

Senator Eliot Shapleigh

An Open Letter to the Citizens of El Paso, Texas

COMMITTEES:

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Nominations
Transportation and Homeland Security
Veterans Affairs & Military
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and Closure - Chair



The Senate of the State of Texas
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Dear Friend:

Right now El Paso is the best place to be! We've had so many great things happen this year that we want to share with you.

We fought for UTEP's participation in the Tier One formulas, reformed the public school finance system by directing \$1.9 billion of new money into schools, and provided teachers with a minimum \$800 per year raise.

We helped recruit new physicians and nurses to El Paso to provide better health care, and secured \$49.7 million for nursing education in El Paso.

We fought the plague of public corruption by establishing the first ethics commission in any Texas county, worked to combat international criminal cartels to keep our streets safe, and helped lower the tax burden for small businesses during the tough economic times.

Best of all, in August, the first class of medical students started class at El Paso's Medical School, the first in the U.S. in 30 years.

Our priorities remain working for access to better jobs, great schools, quality and affordable healthcare, and we will always fight to strengthen the future of El Paso.

During this Thanksgiving season, let's count our blessings, but remember always that our community, our children, and our future are worth the fight!

Very Truly Yours,

Eliot Shapleigh

Eliot Shapleigh



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WORKING FOR YOU

I am honored to serve El Paso as your State Senator. For more than ten years, our office has worked harder, passed more legislation, and spearheaded more key initiatives than any other Senate office in El Paso's history.

We believe our city's progress will be measured by the ongoing expansion of Fort Bliss, an increase in technology-related jobs, solar energy, the Medical Center of the Americas, downtown revitalization, and the Regional Mobility Authority.

With Texas as a strong partner in our foundation of success, along with vibrant and progressive leaders working in our community, we can truly make this decade the "golden era" of El Paso's history.

Right now, El Paso is the best place to be. Here is a summary of what we worked on to make El Paso a success:



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Health and Human Services

For a decade, Texas has been "ground zero in health care" in America, and El Paso has more uninsured by percentage than any large city in the U.S. today. We have fought to make this a key item in our agenda in order to address the issue of the uninsured. We have worked to expand the Children's Health Insurance Program, reinstate a 12-month enrollment in the children's Medicaid program, and improve delivery of health and human services.

- We revamped the Texas Physician Loan Repayment Program, creating a new health care access fund and a consolidation program that will give doctors up to \$160,000 in loan repayment monies for serving in medically underserved areas, including El Paso.
- We worked to require that the Texas Medical Board (TMB) grant a provisional license to practice medicine in certain locations to applicants who meet certain requirements relating to licensure, examination, and sponsorship. Texas is a state with significant shortages in a variety of health care professions, with El Paso being the least staffed city in the state and the United States. The processing time for physician licensure applications has increased significantly, and physicians who desire to practice in El Paso are experiencing processing times of several months despite efforts by TMB to streamline the licensure process.

- We secured \$49.7 million for nursing education, a \$35 million increase from the last budget period. In addition, \$30 million per year will go to nursing schools immediately to increase enrollment for the upcoming 2009-10 school year.
- We worked to create an advisory committee to study and provide recommendations to the legislature regarding the areas of Texas that are underserved in the retail availability of healthy foods and the impact it has on nutrition, obesity, and chronic illnesses. Poor nutrition is a major contributor to obesity, and Texas is currently ranked 15th nationally in terms of obesity.
- We worked to amend the Texas Health and Safety Code to give local governments the power to license and regulate adult boarding homes for the mentally disabled, physically disabled, and the elderly. According to the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC), approximately one thousand such boarding houses exist in the state.

El Paso Medical School

- We secured \$48 million for our new medical school, and \$17 million for a new clinical faculty.
- We added the Paul L. Foster School of Medicine to the Joint Admission Medical Program (JAMP) to provide services to support and encourage highly qualified, economically disadvantaged students pursuing a medical education.

Child Care

- We secured \$12.3 million in additional funding in the state budget to increase monthly visitation by Child Protective Services (CPS) caseworkers. Working with the chair of the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services, Senator Jane Nelson (R-Flower Mound), and the chair of the Senate Finance Committee, Senator Steve Ogden (R-Bryan), we amended S.B. 69 to require that at least 95 percent of the children in the custody of the state are visited by a case worker each month, based on federal guidelines. Although S.B. 69 ultimately did not pass, the funds for this specific purpose were appropriated in the final budget.



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Access to Capital

- We coordinated the 2nd Annual “Invest in the American Dream” Conference in El Paso. The conference focused on applying best practices in financial literacy, creating financial stability, wealth creation, and improving access to capital.
- We continued our efforts to increase financial literacy in El Paso and across Texas. Working with Representative Scott Hochberg (D-Houston), we amended H.B. 3646 to require regional Education Service Centers (ESCs) to train teachers on the financial literacy curriculum and offer individualized training and assistance on teaching personal financial literacy.



