Women of the Texas Senate
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Texas’ first female state senator, Margie Neal, was elected in 1926. The story of her election, however, tied as it was to the fight for women’s suffrage, reaches back at least another half century. Delegates to the state Constitutional Conventions of 1868–69 and 1875 debated proposals to extend the voting franchise to women, but none passed. By the final decades of the 19th century, the Texas Equal Rights Association and other groups were organizing to campaign for equal voting rights in the state.

In March 1918, suffragists secured an important partial victory in the Texas Legislature—the right of Texas women to vote in state primary elections. The impact on Texas politics was immediate. In July of that year, women voting in the Democratic primary secured the nomination of Annie Webb Blanton as state superintendent of public instruction. Despite the fact that women were still prohibited from voting in general elections, Blanton won the November election, becoming the first woman elected to statewide office in Texas.

The next year, progress stalled at the state level, as a contentious referendum for full suffrage failed to gain approval from the voters. In Washington, D.C., however, suffragists achieved a historic breakthrough. On June 4, 1919, the United States Congress submitted to the states a constitutional amendment that would give women the right to vote in all elections, and suffragists worked tirelessly for its passage. On June 28, Texas became the ninth state to ratify the amendment, and on August 18, 1920, the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution was finally ratified. Women could no longer be denied the right to vote.
Since Margie Neal first took the Senate oath of office almost a century ago, 19 women have held the prestigious title of Texas State Senator. During the 60 years following Senator Neal’s election, only five other “lady senators” were elected, each serving as the Senate’s sole female member. Then, in 1987, Senator Cyndi Krier was joined by not one but two other female senators, Eddie Bernice Johnson and Judith Zaffirini. The number of women in the Texas Senate currently stands at eight—a group of successful businesswomen, educators, physicians, lawyers, and judges.
Margie Neal was the first woman elected to the Texas Senate. That, however, was just one of many firsts in a long and distinguished political career that saw her fill important positions at both the state and the national levels of government.

Mary Elizabeth “Margie” Neal was born in 1875 near Clayton, in Panola County, and lived most of her life in nearby Carthage. As a young woman, she attended Sam Houston State Teachers College in Huntsville and began a teaching career that took her to Fort Worth. In 1903, she returned to Carthage to help care for her ailing mother and to run her father’s weekly newspaper, the Texas Mule, which she renamed the East Texas Register. As editor and publisher, she used the paper as a platform to promote women’s suffrage and the Democratic Party.

During her career in Texas politics, Neal broke through many of the state’s traditional gender barriers. She was the first female member of the State Democratic Executive Committee and served as a delegate to the 1920 Democratic National Convention in San Francisco. When Governor Pat Neff nominated her to the board of regents of the State Teachers Colleges, she became the board’s first female member. In 1918, when Texas women won the right to vote in state primary elections, Neal was the first woman to register to vote in Panola County.

Neal was elected in 1926 to represent Texas Senate District 2, which included Gregg, Harrison, Panola, Rusk, and Shelby Counties. During her four sessions in the Senate,
from the 40th through the 43rd Legislatures (1927-1935), Senator Neal introduced and supported many important and enduring pieces of legislation. She introduced the bill that created the State Board of Education. She was instrumental in creating physical education classes in public schools, endorsed a bill that made the study of state and national constitutions mandatory in public schools, and provided crucial support for legislation that increased state funding for rural education. Passionate in her support for the disabled, she successfully promoted legislation providing rehabilitation services and other resources to persons with disabilities and also served on the board of directors of the Texas Society for Crippled Children.

Among her numerous standing committee assignments, Senator Neal chaired the Senate Committees on Educational Affairs, Rules, and Privileges and Elections and served as vice-chair of the Senate Public Debts and Federal Relations Committees. She was twice elected president pro tempore ad interim of the Senate, at the close of the 1st Called Session of the 41st Legislature (1929) and again at the close of the 2nd Called Session of the 43rd Legislature (1934).

In 1935, after her service in the Senate ended, Neal took her talents to the federal government. In Washington, D.C., she worked with the National Recovery Administration and the Social Security Administration, two key components of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s Depression-era New Deal agenda. After moving back to Texas, she worked in San Antonio and Dallas before returning to Carthage in 1945, where she continued to participate in community and public affairs until her death on December 19, 1971. She was buried at Oddfellows Cemetery in Carthage.
In 1947, more than 20 years after Margie Neal’s ground-breaking election, Marian Isabel “Maribelle” Stewart became the second woman elected to the Texas Senate. A Democrat from Houston, Stewart’s Senate tenure was brief, but she left a lasting mark on the state and helped blaze a trail for other women to follow.

Maribelle Hamblen was born on December 1, 1912. She and her first husband, W. Lacy Stewart, were married on Valentine’s Day, 1934, and settled in Houston, where they raised a son. In 1946, W. Lacy Stewart was elected to the Texas Senate to represent Harris County’s 16th senatorial district. His sudden death on March 22, 1947, just nine weeks into the 50th Legislature, left the seat vacant.

Governor Beauford Jester quickly called a special election to fill the vacancy, and on April 19, Maribelle Stewart was elected to replace her husband as senator. She served only six weeks during the regular session and there were no special sessions, but she had a significant impact nonetheless. She succeeded to her late husband’s committee appointments, including the Senate Committees on Criminal Jurisprudence, State Affairs, Labor, Insurance, Enrolled Bills (as chair), and Oil, Gas and Conservation. She was also instrumental in securing the passage of two business-oriented bills introduced by her husband. She served on the conference committees for the two bills and chaired one of them.

When Neveille Colson was elected to the Senate in the fall of 1948, the news that two women would serve together in the upper chamber when the legislature convened in
January 1949 made headlines. It was not to be, however. Although Stewart could have served to the end of her husband’s original term, she resigned her seat in December 1948 when she married Houston attorney W. J. Mills. It was not until 1987 that more than one woman would serve in the Texas Senate at the same time, when Eddie Bernice Johnson and Judith Zaffirini were elected, joining Cyndi Taylor Krier in the 70th Legislature.

