



STATE REPRESENTATIVE ★ FOUR PRICE ★

CAPITOL REPORT

87TH LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Dear Panhandle Neighbors,

Hope.

We all need it - the unwavering belief that the future will bring forth a brighter day. Hope is always essential, but especially so in the troubled times we have all experienced over the past many months since the pandemic hit our country's shores. Virtually everyone has dealt, and is dealing, with its effects on both a personal level and how we function as a modern society. We all desire a return to normal America.

What sustains hope for me, both privately and as your state representative, is faith, family and the people of the High Plains. You would have guessed the first two, but you may be asking how hope is drawn from those for whom I have the privilege of representing at the Texas Capitol.

First, the caring and compassionate acts exhibited by our heroic hospital personnel, healthcare providers and long-term nursing staff, throughout our local communities, are unquestionably inspirational to this very day. Equally inspirational are the selfless acts of courage shown each and every time a law enforcement officer, firefighter and paramedic puts on their respective uniform. Sadly, we have lost some of these heroes as a result of the pandemic. We shall endeavor to always remember their selfless hearts for serving others.

Strength is also drawn from many other constituents such as those engaged in helping feed the world through agriculture. The farmer, the rancher, the feed lot operator and the food production worker show incredible grit in 'normal' times of harsh weather and fluctuating commodity prices, but especially remain committed to producing food for America. All of us likely are now more appreciative of our store clerks, food servers and others in service industries.

The resilience shown by all those in education - students, teachers, counselors and administrative staff - is also inspirational during these challenging times. A thank you to all the moms and dads who had to take on the additional responsibilities of "home room" facilitator during virtual learning is also in order.

All of the above and many others serve as humble reminders that I have the privilege, and the responsibility, of steadfastly serving the great people of House District 87 at the Texas Capitol. I think of you while casting my vote on legislation that impacts all of our families and our future. It is truly an honor to represent our part of Texas - *Home of God, Grass and Grit!* as one local sign proudly proclaims. Texas Panhandle Strong!

God Bless Texas,

Four Price

State Representative





PRICE LEGISLATIVE WORK:



A question frequently asked by constituents and reporters alike, especially at the beginning of every regular legislative session, is what issues our office is prioritizing. The answer has consistently remained the same since first taking office - finding **real solutions** to the challenges that directly impact families. One might say finding practical answers to kitchen table issues:

- **Healthcare** - access to healthcare such as, how close in proximity is the nearest primary care doctor, specialist, hospital or ambulance service.
- **Education** - what educational opportunities are available at the K-12 level and at the college level for those who wish to further advance in their current field of work, change career paths, or pursue new educational opportunities close to home.
- **Economic Development** and **Public Safety** - families desire safe neighborhoods and communities with strong job opportunities.

Enhancing Healthcare Access. Our office has worked on healthcare matters for a number of legislative sessions, and we continue to do so because good health is vital to personal and family success. The lack of healthcare access or delay in timely treatment can detrimentally affect one's recovery from an illness or injury. Access is a challenge especially in the rural areas of our state.

The delivery of medicine through the utilization of technology has tremendously helped patients not only gain access to medical providers but, equally important, timely access to healthcare. We saw the potential of technology helping stretch needed medical resources through the utilization of telemedicine; thereby, helping provide greater access to both primary care and medical specialists statewide. For example, we saw firsthand how an obstetrician practicing at a rural hospital could in a timely manner consult with a neonatal physician specialist at a large urban children's hospital about a newborn baby's premature or otherwise medically fragile condition.

While I authored/sponsored several bills on telemedicine/telehealth in 2017-2019, no one could have foreseen how rapidly the expansion of telemedicine utilization would become until the onset of the pandemic where the utilization of telemedicine has been absolutely critical and a game changer in seeing patients.

Building on our office's prior legislative successes, this session I authored **House Bill 4** which was passed and signed into law by the governor. House Bill 4 makes permanent the state's emergency waivers for the delivery of certain established adult and child healthcare programs by healthcare providers. These waivers proved beneficial to patients in the delivery of timely healthcare and were also shown to be a cost effective

tool in the delivery of healthcare. This leveraging of technology has the potential of continuing to improve patient outcomes by having the patient seen and receiving treatment in a timelier manner.



