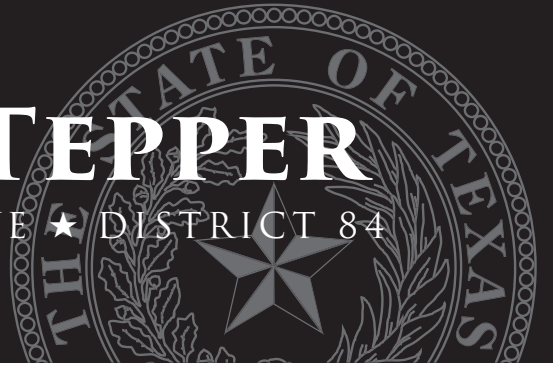




CARL H. TEPPER

STATE REPRESENTATIVE ★ DISTRICT 84



88TH LEGISLATIVE UPDATE

TEXAS HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



STATE REPRESENTATIVE DISTRICT 84

Dear Fellow Texan,

As your state representative for House District 84, "Thank You" for entrusting me to represent you in the Texas House of Representatives. The people of Lubbock County deserve as much consideration as any of the other areas of Texas, including the more populated regions of the state. Now, more than ever, we must preserve our shared values upon which this great state was founded – faith, relationships, economic prosperity, and freedom.

The Governor convened two additional Special Sessions since the last newsletter that focused on measures related to border security, education, school security, and vaccine mandates. The Texas Legislature successfully passed legislation to protect employees from COVID-19 vaccine mandates. We also passed legislation to bolster border security and public safety, which includes the construction of our own border wall and removing illegal aliens who enter this state unlawfully. Despite these victories, we still have work to do.

The 89th Regular Session is quickly approaching, and I'm preparing an ambitious legislative agenda. This newsletter shares with you some of my priorities for the 89th Regular Session and provides updates that impact our county. These priorities include ensuring that our public schools and institutions of higher education continue to prepare students for the future. School safety and financing, border security, continued property tax relief, transportation, and educational options are also top priorities.

If you would like an in-depth overview of the 88th Regular Session and the first two Special Sessions of 2023, please reach out or visit <https://house.texas.gov/members/member-page/newsletters/84/2023-Newsletter-08.24.2023.pdf>.

I hope you find this newsletter helpful and informative, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Texas House of Representatives
District 84

Carl H. Tepper
State Representative



Representative Tepper attends the 2023 Red Raider BBQ & Ribeye Championship

As you may know, the Legislature may only consider legislation during a Special Session on topics determined by the Governor. Governor Abbott directed the Legislature to consider legislative proposals on topics such as border security, educational options, COVID-19 vaccine mandates, and school safety during the final two Special Sessions of 2023. I am pleased to share with you a recap of the Special Sessions.

BORDER SECURITY

The State of Texas continues to experience unprecedented levels of illegal immigration across our Southern Border. As the current President continues to neglect his duty to secure the border and protect U.S. citizens, the State of Texas is engaging to protect our state. The Legislature appropriated over \$6.6 billion towards border security efforts and enacted new laws that prioritize the safety of Texas in 2023. The Legislature passed the following legislation during the final two Special Sessions of 2023 relating to border security and public safety:

Cracking Down on Stash Houses and Smuggling – Senate Bill 4, 88(3)

- Increases the penalties for smuggling persons, operating a stash house, or evading arrest or detention. The bill generally imposes a 10-year minimum sentence across the board for these offenses, with certain enhancements that can provide a 15-year minimum sentence.

Border Wall Construction – Senate Bill 3, 88(4)

- Appropriates \$1.54 billion to the Office of the Governor for public safety, border security operations, and the construction, operation, and maintenance of the border wall.

Prohibiting Illegal Entry into Texas – Senate Bill 4, 88(4)

- Creates the crimes of "illegal entry from foreign nation" and "illegal reentry from foreign nation" for an alien who enters or attempts to enter Texas from a foreign nation at a location other than a lawful port of entry. The bill allows for a magistrate or judge to order an alien to return to the foreign nation from which the alien entered or attempted to enter this state.

Border security and public safety remain top priorities for the 89th Regular Session.

VACCINE MANDATES

I believe each person should have the right to decide whether to receive the COVID-19 vaccine. During the pandemic, many employers required their employees to receive the vaccine or face termination. Reports now show that the vaccines and booster vaccines had little to no effect on the spread of the virus or protection from the virus. The current Presidential



Representative Tepper participates in the Lubbock Chamber of Commerce's Legislative Appreciation Luncheon with Senator Charles Perry and Representative Dustin Burrows.



