



# Tommy Williams

## Texas Senator

State Senate  
District 4  
Chambers  
Harris\*  
Jefferson\*  
Liberty  
Montgomery\*  
Orange  
\*Partial County



COMMITTEES:  
ADMINISTRATION, CHAIR  
FINANCE  
EDUCATION  
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS & TRADE

### TOMMY WILLIAMS

TEXAS STATE SENATOR  
DISTRICT 4

*Dear Friends,*

I hope you and your families are doing well and enjoyed the summer.

As you may know, the 81st Regular session of the Texas Legislature ended in June. Highlights include passing:

- ★ a state budget which meets the needs of our growing state by funding essential services;
- ★ the most significant taxpayer appraisal reform protections in over 30 years;
- ★ a 35% increase in funding for college financial aid;
- ★ regulation of pain management clinics;
- ★ millions in state funding for hurricane relief measures;
- ★ legislation which provides state and local law enforcement agencies with additional tools to combat the threat of transnational gangs;
- ★ continuing tax cuts and spending taxpayer dollars responsibly; and
- ★ new legislation which lowers the tax burden for over 40,000 small businesses across the state.

This session was very busy for me as well. We sent 57 bills to Governor Perry (placing me in the Top Ten of Legislators in bills passed). I also served on 51 conference committees including the most important budget conference committee. Only one other member of the Legislature served on more conference committees.

This session I also served as Chairman of the Senate Administration Committee. My committee was the final stop for legislation headed for the local and uncontested calendar—a legislative fast track. Over one thousand six hundred (1,600) bills were reviewed and passed by the Senate Administration Committee this session. Thanks to the hard work of my staff and committee members **no controversial legislation reached the local and uncontested calendar**. In fact, roughly two-thirds of all bills sent to the Governor this session passed through my committee.

Since 2003, it has been my honor to serve you in the Texas State Senate. I look forward to visiting with you and your family as I travel around the district. Also, I strongly encourage you, your family, and friends to visit my capitol office any time. We can also arrange individual and group capitol tours if notified in advance of your visit.

Please take a minute to read through this legislative report and feel free to contact me with any questions, comments, or concerns.

Sincerely,

Tommy Williams

**P.S. If you would like to subscribe to my “E-Newsletter,” please visit [www.williams.senate.state.tx.us](http://www.williams.senate.state.tx.us) to register.**

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# THE 81ST LEGISLATURE HIGHLIGHTS

## *No Tax Increase Balanced Budget*

For the second legislative session in a row, Tommy served on the Finance Committee and the Budget Conference Committee where the budget was crafted. Tommy ensured state spending was kept in check, the budget was balanced, and taxes were not increased.

The \$183 billion two-year budget reflects the current economy by holding spending growth at two percent, while still funding essential state services. The budget also reflects continuing the one-third cut in local school property taxes approved by voters in 2007.



*Tommy, a CPA, spent days combing through the state's balance sheets while serving on the state budget conference committee.*

## *Taxpayer Watchdog*

Protecting taxpayers from potential market turmoil was one of Tommy's top priorities during the 81st legislative session, and he made sure the state's Rainy Day Fund was not touched. Additionally, Tommy resisted federal unemployment money tied to the federal stimulus, which would have been extremely costly for Texas employers, and he championed a major tax cut expansion for small businesses under the state's business gross receipts tax.

During these difficult economic times, approximately 40,000 small businesses will benefit from increasing the state's business tax exemption from \$300,000 to \$1 million for the first year, and then back to \$600,000 in later years.

## *Education Funding and Accountability*

Public and higher education will see an increase in state funding in the budget Tommy helped craft. Public school teachers will once again see a pay raise for their hard work and dedication, and public schools will receive an increase of \$1.9 billion. Also, funding for college financial aid increased 35%, which will serve approximately 125,000 more students.

Tommy also supported legislation to reform public school accountability. The legislation requires students to focus on English language arts, math, science, and social studies. Students who master these core skills will be better prepared for college and the workforce. The reforms also add flexibility for students who wish to take more career and technology courses.

