

CÉSAR J. BLANCO

The 88th Legislative Session

Friends and Neighbors:

It is an honor and privilege to serve the hard-working people of El Paso and Far West Texas in the Texas Senate. In my second term as your State Senator, we focused on the kitchen-table issues families care about and put people over politics to deliver big victories for our community and families.

This session, we delivered economic security for working families, including property tax relief; expanding food assistance; bolstering childcare; improved access to healthcare; invested in water infrastructure; increased access to broadband; strengthened our public schools, including keeping our kids safe; created incentives for good-paying jobs; and protected our environment and natural resources.

While our work at the Capitol is important, we always put our district and constituents first. Our district office in El Paso is available to assist you with any issues you have with a state agency and regularly hosts service events for you and our community including Back to School Backpack Giveaways, Free Tax Preparation, Thanksgiving Turkey Giveaways, Citizen Workshops, Job Fairs for Veterans, Toys for Tots, and more.

This session's legislative and funding victories pave the way for a healthier, wealthier, and brighter future for our community and families. I take immense pride in our achievements and eagerly anticipate visiting and sharing our progress with our constituents and community. Nevertheless, our work is far from finished. I am determined to continue the fight to make El Paso and West Texas healthier, stronger, and more resilient communities to live, work, and thrive in!

Thank you for your support. I hope you enjoy this newsletter on what we accomplished this session and what we are still working on!

In your service,



César J. Blanco
Texas Senator
District 29



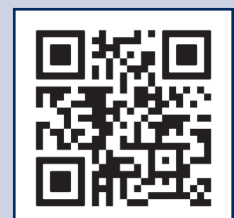
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DELIVERING RESULTS

STATE BUDGET HIGHLIGHTS

Entering the 88th Legislative Session, the Texas Legislature had a record budget surplus of **\$32.7 Billion dollars**. I'm proud to report that the State Budget (SB 1) appropriates **\$321.3 Billion**, making bold and historic investments for the future of Texas while putting money back into the pockets of working families, including **\$18 Billion** for property tax relief; more than **\$2 Billion** for water security; **\$4.8 Billion** for broadband development; **\$14.3 Billion** to bolster mental health services; **\$5.5 Billion** in benefits for retired teachers; **\$11.7 Billion** for higher education and workforce development; and **\$1 Billion** to fund state park system expansions.

★ FIGHTING FOR OUR FAIR SHARE ★

SENATE DISTRICT 29 FUNDING HIGHLIGHTS SECURED BY SENATOR CÉSAR J. BLANCO

Higher Education:

- University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP): **\$251.3 Million**
- El Paso Law School Planning Study: **\$250 Thousand**
- Texas Tech El Paso: **\$169.2 Million**
- Sul Ross State University (SRSU): **\$26.4 Million**
- El Paso Community College (EPCC): **\$60.2 Million**

Local Economic Development & Tourism:

- Grants to Promote Border Economic Development: **\$200 Thousand (\$600 Thousand To Date)**
- Defense Economic Adjustment Assistance Grants for Defense Communities (**Fort Bliss and El Paso**): **\$30 Million**
- Grants for Micro-Businesses for Disaster Recovery: **\$5 Million**
- Wyler Aerial Tramway Renovations: **\$10 Million (\$20 Million To Date)**
- Hueco Tanks State Park Capital Improvements: **\$5 Million**
- Balmorhea State Park Capital Improvements: **\$1 Million**
- Black Gap Wildlife Management Area Rehabilitation: **\$150 Thousand**
- McDonald Observatory: **\$7.2 Million**
- Big Bend Ranch State Park Maintenance: **\$50 Thousand**
- Magoffin Home State Historic Site Repairs: **\$4.1 Million**

Healthcare Delivery and Access:

- New El Paso Cancer Center: **\$65 Million**
- El Paso State Psychiatric Hospital Redesign & Expansion: **\$50 Million**
- Permian Basin Behavioral Health Center: **\$40 Million (\$90 Million To Date)**

Education & Workforce Development:

- Texas Innovative Adult Career Education Grant Program (Project Arriba): **\$4.3 Million**
- Texas Academic Innovation & Mentoring (Boys & Girls Clubs): **\$4.3 Million**
- Colonia Set-Aside Program Allocation for Technology and Computer Access to Residents of Colonias in El Paso: **\$1 Million**



Senator Blanco meets with local community leaders to discuss legislative priorities for the 88th legislative session.

