinary Medical Examiners meet demands for tracking and enforcement of professional standards of care.

Two river authority Sunset bills that I sponsored, House Bills 1535 and 1555, direct the San Antonio River Authority and the Upper Guadalupe River Authority to conduct more comprehensive strategic plans and adopt guidelines for evaluation.

Finally, essential portions of Senate Bill 618, as added to House Bill 3033, improve government responsiveness. The new law defines “business days” under the Texas Public Information Act in a manner that prevents governmental entities from unduly delaying responses to information requests from media and the public.

HEALTHCARE

Although the Legislature once again refused to take up Medicaid expansion, I was able to work with House colleagues to

SENATOR JOHNSON’S 2023 LEGISLATIVE HIGHLIGHTS (CONTINUED)



Team Johnson during the 88th legislative session.

pass several bills advancing healthcare quality and access. House Bill 113 enables Managed Care Organizations to hire more people to help Texans navigate the complex medical system and access the care they need. Better decisions early often lower overall healthcare costs.

Other bills address particularly vulnerable populations. House Bill 12 extends Medicaid eligibility for new mothers from six months to twelve months postpartum. This change is expected to lower the maternal mortality rate and improve infant care, particularly among Black mothers. House Bill 1673 will provide better care for individuals with Alzheimer’s by educating long-term care facility employees regarding the particular needs of these patients. House Bill 2478 provides for testing newborn babies for cytomegalovirus, and is expected to prevent permanent deafness and hearing loss in many children.

SUPPORTING FAMILIES

I passed various bills that improve everyday life for Texas children and their families. In the public school setting, Senate Bill 294 creates a safe protocol to allow school personnel to administer respiratory distress medications; and House Bill 2361 expands mental health services in schools through the hiring of master-level social workers. House Bill 1996 authorizes insurance companies to provide paid family leave policies and House Bill 4034 increases the line of duty death benefits for spouses and children of law enforcement officers. Elements of Senate Bill 609 were incorporated into related legislation, establishing a statewide voluntary nurse home visitation program for new mothers.

PROMOTING SAFETY, LAW ENFORCEMENT, & CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Roadway safety. Senate Bill 1413 ensures that crash sites are cleared faster by giving firefighters the authority to remove wrecked vehicles from the road (previously, only police and transit authorities could do so). This will speed up traffic for motorists, of course, but it also makes roadways safer for first responders.

Forgery and identity theft. House Bill 1910 closes a loophole that previously allowed counterfeiters to get away with forging large amounts of money. Senate Bill 687 makes it easier for victims of identity theft to expunge bogus convictions from their records when their identities are used to commit crimes.

Juvenile rehabilitation. House Bill 5195 requires that juvenile detainees who are to be tried as adults receive the same youth rehabilitative services as other youth detainees: education, mental health screenings, and substance use treatment regardless of their criminal status.

Officer wellness. House Bill 3858 establishes the statewide Police Officer Wellness Program. Based on groundbreaking work by the Dallas Police Department, the state will provide funding for law enforcement agencies to develop wellness programs that proactively engage with officers who have been involved in traumatic incidents.

SENATOR NATHAN JOHNSON'S 88TH LEGISLATIVE SESSION REVIEW:	
<p>\$1.8 BILLION for backup power systems for essential community facilities (SB 2627)</p>	<p>UNDER THE DOME:</p> <p>159 BILLS AUTHORED</p>
<p>\$4.7 MILLION for Psychiatric Residential Youth Treatment Facilities (SB 30)</p>	
<p>\$8 MILLION increase in benefits for widows under the Dallas Police & Fire Pension (HB 4034)</p>	
<p>\$20 MILLION for new Dallas Police Training Facility (HB 1)</p>	<p>47 BILLS BECAME LAW</p>
<p>IN THE DISTRICT:</p> <p>14,231 Correspondence Received</p> <p>66 Media & Interviews</p>	<p>168 Casework Closed</p> <p>317 Meetings & Events</p> <p>55 RESOLUTIONS PRESENTED</p>

*These estimates are based on data collected between January 1, 2023 and July 31, 2023.

MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

MEDICAID EXPANSION

I filed several bills presenting alternative ways for Texas to expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act. Despite the demonstrated success of the program in 38 states, the Texas Legislature again refused to even hold a hearing on the subject. This means loss of the opportunity to keep hospitals and community health clinics open, bring home billions in federal tax dollars, provide health insurance to close to a million people, expand the Texas economy with billions in economic growth, reduce property tax pressures, create hundreds of thousands of jobs, stabilize family finances, and lower the cost of health insurance for individuals and employers.

TEACHERS - RECRUITING & RETAINING

Compensation. Nearly a dozen bills proposed some manner of teacher salary increase, but no teacher pay raise made it through the legislative process. At the time of this writing, it is expected that teacher salaries and other education matters – perhaps including the question of public funding in private schools – will be the subject of a fall special session of the Legislature.



Speaking at a press conference to advocate for Medicaid funding.

MISSED OPPORTUNITIES (CONTINUED)

FIREARM SAFETY

I had hoped to pass two simple bills to advance gun safety. Senate Bill 906 would have allowed individuals to register on a statewide do-not-sell list, thereby providing the ability to stop themselves, in advance, from purchasing a gun if they may be in a dangerous state of mind. Senate Bill 964 would have made it easier for people to store their lawfully owned guns safely at shooting ranges or gun stores by granting stores that offer storage services an exemption from liability for improper use of the stored firearm.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE & PUBLIC SAFETY

Police departments across Texas are struggling to hire enough police officers. They want to be able to hire U.S. legal permanent residents (“LPRs”) to serve. But they can’t. It’s illegal under Texas law – even for LPRs who previously served in the U.S. military! Senate Bill 376 would have fixed that, allowing police departments to hire the quality individuals they need to serve in law enforcement.

Did you know that, under Texas law, a child commits a

crime by running away from home? My Senate Bill 83 would have decriminalized runaways, making it more likely that they receive emergency social services instead of a criminal record. Speaking of decriminalized actions, my Senate Bill 84 would have made it possible for someone convicted of actions that are later decriminalized to expunge their record of those crimes.

WORKFORCE HOUSING & RENTER PROTECTIONS

Texas suffers from a huge deficit of affordable workforce housing. My Senate Bill 1684 and Senate Joint Resolution 77 would have created a fund through which the state could incentivize the development of thousands of new low- and medium-income housing units.

Forty percent of households in Texas rent their residence. A wrongful eviction could mean economic devastation, even homelessness. Senate Bill 1822 would have protected tenants from the unwarranted bias of an eviction record if the eviction suit is dismissed or the renter otherwise prevails in court.

AROUND THE DISTRICT

HOW CAN WE HELP?

Need help navigating state services? My excellent staff is here for you. From driver’s license renewals to unemployment benefits to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) applications and Medicaid benefits, among other services, we can and do help. Please submit requests via email to District16.Johnson@Senate.Texas.Gov or call 972-701-0349.

IDEAS COME FROM YOU

It’s not unusual for ideas to come from constituents like you. For example, a local educator came to my office hours and suggested that Texas require school districts to provide paid parental leave for teachers. Of course we should! That’s why I authored Senate Bill 350. It didn’t pass during the regular session, but I aim to pass it in the upcoming special session. In the past I’ve filed and passed bills affecting healthcare, law enforcement, court procedures, environmental rules and other important matters of public interest.

Your voice matters.



Meeting Dallas College graduate Terrod Shelton and other attendees at the North Dallas Chamber of Commerce Legislative Series event.

