



## TOMMY WILLIAMS

Texas State Senator  
District 4

Committees:  
Finance, Chair  
Administration  
Open Government  
State Affairs

*e-Message from Senator Tommy Williams  
10.25.13*

***Except for my faith and my family, nothing has meant more to me than the opportunity to represent the wonderful people of Southeast Texas in the state Legislature for the past 16 plus years.***

***Tommy Williams***

This message marks my final communication with you as today I have delivered to Gov. Rick Perry my formal resignation as a member of the Texas Senate.

It's a bittersweet time as I write these farewell comments from my Senate District 4 office. I have enjoyed representing you in both the Texas House and Texas Senate, but it's time for me now to move on. I do so filled with extraordinary gratitude for the opportunity, and incredible good fortune I've had to have so many great people working for me. Their support has enabled me to serve my constituents and the State of Texas.

Before updating you on the transition, I want to share some of the legislative highlights since arriving in the Capitol as a young House member in 1997.

I'm proud of what we have accomplished together over the years. Our state's Rainy Day Fund, which serves as a savings account, amounted to only \$7 million when I joined the Texas Senate 10 years ago. That fund will have more than \$7.5 billion when lawmakers open the 2015 legislative session. We began the new fiscal year with over \$2 billion in our general revenue fund. In 2003, my first session in the Texas Senate, our general revenue was basically bumping along pretty close to zero. During this last decade I've had a seat at the table working to improve our state's financial condition. I'm proud to say we now have the top credit rating from every credit rating agency.

The change in financial shape in large part is because our Texas businesses have been so successful. We've worked hard to create an environment where business can be successful. We've also had tremendous population growth, with over 1,200 people moving to Texas every day since 2000.

The challenge facing us now and in the future is to modernize our infrastructure so it can accommodate our present needs and continued growth. Yes, we have some BIG challenges, and it's imperative we invest in water, transportation, public and higher education if we are to prepare Texas for the future.

Looking back, here are a few highlights as I review my legislative career in the Texas House and Texas Senate:

**1997:** During my freshman session in the Texas House, I was able to pass HB 2526 dealing with attorney ad litem in cases affecting a parent/child relationship. Before this bill passed into law, an attorney representing a child involving an effort to terminate the parental/child relationship was not

required to even meet the child. Now, the attorney must minimally meet and interview the child.

One of the themes guiding my approach in public life is we must protect people who can't protect themselves.

**1999:** HB 2761 established a Regional Development Agreement, which allowed The Woodlands and the City of Houston to enter into a moratorium on annexation in order to study various forms of governance.

**2001:** In my final term in the state House, I passed HB 1209 dealing with the uncorroborated testimony of victims in sexual assault cases involving victims who were dependent on the person assaulting them. This included elderly people, young children and persons with intellectual disabilities. These people had no way to make an out-cry because they were dependent on the people who were abusing them. Again, we must protect people who cannot help themselves.

**2003:** I won a seat on the coveted Senate Finance Committee during my first term in the Texas Senate. During that first term I spent a lot of time learning the budgeting process. I passed SB 837, which increased the penalty for aggravated sexual assault of an elderly or disabled person. SB 541 established "Consumer Choice" insurance plans, which helped lower health insurance premiums. I also passed SB 15, which initiated regulations for all abortion clinics, and established a waiting period. Women seeking an abortion have the right to know about fetal development. The bill also required any abortion after the 16th week to take place in an ambulatory surgical center.

As a life-long, pro-life supporter, I consider this legislation a watershed moment in our efforts. I would have preferred stronger measures in 2003 but I've learned through experience the legislative process takes time. . . sometimes small steps are required in order to reach the goal.

**2005:** We spent much of the time dealing with school funding issues. I was Senate sponsor of HB 2, which dedicated new taxes to lower school property taxes - from a maximum of \$1.50 to \$1 per \$100 property valuation.

I also passed SB 18, our "truth in taxation" bill, and other legislation establishing an arbitration process for taxpayers contesting property values. SB 1485 provided an exemption for public disclosure of Social Security numbers in public documents, allowing this sensitive information to be redacted from open record requests.

**2007:** SB 1012 and HB 4109 marked the first time since establishment of the Texas Municipal Code that a community in the extra territorial jurisdiction of a home rule city avoided annexation. This was huge. The legislation allowed The Woodlands to avoid annexation by Houston and to determine their own form of governance.

That same year I earned a spot on *Texas Monthly* magazine's "Ten Best Legislators" list after passing SB 792, which provided local communities greater control of transportation projects. It was important to give local communities primacy over their transportation projects and it has resulted in much better collaboration between local and state transportation officials.

SB 735 repealed the telecommunication infrastructure tax. I worked with Rep. Joe Straus to eliminate this tax, which has been one of the larger tax cuts. This tax appeared on everyone's monthly bill, and removing it remains a really big deal.