## *Property Tax Appraisal Reform*



*Tommy explains why his package of Property Tax Appraisal Reform bills is needed.*

*"...You [Tommy] have provided such leadership to our state, particularly in regard to the improvement of our property tax system. This past session your work on reforming the way that system operates should lead to the largest improvement in it in nearly 30 years."*

*Source: Texas Taxpayers & Research Association*

During the interim, Tommy chaired the Senate Subcommittee on Property Appraisal and Revenue Caps, which was charged with reviewing the property tax appraisal system and recommending reforms. This session, Tommy authored and passed a sweeping package of legislation aimed at protecting property taxpayers. Some of the bills include:

- ★ **HB 3613** - Provides that land of a residence homestead may *not* be appraised based on the highest and best use of the property and must be appraised as a residence. This bill was filed in response to residence homesteads being appraised based on what the land would be sold for if it were converted to commercial property. It also allows 100% disabled veterans to be exempt from paying property taxes.
- ★ **HJR 36** - This constitutional amendment gives the state direct authority to enforce uniform appraisal standards and procedures, rather than requiring administrative and judicial enforcement to originate in the county where the tax is imposed. This amendment goes to the voters for approval on November 3, 2009.
- ★ **SB 771** - Clarifies appraisal standards for the use of comparable sales, and requires chief appraisers to present substantial evidence for increasing the appraised value of property whose value was reduced on appeal in the prior year.

# THE 81ST LEGISLATURE HIGHLIGHTS



In the wake of Hurricane Ike, Tommy took action to protect those who suffered from its destruction.

## *Texas Windstorm Insurance Reform and Natural Disaster Relief*

With the session coming on the heels of Hurricane Ike, Tommy set out to ensure his constituents would be protected and treated fairly under the Texas Windstorm Insurance Association (TWIA). As a lead negotiator, he helped prevent arbitrary surcharges and rate spikes for customers of TWIA. Together with other coastal members, Tommy stood firmly opposed to early versions of the bill which increased rates up to 80 percent, making windstorm insurance unaffordable to coastal residents.

Tommy was proud to author legislation to reduce the financial impact on electricity customers when utility companies rebuild or restore service following hurricanes and other natural disasters. His bill allows utilities to issue low-cost bonds to recover restoration costs, providing utilities and customers a cost-saving alternative to their current options. Projected savings from using the financing mechanism provided for by the bill is \$200 million or more for each company's customers.

## *Prescription Drug Abuse*

One of Tommy's priorities this session was cracking down on the availability of prescription drugs and tracking those who engage in abusive practices. Tommy wrote a bill which requires pain management clinics to be certified by the Texas Medical Board and gives the

Board needed tools to investigate and regulate these clinics. The clinics will also be required to be owned and operated by a licensed physician. This legislation will increase pain management clinic accountability, and will significantly reduce the accessibility of "pill mills" to individuals who intentionally abuse controlled substances.

## *Border Drug Cartels & Illegal Gangs*

With border drug cartels and illegal gangs spreading their reach ever further into Texas, Tommy decided to fight back this session. Thanks to legislation he supported, the state will have new tools at its disposal to crack down on illegal activities and help keep violence from spilling over the border. Law enforcement may now prosecute firearms smuggling as a third degree felony. As a member of the Senate Finance Committee, Tommy diligently worked to increase and improve funding for various border security measures, including the placement of an additional 56 state troopers and 15 game wardens in the border region.



## *Fighting Voter Fraud*

*Tommy fought long and hard to get a Photo Voter ID bill passed in the Texas Senate.*

***"70% of Texans agree with requiring voters to present photo voter identification."***

Source: June 2009 University of Texas Government Department Statewide Survey of Texas Public Opinion

Tommy led the successful effort which allowed the Photo Voter ID bill to be brought to a vote and passed in the Texas Senate. It was Tommy who, after thoroughly researching parliamentary procedure, engineered the designation of Voter ID as a special order calendar item. Throughout the 24-hour-long hearing, and later floor debate, Tommy questioned witnesses and passionately argued that Voter ID is necessary in a democracy to prevent the dilution of legitimate votes. Unfortunately, the bill did not receive a floor vote in the Texas House of Representatives.