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Empowering Emerging Leaders

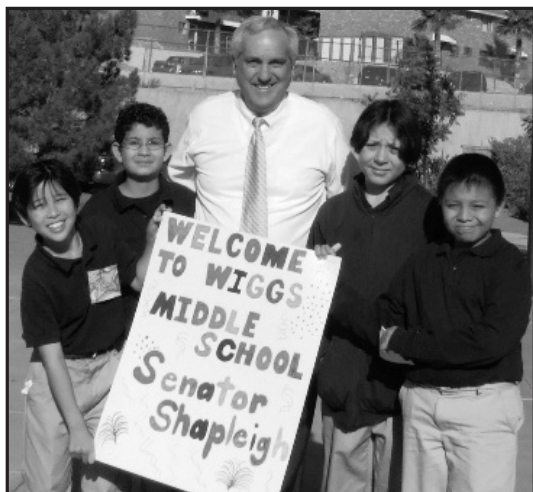
- We organized ¡Ganas! which is an international art and essay contest designed to promote youth empowerment. ¡Ganas! is an international collaboration between our Senate Office, El Paso Independent School District, Ysleta Independent School District, Canutillo Independent School District, Socorro Independent School District, the International Museum of Art, and the City of El Paso. Students were asked to join the contest by taking photos of people, culture, or places that have positive influence on their values, families, and community.
- We hosted the El Paso’s Young Professionals Capitol Retreat in Austin, Texas, in partnership with the United Way of El Paso County’s Young Leaders Society. Young leaders learned about innovations in solar energy, high speed light rail, downtown economic development, infrastructure, great universities, health care policy, and medical policy, all with the goal of helping to build the vision for El Paso 2020.

Fighting Drug Cartels

- We enhanced Border security by working with the chair of the Senate Committee on Transportation and Homeland Security, Senator John Carona (R-Dallas). We amended H.B. 2086 to curb gang activity in Texas and stop violent transnational drug cartels. The bill helps transform the Department of Public Safety (DPS) by giving the agency new tools to identify, arrest and prosecute cartel leaders. We also co-authored S.B. 2225 to make it a third-degree felony for an individual to knowingly transport or transfer a firearm across the Texas-Mexico border.

Great Schools

- We secured continued funding for the most successful dropout prevention program in Texas. The state budget appropriated \$41.9 million for the Communities in Schools (CIS) program that aims to help young people successfully learn, stay in school, and prepare for life.
- We worked to reform the public school finance system by directing \$1.9 billion of new money into schools and providing teachers with a minimum \$800 per year raise. This infusion of funding was paid for with federal stimulus dollars.



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Higher Education

- We worked to create additional Tier One universities in Texas—especially at UTEP. Part of our Tier One bill was amended into H.B. 51, which passed and amends current law relating to measures to enhance and maintain the quality of state universities, including funding and incentives to support emerging public research universities.
- We fought to reform the student lending industry in Texas by passing S.B. 194, which precludes a person employed by a university’s financial aid office from owning stock or other ownership interest in a student loan lender, other than through ownership of shares in a publicly traded mutual fund or a similar investment vehicle.
- We passed S.B. 2178, which establishes a computer lending pilot program to provide state surplus computers to public schools so they may be available for use by students and their families. The option to work towards purchasing the computer will also be available, as well as instructional computer training classes.

Lowering Your Taxes

- We passed storm water fee exemption legislation. S.B. 1522 exempts property owned by school districts from fees, while S.B. 874 exempts property owned by the county.

We reformed the appraisal district appeal process. Working with Representative Bill Callegari (R-Katy), we amended H.B. 1030 to require Texas’ largest counties—including El Paso—to provide for electronic protest of property tax appraisals.

Quality of Life

- We stopped the spread of colonias by sponsoring H.B. 2833 to ensure that any new homes built in Texas counties will be held to the same high standards as those used in incorporated areas of the state.
- We created the El Paso County Ethics Commission, the first of its kind in Texas. S.B. 1368 allows the county to establish an independent ethics commission that adopts, publishes, and enforces an ethics code governing county public servants.
- We worked to enable the development of trails and green space in El Paso. Utility easements in El Paso are very attractive for several reasons, including increased connectivity between the mountain and river, conversion to a more attractive use, and acquisition of new park/trail areas for little expense. However, public utilities have been reluctant to allow a trail to be routed over their land because of potential liability costs if someone were to get injured. H.B. 783, the companion bill to our S.B. 1563, protects a utility that allows public recreational use on their property by limiting the landowner’s liability.

Renewable Energy

- We hosted our 9th annual “Tu Comunidad Environmental Summit”. The goal of the summit was to provide accessible information on environmental and conservation issues to the public such as electricity conservation, recycling, illegal dumping, and air quality by city and government experts.



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Veterans Affairs

- We filed S.B. 192, as means of thanking disabled veterans for the enormous sacrifice they have made for our country. This bill exempts 100 percent disabled or totally disabled veterans from all ad valorem property taxes on their homestead. This concept passed as an amendment to H.B. 3613.
- We improved public education funding formulas for area school districts based on work from last session. Working with Representative Scott Hochberg (D-Houston), our S.B. 196 passed in H.B. 3646 to include a special funding allotment for students who are moving to Texas as a result of BRAC or whose families have been deployed in an active combat zone.
- We filed S.B. 200 to ensure that veterans and their families can pay in-state tuition regardless of the length of time the person has resided in Texas. Veterans who were not Texans, but who wanted to attend a public college or university in Texas were required to pay out-of-state tuition and fees until they lived in Texas for one year. This concept passed in S.B. 297.

PUBLIC OFFICIAL OF THE YEAR

Senator Shapleigh was named Public Elected Official of the Year by the National Association of Social Workers Texas Chapter (NASW) due to his dedication to policies that affect social justice, health care, education, civil and human rights, and social work practice. In recognition of the responsibilities and challenges of public service, NASW established an annual award to recognize the outstanding service and contributions of an elected official.



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