Transportation & Trade:

- Center for International Intelligent Transportation in El Paso: **\$1.6 Million**
- Pecos County DPS/TxDOT Building Renovations: **\$2 Million**
- El Paso Ports of Entry Intelligent Transportation System Implementations: **\$32 Million**

Regional Water:

- Rio Grande Compact Litigation for El Paso's Fair Share of Water: **\$10.1 Million (\$41.9 Million To Date)**
- Rio Grande Compact Commission: **\$10.5 Million**
- Pecos River Compact Commission: **\$273 Thousand**
- Leaking Water Wells Program to Plug Abandoned P-13 Oil Wells: **\$10 Million**

MAJOR STATE HIGHLIGHTS

BRIDGING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Nearly 2.8 Million households in Texas lack broadband, affecting around 7 Million people. This session, I was proud to co-sponsor and pass legislation establishing a broadband infrastructure fund of \$4.8 Billion to ensure families can access online education, telehealth services, or other digital opportunities.

FUNDING WATER INFRASTRUCTURE

Water is the lifeblood of our community, yet many communities in Far West Texas still struggle with access to clean water and still face drought conditions. This session, I co-authored and helped pass SB28 to invest \$1 Billion to upgrade the state's aging water infrastructure, increase the state's water supply, and put Texas on the path to a drought-proof, water-secure future for generations to come.

IMPROVING ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

Expanding Care for New Mothers

To address rising maternal mortality, I co-sponsored and helped pass legislation to expand Medicaid coverage for new mothers from 6 months to 12 months, improving maternal health by allowing Texas moms to keep seeing their doctor, continue their medications, and take other steps to stay healthy during a time that is so important for their health and their baby's health.

Bolstering Mental Health Services

98% of Texas counties have a mental health professional shortage and access is getting worse. To improve access to mental health services, I proudly joint-authored and helped pass SB26 to invest \$15 Billion to expand access to local mental healthcare, as well as SB850 to improve access to mental healthcare in rural school settings. This bill will add a rural Education Services Center (ESC) representative to the Texas Child Mental Health Consortium to serve as the direct link between rural schools and behavioral health services.

Addressing Nursing Shortage

To address our worsening nursing shortage, I co-authored and helped pass SB25 to provide support for nursing-related education, including scholarships and loan repayment programs that will attract and retain nursing professionals and improve access to healthcare, especially in rural communities.

CREATING BETTER PAYING JOBS

Economic development is essential to the strength of our local economy and opens the door for more high-paying jobs in our region. I was proud to co-sponsor HB5, The Texas Jobs, Energy, Technology, and Innovation Act, that will bring high-paying jobs and economic growth to our region. The bill will allow local school districts to offer property tax breaks to eligible businesses based on the number of jobs created and capital invested in the community.

SUPPORTING OUR RETIRED TEACHERS

After years of teaching our students, retired teachers deserve to live in retirement comfortably and with dignity. This session, we reaffirmed our support for our retired teachers by passing SB10 and HJR2 to invest \$3.3 Billion to ensure a more financially secure retirement for our teachers. With this investment, retired teachers will receive a long-overdue Cost-of-Living-Adjustment (COLA), a 13th check for an average amount of \$2,300, and a freeze on TRS Care insurance premiums.



Senator Blanco delivering a speech on the Senate Floor.

KEEPING OUR KIDS & TEACHERS SAFE

To improve school safety for our kids and teachers, I was proud to co-sponsor and help pass HB3 which invests more than \$327 Million into school safety and security. However, it is only one step in the right direction. We need a comprehensive approach to school safety that includes school hardening and security, investments in mental health, and curbing the easy access to guns and assault rifles with common sense gun-safety measures.

LOWERING THE COST OF PRESCRIPTION MEDICINE

Working families and senior citizens are struggling with rising costs of prescription medicines, often leading to missed doses or impossible decisions between medicine and food or other necessities. To help lower the cost of medicine, I co-authored and helped pass bills to mandate Health Benefit Plans to disclose the lowest-cost alternative prescription medicine and allow Texas to import affordable prescription drugs from outside the US, reducing prices of those prescriptions by up to 70% for patients and seniors.

BUILDING A STRONGER WORKFORCE

To ensure our state has a well-paid and skilled workforce, I proudly co-sponsored and helped pass HB8, which allocated \$683 Million to implement an innovative new model for financing Texas's community college system. Texas will now incentivize community and technical colleges to focus on measurable student success by funding them for awarding degrees and certificates in high-demand occupations.

DELIVERING HISTORIC TAX RELIEF TO FAMILIES

El Paso and West Texas families are struggling with skyrocketing local property taxes. It's the number one complaint from working families and homeowners. In the second called session, I was proud to co-author and help pass a historic tax relief package to deliver real economic relief to homeowners, renters, and small businesses with the largest property tax cut in Texas history. With this legislation, homeowners will save on average \$1,373 every year. By raising the homestead exemption to \$100,000 and \$110,000 for seniors and buying down local school property taxes, over 60,000 homeowners in El Paso and West Texas could pay zero dollars in local school district property taxes. Additionally, the package doubles the state franchise tax exemption, effectively eliminating the state's franchise tax for over 67,000 small businesses.