## THE TEXAS FLAG

***Honor the Texas Flag: I pledge allegiance to thee, Texas, one state under God, one and indivisible.***

### *Flying the Texas Flag*

When flown out-of-doors, the Texas flag must be on a flagpole or staff at least two and one half times as long as the flag. It should not be unfurled earlier than sunrise and should not be left out in the rain, snow, or inclement weather. It should be flown with the white stripe at the uppermost except in case of distress.

When the flag is displayed horizontally against a wall, the blue field should be at the flag's own right (observer's left). When the state flag is displayed vertically against the wall, the blue stripe should be above the white and red stripes and the white stripe should be to the flag's own right (observer's left). The state flag is displayed at all Texas public schools during regular school days and carried with pride in most state holiday parades.

### *How to Purchase a Texas Flag*

If you wish to purchase a Texas flag that has been flown over the State Capitol, please contact one of my offices and my staff will be happy to assist you.

The Texas Senate offers the following flags to choose from:

3x5 Nylon: \$15.25

3x5 Cotton: \$20.25

4x6 Nylon: \$22.00

4x6 Cotton: \$29.55

## OF LOCAL INTEREST

### Local Priorities

Every session Tommy makes sure local district concerns are addressed. This session was no exception. He passed legislation to:

- Ensure the Lamar Institute of Technology is recognized as an independent institution for the purposes of accreditation;
- Protect and continue the operations of the Devers Canal System (which rice farmers in Chambers and Liberty Counties rely on for their water supply) by placing it under the management of the Lower Neches Valley Authority; and
- Further consolidate powers of The Woodlands Homeowners Association into The Woodlands Township by enforcing covenants, giving the Township the right to vote on the Montgomery County Appraisal District Board of Directors, removing METRO's taxing authority from the Harris County portion of The Woodlands, and requiring a vote of the people to become a municipality.

In addition, Tommy ensured the following items were included in the state budget:

- A provision requiring the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality to inspect the San Jacinto River twice-a-year by helicopter. This will protect the San Jacinto River and local area drinking water supplies from pollution arising from aggregate operations;
- \$10 million for the purchase of seatbelts for school busses; and
- Funding in the state's supplemental appropriations bill to help Senate District 4 recover from Hurricane Ike, including over \$6 million for local higher education institutions, \$16 million for debris removal, and \$62 million appropriated to the Governor's Office to help school districts rebuild and provide other disaster relief.



Tommy, Sen. Huffman, and Lt. Governor Dewhurst with local chamber officials as they are recognized on the Texas Senate floor on Golden Triangle Days.

### Be Prepared for Hurricane Season

Hurricane season officially started June 1 and lasts through November 30. If you live along the coast, keep your gas tank full and ensure you have a family plan, survival kit and evacuation maps. If state or local officials order an evacuation - leave immediately! Also, be sure your home is secure and take pets, medicines, and all official documents you might need. Unless you are physically unable to evacuate, we urge you to listen and obey evacuation orders. Remember, the longer you

wait, the more likely you will be stuck in evacuation traffic. If you are elderly or disabled and need evacuation assistance, please call **2-1-1**. For more detailed information go to [www.txdot.gov/travel/hurricane.htm](http://www.txdot.gov/travel/hurricane.htm), or call Tommy's office for information.



Constituents visit the Capitol for Chambers County Day.

### Tribute to Fallen Soldiers of Senate District 4

This section is dedicated to those who made the ultimate sacrifice - their lives. No words can properly express our gratitude to these fallen soldiers and their families.

William M. Amundson, Jr., Cpl.  
Andrew T. Arnold, CWO  
Kamisha J. Block, Spc.  
Hoby F. Bradfield, Jr., Spc.  
Jason L. Brown, Staff Sgt.  
Gary L. Collins, Staff Sgt.  
Dustin R. Donica, Spc.  
Jerry M. Durbin, Jr., Staff Sgt.  
Zachary R. Endsley, Pfc.  
Shane L. Goldman, Pfc.  
Ryan P. Green, Sgt.  
Cory C. Kusters, Spc.  
Fred L. Maciel, Lance Cpl.  
Sidney J. Marceaux, Jr., Chaplain (Col.)  
Robert A. Martinez, Lance Cpl.  
William B. Meeuwsen, Sgt.  
Reyes Ramirez, Sgt.  
Edward C. Reynolds, Jr., Staff Sgt.  
Wesley Riggs, Pfc.  
Russell L. Slay, Sgt.  
John R. Stalvey, Cpl.  
Shaun P. Tousha, Sgt.  
Michael B. Wafford, Lance Cpl.  
Benjamin D. Williams, Staff Sgt.  
Luke C. Yepsen, Lance Cpl.