Representative Tepper is interviewed by a local news station about the Special Sessions.

Administration even attempted to require employees of certain large companies to receive the vaccines. During the 3rd Special Session of 2023, the Legislature enacted **Senate Bill 7** to prohibit employers from requiring an employee to receive a COVID-19 vaccine or taking adverse action against the employee for refusing the vaccine. The bill imposes an administrative penalty of \$50,000 for an employer who requires a person to receive the vaccination. No person should have to choose between a "job" and a job.

PUBLIC SCHOOL FINANCE

Every child, regardless of their circumstance, deserves access to a quality education. To that end the Legislature provided school districts with monumental funding increases for the fiscal biennium. Because of the property tax reforms and investments last year, the state now funds over 50% of the public school finance system, which is the first time in decades that this has been done. Some of these funding increases include:

- \$3.2 billion to fully fund projected enrollment growth;
- \$2.4 billion to fund the increase in the golden penny yield;
- \$1.4 billion in new funding for school safety measures. This includes \$300 million in the school safety allotment (an increase from \$100 million in the previous biennium) and \$1.1 billion in school safety grants. An additional \$400 million in school safety funding was provided through a budget execution in the fall of 2022, totaling \$1.8 billion in new funding for school safety overall;
- \$500 million in additional state aid under the Foundation School Program, which provides a new source of state aid to each district to support the evaluation, adoption, or use of instructional materials approved by the State Board of Education. The funding will also be used to expand access to open education resource instructional materials;
- \$589 million to mitigate the increase of health insurance premiums for teachers participating in TRS ActiveCare;
- \$307 million in funding increases for technology and instructional materials; and
- \$60 million for the new Instructional Materials Allotment.

ected the Legislature to consider legislation related to border security, a recap of the Legislature's actions during these Special Sessions.

Lubbock County is fortunate to have so many high-quality school districts and public charter schools with dedicated teachers and support staff. During the 4th Special Session of 2023, I supported **House Bill 1**, which would have increased funding to public schools by another \$7 billion for items such as teacher and staff pay raises.

We also recognize that it's the parent's right to direct the education of their child and the same bill included funding for a limited school choice program for special education and underserved children. Each child is unique and may thrive in different learning environments. Educational freedom would allow parents to tailor their child's education to their individual needs and preferences.

It is possible to empower parents with more educational options while also supporting our public schools. The state budget also funds state parks and public highways, and that funding doesn't diminish the funding for public schools either. The legislation was defeated due to an unwillingness to compromise. This is disappointing as public school finance and other school options are not inherently conflicting.

Public school finance and educational options remain top priorities for the next 89th Regular Session.

SCHOOL SAFETY

The Texas House continues to prioritize school safety and the security of our students and faculty. During the 88th Regular Session, Lubbock's own, Representative Dustin Burrows, spearheaded **House Bill 3** to secure our schools further. The bill enacted comprehensive measures to increase school safety that, among many components, requires each public school campus to have at least one armed adult and establish an office of school safety and security within the Texas Education Agency. As a member of the House Appropriations Committee I helped to secure \$1.4 billion more for the fiscal biennium for these programs.

School safety remains a top priority for the 89th Regular Session.



Representative Tepper holds the District 84 Christmas Ornament during the final Special Session of 2023.

I intend to pursue an ambitious legislative agenda for the 89th Regular Session to help families raise a family.

PROPERTY TAX RELIEF

Property tax relief remains a top priority for the next legislative session. Last year, the 88th Legislature appropriated \$18 billion in tax relief by:

- Increasing the homestead exemption to \$100,000;
- Buying down the M&O portion of ISD property taxes by 10.7 cents, or \$12.6 Billion;
- Implementing appraisal caps of 20% for non-homesteaded property valued at \$5 million or less for three years; and
- Doubling the franchise tax exemption and removing burdensome filing requirements for exempt entities.

The Legislature's actions to stabilize or even lower property taxes have mostly proven successful, but as a reminder, the State of Texas does not impose a property tax. Local governments set your property tax rates. The success of any property tax reforms depends on the tax rates of local governments; including school districts, cities, counties, and special purpose districts. When the Legislature "buys down" the M&O portion of ISD property taxes, the state provides additional state funding to public schools while reducing the amount of local property taxes needed to fund the schools. This means local tax rates can be reduced without sacrificing school funding since the state government is infusing billions of new funds into the public school finance system.