SENATOR BLANCO'S LEGISLATIVE HIGHLIGHTS

EXPANDING FOOD ASSISTANCE FOR FAMILIES

More than 4 million Texans and 345 Thousand El Pasoans are facing food insecurity and are struggling with recent inflation and rising costs of living. Because Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) eligibility is linked to vehicle values, which have risen, hungry Texans are losing benefits at a time when they need them most. These vehicle limits were set over 20 years ago and they are outdated and out of touch with reality. That is why I was proud to sponsor and pass HB1287 to expand SNAP food assistance to help more Texas families put food on the table.

COMPENSATING FARMERS AND RANCHERS FOR BORDER - RELATED PROPERTY DAMAGE

In Far West Texas, ranchers and farmers have suffered substantial damage from increased trafficking, smuggling, and bailouts, including damage to fences, crops, livestock, and infrastructure. To support our ranchers and farmers who are victims of this property damage, I filed and passed SB1133 to provide up to \$75 Thousand per incident to eligible ranchers and farmers.

HONORING OUR VETERANS

For many veterans, mental healthcare and the transition to civilian life is a challenge. Veterans deserve our gratitude and support for their service. The bills that I authored and passed this session will improve veterans' mental health and overall quality of life. HB1633 cuts parking fines for disabled veterans, SB544 addresses the teacher shortage by helping veterans transition to civilian teaching jobs, HB1457 improves the quality of mental healthcare provided to veterans, and HB1740 allows free state park access for Veterans & Gold Star families.

EXTENDING SAFETY NET CARE HEALTHCARE IN EL PASO

El Paso County Hospital District established the Local Provider Participation Fund (LPPF) to access critical federal dollars to deliver vital health care and hospital services for low-income Texans who don't qualify for other state or federal healthcare programs. SB849 extends the expiration date of the LPPF and ensures El Paso County hospitals will continue to access federal funds to supplement costs associated with indigent healthcare.

PROMOTING ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

West Texas is blessed with abundant natural and energy resources. This session I was proud to author and pass a comprehensive environmental protection package, comprised of SB1210, HB591, and HB4256 to promote renewable geothermal energy, reduce flaring & greenhouse gas emissions, decrease the number of abandoned oil & gas wells, remediate toxic leaking water wells in Pecos County, and help pave the way to a cleaner future while positioning West Texas as a leader in renewable energy production and environmental sustainability.

INCREASING ACCESS TO COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKERS (PROMOTORAS)

Community Health Workers (Promotoras) play a vital role in bridging underserved communities to quality healthcare. For safer and healthier communities, I sponsored and passed HB113 to elevate the work of Promotoras and make it easier to hire additional Community Health Workers.

IMPROVING LIFE-SAVING CARE FOR THE BIG BEND REGION

To help families get the proper care when they need it, I filed and passed SB1526, authorizing the Big Bend Regional Hospital District to provide EMS services and regionalize EMS operations. Additionally, SB1588 helps EMS providers hire qualified ambulance drivers, enhancing response and care.



Senator Blanco leading a press conference on the HEAL Texans Act to expand healthcare access and options.

PROMOTING PARKS & GREENSPACE IN EL PASO COUNTY

To promote the outdoors and quality of life in El Paso County, I passed SB938 and SJR32 to authorize local conservation and reclamation districts in El Paso County to issue bonds to build parks and greenspace if approved by local voters. However, voters statewide must pass Proposition 11 in the upcoming November constitutional election to give El Paso the same authority other large counties already have.

ALIGNING LOCAL ELECTIONS FOR COST SAVINGS AND BETTER TURNOUT

Holding multiple elections a year results in a significant cost to local taxpayers. SB2258 and SB1131 give the City of Fort Stockton and the El Paso Independent School District the authority to change their election dates from the May uniform election date to the November uniform election, to save local taxpayer dollars and increase voter participation.

ENHANCING CHILDCARE ACCESS

The lack of affordable access to quality childcare holds families back from achieving their full economic potential. To help expand access, especially in rural areas, I passed SB1327 to bolster the childcare workforce and coauthored and passed SB1145 to provide property tax relief to childcare facilities to alleviate growing financial burdens and help them stay open.

DISTRICT WORK & CONSTITUENT SERVICES

CÉSAR IN THE COMMUNITY



Senator Blanco hands out a free backpack at his annual Back-to-School Backpack Giveaway.

Assisting the constituents of Senate District 29 is extremely important to our office. In addition to our office's direct constituent services for various state-related issues, our office is committed to delivering appropriate community service events to provide essential support to residents in need. As of August 2023, our office has directly hosted sixteen community-based service events and community meetings this calendar year, including a free Last Will and Testament, back-to-school backpack giveaways, free tax-preparation clinics, box-fan giveaways, and participated in 30 community-led community forums/ informational sessions on topics ranging from health and mental healthcare access, small business development, economic security, border security, transportation, and legislative updates.