COMMUNITY RECOGNITION

One of the privileges I hold as a state senator is the opportunity to honor outstanding achievements of remarkable Texas individuals and organizations. During the 88th legislative session, I shined public light upon the great civic contributions of Dallas RIGHT Care; the Dallas Regional Chamber; Texas Impact (50th anniversary); The Concilio (40th anniversary); the city of Mesquite

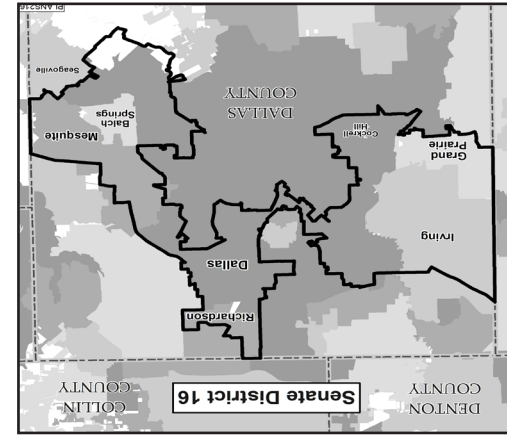
delegation; Dallas Police Chief Eddie Garcia; Ms. Opal Lee (the grandmother of Juneteenth); and the Dallas Wings, among many others. It is the dedication, hard work, and exceptional accomplishments of people and groups such as these that make our state a better place for all Texans.



Honoring Dallas Police Chief Eddie Garcia for his service on Chiefs Day at the Capitol.



Celebrating 40 years of Service: The Concilio's unwavering dedication was recognized at the 2022 Big Dreams Gala during Hispanic Heritage Month.



Senator Nathan Johnson

District 16
P.O. Box 12068 Austin, Texas 78711

HELPFUL TOLL-FREE NUMBERS

2 - 1 - 1	General Help & Services	www.senate.texas.gov
(800) 4-CANCER	Cancer Information Service	www.house.texas.gov
(800) 621-0508	Child Support Hotline	www.house.texas.gov
(800) 252-8014	Consumer Protection Hotline	www.house.texas.gov
(800) 843-5789	Governor's Assist. Hotline	www.sos.texas.gov
(800) 772-1213	Elections Division	www.sos.texas.gov
(800) 252-9690	Social Security Administration	www.comptroller.texas.gov
(800) 848-4284	Lawyer Referral Service	www.comptroller.texas.gov
(800) 252-9152	Crime Victim Clearinghouse	www.capitol.texas.gov
(800) 252-8263	Immunization Hotline	www.capitol.texas.gov
(800) 942-3678	Medicaid Hotline	www.governor.texas.gov
(800) 458-9858	WIC Hotline	www.governor.texas.gov
(800) 936-6400	Nursing Home Complaints	www.governor.texas.gov
(800) 252-7031	Rehabilitative Services	www.saltornetgeneral.gov
(800) 862-5252	Injured Worker Hotline	www.saltornetgeneral.gov
(800) 939-6631	Child Care Information	www.texasagriculture.gov
9 - 8 - 8	Unemployment Hotline	www.texasagriculture.gov
	Suicide and Crisis Lifeline	www.glo.texas.gov

GOVERNMENT RESOURCES ONLINE

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.

HOW TO CONTACT

Office of Senator Nathan Johnson
CAPITOL OFFICE

P.O. Box 12068
Room 3E.10
Austin, TX 78711-2068
(512) 463-0116

(972) 701-0349

Dallas, Texas 75251

Suite 1010

1222 Merit Drive

DALLAS OFFICE

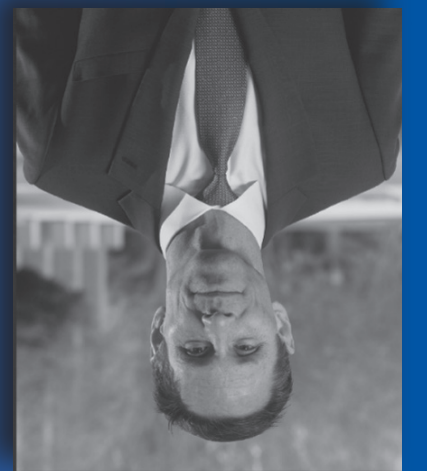
Scan the QR code to
share your thoughts

bit.ly/SNSurvey



JOHNSON.N.SENATE.TEXAS.GOV

DISTRICT16.JOHNSON@SENATE.TEXAS.GOV



PRSR STD
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit No. 2468
Austin, Texas