

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • DISTRICT 99  
**Charlie Geren**

**84th LEGISLATIVE REPORT**

State of Texas  
House of Representatives



Charlie Geren



Dear Friends & Neighbors,

It is an honor and a privilege to serve you in the Texas House of Representatives.

On June 1, 2015, the Texas Legislature adjourned, closing out a successful and productive 84th Regular Legislative Session. Thanks to the leadership in the Texas House and hard work amongst its members, we cut taxes by almost \$4 billion across the state, substantially increased border security, and protected Second Amendment rights. We also increased education and transportation funding and created greater transparency and accountability in government.

One of the most pressing issues facing the Legislature each session is setting the state budget for the next two years. Even with improved economic times, crafting the budget is a challenging task. The legislature passed a fiscally responsible budget and capped spending at a growth rate of less than two percent per year. We also left more than \$11 billion in the Economic Stabilization Fund (Rainy Day Fund).

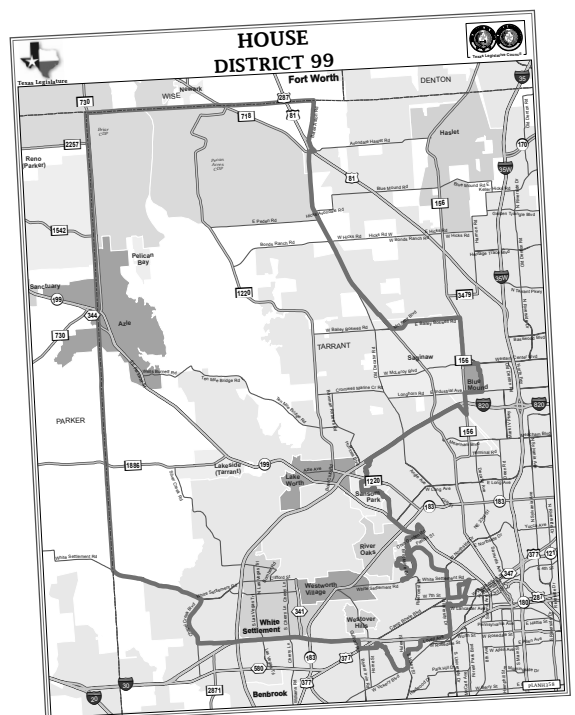
You will find specific examples in this newsletter of progress made in the areas of tax relief, border security, second amendment rights, and public health and safety, as well as a number of other notable achievements made by the legislature.

In serving District 99, I worked on a number of issues of particular interest within our community. I have met with many of you and listened to your concerns. Issues such as public education, job creation, government waste, Veterans' affairs, and transportation were top priorities for our district.

I hope you will take the time to review some of the accomplishments highlighted in this newsletter. The success we enjoyed this session is due to your continued involvement in the legislative process. Please do not hesitate to contact my office if I can be of service to you.

Sincerely,

Charlie Geren





## TEXAS BUDGET & FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

The Texas legislature accomplished the challenging task of creating a fiscally responsible budget.

### • *Balancing the Budget*

- When adjusted for population growth and inflation, the next biennium's budget increased as little as two percent per year and allows for \$4 billion in tax relief.

### • *Maintaining the Economic Stabilization Fund ("Rainy Day Fund")*

- We kept \$11 billion in the Rainy Day Fund while increasing funding to public education programs.

### • *Budget Transparency*

- H.B. 7 was passed to enhance government transparency and to ensure the state uses fees for their intended purposes. For example, the bill requires certain oil and gas taxes and fees to be deposited into the oil and gas regulation and cleanup fund instead of being deposited into general revenue.



*Rep. Geren & Rep. Goldman with students from Tarrant County*

## TAX CUTS

### • *Property Tax Cuts*

- S.B. 1 increases the homestead exemption for school district property taxes from \$15,000 to \$25,000 to reduce the burden placed on homeowners. The bill requires a constitutional amendment (Proposition 1) to be passed by the voters in the November 3, 2015 election.

### • *Margin Tax Cuts*

- H.B. 32 helps Texas keep producing jobs by reducing the franchise tax rate on Texas businesses by 25 percent and provides additional tax relief to businesses that meet certain revenue thresholds.

### • *Occupation Tax Cuts*

- H.B. 7 cut taxes by \$250 million by repealing the annual \$200 "professional tax" on a number of professions.

## BORDER SECURITY

- As a co-author of H.B. 11, I am proud to provide an additional \$800 million in funding for hundreds of new state troopers along the Texas-Mexico border to help secure the border from potential terrorists, drug cartels, and human traffickers.