A primary concern regarding property taxes is the growth in property appraisals. When a landowner's property appraisal rises, the amount of taxes the landowner must pay typically rises as well, depending on the tax rate set by the local taxing entities. Although lower property tax rates help to decrease a landowner's tax burden, ever-increasing property tax appraisals limit the effectiveness of buying down the M&O tax. During the Regular Session and multiple Special Sessions of 2023, I filed legislation to further limit the growth of property tax appraisals. The state must implement lasting, more stringent "appraisal caps" for all property, regardless of the property type or valuation. I intend to file legislation to accomplish this goal again during the 89th Regular Session.

HIGHER EDUCATION

The 88th Legislature made monumental investments in higher education, including a revised method of funding our community colleges and the establishment of the Texas University Fund (TUF). As the 89th Legislature approaches, I remain committed to ensuring our institutions of higher education are successfully preparing students for the future while remaining affordable.



LEGISLATIVE DATES OF INTENT

- Tuesday, January 14, 2025
- Friday, March 14, 2025
- Monday, June 2, 2025

IONAL LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES ★

regular Session that prioritizes the needs of our growing community and ensures Texas remains the best state for people to live, work, and

Texas Tech University

Among many constitutional amendments, voters approved the establishment of the TUF in the November 2023 Constitutional Amendment Election. The TUF is a \$3.9 billion endowment to support research activities at certain Texas universities, including Texas Tech University. Texas Tech University received \$44 million from the new TUF in fiscal year 2024 and is projected to receive \$45 million in fiscal year 2025. These funds allow Texas Tech University to prepare Red Raiders for the workforce through increased graduate and undergraduate research opportunities and create new technological innovations.

Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center

Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center (TTUHSC) produces critical research and provides invaluable healthcare. The 88th Legislature appropriated \$10 million for the fiscal biennium to TTUHSC to establish the Institute of Telehealth and Digital Innovation. This Institute has already expanded healthcare access here and to our neighbors in the most remote regions and will continue to reshape the future of healthcare in West Texas and beyond. I'm pleased to share that the House Committee on Appropriations will study mission-specific formula funding at health-related institutions (HRIs) of higher education during the interim. This item is critically vital to the operations of TTUHSC. Increased mission-specific formula funding for TTUHSC would help address funding disparities among Texas HRIs and increase TTUHSC's research capacity.

South Plains College

South Plains College serves Lubbock County students and does a tremendous job of ensuring that they're ready to enter the workforce or transfer to a four-year university. The 88th Legislature established a new dynamic funding formula for our community colleges by passing House Bill 8. This legislation substantially increased funding to the state's community colleges by \$683 million and the funding is based on student achievement! These achievement metrics include licenses and other credentials for professions or trades, and more real-world uses. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board estimates that this legislation has increased formula funding to South Plains College by approximately \$5.7 million from fiscal year 2023 to fiscal year 2024—a 42.3% increase!



Representative Tepper bears from Min H. Kang, PharmD, the Cancer Center Associate Director at Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center.



Representative Tepper and his Capitol staff tour Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center with President Lori Rice-Spearman, Ph.D.

EREST

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|------------------|---|
| 1st Day | 89th Legislature convenes at noon. |
| 60th Day | 60-day deadline for bill filing |
| 140th Day | Sine die (Last Day of the 89th Regular Session) |

★ OTHER UPDATES ★



GLO Commissioner Dawn Buckingham, M.D., provides updates on the construction of the West Texas State Veterans Cemetery.

WEST TEXAS STATE VETERANS CEMETERY

I am excited to share that the construction of the West Texas State Veterans Cemetery in Lubbock is underway! This project is made possible through a combination of local, state, and federal resources. Last year, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs granted the Texas General Land Office (GLO) and Texas Veterans Land Board (VLB) over \$15.9 million to establish the cemetery. The 88th Legislature also appropriated approximately \$2.2 million necessary to support operational and salary costs for the project.

The cemetery will serve more than 21,000 Veterans and their eligible family members. It will include 510 pre-positioned crypts, 600 columbaria niches, 1,000 in-ground cremated remains plots, an administrative building, a maintenance facility, a memorial walk, a scattering garden, and all associated roads, landscaping and irrigation. The GLO estimates that the construction will last 22 months and conclude in summer 2025. Pre-registration is now open for interment at the cemetery through the VLB. Please contact my office if you need assistance connecting with the VLB. "Thank you" to Commissioner Dawn Buckingham, M.D., and her entire team at the GLO for their tremendous work.

