



FEBRUARY 16, 2009 - AUSTIN, TEXAS

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COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS RELEASED

Senate and House committee assignments have been announced for the 81st Legislature. The Lt. Governor assigned 18 standing committees and two sub-committees in the Senate, while the Speaker named 34 committees in the House.

Senator Shapiro maintained her chairmanship of the Senate Education Committee, a position she has held since 2003. In addition, she continues to serve on the Senate Committees on Finance, Transportation & Homeland Security, and Administration.

Of the standing committees three are new - Agriculture & Rural Affairs, Economic Development, and Higher Education. The two sub-committees are Flooding & Evacuations, and Base Realignment & Closures. Click [Senate Committee Roster](#) to view the full Senate Committee list with membership.

Committees in the House changed dramatically, under the new Speaker. The Dallas area will be well represented with Plano Representative Brian McCall as chair of the influential House Calendars Committee, while metroplex area Representative Jim Pitts, R-Waxahachie, will be chairing the House Appropriations Committee. Also, Representative Burt Solomons, R-Carrollton, will chair State Affairs and Representative Dan Branch, R-Dallas, will chair Higher Education. For a full list of House Committee assignments, click on [House Committee Roster](#).

You can use the Texas Legislature Online's Committee Information page to find a database of searchable information about committee membership, schedules, minutes, process and other related material by clicking [Capitol Online](#).

COLLIN COUNTY CAME TO AUSTIN

Senator Shapiro welcomed a hometown crowd to the State Capitol on Monday and Tuesday last week for Collin County Day. The delegation of about 350 citizens from across Collin County spent 2 days in Austin hearing from state leaders and Capitol insiders, as well as touring the Capitol, meeting with legislators, and watching legislative proceedings in both the Senate and House Chambers.



The group joined with Denton and Grayson Counties for a Tri-County

(Shown L to R: Senator Craig Estes, County Judge Keith Self; Collin County Commissioners Kathy Ward, Matt Shaheen, Joe Jaynes; Senator Shapiro).



Senator Shapiro is joined by her fellow Collin County legislators, Representatives Jerry Madden, R-Richardson, Ken Paxton, R-McKinney, Jodie Laubenberg, R-Parker, and Brian McCall, R-Plano

Luncheon, where they heard from Gov. Perry; and later at a legislative reception where their Senate and House representatives address the crowd of more than 500.

"This was the first ever Tri-County event and it was most successful," Senator Shapiro said.

The trip ended on Tuesday with [Senate Resolution 46](#) by Senator Shapiro and her colleague, Senator Craig Estes, R-Wichita Falls, praising Collin County and welcoming the group to the Texas Senate. Shapiro and Estes both represent Collin County.

FLORENCE'S FOCUS: "MYSPACE" BILL

Last week, the Connecticut Attorney General's office identified and removed 90,000 convicted sex offenders from the popular social networking site, MySpace.

In Texas, more than 100 people have been arrested in connection with using the internet to prey upon children. Twenty-eight of those were arrested after being accused of accessing MySpace in violation of their parole conditions. These statistics are, no doubt, frightening when you consider how popular this networking tool has become among our youth.

That's why I have filed Senate Bill 689, which would add email addresses, online identifiers, and cellular telephone numbers to the list of information that recently released sex offenders must provide the Department of Public Safety for the Texas Sex Offender Registry.

I have spent my career working to protect the innocent against predatory sexual offenders. With today's new internet sites, now is the time to take this fight into the virtual world and target those who target our children online.

This legislation is the result of a months-long conversation with the attorney general's office about the pervasiveness of this problem and the need for Texas to take action. Privacy and secrecy are a sex offender's best friend, so we must shine the light on these internet based platforms in order to remove them as a tool for predators to exploit. And, in this electronic age, the internet is the telephone of today's youth. When they are online, they are exposed and the threat is real. This bill would prohibit defendants adjudicated in our criminal justice system from using the internet to access pornographic material or communicate with children under the age of 18.

We have made landmark strides in protecting against, adjudicating, and convicting sexual predators in our state. The intent of SB 689 is to continue that fight on the next frontier - the internet. This legislation goes straight to the heart of the issue of dangerous sex offenders using the internet as a tool to prey upon children. These activities must stop, and the Texas Legislature must be at the forefront of finding the solution.