From 1971 to 1982, Maribelle Stewart, then known as Maribelle Reich, served as clerk of the First Court of Civil Appeals in Harris County. Her brother, Judge William Hamblen, had been elected in 1961 as the first mayor of Seabrook, a small city on Galveston Bay where Maribelle took up residence. She died there on April 8, 1991.
Esther Neveille Higgs Colson, a Democrat from Navasota, was the first woman elected to both houses of the Texas Legislature. When she left the legislature after nearly three decades of service, she was one of its longest-serving members.

Neveille Higgs was born on July 18, 1902, in Bryan, where she received her early schooling. During the 1920s and 1930s, Neveille attended classes at several Texas universities, including Baylor University, The University of Texas, and the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas (now Texas A&M University), though she did not complete a degree. Around 1925, while teaching in Iola, in Grimes County, she married Nall Colson, a local football coach.

Nall Colson was elected to the Texas House of Representatives in 1932. In Austin, Neveille served as her husband’s secretary and, at times, also worked for the secretary of state’s office and the Internal Revenue Service. Nall Colson’s legislative career ended in 1937 and the couple subsequently divorced. In 1938, Neveille ran successfully for the House district her former husband had served.

In the House of Representatives, Colson promoted legislation to improve juvenile corrections, education, and public roads, particularly roads in rural areas. In 1946, she became the first woman to author a constitutional amendment that was subsequently approved by Texas citizens—a measure to ensure that taxes collected from road users were dedicated specifically to road construction. Her reelection in 1946 made her the longest-serving female legislator in Texas history, surpassing Margie Neal’s eight years.
In 1948, Colson was elected to represent Senate District 5 in east central Texas. During her 18 years in the Senate, from the 51st through the 59th Legislatures (1949-1967), she was the state’s only female senator. Still, Colson refused to be pigeonholed or to receive special treatment. Early in her Senate tenure, she turned down the offer of an office just off the Senate floor traditionally reserved for more senior members. Instead, she insisted on receiving a third-floor office typically offered to male senators with her seniority, an arrangement that required her to climb the Capitol stairs several times a day. She also declined to sponsor reform legislation aimed specifically at women’s issues, derisively named “petticoat legislation” by the press and conservative legislators.

As a senator, Colson continued her efforts in support of public roads and public schools. In 1949, the Colson-Briscoe Act allocated funding for a statewide system of farm-to-market roads. With additional federal money, the funding enabled the Texas Highway Department to nearly double the number of paved rural roads in the state in two years. Also in 1949, Colson helped pass the Gilmer-Aiken Laws, a package of education reforms that consolidated school districts, provided state equalization funding, raised teacher salaries, and based state funding on student attendance.

Senator Colson served on more than two dozen Senate committees and on the Legislative Budget Board. She chaired six committees, including the Senate Education and Public Affairs Committees, and served as vice-chair of the Senate Committees on Finance, Agricultural Affairs, and Nominations, among others. In 1954, the state’s longest girder bridge, near Washington-on-the-Brazos, was named the Nevelle H. Colson Bridge in her honor.

After leaving the legislature, Colson stayed active in her community. She was curator of the Sam Houston Memorial Museum in Huntsville before returning to Bryan, where she died on March 3, 1982. She was buried at the Bryan City Cemetery.
Speaking at the 1992 Democratic National Convention in New York City, Barbara Jordan asked, “What is the catalyst which will bring about the change we’re all talking about?” Throughout her adult life, Jordan herself was just such a catalyst in advancing civil rights in Texas and the nation.

Barbara Charline Jordan was born in Houston on February 21, 1936. With strength and courage instilled at a young age by her family, she excelled academically despite racial segregation and discriminatory Jim Crow laws. At Houston’s Phillis Wheatley High School, a career day speech by African American attorney Edith Sampson inspired Jordan to consider a legal career. A gifted orator, she won first place in the Texas State Ushers Oratorical Contest in 1952, earning the chance to compete in the national championship in Chicago, which she also won.

After graduating from Texas Southern University and Boston University Law School, Jordan returned to Houston, where she opened a private law practice and immersed herself in community affairs and politics. As a volunteer for the 1960 Kennedy-Johnson presidential campaign, she organized African Americans in Harris County, helping to spur the largest voter turnout the county had ever experienced. Jordan’s political career was launched.

She became the speaker for the Harris County Democratic Party and, in 1962 and 1964, ran unsuccessfully for the Texas House of Representatives. In 1966, however, she won election to Senate District 11, becoming the first African
American since 1883, and the first African American woman ever, to hold the position of Texas State Senator.

In the Senate, from the 60th through the 62nd Legislatures (1967-1973), Jordan introduced and collaborated on legislation affecting the environment, minimum wage standards, and discrimination in business contracts. She chaired the Senate Committee on Labor and Management Relations and the Senate Committee on Urban Affairs and served on more than a dozen other standing committees, including the Senate Committees on Finance, Education, State Affairs, Jurisprudence, and Public Health.

Elected to the United States House of Representatives in 1972, Jordan was the first African American woman from a Southern state to serve in Congress. On the advice of former President Lyndon B. Johnson, she joined the House Judiciary Committee and the House Ways and Means Committee. As a member of the Judiciary Committee during the Watergate hearings in July 1974, she gained national prominence. Her powerful words in support of the impeachment of President Richard Nixon, delivered with precise diction and in a booming voice, garnered some media scrutiny, but her eloquence and sincerity were never questioned. Two years later, Jordan became the first woman to deliver the keynote address at a Democratic National Convention.

Jordan retired from public office in 1979 and accepted a professorship at the Lyndon Baines Johnson School of Public Affairs at The University of Texas at Austin. She later served as ethics advisor to Governor Ann Richards and received many honors, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the Spingarn Medal for service to the African American community, and induction into the National Women’s Hall of Fame.

On her death in January 1996, Jordan was the first African American woman to be buried at the Texas State Cemetery in Austin. Through her lifework as attorney, civil rights advocate, orator, state legislator, and congresswoman, Barbara Jordan left an indelible legacy to Texas and the nation—a legacy that continues to inspire all those who seek a more just and equitable world.
Elizabeth “Betty” Richards Andujar made Texas political history in 1972 as the first Republican woman elected to the Texas Senate. In 1977, she became the first Republican to be elected president pro tempore of the Senate, a position that made her acting governor when both the sitting governor and lieutenant governor were out of state. As such, she was the first Republican to occupy the governor’s chair since Reconstruction.