Price receiving bill signing pen at HB 4 Bill Signing Ceremony



Addressing Healthcare Costs. In the latter part of 2019, I met with constituents, including parents of children with diabetes. Concerns were shared over the costs of life-saving medications, including the cost of insulin. During the 2021 regular legislative session, I worked across the aisle and across the rotunda on this issue and was pleased to cosponsor **Senate Bill 827** which passed and was signed into law. This legislation limits the co-pays to \$25 for each insulin prescription per month for insured Texans covered by state-regulated health plans. I also coauthored House Bill 18 which was passed into law and establishes a self-replenishing fund for prescription rebates. This continues our office's commitment to addressing costs, which included cosponsoring Senate Bill 1264 in 2019 providing consumer protections against unexpected, or more commonly referred to as 'surprise', medical and healthcare billing.

Increasing Access to AEDs. Automated external defibrillators (AEDs) are portable, life-saving medical devices designed to treat people experiencing a heart attack. These devices have become increasingly more user friendly and lower in cost. To encourage greater access to these medical devices that literally can be the difference between life or death, I was the primary sponsor of **Senate Bill 199**, in an effort to encourage all businesses to consider having such life-saving devices in their place of business. This builds on our office's efforts in 2019, where we successfully included in the state's budget, funding for the purchase of AEDs to be carried in vehicles of state troopers assigned to the Northwest and West Texas regions, where the nearest ambulance or hospital can be a significant distance in miles.

Strengthening Mental Health Parity. This session I authored and passed into law **House Bill 2595** which builds on and further strengthens the existing mental health parity law which our office worked on in 2017, House Bill 10. The concept of mental health parity is that mental health benefits, provided by an insurer regulated by the state, should be fairly received as any physical medical condition which can be seen, for instance a broken bone. Among other things, H.B. 2595 requires the Texas Department of Insurance to establish a parity complaint portal for the timely processing of alleged improper denials of mental health benefits.

Aiding COVID-19 Response Locally. In February 2020, our office received a briefing on COVID-19 from the commissioner of the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS). Following the briefing, we reached out to local health providers and hospitals to assess their need for personal protective equipment (PPE) and offer our assistance to help facilitate the delivery of state resources to the Texas Panhandle. It was our privilege to engage in ongoing and consistent collaboration with frontline healthcare heroes, local

officials, and various state agencies (Texas Department of Emergency Management, Texas Health and Human Services Commission, and the Texas DSHS), to help coordinate the delivery of PPEs, testing supplies and other medical equipment to the Texas Panhandle.

Our office also steadfastly facilitated the coordination among the staff of Texas A&M University, Texas Tech University Health Science Center in Amarillo, and a local physician practice and its laboratory in having collected COVID test specimens actually ex-



Price laying out a bill in the House Chamber



amined at the Texas A&M Veterinary Medical Diagnostic Laboratory located in Amarillo. This was a game changer, in that, the turn around time for test results was drastically reduced to no more than 24 to 48 hours. The reduction in time was due to the collected specimens not needing to be shipped off for analysis but instead examined locally. Recall that at the time, the availability of testing tools was an extreme impediment in the war against COVID. It was my privilege to author and pass House Resolution 1393 recognizing the extraordinary team efforts of all involved in this endeavor.

The pandemic to this very day has resulted in an overwhelming number of us developing a very heartfelt appreciation for all frontline healthcare personnel and for all of the staff who support them. May we never forget their selfless acts of courage. And while words are inadequate, it is nevertheless appropriate and a privilege to recognize their heroic effort on behalf of our local communities and the people of the Texas Panhandle through the passage of respective Texas House Resolutions: BSA Health System, H.R. 1895; Golden Plains Community Hospital, H.R. 1948; Moore County Hospital, H.R. 1887; and Northwest Texas Healthcare System, H.R. 1889.

Furthering Educational Opportunities.

Our office has ongoing dialogue and engagement with secondary schools and institutions of higher education throughout House District 87. We are consistently impressed by the dedication exhibited by our area teachers, professors, administrators, and, of course, the students who excel academically and athletically at the highest levels of competition.