SENATOR SHAPIRO FILES JACOB FOX BILL

Thousands of children are transported for child care daily, but child care providers are not currently required to participate in any safety training related to the transportation of young children. The absence of such training has become evident recently with reports of children left in vans of local Dallas day care facilities, resulting in injury and even death.

"Tragically, every year, children die because they are unaccounted for when forgotten in cars, vans and buses," Shapiro said. "There is no excuse for a child to be left behind. The loss of life of an innocent child due to this type of negligence is unimaginable and unacceptable."

[Senate Bill 572](#), named "Jacob's Law" after a four-year-old who died in 2006 of heat exhaustion after being forgotten in a day care van, would require child care providers that transport children to complete at least two hours of transportation safety training per year.

Jacob Fox was left in a van in 104 degree temperatures. Recently reports surfaced of yet another young child left behind in a day care van, despite the fact that another child was forgotten at the same school a few days prior. Police and state regulators are investigating the facility and the circumstances surrounding both of these incidents.

"Parents put their children on buses and in child care vans every day, under the assumption that their child will be safe and accounted for," Shapiro said. "It is tragic that this has not been the case. It is my intention that Senate Bill 572 prevent other parents from having to face the grim reality that Jacob's mother did."

The training required in SB 572 would apply to providers transporting children whose chronological or developmental age is nine-years-old or younger, and will be carried out through the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. Training topics would include the proper use of safety restraints, vehicle maintenance, proper behavior during transport, loading and unloading procedures, and safe accounting for each child and their well-being.

SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEE FIRST HEARING: SCHOOLS HIT BY HURRICANE

The Senate Education Committee heard testimony from several school districts impacted by Hurricane Ike last fall. At its peak, Hurricane Ike displaced 7,862 students. As of January, the count was still at 6,862.

While each district faces its own unique challenges, several common threads emerged. Some districts have seen a sudden decrease of students while others have seen a sudden increase. These fluctuations affect staffing, spacing and their supply of educational materials. It is still too soon to determine whether the displacement of these students will be temporary or permanent.



Senate Education Committee Chairwoman Florence Shapiro (right) talks with newly appointed Committee Vice-Chair Dan Patrick, R-Houston, before the Education Committee meeting about the impact of Hurricane Ike on Gulf Coast area schools.

In addition to student counts, staffing issues are also a major concern. Just as students are displaced, so are many educators, hindering the return to normal operations. Facilities are another issue. Some buildings only received minor or cosmetic damage while others have been totally destroyed.

All of these issues put increased financial pressure on these districts. It is clear that the state's current funding models fail to recognize the exigencies these districts face. For instance, Galveston ISD is expecting to submit around \$12 million in recapture payments to the state while still needing \$45 million for clean-up costs. All of these districts have property values impacted by the disaster, but it takes at least a year for the state to recognize this in its funding formulas.

Perhaps the loudest clamor is over federal assistance. The delays in assistance from FEMA far exceed the levels from disasters such as Hurricane Katrina. Senator Shapiro and the Committee promise swift action to assist these needs.

If you would like to hear more from these districts, please visit the committee's website at: [Senate Education Committee](#).

SENATE BILL 644 - DISASTER RELIEF FOR SCHOOLS

The occurrence of natural disasters like Hurricane Ike impair school districts' abilities to meet their educational obligations. For some districts, these events will cause a decline in student population counts if the district is hit by the disaster, or an increase if the district is located in surrounding areas.

"Natural disasters create personnel issues, transportation issues and facilities issues," says Senator Shapiro, who has filed [Senate Bill 644](#) to address such issues. "And while Texas' current law has some mechanisms to assist affected districts, most of those mechanisms are just inadequate to meet the needs of affected districts."

"In addition," she continued, "Texas' funding mechanisms take too long to recognize the reality of property values impacted by disasters, increasing the financial pressures on districts. Districts need timely help and that is their bottom line. They need help as quick as they can get it."

Senator Shapiro's bill would assist school districts impacted by natural disasters by holding districts harmless to their student counts at 100 percent for two years if the district is impacted by a natural disaster. It also allows debit of recapture payments for remediation of natural disaster for two years while allowing districts to seek state surplus funds to pay for natural disaster remediation. Finally, the bill adjusts property values for districts impacted by natural disaster to speed up the state recognition of value loss.

