



The Senate of The State of Texas

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STATE SENATOR GONZALO BARRIENTOS COMMENTS ON SPECIAL SESSIONS

State Senator Gonzalo Barrientos (D-Austin) remarked today on the conclusion of the Second Called Session of the 79th Legislature, and unsuccessful efforts to address school finance. “The whole effort was hamstrung by leadership from the outset. You simply cannot take a school system which has been held unconstitutional due to inadequate, and inequitable, funding, and fix it without raising revenue. But that’s just how the governor and the speaker set it up. From the governor’s calling repeated special sessions when there was no real consensus, to the speaker’s insistence on a revenue neutral bill, to the silly \$23,000-a-day staring contest engaged in by the speaker and the lieutenant governor as the second session sputtered to a close, this whole exercise was much more about political posturing for Republican primaries than about fixing the schools or offering real tax relief.”

“I had my own proposals to make sure *everyone* received actual tax reductions,” said the senator. “Because more than one-third of Texans rent, I wanted to give renters a rebate when the landlords’ taxes went down. The majority party, on the other hand, wanted us to trust good-hearted landlords to pass on the savings instead. I also wanted to provide more broad-based property tax relief by raising the current homestead exemption of \$15,000 to \$30,000. The governor eventually proposed an increase to \$22,500, combined with a reduction of the \$1.50 property tax cap to \$1.20. My plan, in conjunction with a lowering of the \$1.50 property tax cap to \$1.25, would have provided \$304.44 of annual property tax relief to homeowners at the lowest appraised values and \$424.10 to an average Texas homeowner. Those figures represented 32.2% and 13.4%, respectively, more annual tax relief than provided by the Governor’s plan. The numbers are pretty clear - more people get more tax relief under my approach. But, politics carried the day, and the leadership joined together to back the plan that (1) disproportionately rewarded the relative handful of people who have the most expensive homes in the most desirable neighborhoods, and (2) paid for it by *raising* the taxes of the majority of Texans.”

“There were just never enough winners under any of the proposals backed by leadership to generate enough votes,” Barrientos continued. “What’s good for Highland Park, or, frankly, many of the school districts in my state senate district, isn’t always good for Pflugerville, which is also in my district, or the rest of the state. The suburban tail shouldn’t wag the state dog, but that’s the unhappy but predictable result of the Republican redistricting of the House and Senate after the 2001 session, and the elections that followed.”

“It’s a shame,” Barrientos concluded, “because we could have really helped people if the leadership had focused on the interests of *all* Texans, rather than just the few.”