During the most recent regular legislative session, the Texas Legislature passed a biennial budget for the state fiscal years 2022-2023 which fully funded the investments in public education initiated during the 2019 session. The budget also includes \$3.1 billion for student enrollment growth.

Regarding enhancing higher education opportunities, we are thrilled to see the inaugural class of veterinary students of the Texas Tech University School of Veterinary Medicine at Amarillo commence their coursework in the newly constructed world-class facilities. It was a long journey to make this much needed veterinary school a reality and many in our community and across the state played a crucial role. We are pleased to have had a part in the legislative arena in helping our region and state write a new chapter to our state's rich and iconic agricultural history. Also, we are pleased with the tremendous accomplishments of West Texas

A&M University, including its new Amarillo campus for nursing education and its newly opened VERO facility on its Canyon campus designed for veterinary education, research, and outreach.

All of the above demonstrate that educational opportunities at all levels have tremendous value to individuals and to society as a whole. I believe in investing in education.



Price discussing policy with a House colleague

Strengthening Economic Development.

Access to reliable high speed broadband is absolutely vital to rural Texas. Economic development, supported by foundationally strong education and healthcare ecosystems, will help rural Texas thrive and compete with our urban friends. That is why our office has worked on the broadband issue for several years, including my authoring and passing House Bill 1960, in 2019, which created the Governor's Broadband Development Council. At the time this bill was passed,



COVID-19 was not part of our everyday vocabulary, and thus, virtually no one could have foreseen how broadband connectivity would become a crucial necessity in one's everyday life.

The pandemic and, in part, House Bill 1960 accelerated broadband planning in Texas. Via House Bill 1960, the council, comprised of diverse stakeholders, is required to provide an annual report setting forth recommendations for broadband development in Texas. Several recommendations contained in the 2020 report were incorporated into **House Bill 5**, which I was pleased to joint author during the recent regular session. House Bill 5, in part, creates a state broadband development office for the purpose of developing a coordinated state effort to make reliable broadband more accessible and allow the receipt of federal funding designated for such development efforts.

Another aspect to vibrant economic development is an efficient transportation network. In that regard we communicate with the Texas Department of Transportation, including the Amarillo district office, local officials and constituents on road issues throughout House District 87. Progress is being made on State Loop 335, along with I-40 and I-27 improvements.

We also look towards future anticipated needs such as the expansion of Interstate 27, which is conceptually known as the Ports-to-Plains Corridor. In 2019, I authored House Bill 1079, which called for TxDOT, with the assistance and input of an advisory council comprised of mayors and county officials, to conduct a comprehensive study regarding the feasibility of constructing such a corridor. The study resulted in a very favorable report for the construction of the corridor when federal funding becomes

available. During the recent regular session, I was the primary House sponsor of **Senate Bill 1474**, which continues the work of the advisory council in providing local input to TxDOT.

Supporting Public Safety. For a number of legislative sessions, I have worked on forensic mental health and behavioral health matters involving our state's justice system. During the 2021 regular session, I authored **House Bill 976** allowing for a broader pool of judges to preside over specialty courts, especially in rural areas. Specialty courts, such as drug courts, have been successful in helping defendants benefit from potential life-changing intensive treatment programs. These courts provide receptive low-risk defendants pathways to become productive members of society. House Bill 976

passed the Texas House and became law when the bill's language was incorporated in **Senate Bill 1530**.

To help ensure that a person is not denied potential life-saving emergency medical help, I joint authored **House Bill 9** during the recent regular session which establishes criminal penalties for anyone who knowingly obstructs an emergency vehicle or obstructs access to an emergency room.

Additionally, I was pleased to support and vote for legislation in both the 2021 Regular Legislative Session in Senate Bill 1 and in the 2021 Second Called Legislative Session in House Bill 9 to provide significant funding for border security measures, including monies to help law enforcement fight drug trafficking and human trafficking. The legislation provides funding for the hiring of additional state troopers and for the purchase of additional law enforcement equipment. The total amount appropriated for the 2022-2023 biennium is in excess of \$2.8 billion.



Price listening to a House colleague



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