Tommy with local chamber officials as they are recognized on the Texas Senate floor on Montgomery County Day.

# THE 81ST LEGISLATURE, FIRST CALLED SESSION

The Texas Constitution authorizes the Governor to bring legislators back to Austin for a Special Session and is responsible for setting the agenda, also known as the "call." The First-Called Special Session of the 81st Legislature convened July 1 and adjourned on July 2. It was limited to three agenda items, and the Legislature took swift action to pass legislation ensuring the state can issue \$2 billion in voter approved bonds

to build roads and keeping open some of our most critical agencies, including the Texas Department of Transportation and the Texas Department of Insurance. However, legislation extending TxDOT's authority to build toll roads through public-private partnerships did not enjoy much support and was not addressed by either the House or the Senate.

## ABOUT SENATOR WILLIAMS



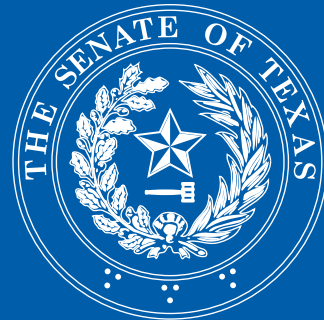
*Tommy and his wife Marsha during the last days of the session.*

Senator Tommy Williams brings a strong record of business achievements, community involvement, and public service to the people of Southeast Texas. Tommy served in the Texas House of Representatives for three terms, and in November 2002, Texans showed their confidence once again by electing him to the Texas Senate with 64% of the vote, and re-electing him to the Texas Senate in 2004 and 2008. He is a member of the Texas Society of CPAs, an outspoken advocate for Texas taxpayers, and a recognized and respected leader in budgetary issues.

Tommy is a life-long Texan. He was born in Marshall, Texas and attended schools in the Marshall Independent School District. After graduating from Texas A & M with a BBA in Accounting, he began a career in industry and public accounting prior to entering the insurance and financial services field in 1983. He now serves as President of Woodforest Financial Services, an affiliate of Woodforest National Bank.

As a Texas Senator, Tommy serves as Chairman of the Senate Administration Committee and as a member on the Senate Finance Committee, Education Committee, and International Relations & Trade Committee. By special appointment of Lt. Gov. Dewhurst, Tommy also serves as a member of the Legislative Audit Committee, the State Preservation Board, and The Energy Council. His legislative leadership and strong conservative voting record have been recognized and honored by many state and community groups and organizations throughout his tenure in the Texas House and Texas Senate.

The proud parents of two sons, Tommy and his wife, Marsha, are active community leaders and members of The Woodlands United Methodist Church.



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# CAPITOL UPDATE

THE 81ST LEGISLATURE

FALL 2009

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.

## HELPFUL TOLL FREE NUMBERS

Abuse Hotline (children, elderly, disabled) . . . . .	800-252-5400	Injured Workers . . . . .	800-578-4677
Children's Health Insurance (CHIP) . . . . .	800-647-6558	Insurance Information and Assistance . . . . .	800-252-3439
Child Support Enforcement . . . . .	800-252-8014	Legal Referral . . . . .	800-252-9690
Consumer Protection (Attorney General) . . . . .	800-621-0508	Medical Hotline . . . . .	800-252-8263
Consumer Credit Helpline . . . . .	800-538-1579	Runaway Hotline . . . . .	888-580-4357
Crime Victims Compensation . . . . .	800-983-9933	Student Financial Aid . . . . .	877-782-7322
Crime Stoppers . . . . .	800-252-8477	Taxpayer Information . . . . .	800-252-5555
Emergency Roadside Assistance . . . . .	800-525-5555	Voter Registration/ Elections . . . . .	800-252-8683
Governor's Citizen Assistance Hotline . . . . .	800-843-5789	Youth Hotline . . . . .	800-210-2278