STATE NEWS

SHAPIRO SIGNS ONTO BILL TO REFORM STATE SCHOOLS

Abuse and neglect in our Texas state schools has been at the forefront of discussions amongst legislators this session.

Senator Shapiro is helping to protect residents of the state schools Texas by signing onto Senator Jane Nelson's [Senate Bill 643](#), creating a governor-appointed office to investigate injuries and deaths and oversee the schools. Other proposed changes include better background checks for staff, audits of the schools twice a year and other safety measures.

Texas houses nearly 5,000 residents in 13 state schools. A U.S. Justice Department report finds that 53 patients in the state's large residential facilities died in 2007 from preventable conditions that were often the result of lapses in care.

SHAPIRO SIGNS ONTO MATH & SCIENCE TEACHER SHORTAGE MEASURE

Senator Shapiro has joined Senator Dan Patrick, R-Houston, in filing legislation to reverse the growing shortage of math and science teachers across the state. [Senate Bill 816](#) creates a scholarship program for college students pursuing degrees in math or science. The program would provide each recipient with an annual scholarship of up to \$5,000 for four years. Upon graduation, the graduate would be required to teach math or science for four years in underserved areas of the state.

Recent studies on the shortage of teachers revealed the shortage is most felt in secondary math and science faculty. As an example, high school science teachers shortages have increased 80 percent since 2004.

"The shortage of math and science degreed teachers is forcing teachers without a strong background in these areas to fill the gaps," Patrick said. "Current certification exam results show almost half of prospective math and science teachers lack strong content knowledge of these fields."

More than one-third of high school science teachers are not certified to teach science.

"When districts are experiencing shortages in subject areas such as math and science, it is far more constructive to find ways to help more people obtain the appropriate certification than to assign teachers out of field. The Texas Classroom Teachers Association supports the proposal, and we look forward to developing solutions to teacher shortages," said Holly Eaton, Texas Classroom Teachers Association Director of Professional Development and Advocacy.

"For Texas to remain competitive in a global economy, we must provide our students with math and science teachers of the highest quality and strongest content knowledge. This bill will greatly help us reach this goal by encouraging individuals to enter the teaching field and to remain in the classroom," Senator Shapiro said.

SHAPIRO JOINS TEXAS HIGH SPEED RAIL LEGISLATIVE CAUCUS

Senator Shapiro has joined the Texas High Speed Rail Legislative Caucus, organized by the Texas High Speed Rail & Transportation Corporation, a non-profit organization made up of local transportation and elected officials from across the state. It is a grassroots effort to start the first-ever, high-speed rail passenger system and multi-modal transportation corridor in Texas, which would be called the Texas T-Bone.

The Texas T-Bone Corridor is aptly named because it would form a proposed, T-shaped network of rail lines that would connect 16 million people living in or along the Dallas-Ft. Worth, San Antonio, and Houston corridor. This geographic area plays a vital role in linking Texans to business and commerce, family and friends, airports, and even facilitating our military's ability to efficiently and quickly deploy to protect our homeland, if ever need be.

Instead of sitting in traffic during a three to four hour drive from Dallas to San Antonio, for example, experts say Texans can travel the same distance in just 90 minutes. Cost feasibility reports estimate that double-tracking rail lines and making other physical improvements between Dallas-Ft. Worth and San Antonio could cost \$1.18 billion. That cost is compared to the proposed cost of the Trans-Texas Corridor down I-35, at \$1.4 trillion, and to the approximate \$8 billion per year that Texas spends in road building.

SENATE FINANCE COMMITTEE BEGINS WORK ON STATE BUDGET

The Senate Finance Committee is considering how to pay for services in the wake of a

national economic downturn. State leaders have suggested a 2.5 percent reduction in budgets for this fiscal year from all state agencies.

The Chief Revenue Estimator for the Comptroller's office says that the housing market in Texas isn't as bad as outside the state. He adds that home sales are down, but not at the level seen in some of the other 50 states. While, sadly, Texas can expect to lose about 110,000 jobs through the third quarter of the fiscal year, mostly in oil and gas, construction and the retail sector, there is some good news. According to projections, Texas can expect slight economic gains in 2010, with recovery expected by 2011.