Betty Richards was born November 6, 1912, in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, the daughter of a Pennsylvania chief justice. She received a bachelor of arts degree from Wilson College in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, and in 1935, she married physician John Jose Andujar. The couple moved to Texas in 1937, settling in Fort Worth, where John was appointed laboratory director of Harris Hospital.

Andujar began her political career in the 1950s by volunteering for political campaigns, including Dwight Eisenhower’s 1952 presidential bid, and by serving on the Republican state committee. In 1970, she ran for a seat in the Texas House of Representatives and was defeated, but in 1972, in the wake of the Sharpstown corruption scandal, she won a hard-fought election in Senate District 12.

Andujar served five legislative sessions in the Senate, from the 63rd through the 67th Legislatures (1973-1983). She supported the creation of the Texas Commission on the Status of Women to advocate for the legal and economic rights of women, supported the development of service centers for displaced homemakers, and sponsored legislation
that addressed rape and helped women receive child support. Determined to reform the medical profession, she led legislative efforts to modernize the state medical examiner system and require that county coroners be qualified pathologists. Her committee assignments included service on the Senate Committees on State Affairs, Natural Resources, Economic Development, and Intergovernmental Relations.

Andujar was a delegate to the Republican National Conventions in 1972 and 1976 and served as Republican national committee woman for Texas from 1976 to 1980. She was also the first senator to have a husband. With the Senate Wives Club closed to him, Dr. Andujar established and served as the president and sole member of the Senate Husbands Club. The Andujars’ early leadership of the Republican Party caused one Fort Worth politician to quip, “They have made being Republican respectable in Texas.”

Following her retirement from the Senate, Andujar continued to support causes that were important to her. In 1988, she and her husband established the first permanent chair of pathology at The University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center. In 1996, she received the Citation of Merit award from the Texas Society of Pathologists for her legislative efforts to modernize the medical examiner system. Her dedication to the medical community was demonstrated once again by her support of the expansion of the Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine, now the University of North Texas Health Science Center.

Betty Andujar died June 8, 1997, and was buried at the Statesmans’ Meadow section of the Texas State Cemetery in Austin.
Cynthia “Cyndi” Taylor Krier of San Antonio was the first Republican and the first female state senator from Bexar County. She forged a broad coalition of voters and, following her career in electoral politics, has remained an involved member of her state and community.

Krier was born July 12, 1950, in Beeville and was raised there and in the small town of Dinero, about 40 miles northwest of Corpus Christi. An honor student and basketball player, she attended San Antonio College and Trinity University before transferring to The University of Texas at Austin to major in journalism. She graduated from The University of Texas School of Law in 1975.

At the time of her election to the Texas Senate in 1984, Krier was a practicing San Antonio lawyer and already a seasoned political professional, having served on the legislative staff of United States Senator John Tower, on the White House staff of counselor to the president Anne Armstrong, and on Governor Bill Clement’s bipartisan Task Force on Equal Opportunities for Women and Minorities.

Attracting the support of women, independents, and some Democrats, Krier won election to the Texas Senate in landslide fashion. She served in the Senate from the 69th through 72nd Legislatures (1985-1993). The media, at times, dubbed her a progressive Republican, citing her support of the federal Equal Rights Amendment and her pro-choice position on abortion rights. Of more importance to Senator Krier, however, was her influence on state-level issues. In her four sessions, she passed legislation to
improve the collection of child support, address child abuse and family violence issues, improve children’s healthcare, improve Texas’ juvenile justice system, create the Texas Alternative Dispute Resolution Procedures Act, protect the state’s water supply, and expand business opportunities through tourism development and job-training programs.

Senator Krier served on the Senate Finance, Natural Resources, Health and Human Services, and Jurisprudence Committees as well as on the governing body of the Texas Legislative Council. She chaired the Senate Education Committee in the 71st Legislature. In Krier’s second session, Judith Zaffirini and Eddie Bernice Johnson joined her in the Senate, making the 70th Legislature the first in Texas history with more than one female senator.

In 1992, Krier became the first woman and the first Republican to be elected Bexar County judge, an office she held until 2001. As county judge, Krier continued to address the problem of family violence, supported the construction of a new county jail, and worked to create a more open appointments process to county boards and commissions and to require competitive bids and proposals for county contracts.

She has remained active in civic matters, serving on the board of regents of The University of Texas System and maintaining affiliation with the American Bar Association, the Chamber of Commerce, the American Cancer Society, and United Way. In 2002, Krier became the vice president for Texas governmental relations for the United Services Automobile Association insurance company.

In recognition of Krier’s achievements, a federal post office in San Antonio has been named in her honor, as has the Cyndi Taylor Krier Juvenile Correctional Treatment Center, a long-term residential program facility in San Antonio focusing on therapeutic intervention and rehabilitation.
A registered nurse, Eddie Bernice Johnson was the first African American woman elected to represent Dallas County in the Texas House of Representatives and the Texas Senate, and today she serves the people of Dallas in the United States Congress.

Johnson was born and raised in Waco. She studied nursing at Saint Mary’s College in Indiana and at Texas Christian University before moving to Dallas, where she worked at the Veterans Administration Hospital as chief psychiatric nurse, the hospital’s first African American professional. Her passion for social and civil rights spurred her to write the hospital’s equal employment opportunity guidelines with the goal of protecting future minority employees.

In 1972, Johnson resigned from the hospital and ran for a seat in the Texas House of Representatives. Her landslide victory in the Democratic primary was sparked by voters ready for change after scandals had rocked the Texas Legislature, and she did not face an opponent in the general election. During her three terms in the Texas House, Johnson served on the House State Affairs, Calendars, Human Resources, and Social Services Committees and as chair of the House Labor Committee. During this time, she also received a master’s degree in public administration from Southern Methodist University and was a delegate to the 1976 Democratic National Convention in New York City. In 1977, she stepped down from her seat in the House to accept a presidential appointment as regional director of the United States Department of Health, Education and Welfare.
Johnson reentered Texas politics in 1986 with a successful campaign to represent a portion of Dallas County in the Texas Senate. Senator Johnson served in the Senate during the 70th, 71st, and 72nd Legislatures (1987-1993). Her legislative priorities in the Senate included criminal justice, consumer affairs, racial equality, child care, maternity leave, and education. She served on the Senate Committees on Education, Finance, Health and Human Services, and Intergovernmental Relations, among other committee assignments. She also served as chair of the Special Committee on the Creation and Expansion of Minority and Women-Owned Business Ownership Opportunities.