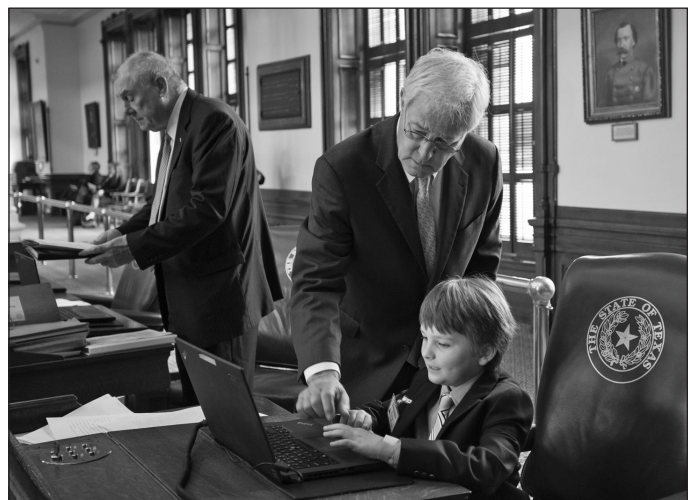
## TEXAS EDUCATION

### • *Public Education*

- The legislature fully funded classroom enrollment growth and appropriated an additional \$1.5 billion to public education through H.B. 1.
- H.B. 4, one of Governor Abbott's initiatives, focused on creating a high quality and accountable prekindergarten (pre-k) program beginning with the 2015-2016 school year. The bill provides new funding for school districts who choose to adopt new pre-k standards.
- H.B. 2804 creates a uniform A-F rating system for public schools so that parents and students can analyze their school's performance.

### • *Higher Education*

- H.B. 1 provides an additional \$1.5 billion for the next biennium for higher education and created the new Governor's University Research Initiative fund to attract top researchers to public universities.



*Rep. Geren with a page of the day on the Texas House floor*

# 84TH TEXAS LEGISLATIVE SESSION WRAP UP

## ECONOMY & BUSINESS

Along with cutting taxes, the legislature passed a number of measures to continue Texas' role as a leader in economic success.

- H.B. 2712 is a bill I authored and passed to help Texas compete with other states for large data center projects. With the passage of the bill and work of local and state leaders, Facebook broke ground on its fifth data center worldwide after selecting Fort Worth among 220 other cities. The project will bring millions of dollars in capital investment to Tarrant County and revenue for state and local governments.
- Texas is the premier state for business, and we want to keep it that way. That is why the Governor and the legislature established the University Research Initiative. The proposal enhances Texas' ability to recruit nationally-recognized researchers, which will promote economic development by helping ensure we have a highly educated world-class workforce.
- To compete with our Gulf Coast neighbors, the legislature passed S.B. 709 which will increase the efficiency of the permit process for industrial projects. Before, many would-be industrial investors could not plan projects with certainty, and as a result, would take them to neighboring states.



*Governor Abbott, Fort Worth Mayor Price, & Rep. Geren at Facebook Groundbreaking*

## TRANSPORTATION

The Texas economic climate is one of the best in the nation. In order for businesses and jobs to continue coming to our state, our transportation infrastructure must keep up with the demand for an efficient system, not to mention continuing to support current needs.

- To address this demand, we ended gas tax diversions and passed S.J.R. 5 to allow for a stable revenue source to address the state's transportation needs without raising taxes or fees. The resolution also prevents the use of these funds for toll roads.



*Rep. Geren receiving an award*

## MILITARY AND VETERANS

One of the greatest assets to our country is the men and women who serve our nation. We passed a number of measures to address issues facing the 1.7 million veterans in our state.

### • *Spousal Property Tax Exemptions*

- Prior to this legislative session, the surviving spouse of a totally disabled veteran could be exempt from residential property tax if the veteran died after January 1, 2010. If the disabled veteran died prior to that date, the spouse was not exempt. H.J.R. 75 and H.B. 992 extend the current exemption to surviving spouses of totally disabled veterans who died prior to the date above.

### • *Veteran's Mental Health*

- S.B. 55 creates a public-private partnership grant program which addresses mental health needs for Texas veterans and their families.
- H.B. 19 strengthens the Military Veteran Peer Network by enhancing mental health intervention services for veterans. It requires state agencies to establish preventative family crisis support services for veterans and military families and supports local collaboration of both mental health services and preventive family crisis support services.





• ***Veterans Employment***

- S.B. 805 authorizes the direct hiring of veterans through the Texas Workforce Commission’s automated system, requires agencies to increase the number of veterans in an agency’s interview pool, and requires large agencies to have a designated Veteran Employment Liaison.
- H.B. 2014 allows experience obtained through military service to satisfy requirements needed for a certification to teach career and technology education classes in public schools.
- S.B. 807 waives the state license application and examination fees for military members, veterans, and their spouses.