COMBATTING ANTISEMITISM AND ANTICHRISTIANITY

As Israel responds to terrorist attacks university campuses across the nation have witnessed an alarming rise in violent demonstrations. Some protestors have lawfully exercised their First Amendment rights but many others have broken the institutional rules of universities and numerous laws. The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution is paramount to our democracy, but this right is not unlimited. Protestors cannot engage in practices that disrupt university operations or intimidate and threaten other students and faculty.

On April 30, 2024, I initiated a joint statement in response to the ongoing protests on Texas university campuses relating to the Israel-Hamas conflict. With short notice 35 fellow House Members signed onto the statement which stated:

"We reject terrorism in any form. We reject physical and mental intimidation and all evil iterations of such, including within our own borders of Texas and on our university campuses.

Israel has a fundamental right to defend itself and should use any and all means necessary to destroy terrorism, which includes wiping Hamas from the face of the Earth. We stand with Israel."

There were limited protests at Texas Tech University but they remained peaceful and only included students affiliated with the University. I applauded the administration of Texas Tech University and the Texas Tech University System for maintaining order while ensuring students can exercise their free speech.

SUNRISE CANYON

The StarCare Specialty Health System (StarCare), particularly at Sunrise Canyon Hospital and the Hope Center, is poised to transform mental health care delivery in West Texas.

During the 88th Legislative Session, I filed House Bill 4415 in coordination with Senator Charles Perry. This bill facilitated the transfer of ownership of Sunrise Canyon Hospital from the Texas Health and Human Services Commission back to StarCare, honoring a commitment made over 30 years ago. This transfer cleared a hurdle allowing Sunrise Canyon to expand.

In addition to the transfer of the property back to StarCare, the 88th Legislature appropriated approximately \$52 million in new funds to Sunrise Canyon Hospital to increase operational funding and for capital construction. The groundbreaking ceremony for the Sunrise Canyon Hospital Expansion and the Hope Center occurred on March 28, 2024. This groundbreaking represents a monumental milestone in our ongoing efforts to enhance mental health services in West Texas. The Hope Center will serve as a diversion center for individuals experiencing crises that do not require a higher, more costly, or more restrictive level of intervention; such as jails and emergency rooms. This vital resource will ensure immediate access to support and treatment in the most cost-effective setting. With funding sourced from the City of Lubbock and Lubbock County; StarCare worked hand-in-hand with the West Texas Mental Health Collaborative to make this vision a reality.

The Hope Center is set to open in June 2025 and will provide assessment, consultation, and crisis intervention services in a state-of-the-art facility adjacent to the newly expanded Sunrise Canyon Hospital. This proximity will streamline immediate access to comprehensive inpatient care when a higher level of treatment is required. We are proud to have StarCare in our community working as the stewards of mental health for our citizens. My staff and I toured StarCare and the Lubbock County Detention Center and we salute the seamless cooperation between the StarCare staff and the Lubbock County Sheriff's Office. We are inspired by their initiatives to change and improve the lives of the populations in their care. StarCare CEO Beth Lawson and board president Judge (Ret) Drue Farmer, and Lubbock County Sheriff Kelly Rowe and all of their board members and staff deserve recognition for their initiatives in these areas. Their cooperation and procedures are becoming standard practice around the state.



Representative Tepper participates in the groundbreaking ceremony for the Sunrise Canyon Hospital Expansion and the Hope Center.



CARL H. TEPPER

STATE REPRESENTATIVE ★ DISTRICT 84

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STATE REPRESENTATIVE
CARL H. TEPPER



CONSTITUENT SERVICES

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Our office is happy to connect you with a state agency if you are having issues contacting the agency. Please contact our office if you need assistance.

Certificates of Achievement

At no cost to you, we're equipped to assist you in commemorating a special occasion by crafting an official proclamation or certificate by the Texas House of Representatives. Whether you are celebrating a birth, marriage, retirement, or special event, you can contact our office to learn more.

Visit the Capitol

The Texas State Capitol Building is open to the public all year, with the exception of major holidays. The Capitol's visiting hours are 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. on weekdays and 9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. on weekends. Professional guided tours of the Capitol are available throughout visiting hours, free of charge.

