



SENATOR JANE NELSON

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Guide to the Texas Legislature

The Texas Legislature meets in regular session for 140 days in every odd-numbered year, in accordance with the Texas Constitution. The framers envisioned a citizen legislature that would adhere to the principles of limited government, meeting for a short period of time in order to pass a 2-year budget, consider legislative revisions and then go home to live and work under the laws they pass.

The governor has the authority to call the Legislature into a special session that can last no longer than 30 days. Only items specified by the governor may be considered in a special session.

The next regular session of the Texas Legislature will begin Jan 13, 2009 and conclude June 1, 2009.

Bill Tracking

Texas Legislature Online - www.capitol.state.tx.us
Texas Senate Online - www.senate.state.tx.us
Bill Status Hotline - 1-877-824-7038
E-mail notification - www.capitol.state.tx.us (click on My TLO)

Tips for Communicating With Legislators

Every office handles communication from citizens differently. Some offices do not accept e-mail. Some do not respond until after the legislative session. One rule is true throughout the Legislature. Legislative courtesy requires that each legislator be allowed to assist their own constituents. Translation: most likely you will only receive responses from the Senator and Representative who represent your area. However, if you simply want to drop a note of encouragement, you may contact any legislator in the following manner:

Texas State Senators
The Honorable (first, last)
P.O. Box 12068
Austin, TX 78711
first.last@senate.state.tx.us

Texas State Representatives
The Honorable (first, last)
P.O. Box 2910
Austin, TX 78768
first.last@house.state.tx.us

Tips for Communicating with Senator Nelson

Senator Nelson personally reads every e-mail, fax, letter and phone message that comes into her office. However, responses are prioritized for residents of Senate District 12 who request a response. Even though correspondence has doubled in each session in which she has served, Senator Nelson responds to all constituents. While some members do not accept e-mail due to the large amount of spam and form letters, Senator Nelson prefers e-mail correspondence because it is the quickest way to receive input from constituents. To ensure that your e-mail is given the highest degree of importance, please end every e-mail with your name, home address and identify yourself as a constituent in Senate District 12.

Getting Your Point Across

Tips on Advocating Issues Before the Legislature

Most lawmakers have at least one office in their district and keep regular office hours. In addition, legislators have offices at the Capitol in Austin. However, predicting a legislator's availability is difficult when the Legislature is in session. Most members serve on multiple committees. Sometimes those meetings occur simultaneously, and they literally have to be two places at once. However, if they know their constituents have traveled to the Capitol, they will make every effort to meet personally or arrange a meeting with staff.

When you come to Austin or call a legislative office or send a letter, fax or email, remember to contact both of your incumbents -- State Senator and State Representative. (Click on "Who Represents Me" at www.capitol.state.tx.us). Following are a few tips on maximizing the impact of your comments on issues before the Legislature:

- **Identify yourself.** Tell legislators that you are a constituent and/or if you voted for them. Tell them if you have family, social, business, or political ties or if you share their philosophy on certain issues.
- **Be courteous.** The old adage that sugar works better than vinegar is very true at the Capitol. Legislators respond to constructive ideas and positive solutions. Even when you strongly disagree with their position, remember not to lose your temper and alienate a legislator. You may need to work with him or her on other issues.
- **Be clear.** It is important to say what you want legislators to do. Specify whether you want them to introduce a bill, offer an amendment or vote a certain way on pending legislation. If you want a response, ask for one. Give deadlines if the matter is urgent.
- **Be firm.** Senate districts include more than 600,000 people, and House districts include roughly 200,000. The overwhelming amount of meeting requests makes it difficult to accommodate everyone. So when you get that face-to-face meeting, make it count.
- **Be brief.** Making clear, concise points creates a strong impression. Good ideas can get lost in a laundry list.
- **Be personal.** Form letters are ineffective. Speak from the heart or from personal experience.
- **Present a one-page summary.** Legislators love these. A typed guide helps them remember your priorities. It also allows staff to enter your priorities into bill tracking systems. A bill track is often the last item a legislator reads before casting his or her vote.
- **Use a local angle.** Legislators respond to information about how a bill will positively or negatively affect the community.
- **Keep in touch.** Communicate when legislators are out of session as well as when they are in session. Often times legislators have more time to digest your comments during the interim period.
- **Offer to be a resource.** If you have specific skills or background relating to legislation, let legislators know. They may call for information beyond the talking points presented by Austin-based professional or interest groups.
- **Recognize effort.** So often legislators only hear from constituents when they are angry. When they act in ways you appreciate, send a positive message. It helps to reinforce that they made the right decision.