In 1992, rather than pursue a third term in the Texas Senate, Johnson ran for a seat in the United States House of Representatives. Winning 74 percent of the vote, she became the second African American woman to represent Texas in Congress and the first registered nurse ever to be elected to Congress. During her congressional tenure, she has served as chair of the Congressional Black Caucus and as deputy Democratic whip. In December 2010, Johnson became the first African American woman to be selected as the ranking member of the House Committee on Science, Space and Technology. From 2000 to 2002, she was the ranking member of the House Subcommittee on Research and Science Education. Today, Johnson continues to emphasize the need to invest in science, technology, engineering, and math education.

Congresswoman Eddie Bernice Johnson is the proud mother of one son, Kirk, and grandmother to three grandsons. She resides in Dallas and is serving her 13th term representing the 30th Congressional District of Texas.
Judith Lee Pappas Zaffirini is the longest-serving woman in Texas Senate history. Also the first Hispanic woman to serve in the Senate and currently the senior senator representing the border region, Senator Zaffirini is widely respected, by colleagues and constituents alike, for her expertise in parliamentary procedure and her dedication to family and social issues.

A native of Laredo, Zaffirini was an exemplary student at The University of Texas at Austin, where she earned bachelor of science, master of arts, and Ph.D. degrees. She also studied at Laredo Community College and the University of Houston. She worked 13 years as an educator at the junior high, college, and university levels, performing a variety of functions, including teacher, curriculum writer, and administrator.

Prior to her election to the Senate in 1986, Zaffirini was active in Democratic Party politics, serving on the Democratic National Committee, as vice-chair of the Texas Democratic Party, and, from 1978 to 1984, on the State Democratic Executive Committee. In the Senate, she has continued to speak for the causes most dear to her, working to improve public education, higher education, and health and human services. She is known for her remarkable work ethic, best exemplified by her consecutive votes record and her near-perfect Senate attendance. Since 1987, the only disruption in her attendance was a deliberate absence to help break the Senate’s quorum during the 2003 fight over congressional redistricting. As of 2016, Senator Zaffirini had cast 55,660
consecutive votes and had sponsored and passed 895 bills and 52 substantive resolutions.

During her years of service in the Senate, Senator Zaffirini has chaired the Senate Health and Human Services Committee, the Senate Higher Education Committee, and the Senate Government Organization Committee. She currently serves as vice-chair of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources and Economic Development. Her many other committee assignments have included the Senate Finance; State Affairs; Business and Commerce; Education; International Relations and Trade; Agriculture, Water, and Rural Affairs; and Administration Committees. The first Hispanic woman to be named president pro tempore of the Texas Senate and Governor for a Day, Senator Zaffirini also served on the Legislative Budget Board from 2004 to 2014. In 2012, she organized the Eagle Ford Shale Legislative Caucus to address the opportunities and challenges of oil and gas development in South Texas.

Senator Zaffirini has received hundreds of awards and honors for her legislative, community-service, and professional achievements. She has been named one of the “100 Most Influential Hispanics” by Hispanic Business magazine and has appeared four times on Texas Monthly’s list of “10 Best Legislators.” She is the namesake of Laredo Community College’s Senator Judith Zaffirini Library as well as the Senator Judith Zaffirini Elementary School in Laredo.

Senator Zaffirini is a lector at Blessed Sacrament Catholic Church in Laredo and member of the Texas Philosophical Society and of Phi Kappa Phi Honor Society. She and her husband of almost 52 years, Carlos, live in Laredo.
In 1991, Margaret Ann “Peggy” Mulry Rosson became the first woman from El Paso to serve in the Texas Senate. By that time, however, she had already established a long record of distinguished community and civic involvement.

Peggy Rosson was born in Indianapolis, Indiana, on April 11, 1935, and graduated from that city’s George Washington High School in 1952. Her life as a Texan began in 1954 with a move to El Paso, where she worked as a paralegal and businesswoman before launching a career in public service that earned her accolades from environmentalists, consumer advocates, and women across Texas. She was also a director of the Bank of the West in El Paso.

In 1983, Rosson became the first woman appointed to the Public Utility Commission of Texas. She was elected chair in 1985, and after she left the commission, she applied her expertise in utilities to representing the Office of the Attorney General on the State Cogeneration Council from 1987 to 1991.

Senator Rosson’s service in the 72nd, 73rd, and 74th Legislatures (1991-1997) focused largely on concerns that affected her home district of El Paso: utilities, colonias, and cross-border issues with Mexico. Rosson fought unfair wage conditions for garment workers in El Paso, cracked down on illicit dumping in West Texas, and brought attention to water quality and health conditions in colonias. She was also a co-sponsor of legislation that created the Texas Ethics Commission. Her committee appointments reflected her interests, as she sat on the Senate
International Relations, Trade and Technology, Finance, Economic Development, Intergovernmental Relations, Redistricting, Ethics and Elections, Natural Resources, and Administration Committees and was vice-chair of the Senate Committee on State Affairs.

“It is getting better,” she said of the Texas Senate’s male-dominated reputation. Ever the pragmatist, her advice to new lawmakers of both sexes was to be more prepared than one’s opponent and to keep arguments civil. “There are no permanent friends or enemies in politics,” she counseled.

Senator Rosson, a Democrat, stayed true to her beliefs even when they went against the grain. She voted to make concealed handguns legal and fought anti-choice legislation, and she was the lone senator to vote against a large telecommunications bill in the 74th Legislature. Senator Rosson believed that the bill gave too much power to the monopolies and put too many limitations on competition and that those flaws outweighed potential benefits the legislation might have provided, such as requiring local telephone companies to upgrade their networks to certain technological standards.