In the past year, along with the support of critical community partners, our office has successfully:

- Provided over **200** box fans to senior citizens in Far West Texas to beat the heat;
- Raised over **\$24,000** in monetary and in-kind donations to provide over **2,300** backpacks to 8 elementary schools in El Paso and Pecos Counties;
- Distributed **275** turkeys to needy families during Thanksgiving; and
- Collected over **5,000** toys to help less fortunate children experience the joy of Christmas.

We still have several events in the works for later this year, such as our 8th Annual Citizenship Workshop, Thanksgiving Turkey Giveaway & Canned Food Drive, a Veterans' Job Fair, and our Toys for Tots donation drive, to name a few. To stay up to date on our community service events, mobile office hours, and town halls, sign up for our SD29 newsletter using the QR code below!



Senator Blanco hands out a free box fan at his annual "Beat the Heat" Senior Box Fan Giveaway in Sierra Blanca.

How may we help you?

- ◆ Need assistance with a state agency?
- ◆ Want a flag flown for a SD29 constituent for a special occasion?
- ◆ Want to honor a constituent or business with a resolution or proclamation for an important milestone, anniversary, or special occasion?
- ◆ Have questions on a specific bill?
- ◆ Have an idea for a bill or change to state law?

To make a request, email us at District29.Blanco@senate.texas.gov or call 915-577-0029 or visit <https://senate.texas.gov/member.php?d=29>.

Senator César Blanco's Session Accolades & Recognitions

- Public Education Champion Award by Raise Your Hand Texas
- Legislative Equity Champion 2023 by Dia De La Mujer Latina
- Hunger Leadership Award by Feeding Texas
- Legislator of the Year by Texas Nurse Practitioners
- Trailblazers Legislative Award by The Family Place
- *And more!*

Sign up for news & updates by scanning the QR code!



Senator César J. Blanco proudly represents the people of Brewster, Culberson, El Paso, Hudspeth, Jeff Davis, Pecos, Presidio, and Reeves counties in the Texas Senate.

César was raised in El Paso, and after high school, he continued his family's tradition of military service in the U.S. Navy. He graduated from the University of Texas at El Paso and continued his public service by working for three Members of Congress representing El Paso and West Texas.

César was first elected in 2014 to the Texas House of Representatives. During his three terms, he delivered for El Paso by leading initiatives to strengthen our workforce, economy, and border communities, improving the quality of life and increasing economic opportunities. He led efforts to protect education benefits and expand mental health resources for veterans, rein in rising prescription drug prices, and increase oversight over border security.

ABOUT CÉSAR J. BLANCO

For his record, Texas Monthly named him one of the best legislators in Texas. In 2020, César was elected to the Texas Senate.

Senator Blanco currently serves on the distinguished Senate Committees on Health & Human Services; Natural Resources & Economic Development; Water, Agriculture, & Rural Affairs; Veteran Affairs; and Border Security. In addition, he serves as the Vice-Chairman of the Texas Senate Hispanic Caucus.

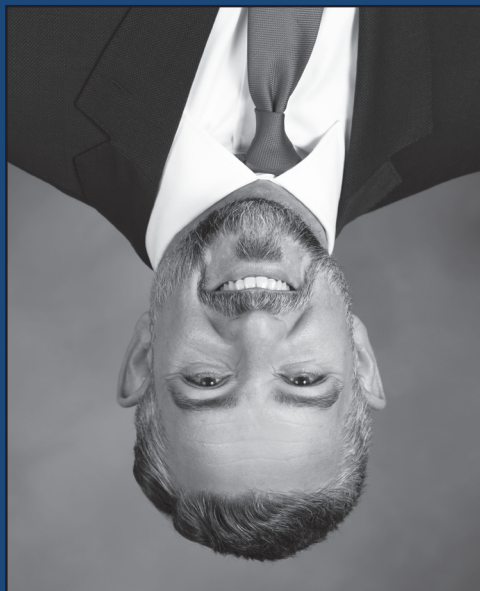
Senator Blanco is active in the community as a member of the American Legion, El Paso Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), the Rio Grande Council of Governments (RCOG), the Medical Center of Americas (MCA), National Association of Latino Elected and Appointed Officials (NALEO) Educational Fund Board of Directors, and Project Bravo Board of Directors and also serves as co-chair for the 2024 Texas Democratic Convention. César lives in El Paso with his wife Lili, and their dogs Lulu and Skipper (Skip).



Senator César J. Blanco

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SENATOR CÉSAR J. BLANCO

SENATE DISTRICT 29



Capitol Report

Proudly Serving the people of Brewster, Culberson, El Paso, Hudspeth, Jeff Davis, Pecos, Presidio, and Reeves counties in the Texas Senate.

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.