The committee's hearings on Article III of the state budget, which funds public education, holds these findings thus far:

- The cost to the state for education will be less in the 2010-2011 biennium, according to the Legislative Budget Board, due to higher than expected property value growth, combined with student growth under projected levels. The state will also have to make one less payment to the Permanent School Fund this biennium, to correct for past payments deferred one biennium ahead in past sessions.
- The state is also considering \$64 million for training teachers on how to administer and teach for the new end of course exams.

Senator Shapiro opposed proposed program cuts from the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services, which would eliminate the Autism Services Program she helped create last session. Service providers were told to shut their doors by March 31, 2009, which sent parents and providers into a panic. Shapiro fought in committee to overturn these cuts and has been assured by Senate Finance chairman Steve Ogden, R-College Station, that the program will remain intact.

To monitor the work of the Senate Finance Committee, please click [Finance](#).

2009 TEXAS LEGISLATIVE SESSION EMERGENCY ISSUES

The Governor has declared emergency items for the 2009 legislative session. This emergency designation allows lawmakers to begin considering these issues in the initial 30 days of the legislative session.

The emergency items include:

- Legislation to provide supplemental appropriations to state agencies and institutions related to hurricane response and recovery associated with the hurricanes of 2008;
- Legislation to assist public and private entities with recovery from the hurricanes of 2008;
- Legislation to reform the Texas Windstorm Insurance Association (TWIA) and legislation to fund the Catastrophe Reserve Trust Fund related to TWIA;
- Legislation to improve state schools and centers operated by the state of Texas; and
- Legislation to appropriate funds to the Texas Department of Criminal Justice for the purchase and use of screening and detection devices for contraband and personnel, as well as comprehensive security equipment.

"By designating these items emergencies, lawmakers are able to begin considering these important issues relating to the safety, security, recovery of our state," Gov. Perry said.

CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY DAY AT THE CAPITOL

Senators Shapiro, Nelson and Harris passed [Senate Resolution 134](#) honoring the Children's Advocacy Centers (CACs) of Texas, this week. These centers play a vital role in bringing young victims of physical and sexual abuse both justice and healing.

In the early 1990s, when Sen. Shapiro first crafted Ashley's Laws, there were only 13 CACs operating in Texas, but now there are more centers in Texas than in any other state in the nation with 63 in Texas.



Senators Shapiro, Nelson and Harris join floor guests representing four North Texas advocacy centers: (From L to R: Senator Jane Nelson, Mary Blake Meadows, Chairman of the Board, Dallas Children's Advocacy Center, Diana Estell, Collin County Children's Advocacy Center Board Member, Elaine Emery, Board Vice President, Children's Advocacy Center of Denton County, Nancy Hagan, Executive Director, Alliance For Children (Tarrant County), David Heselton, President of the Board, Children's Advocacy Centers of Texas-Plano, and Senator Shapiro).

The work and advocacy of the numerous professionals and agencies involved with

CACs helps child victims through the justice system in a manner that reduces the trauma associated with a judicial system built for adults.

TELECOM CORRIDOR DAY AT THE CAPITOL

Senator Shapiro and Senator John Carona recognized Richardson's Telecom Corridor this week with [Senate Resolution 161](#). The Corridor is a major employment center in the Dallas metro area, second only to Dallas Central Business District in numbers of daytime workers. The success of the Corridor is due in large part to collaborative work by the Richardson Chamber of Commerce and the City of Richardson; and assistance from the state's Texas Enterprise Fund and Emerging Technology Fund, a program created by Senator Shapiro in 2005, and being improved upon this session with her recently filed [Senate Bill 783](#). These funds provide Texas the ability to develop and commercialize new technologies, and allow recruiting of the best research talent in the world.

DISTRICT NEWS

SENATE DISTRICT 8 TOWN HALL SET FOR FEBRUARY 28TH

Senator Shapiro's Town Hall Meeting is set for Saturday, February 28, 2009, in two locations for Senate District 8 constituents.

Dallas County (9:00 am - 10:30 am)
Jesuit College Preparatory School
The Lecture Hall
12345 Inwood Road
Dallas, Texas

Collin County (11:30 am - 1:00 pm)
Frisco City Hall
6875 Main Street
Frisco, Texas

For more information, call 972-403-3404 or email Florence.shapiro@senate.state.tx.us

UNT DALLAS HITS 1,000 ENROLLMENT

The University of North Texas at Dallas now boasts 1,032 full-time students, based on preliminary Spring semester numbers. The UNT branch needed at least 1,000 students to become independent of the flagship Denton campus so it can grant its own degrees.