Each time she “retired” from her professional life, either as a paralegal in 1977 or 10 years later when she left the Public Utility Commission of Texas, Peggy Rosson vowed to become, in her words, a “full-time wife.” She finally attained that status with her retirement from the Senate in 1997, but not before leaving behind a lasting imprint on her adopted home state.
Jane Gray Nelson made Texas Senate history in 2014 when she was named chair of the Senate Finance Committee, the first woman to chair a standing budget-writing committee in either house of the Texas Legislature. First elected to the Senate in 1992 and representing portions of Denton and Tarrant Counties, Senator Nelson is currently the longest-tenured Republican in the Senate.

Nelson graduated from the University of North Texas and pursued graduate studies at Southern Methodist University. After teaching public school in Arlington, she became a self-described “full-time mom and professional volunteer,” which included working at the grassroots level in support of Republican candidates. In 1988, she was elected to the State Board of Education, where she would serve for four years. Bringing to the board a practical understanding of ways to improve the education system, she led efforts to correct more than 5,000 errors in school textbooks and to reform the method by which the state chooses educational materials.

In the Senate, Nelson has continued to support education. She has endorsed legislation to improve fitness and nutrition among schoolchildren and to dedicate lottery proceeds to school funding. Other causes she has championed include assisting victims of domestic violence, protecting abused and displaced children, and reforming medical liability laws.

Senator Nelson has chaired the Senate Nominations Committee and served six legislative sessions as chair of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee, the longest-serving chair of that committee in Senate history. In that capacity, she sup-
ported measures creating the Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas and protecting patient privacy. In 2011, she was instrumental in securing the passage of omnibus health-care legislation that included provisions overhauling the state Medicaid program and cutting healthcare costs by allowing physician groups and hospitals to enter into healthcare collaboratives. Nelson has also served on the Senate Education, Criminal Justice, State Affairs, Open Government, and Government Organization Committees and as a member of the Legislative Budget Board. She was elected president pro tempore of the Senate in 2003.

As current chair of the Senate Finance Committee, Senator Nelson serves in one of the most powerful positions in state government. Committee members of both parties have praised her firm but inclusive approach to chairing the committee. She formerly chaired the influential Texas Sunset Commission, which is charged with reviewing the functions and performance of state agencies and recommending needed changes.

Senator Nelson and her husband, Mike, are parents of five children and grandparents to 10 grandchildren. Together, they operated an aircraft component manufacturing company in Denton. For her public service, Senator Nelson has received awards from the American Cancer Society, the Texas Council on Family Violence, the Texas Medical Association, and the Parent Teacher Association, of which she is a lifetime member.

A strong and skillful leader, Senator Nelson has often been the impetus behind important legislation. “I enjoy working with people to come up with solutions,” she has said. “I want us to work together to do what the Texas Legislature needs to be doing, and that is passing laws that are good for Texas.”
In a political career that spanned more than 30 years, Florence Muriel Donald Shapiro served as city council member, mayor, and Texas State Senator. As chair of the Senate Education Committee from 2003 until her retirement from the Senate in 2013, she was acknowledged as one of the state’s leading educational policymakers.

Shapiro is a first-generation American. Born in New York City, the daughter of Holocaust survivors, she became the first member of her family to earn a college degree. After graduating from The University of Texas at Austin with a degree in secondary education, she taught high school English and speech in Richardson. A Republican, Shapiro entered politics in 1979 and was elected to the city council of Plano, her adopted hometown. In 1990, she was elected mayor of Plano. She won election to the Texas Senate two years later, first representing District 2 and later District 8, which included Plano and nearby areas of the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex.

Senator Shapiro served 10 legislative sessions in the Senate, from the 73rd through the 82nd Legislatures (1993-2013). In addition to her tenure as chair of the Senate Education Committee, she chaired the Senate State Affairs Committee and served as co-chair of the Senate Higher Education Committee. Her many other committee assignments included service on the Senate Committees on Finance, Natural Resources, Criminal Justice, Intergovernmental Relations, Transportation and Homeland Security, and Administration. Senator Shapiro also served as a member of the Legislative Budget Board. She was instrumental in
passing a wide range of legislation, including authoring the joint resolution that allowed voters to approve the Texas Mobility Fund, which improved Texas’ ability to finance transportation projects throughout the state, and important bills affecting homeland security, economic development, and criminal justice.

Senator Shapiro’s signature cause, however, was the welfare of Texas children. In 1995 she authored “Ashley’s Laws,” which provided stronger measures to protect youth from sexual predators. But it was her commitment to education that most typified her concern for children. As chair of the Senate Education Committee, she dedicated herself to improving the public schools of Texas. In addition to overseeing reforms of school curriculum, standardized testing, and textbooks, she authored landmark school-finance legislation in 2006 that reformed the way education is funded in Texas.

Senator Shapiro has also taken the initiative in helping to build charitable organizations. She is a founding member of the Women’s Leadership Council of United Way and a founder of the Junior League of Collin County. Her many awards recognizing her superb leadership include the Legislator of the Year Award in 2008 from Children’s Advocacy Centers of Texas, the Jack Lowe Award for Community Leadership, the John Ben Sheppard Public Leadership Forum’s Political Courage Award, the Woman of the Year Award from Les Femmes du Monde, and the Lifetime Achievement Award from Dallas Can! Academy.

On April 9, 2005, Senator Shapiro served as Governor for a Day, making her only the sixth woman in Texas history to receive this honor. In 2008, President George W. Bush named Senator Shapiro to the governing body of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and selected her to accompany a presidential delegation to Israel. Since leaving public office, she has served on the boards of the Southwestern Medical Foundation and the Children’s Medical Center of Dallas and has served as vice president of the Dallas Holocaust Museum for Tolerance and Education. A mother of three and a grandmother, she lives with her husband, Howard, in Plano.
Leticia San Miguel Van de Putte is a leader among the Hispanic women of Texas. The Democratic nominee for lieutenant governor in 2014, she was first elected to the Texas Senate in 1999 and served 16 years representing San Antonio and nearby parts of Bexar County before resigning her seat to run for mayor of San Antonio.

