

# Senator Jane Nelson

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## A BIRD'S EYE VIEW OF THE TEXAS SENATE

Article by Senator Jane Nelson

If you are like me, you have probably spent some time in recent days reflecting on the year that just passed and making plans for the new one that is just beginning. Among my top goals for 2008 is to help Republicans become more informed and involved in our discussions here at the State Capitol.

With that in mind, I am happy to have been asked to serve as our TFRW liaison to the Texas Senate for 2008. In the weeks and months ahead, I will be alerting TFRW to issues before the Senate that affect our families, our businesses, our communities and our Party.

Additionally, I want to help TFRW members become experts on tracking issues before the Legislature. If you would like to receive my handout on advocating issues before the Legislature, e-mail me at [jane@janenelson.org](mailto:jane@janenelson.org). Or read on for a quick view into my home away from home -- the Texas Senate.

It's been said that the Texas Senate is the most deliberative body on the planet because its rules make it necessary to legislate through consensus. In order for any bill to be considered, the presiding officer, our lieutenant governor, must first recognize the Senator carrying it. Then two-thirds of the members present must consent to bringing it up for consideration.

If all 31 Senators are present, 21 members must vote "yes" for an issue to advance. During my first legislative session, I was one of 9 Republicans. It was miserable. Every day we were steamrolled. As our numbers grew, the two-thirds rule helped us stop bad legislation.

Now that we are in the majority, it is more commonly used by the other side. There are 11 Democrats in the Senate -- just enough to serve as a blockade. Despite the rule, we have been successful in bringing along a Democrat or two on key issues such as reducing frivolous medical lawsuits and strengthening marriage.

If we can pick up one more seat in November, we can ensure passage of our key issues. However, this is not the only way we can succeed. TFRW members are movers and shakers in every community. We are business owners, teachers, civic leaders and super volunteers whose influence is respected.

We have a presence in all 31 Senate districts, even those represented by Democrats. Every Senator should be hearing from us, individually and collectively, on our priority issues.

Now is a perfect time to open up a dialogue with your Senator. According to the Texas Constitution, the Legislature meets for 140 days in odd-numbered years. We are currently in the interim period and will not reconvene until January 2009.

During the interim, legislators work on their agendas and glean legislative ideas from their constituents. Additionally, Senate committees will soon receive interim assignments, which will require holding public hearings on a wide range of issues.

The best resource for following the Texas Senate is our web site: [www.senate.state.tx.us](http://www.senate.state.tx.us). Here you can read bios on each Senator, find out who serves on each Committee, watch live legislative hearings, tune into press conferences and sift through the Senate journal, chronicling how we vote on the issues.

If there is a particular committee whose work you wish to track, you can sign up to be notified via email when hearing dates and formats are set by visiting the Legislature online at [www.capitol.state.tx.us](http://www.capitol.state.tx.us).

TFRW has long been recognized as a force in Texas elections. Let's resolve in 2008 to make TFRW a success not only at the ballot box, but also under the dome of our state capitol.