UNT Dallas representatives say they plan to open an independent UNT Dallas in Fall 2010. They are asking the state Legislature for \$43.5 million to build a second building and \$6.3 million to hire more faculty and staff. This Spring's full-time enrollment is up 35 percent from one year ago. To learn more, please visit [UNT Dallas](#).

LEGISLATURE HONORS GOLD MEDALIST NASTIA LIUKIN

Senator Shapiro and Representative Jodie Laubenberg honored 2008 Beijing Olympic gold

medal gymnast Nastia Liukin of Parker, last week during the Collin County Day celebration. Senate Concurrent Resolution #14 highlights Liukin winning five medals, including the gold medal in the Women's Individual All-Around Final in Beijing, as well as three silvers and a bronze - tying the previous record for the most medals won by a U.S. gymnast in one Olympics.

Nastia was born in Moscow in October of 1989, and her mother, Anna, was a world champion in rhythmic gymnastics while her dad, Valeri, was an Olympic medalist in the 1988 Seoul Olympics. In fact, Valeri won two golds and two silvers as a member of the Soviet gymnastics team. But when little Nastia was just two years old, the family picked up and moved to the United States. Nastia trains today at her father's gym in Plano.

COUNTY FARM BUREAU CELEBRATING WHAT FARMERS PROVIDE COUNTRY

This week, join the Collin County Farm Bureau in the celebration of America's food supply.

Based on US Department of Agriculture statistics, the Farm Bureau's Food Check Out Week, held seven weeks into the year, marks the time when average Americans will have enough earned income to pay for their entire year's food supply.

In recognition of this, the Collin County Farm Bureau is commemorating the fact that America's food supply is the safest and most affordable in the world, despite the recent peanut recall. There are 21.3 million farms in the US and about 99 percent of those farms are operated by individuals, family partnerships or family corporations.

To celebrate the week, the CCFB is giving a \$5 off breakfast coupon at Bill Smith's Café in McKinney this week (Feb. 15-21st).

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

ENROLLMENT DEADLINE NEAR FOR PREPAID COLLEGE TUITION PROGRAM

The current enrollment period ends February 28th for the Texas Tuition Promise Fund, Texas' new prepaid college tuition program. Enrollment allows Texas families to lock in college tuition and required fees at current prices of Texas public colleges, offering many flexible options to prepay those expenses before a child is ready to go off to college.

During the current enrollment period, parents of a newborn child can pay \$15.16 per month until their child's high school graduation to prepay a year of tuition at a community college. And parents of a 7-year-old, for example, who prepay the weighted average cost of one year's tuition at a four-year Texas public university can spread payments over a decade for \$81.53 per month.

To learn more about the Texas Tuition Promise Fund, please visit [Every Chance Every Texan](#).

TEXAS INDEPENDENCE DAY IS MARCH 2ND - EXPLORE OUR HISTORY

Texas Independence Day is only a few weeks away and the Texas Historical Commission urges people to get out to explore Texas' rich, historic landscape. Celebrated on March 2nd, Texas Independence Day marks the signing of the Texas Declaration of Independence while honoring Texans who helped shape the history of the state.

The THC encourages people to honor our state's real stories by exploring the Texas Independence Trail Region. The Texas Independence Trail Region is part of the THC's Texas Heritage Trails Program, the award-winning regional tourism initiative that helps Texas communities promote tourism, revitalize local economies and foster community leadership through historic preservation. To learn more about our state's early history, please visit [Texas Independence Trail](#).

SENATOR SHAPIRO IN THE NEWS...

- [Amidst swirl of budget talks, victory emerges for autistic children](#), *Austin American Statesman*, February 13, 2009
- [The New Wildcatters](#), *Austin Chronicle*, February 12, 2009
- [Math, science teacher shortage worsens](#), *Dallas Morning News*, February 10, 2009
- [Texas senators look to reform school finance - again](#), *Fort Worth Star Telegram*, February 9, 2009
- [Districts hit by Ike plead for exemption](#), *Houston Chronicle*, February 11, 2009
- [Shapiro fights to protect under-age MySpace users](#), *Plano Star Courier*, February 9, 2009

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