Senator Van de Putte is the daughter of a ninth-generation Tejano family, but she was born in Tacoma, Washington, where her father was stationed at Fort Lewis. After the family’s return to Texas, she was reared in San Antonio and attended that city’s Thomas Jefferson High School. She graduated from The University of Texas at Austin’s College of Pharmacy in 1979 and worked at her grandfather’s pharmacy before buying her own business in the Loma Park area of San Antonio. Her legislative career began in 1990 with her election to the Texas House of Representatives. In 1993, she was awarded a prestigious Kellogg Fellowship at Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government.

After serving five terms in the Texas House, Van de Putte arrived in the Senate with a wealth of legislative experience and a firm idea of her priorities: veterans issues, children and families, education, indigent populations, and economic development. In addition, through her continuing work as a practicing pharmacist, Senator Van de Putte brought to the Senate a unique insight into healthcare issues facing the state.
Senator Van de Putte served in the Senate from the 76th Legislature through a part of the 84th Legislature (1999-2015). During her legislative career, Van de Putte’s colleagues repeatedly chose her to fill important posts. Between 2003 and 2005, she served as president of the National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators and from 2006 to 2007 was president of the National Conference of State Legislatures. In 2008, she was co-chair of the Democratic National Convention, as were Texans Barbara Jordan and Ann Richards before her. In the Senate, she served as chair of the Senate Democratic Caucus from 2003 to 2011 and chaired the Senate Veteran Affairs and Military Installations Committee. Additional committee assignments included service on the Senate Committees on State Affairs, Business & Commerce, Criminal Justice, Education, Higher Education, Intergovernmental Relations, Jurisprudence, Nominations, and Administration.

Senator Van de Putte has received many awards over the years from constituents and community organizations: the 2001 Outstanding Hispanic Woman Award from Image de San Antonio, Woman of the Year 2003 by the Mexican American Business Professional Women, a 2007 Las Primeras Award from the Mexican American National Association, Outstanding Latina of the Year 2008 from the Hispanic Students’ Association at Saint Mary’s School of Law, Women’s Advocate of the Year Award 2010 from The University of Texas Women’s Studies Institute, and the Vietnam Veterans of America Legislator of the Year Award in 2011. In 2008, the Texas A&M University Press published a political biography of Senator Van de Putte entitled Latina Legislator: Leticia Van de Putte and the Road to Leadership by University of Texas at San Antonio political science professor Dr. Sharon A. Navarro.

Senator Van de Putte and her husband, Pete, have six children and many grandchildren and reside in San Antonio.
A native of New Iberia, Louisiana, and a graduate of Louisiana State University, Joan Huffman came to the Texas Senate following a successful career as a prosecuting attorney and a criminal district court judge in Houston. With her knowledge of criminal law and years of courtroom experience, Senator Huffman has emerged as an influential leader in setting state criminal jurisprudence policy.

Huffman began her career in the Harris County District Attorney’s Office as a secretary. That work sparked her interest in criminal law, and she earned a law degree by taking night classes at South Texas College of Law while working as a legal intern by day.

In nearly 14 years as a prosecuting attorney for Harris County, part of that time as chief felony prosecutor, Huffman was the lead prosecutor in more than 100 trials, many of which dealt with such violent crimes as murder and child sexual assault. Beginning in 1999, she served six years as Judge of the 183rd Criminal District Court in Houston, where she earned a reputation as an evenhanded, uncompromising judge.

In December 2008, Huffman won a special election to represent Senate District 17, which includes parts of Brazoria, Fort Bend, and Harris Counties. She was elected to a full term in 2010 and again in 2014. Senator Huffman currently serves as chair of the Senate State Affairs Committee, as vice-chair of the Senate Criminal Justice Committee, and as a member of the Senate Finance Committee. She has also served on the Senate Committees
on Health and Human Services, Jurisprudence, Higher Education, Transportation and Homeland Security, and Veteran Affairs and Military Installations. A former member of the Sunset Advisory Commission, she helped to eliminate six nonessential state agencies, saving the state $161 million over the 2012-2013 fiscal biennium.

In January 2011, Huffman was elected vice-chair of the Legislative Sportsman’s Caucus, and from 2013 to 2015, she served as chair of the Senate Republican Caucus. She has also served as an appointed ex officio member of the Governor’s Criminal Justice Advisory Council.

In addition to law and order issues, Senator Huffman’s legislative interests include border security, property owners’ rights, taxation, children’s healthcare, and education. The Texas District and County Attorneys Association, the Texas Medical Association, the Harris County Medical Society, the Texas Association of Business, and Court Appointed Special Advocates are among the numerous organizations that have recognized Senator Huffman for her work in the legislature. She resides in Houston with her family.
An attorney, business executive, and former Fort Worth City Council member, Wendy R. Davis served three legislative sessions representing Senate District 10, largely composed of southern and central Tarrant County, including much of her hometown of Fort Worth. In her second term, she led a filibuster on the Senate floor, an event that attracted nationwide, even worldwide, attention. Rather than pursue another term in the Senate, Davis accepted the 2014 Democratic gubernatorial nomination but was unsuccessful in her campaign for the state’s highest office.

Davis was born and raised in Tarrant County and graduated from Richland High School in North Richland Hills. At the age of 21, she was divorced and raising an infant daughter on a tight budget. She began taking classes at Tarrant County College and, with the help of academic scholarships and student loans, was able to transfer to Texas Christian University, where she majored in English and graduated at the top of her class—the first person in her family to graduate from college. She went on to attend Harvard Law School, where she graduated with honors.

Returning to Texas, Davis served as clerk to United States District Judge Jerry L. Buchmeyer in Dallas before joining the Fort Worth office of the law firm Haynes and Boone. From 2004 to 2009, she was chief executive officer of the Fort Worth division of Republic Title Company. In 2010, she joined with attorney Brian Newby to form the law firm Newby Davis.
While her business and legal careers thrived, Davis also dedicated herself to public service. She was elected to the Fort Worth City Council in 1999 and served for nine years, chairing the city’s Economic Development Committee and earning a reputation as a councilwoman who could unite politicians and voters across party lines.