SB 1879 became the first bill in a package aimed at regulating pain-management clinics and addressing illegal prescription drug abuse. (I've continued to work on this issue throughout my career.)

SB 244, the so-called "Darth Vader" bill, allowed for the temporary sealing of search warrant affidavits, which law enforcement supported and print media opposed. This bill was influenced by a murder of two young women in Montgomery County followed by an attempt from the *Houston Chronicle* to obtain the search warrant affidavit. The information allowed the suspect to hose down the interior of his pickup truck to wash away evidence. This legislation allows a judge to seal the affidavit to protect details temporarily, until law enforcement has the opportunity to execute the search warrant.

**2009:** This session marked my most productive as an elected official. At the end of the session I had 57 bills on the governor's desk, ranking me 10th among 181 legislators. I also served on 51 conference committees, including the one responsible for the state budget. A conference committee involves 5 members from each chamber appointed to reconcile differences in similar legislation. The conference committee develops a final version for the Senate and House to consider in an up-or-down vote.

I was involved in drafting the Health and Human Services portion of the budget, which represents 33 percent of the state budget.

I also served as Chair of the Senate Administration Committee, which oversees purchasing and personnel for some 600 central staff employees; printing, enrolling and engrossing of all legislation; and coordination between the Secretary of the Senate, Senate parliamentarian, lieutenant governor in addition to communications with the state House of Representatives. This committee also controls the local and uncontested bill calendar. We reviewed over 1,600 bills and determined which should go to the floor for full debate. Two-thirds of all bills which end up on the Governor's desk pass through this committee.

The first bill in this session passed and signed into law was SB 769, relating to the recovery of system restoration costs for electric utilities after a natural disaster. This legislation saved my constituents more than \$322 million by reducing the financing cost of storm recovery expenses.

I was primary author or senate sponsor of nine other pieces of legislation affecting property tax reform and appraisal reform. The Texas Taxpayers & Research Association called the package the "single largest improvement in the Texas property tax system in nearly 30 years."

**2011:** I served as chairman of the Senate Transportation and Homeland Security Committee in a session dominated by a massive budget shortfall because of the national recession. I passed 56 bills to the governor's desk

and served on 22 conference committees, including the committee responsible for crafting the final state budget.

SB 20 created the Texas Clean Transportation Triangle supporting the development of more than 60 new natural gas refueling stations to reduce emissions and to advance energy independence by using natural gas. The triangle connects Houston, San Antonio, Austin and the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

SB 158 addressed fraudulent or unlawfully obtaining, delivering, dispensing, distributing or diverting of controlled substances.

**2013:** The premiere highlight of my legislative career came when Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst appointed me Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee. Once again, *Texas Monthly* named me one of the “Top Ten” legislators.

It was a great honor to lead the Texas Senate in budget negotiations. This budget will fund our state's priorities, provide significant tax relief, and hold future budget growth below our anticipated population plus inflation growth.

Here's what we did.

We dramatically improved equity in the funding of our public schools.

We also upgraded our graduate medical education program which will allow our Texas-educated doctors to remain in Texas rather than exporting their education and practices to other states. Texas does not have a sufficient

number of physicians to adequately serve her population, and funding more graduate medical slots will significantly address this shortage.

We secured the Teacher Retirement System so it can be actuarially sound and we made good progress on the state Employee Retirement System's financial integrity.

We increased budget transparency by reducing our reliance on dedicated funds to balance our state budget.

We increased transportation funding.

We increased funding for border security operation.

We improved funding for our community and technical college systems and implemented new funding formulas.

We significantly increased funding for mental health programs across all agencies including special services for our returning veterans.

I was the author or sponsor of 63 bills sent to the governor and also SJR 1 – the constitutional amendment authorizing the transfer of \$2 billion from the Rainy Day Fund to the State Water Implementation Fund for Texas, subject to voter approval.

I also won unanimous Senate support for SB 21, which will require certain applicants for unemployment benefits to take a drug test. The law, which takes effect on Feb. 1, 2014, will help discourage Texans from using illegal



drugs. Applicants for unemployment benefits must be ready and able to go to work.

My resignation will trigger a special election to fill the unexpired portion of my term, which runs through 2016. Gov. Rick Perry will call the special election.

Until a successor is chosen to represent Southeast Texas in the state Senate, much of my Senate staff will stay on board to help serve the people of the district. I am able to do this because we are not in a legislative session, and it's not likely that a special legislative session will be called next year.

Senate staff will continue to respond to constituent inquiries and will continue to serve the people of Senate District 4.

I wish I could thank each of you for the opportunity you've given me to represent our region in Austin. You placed your trust and confidence in me, and it is something I will always remember. I took on this responsibility with enthusiasm, and it has truly been my greatest honor.

May God always bless you and your family, and may He continue to bless Texas!

*Tommy*