



STATE REPRESENTATIVE

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79TH LEGISLATIVE SESSION ISSUES CONTINUED . . .

Eminent Domain

In the wake of the recent US Supreme Court ruling (*Kelo vs. New London*), legislators passed legislation in the Second Special Session that will protect Texans and their land by legislation that places appropriate limits on the exercise of eminent domain by Texas and its political subdivisions such as cities and counties. This legislation protected private property from inappropriate takings for economic development, yet allows state and local governments to use eminent domain in clear public-use situations (road construction and other vital infrastructure).

Statement from Rep. Truitt About the Texas Supreme Court Ruling on School Finance

The long-awaited Supreme Court opinion has been delivered. It confirmed what we suspected, that over time the current method of public school finance has evolved to where it has become unconstitutional because we have, in effect a statewide property tax.

To devise an appropriate method of public school finance, the Court decisively noted that it is appropriate to “leave such matters to the discretion of the Legislature,” and I could not agree more. The Legislature is charged to fix this by June 1, 2006. And we shall.

The Court threw out challenges to the adequacy, efficiency and suitability of the state education system, even praising recent school reforms and academic progress. And while the Court ruled that there is no current constitutional violation related to the “adequacy” of education, there is an “impending” problem in that “the public education system has reached the point where continued improvement will not be possible absent significant change, whether that change take the form of increased funding, improved efficiencies, or better methods of education,” and that that we will drift toward inadequacy unless the Legislature acts to avoid such. Therefore, we must solve the problems with school finance so our teachers will be in a better position to educate our children, and our property taxpayers will get needed relief.

Now, with this court case behind us, when the Governor calls us back to finally deal with the matter, I am hopeful that all parties will be at the negotiating table in good faith. High quality education is vital to the future of the state. I have been and remain eager to be among the members of the Legislature working to replace the current system and striving for an efficient, fairer, more equitable funding system that will promote excellence in the classroom and appropriate teacher benefits.

TRANSPORTATION

Representative Truitt’s transportation priority has been funding improvements for highways in District 98. \$526 million dollars was allocated for the Funnel Project, and an additional \$50 million has been allocated to fund engineering for this project. The success of transportation funding can be seen in the district with current and on-going improvements to SH 114 and I-35 W, and plans to extend US Highway 377 north from Keller.



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Representative Vicki Truitt’s Committee Assignments

- Appropriations
- Chairman of Budget and Oversight for the House Committee on Public Health
- Vice Chairman of the Sunset Advisory Commission

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Dear Friends:

Finally, I am home now and I am excited to share with you some highlights of the 79th Legislature, which met throughout the spring, summer and early fall of 2005. I wanted to keep you informed of what occurred on several major issues that are important to the people of District 98.

The legislature accomplished a lot. We reformed a broken workers' compensation system. We overhauled adult and child protective services. We put an end to frivolous asbestos lawsuits which were costing business millions of dollars, invested more in good jobs and new technology, cracked down on illicit use of methamphetamine that destroys lives and families and worked to protect the institution of marriage and property rights.

During my fourth term as your representative, my duties and responsibilities grew. Rest assured; however, that regardless of how broad my statewide responsibilities become, I shall never forget that it is my constituents to whom I owe my first and faithful allegiance.

It remains an honor to serve you. Thank you for the privilege. Best wishes to you and yours as we enter the New Year.

Sincerely,

Vicki Truitt
State Representative District 98



79TH LEGISLATIVE SESSION ISSUES



Rep. Truitt discusses the merit of a bill with Rep. Fred Brown.

A Balanced Budget without New Taxes

Representative Truitt serves on the Appropriations committee and helped pass one of the most important pieces of legislation, the biennial state budget. The new budget for fiscal years 2006 and 2007 will fund the state's priorities without new or increased taxes.

On a local note, Fort Worth will receive \$3.1 million dollars to help build the next phase of the Fort Worth Business Assistance Center at the Guinn campus. A new building will house the expansion of a very successful high tech incubator center. The UNT Health Sciences Center will also receive money to help build out a lab at their campus for related high tech research.

Workers' Compensation Overhauled

Texas' Workers Compensation System had become known as one of the least effective systems in the country. It had become a system that did little to help injured workers recover despite saddling employers with some of the highest costs in the nation.

The reforms adopted by the legislature in HB 7 will lead to lower costs for employers and ensure injured workers get the timely care they need so they can get back to work as quickly as possible. Injured workers will see the cap on weekly benefits increase by 12 percent, and they will have a stronger voice in the process through a new Office of Injured Employee Counsel. Employers will get much needed financial relief on insurance costs, allowing more employers to opt into the system, and freeing resources to create jobs.

The most important reform required the creation of service networks that enable employers to control costs and eliminate waste and abuse. By replacing government mandates on medical fees with free market principles, doctors will have a stronger incentive to participate, and injured workers will have greater access to care.

These reforms will give those hurt on the job the care they deserve, at a price employers can afford. And just as important, they will help create

thousands of new jobs for our families as more employers will now come to Texas for our excellent business climate.

Overhaul of Child and Adult Protective Services (CPS and APS)

A comprehensive protective services reform plan was enacted that remedies many problems and provides greater protection for Texas' most vulnerable citizens – our children and the elderly. Rather than pumping money into the same broken system, these reforms make changes at the heart of agency culture, improving management and oversight, and establishing accountability for performance.

SB 6 added 2,500 child-abuse investigators and additional protective service workers who will have improved training, better equipment and better compensation. Caseloads will be lowered by 40 percent and bureaucratic paperwork cut in half. CPS investigators will now be free to spend 38 percent more time with children and families. At APS, lawmakers increased employee training, strengthened client assessment standards, and equipped caseworkers with better technology to quickly determine whether a person is in danger, and get them help as soon as possible.

Protecting the Sanctity of Life and Marriage

This fall, Texans voted on a Constitutional Amendment defining marriage. SJR 6 defines marriage as between one man and one woman. Texas voters adopted this amendment on November 8, 2005. Texas now joins 14 states that statutorily and constitutionally ban same-sex marriage.

Teacher Retirement System

The TRS fund is actuarially unsound. To gauge the size of the problem, if the state were to try to fix the problem through revenue contributions alone, the annual state contribution to the system of \$2.9 billion would need to be increased by \$900 million – a 31% increase. The Legislature reduced the deterioration of the system, reduced incentives for teacher early retirements, and doing so in a way that financially protects current and former teachers.



Rep. Truitt addresses the Texas House on Public School Finance.