Senator Davis served in the Senate from the 81st through the 83rd Legislatures (2009-2015). Her priorities included legislation aimed at creating jobs, securing veterans’ rights, increasing public school and transportation funding, curbing predatory lending practices, and improving transparency in the state budgeting process. Her legislative work was commended by a wide variety of organizations, including the Texas Veterans Commission, the Texas Classroom Teachers Association, the Combined Law Enforcement Associations of Texas, the Texas Municipal League, and the Texas Association of Counties. In 2009, following her first legislative session, Senator Davis was named “Rookie of the Year” by Texas Monthly magazine and “Freshman of the Year” by both Texas Watch and AARP. The readers of Fort Worth Weekly voted her “Best Servant of the People” in 2007, 2009, and 2012, and Governing magazine included her on a national list of “12 State Legislators to Watch in 2012.”

Senator Davis served as vice-chair of the Senate Committee on Open Government and as vice-chair of the Senate Committee on International Relations and Trade. She also served on the Senate Committees on Economic Development, Education, Transportation, and Veteran Affairs and Military Installations.

Senator Davis’ civic activities include working with the Women’s Policy Forum, the League of Women Voters, and Fort Worth-area chambers of commerce. She is an avid runner and cyclist and is the proud mother of two daughters, Amber and Dru.
Donna Burrows Campbell was elected to the Texas Senate in 2012 to represent District 25, a six-county district stretching across Central Texas from Boerne to Seguin and from San Antonio to Austin. A practicing physician, she is the first female medical doctor to serve in the upper chamber.

Campbell was born at a naval base in San Diego, California, where her father was stationed, and was reared in Oklahoma. She began her medical career as a nurse, earning a bachelor of science degree in nursing from the University of Central Oklahoma in Edmond, Oklahoma, followed by a master of nursing degree from Texas Woman’s University as a cardiovascular clinical nurse specialist with an additional role in nursing administration. She received her medical degree from the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center in Lubbock and completed her residency at The University of Texas Health Science Center in Houston. She received the Morton Award as an outstanding resident in ophthalmology at the Hermann Eye Center in Houston.

Dr. Campbell is certified in both emergency room medicine and ophthalmology. At the time of her election to the Senate, she was the medical director at Columbus Community Hospital Emergency Department and worked full-time at an emergency room in Houston. Through her volunteer medical work with the Christian Eye Ministry, Dr. Campbell has performed hundreds of eye surgeries in the west African nation of Ghana.
She began her political career in 2010 while a resident of Columbus, making a bid for the United States Congress. Although she lost the race, she succeeded in establishing herself as an advocate for conservative social values, limited government, and reduced government spending.

She won election to the Texas Senate two years later, defeating a longtime incumbent in the Republican primary before securing victory in the general election. Senator Campbell currently chairs the Senate Committee on Veteran Affairs and Border Security. She has also served as vice-chair of the Senate Committee on Nominations and as a member of the Senate Committees on Business and Commerce, Transportation, Education, Health and Human Services, Intergovernmental Relations, Jurisprudence, and Administration. In 2014, she was appointed to the governing body of the Texas Legislative Council. By gubernatorial appointment, Senator Campbell represents Texas on the Southern Regional Education Board Legislative Advisory Council.

Dr. Campbell is a member of the American Academy of Physician Specialists and the medical school honor society Alpha Omega Alpha. She has been honored for her service by the Texas Association of Business, the Texas Veterans Commission, and the National Rifle Association. She lives in New Braunfels with the youngest of her four daughters.
Growing up in the South Texas farming community of Palito Blanco in a family of 10 children, Sylvia R. Garcia learned at an early age the importance of hard work and education. Her parents had to struggle to provide for their family, but they instilled in her the virtues of community and civic involvement. Garcia graduated from Ben Bolt-Palito Blanco High School before obtaining a degree in social work from Texas Woman’s University in Denton, which she attended on a scholarship. She went on to earn a law degree from the Thurgood Marshall School of Law at Texas Southern University in Houston.

In the early 1980s, Houston mayor Kathryn Whitmire appointed Garcia director and presiding judge of the Houston Municipal Court system, where she served for five terms. She was elected Houston City Controller in 1998, where she acted as a watchdog over the public’s finances and as an advocate on behalf of taxpayers. In 2002, she became the first Hispanic and first woman elected in her own right to the Harris County Commissioners Court. As commissioner, she helped improve conditions for working families, increased protection of the elderly and children, and promoted economic development and the creation of new jobs.

In March 2013, Garcia won a special runoff election to the seat left vacant by the death of Senator Mario Gallegos. She was sworn into office on March 11, becoming the third Hispanic woman to serve in the upper chamber. Although arriving in the Senate midway through the regular legislative session, Senator Garcia was influential in her support
for legislation restoring funding for public education, regulating payday lenders, improving management of the Port of Houston Authority, and reforming the process of gubernatorial nominations. In 2017, Senator Garcia was appointed to the Senate Committees on Criminal Justice, Transportation, and Intergovernmental Relations. She has also served as a member of the Senate Committees on Education, Government Organization, Jurisprudence, Nominations, and Veteran Affairs and Military Installations.

Throughout her career in public office, Senator Garcia has participated in a wide variety of community organizations. She has served on more than 25 community boards and commissions and is active with the San Jacinto Girl Scouts, the Houston Hispanic Forum, the American Leadership Forum, and the Museum of Fine Arts - Houston. Senator Garcia has been named “Humanitarian of the Year” by the National Conference for Community and Justice. She is also a recipient of the Texas Woman’s University Board of Regents Woman of Distinction Award, the Board Award from the San Jacinto Girl Scouts, and the Hispanic Scouting Distinguished Citizen Award from the Sam Houston Area Council of the Boy Scouts of America.

Senator Garcia represents Senate District 6 in Harris County, including parts of Houston, Pasadena, and Baytown. She lives in Houston.
Lois W. Kolkhorst was elected to the Texas Senate on December 5, 2014, in a special election, to represent District 18, which encompasses all or portions of 21 counties in a mostly rural area west of Houston and along the Gulf Coast. A native of Brenham, Kolkhorst graduated from Texas Christian University with a bachelor of arts in advertising and public relations. She played for the Lady Horned Frogs golf team and was named to the Academic All-Southwest Conference Team.