• ***Veteran Outreach Effort***

- S.B. 1308 requires the Texas Department of Public Safety to provide veterans who receive driver licenses an informational paper about veteran services provided by Texas.

• ***Donating Opportunities to Veterans***

- H.B. 3710 (Concealed Handgun License) and H.B. 1584 (Hunting & Fishing License) allow Texans to donate to the Fund for Veterans’ Assistance when applying for these licenses.

## GOVERNMENT REFORM & TRANSPARENCY

The legislature passed a series of reforms to increase transparency throughout governmental and political processes.

- H.B. 15 and H.B. 20 provide new protections for taxpayers when state agencies hire private contractors to carry out services. The reforms will increase oversight of state agencies in the contracting process and provide new standards, transparency and accountability to ensure that taxpayer dollars are being used appropriately.



*Lt. Governor Patrick & Rep. Geren  
in Lt. Governor’s Office*

## FAMILY AND FREEDOM

• ***2nd Amendment Rights***

- H.B. 910 allows background-checked concealed handgun license holders to openly carry handguns on or after January 1, 2016. The legislation respects the rights of private property owners to prevent or restrict the carrying of a handgun on their premises.

• ***Pro-Life***

- H.B. 3994 was passed and is known as the “Judicial Bypass bill”. It allows judges to ask more substantial, relevant, and considerate questions of a minor before they go through an abortion. The bill also extends the date and time by which a court is required to rule on an application and by which an appellate court is required to rule on an appeal.

• ***Constitutional Right to Hunt, Fish, & Harvest Wildlife***

- S.J.R. 22 is a constitutional amendment that secures Texans’ right to hunt, fish, and harvest wildlife if approved by voters in the November 3, 2015 election.

• ***Death Benefits for Spouses of First Responders Killed in Line of Duty***

- Under previous state law, if the surviving spouse of a first responder remarried, they would lose certain death benefits. I authored H.B. 1094 to provide lifetime benefits to surviving spouses of members of law enforcement, fire and other first responders who die in the line of duty, even if the surviving spouse remarries. These first responders paid the ultimate sacrifice and their surviving spouses should not be penalized for remarrying.



*Governor Abbott & Rep. Geren with families of  
fallen first responders at H.B. 1094 Bill Signing*

## FREEDOM OF RELIGION

### • *Pastor Protection Act*

- S.B. 2065 protects pastors from lawsuits or criminal prosecution if they refuse to perform marriages that violate their religious beliefs.



*Representative Geren During Opening Prayer*

## PROPERTY RIGHTS

- S.B. 1812 was a bill I sponsored that creates a continuous reporting process for entities that are granted eminent domain authority. A webpage on the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts' website will allow the public to look up any entity's contact information, a list of statutes on which an entity bases its eminent domain authority, and the county/counties where the entity operates and exercises its eminent domain authority.

## WATER

Even with the increasing rainfall, Texas needs a variety of water sources for our state's increasing population and agricultural needs.

- H.B. 2031 streamlines the regulatory process for marine seawater desalination, the process of removing salt and minerals from seawater. The Gulf of Mexico could be a new source of water for our state.

## GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY & ETHICS

### • *Protection of State Employee Identification*

- With the recent theft of millions of federal employees' personal data, we need to do more to protect the public servants of this state. I authored H.B. 1443 to protect the confidentiality of our state employees by requiring the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts to issue every employee a Texas Identification Number that is not based on their Social Security number.

## OTHER BILLS OF LOCAL INTEREST

I authored a variety of bills during the 84th Legislative Session. Here are a few of them that relate directly to our area:

### • *Canine Encounter Training for Peace Officers*

- A number of constituents came to me after incidents across the state of fatal dog shootings by peace officers encountering unfamiliar dogs. I joint authored H.B. 593 and worked closely with affected dog owners and police organizations to create a statewide canine encounter training program so that peace officers can learn nonlethal and humane methods for dealing with dogs.

### • *Texas Farm & Ranch Lands Conservation Program*

- This program was created in 2005 to provide grants to landowners in order for the state to purchase voluntary conservation easements. The program has never received an appropriation but with the passage of H.B. 1925, the program will receive funding and will be moved from the Texas General Land Office to the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department which has a more direct role in the conservation of our state's land and waters.

### • *Vehicle Storage Facilities (Tow Trucks)*

- After hearing numerous concerns from constituents about tow truck companies refusing to accept certain common forms of payments after their automobile was towed, I passed H.B. 804. The bill protects consumers by requiring tow companies to accept cash, debit and credit cards for charges associated with the tow of a vehicle.



*Rep. Geren & Rep. Goldman recognizing constituents in the Texas House gallery*

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## 84TH LEGISLATIVE REPORT

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*Rep. Geren,  
 Fort Worth Mayor Price  
 & Tarrant County  
 Legislators & Guest*