She and her husband, Jim, live in Brenham with their two children. The couple owns a fuel distributorship based in Navasota and a chain of convenience stores with locations in Brenham, Navasota, Bryan, and several other towns in or near the Brazos Valley. Before running for political office, Kolkhorst served as president and CEO of the Washington County Chamber of Commerce and on the Brenham Economic Development Foundation.

She was elected to the Texas House of Representatives in 2000 and served from the 77th through the 83rd Legislatures. In preparation for her initial term in the House, she met with many civic and business leaders in her district, and from these discussions, she learned that groundwater was the most important issue to her constituents. During the ensuing legislative session, she authored a bill that created the Bluebonnet Groundwater Conservation District in her region of the state.

Kolkhorst served three consecutive terms as chair of the House Committee on Public Health and two consecutive
terms as chair of the House Appropriations Committee’s Subcommittee on Education. She also served on the House Committees on County Affairs, Land and Resource Management, Higher Education, Corrections, and Appropriations. In 2006, she was appointed to the Sunset Advisory Commission, where she worked to improve efficiency in government.

During her tenure in the House, Kolkhorst worked diligently to protect property rights and the rights of consumers and to eliminate licensing requirements for small food producers. In 2009, she authored a bill that prescribed uniform standards for reporting the total cost of attendance at colleges and universities and required that the information be made easily accessible to the public. In 2011, she authored a bill that strengthened the privacy of individually identifiable medical records. During the same legislative session, she sponsored a bill that allowed individuals to sell homemade food products directly to the customer without burdensome state or local regulation. Also in 2011, Kolkhorst helped defeat legislation that would have authorized the Trans-Texas Corridor, which was conceived as a network of privately owned toll roads, some of which would have been built on land acquired under eminent domain.

She has received the Rural Legislator of the Year Award from the Association of Rural Communities in Texas and the Friend of Texas Children Award from United Ways of Texas, and in 2007 she was named one of the 10 best legislators by Texas Monthly magazine.

Senator Kolkhorst currently serves as chair of the Senate Committee on Administration and as a member of the Committees on Finance; Health and Human Services; and Agriculture, Water, and Rural Affairs. She has also served as vice-chair of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee and as a member of the Committees on Transportation and Education.
Konni Lyn Burton was born in Kerrville and grew up in the small town of Banquete, about 30 miles west of Corpus Christi. She attended the University of North Texas and graduated with a degree in marketing. She met her husband, Phil, while they were both attending the university. After they graduated, the couple moved to Tarrant County and joined Calvary Lutheran Church in Richland Hills. A strong pro-life advocate, Senator Burton would later serve on the church council.

She worked for a few years at a paper distribution company and then started her own wedding consulting business. During this period, Senator Burton and her husband began volunteering at the Gladney Center for Adoption in Fort Worth, and she served in leadership positions on the organization’s auxiliary board. When she and Phil adopted their first daughter from the Gladney Center, Senator Burton decided to devote herself to being a mother full time. They adopted their second daughter four years later. The family lives in Colleyville.

A member of the NE Tarrant Tea Party, Senator Burton believes in limited government, fiscal responsibility, and personal accountability. She has served on the organization’s steering committee and was elected vice president of its board of directors. Since 2010, she has served on the Tea Party Caucus advisory committee, which was formed by then-Senator Dan Patrick. Before running for political office, she worked diligently to help elect conservative candidates to the Texas House of Representatives. Her
campaign efforts included walking precincts and organizing events on behalf of candidates.

During her own campaign for state senator, Burton argued for an emphasis on the constitutional functions of government and identified transportation infrastructure and education as funding priorities. She won the November 2014 general election to represent Senate District 10, which encompasses much of Tarrant County.

Senator Burton currently serves as vice-chair of the Senate Committee on Administration and as a member of the Senate Committees on Criminal Justice, Health and Human Services, and Natural Resources and Economic Development.

She has also served as vice-chair of the Senate Committee on Veteran Affairs and Military Installations and as a member of the Committees on Higher Education and Nominations.
A distinguished ophthalmologist, Dawn Buckingham was elected in 2016 to represent Senate District 24, extending from western Travis County across the Texas Hill Country and north through the geographic center of the state.

Born into a seventh-generation Texas family, Buckingham spent her earliest years on Fox Run Farm near the town of Rockwall in north Texas. In her youth, her family moved to Austin. After graduating from Westlake High School, she worked two jobs to pay her way through college at The University of Texas in Austin, where she graduated magna cum laude.

Buckingham earned her medical degree from The University of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, followed by a residency in ophthalmology at the Medical Branch and a fellowship in oculoplastic and reconstructive surgery at the Albany Medical Center in Albany, New York. She is a partner in Eye Physicians of Austin, where she practices as a reconstructive and cosmetic surgeon. Before her election to the Senate, Dr. Buckingham served a term as president of the Texas Ophthalmological Association, chaired the Texas Medical Association’s Council on Legislation, and was recognized for her professional accomplishments by the American Academy of Ophthalmology, the Austin Business Journal, and Texas Monthly.

In 2013, Governor Rick Perry appointed Buckingham as a citizen member of the State Board for Educator Certification and she was later elected vice chair of the board. In 2014,
she was elected to the board of trustees for the Lake Travis Independent School District and was appointed by Lieutenant Governor David Dewhurst to serve as a public member of the Sunset Advisory Commission. During her service on the commission, she recommended statutory changes designed to improve investigations into fraudulent healthcare billing.

During her Senate campaign, Buckingham ran on a platform of limited government, advocating free market reforms to reduce healthcare costs and cutting government healthcare regulations. She vowed to reduce bureaucracy in public education to allow a larger share of funding to be spent directly on students. Senator Buckingham serves alongside Senator Donna Campbell, who is also a physician, making the first time that two female medical doctors have served together in the Texas Senate. Buckingham is currently a member of the Senate Committees on Health and Human Services, Higher Education, Veteran Affairs and Border Security, and Nominations.

Senator Buckingham and her husband, Dr. Edward Buckingham, live in Lakeway with their two teenage children. She volunteers with a number of organizations, including the Lakeway Girl Scouts and the Lake Travis Youth Association, and is an avid hunter and outdoorswoman.
Women of the Texas Senate