

Texas Rural Health and Economic Development Advisory Council

Member Bios

The Honorable Craig Estes; State Senator, District 30

Senator Estes was first elected to the State Senate in a 2001 Special Election, and then re-elected in 2002, 2004 and 2008. Senator Estes is the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Rural Affairs as well as Vice Chairman of the Senate Committee on Natural Resources. He also serves as a member of the Senate Finance, Business and Commerce and Veterans Affairs and Military Installations Committees. Additionally, Senator Estes was appointed by Lieutenant Governor David Dewhurst to serve as a member of the Senate Select Committee on Redistricting, which used the 2010 census data to reapportion congressional districts as well as districts for the state legislature.

Senator Estes has also been appointed by Governor Rick Perry to serve on the Southern States Biobased Alliance and to the Western States Water Council. Lieutenant Governor David Dewhurst appointed Senator Estes to the Agriculture and Rural Development Committee of the Southern Legislative Conference of the Council for State Governments, and the Agriculture and Energy Committee for the National Conference for State Legislators. In October 2011, Senator Estes was appointed to the Texas Rural Health and Economic Development Advisory Council by the Lieutenant Governor.

Senator Estes was instrumental in founding the Bioenergy Policy Council, which works to expand research and development of domestically produced alternative fuels in order to promote economic growth and reduce dependence on foreign energy. Senator Estes is currently a board member on the council.

Senator Estes also serves on the Board of Directors of Texas Conservative Coalition Research Institute, and is co-chairman of the Economic Development Task Force. Senator Estes represents the fifth generation from the North Texas area, and he was born and raised in Wichita Falls.

The Honorable Chuck Hopson; State Representative, District 11

State Representative Chuck Hopson is serving his sixth term as a State Representative and currently represents Cherokee, Houston, Panola, and Rusk Counties.

Chuck is an independent pharmacist from Jacksonville, where he owned and operated May Drug from 1973 until 2010. Born in Jacksonville on September 18, 1941, Chuck graduated from the University of Houston, where he received a degree in Pharmacy.

Prior to his service as a State Representative, Chuck was active in local government where he was elected to the Jacksonville School Board, the Jacksonville City Council, and was appointed Vice-Chair of the local Planning and Zoning Commission. Chuck also serves on the Board of Trustees for Lon Morris College in Jacksonville.

Chuck is an active member of his community serving on numerous boards and charitable organizations, including Austin Bank and the Nan Travis Hospital Foundation. Chuck has also served First United Methodist Church of Jacksonville as a Sunday school teacher.

Chuck and his wife Billie, a former educator and school counselor for more than thirty years and now in private practice, have three grown children and seven grandchildren. As an active and lifetime member of the National Rifle Association and the Texas State Rifle Association, Chuck appreciates hunting, fishing, and collecting guns. Chuck is also an avid tennis player, golfer and runner.

The Honorable John Thompson; County Judge, Polk County

Judge Thompson has served as Polk County Judge for the last 21 years, with a special interest in developing and utilizing regional partnerships to address local, state and national issues.

He has chaired the Legislative Committee for the County Judges and Commissioners Association since 1997. Currently, Judge Thompson serves as President of the North & East Texas County Judges and Commissioners Association. He has served as President of the Texas Association of Regional Councils.

Judge Thompson has dedicated much of his energy to working for transportation solutions in Texas and throughout the nation. He currently serves as President of “Alliance I-69 for Texas”, and as Chairman of the “Gulf Coast Strategic Highway Coalition (Strategic I-14).” In 2000, the Texas Department of Transportation honored him with the “Road Hand Award” and in 2004 he was awarded the Department’s Russell H. Perry Award- both recognizing his interest and efforts in the improvements of transportation.

In 2009, Judge Thompson became the second ever to receive the Giles W. Dalby Award for Judicial Leadership by the Texas Judicial Academy and the Texas Association of Counties.

The Honorable Don McBeth; Director of Advocacy and Communications, Texas Organization of Rural and Community Hospitals

Don McBeath is the Director of Government Relations for the Texas Organization of Rural and Community Hospitals (TORCH) where he serves as a liaison with state and federal lawmakers, and agencies for more than 150 rural hospitals in Texas. In that role, he provides rural health policy information to both the members of the Texas Legislature and members of Congress from Texas. He was also a driving force behind recent state legislation to allow hospitals in rural areas to directly employ physicians in an effort to enhance recruitment opportunities.

Prior to joining TORCH in October 2007, Don was Director of Telemedicine and Rural Health for Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center in Lubbock, a position he held for nine years. In that role, he worked with many communities across West Texas on rural health issues and directed the telemedicine program for Texas which is used extensively in the prison system and in rural communities to electronically link physicians and patients. He was also instrumental in the establishment of the West Texas Area Health Education Center program at Texas Tech.

Don also served as Lubbock County Judge from January 1991 through December 1998 and as the Office Administrator of the Lubbock County District Attorney's Office for the ten years prior to being County Judge. Early in his career, Don worked in radio and television news.

Throughout his health care career, Don has been active in many state and national health organizations, including the National Rural Health Association. He is a past president of the Texas Rural Health Association.

A 1977 graduate of Texas Tech University with an Arts and Sciences Degree in Telecommunications, he has been honored as an Outstanding Alumnus from the Texas Tech School of Mass Communications.

The Honorable Orlando Correa; Mayor, Raymondville, Texas

Mayor Correa has spent the last 12 years as an elected official in Raymondville, Texas; six years as City Commissioner and six years as the city's mayor. During his time as a city official, Mayor Correa has been elected to the Willacy County Appraisal District and the Lower Rio Grand Valley Development Corporation. He has also been appointed to the Raymondville Economic Development Board.

Mayor Correa earned his bachelor's degree in education along with a double master's degree in Counseling & Guidance and Administration. He has spent the last 23 years of his career in the education field. Currently, he works as a high school counselor in his community.

Mayor Correa and his wife, Christina, have been married for the last 23 years. He is an active member of the Willacy County Lion's Club and enjoys spending his time hunting and fishing.

The Honorable Jay Carnes; Uvalde City Council

Jay Carnes was born and raised in Uvalde, Texas. In 1997 he graduated from the University of Texas with a BBA in finance. After graduating, he returned to his hometown and was elected to the Uvalde City Council where he has served since 2008. For the last 15 years, Carnes has been running an agricultural wholesale business that does over 15 million in annual sales and has an annual payroll of 3.5 million.

In 2004 Carnes became involved in agriculture politics on the producer side of the industry. He has worked on issues such as the 2004 farm bill, agriculture workforce issues and water. Currently, Carnes serves as the Texas board representative on the National Council of Ag Employees. He is the immediate past president of Texas Vegetable Association.

Donna Kuenstler, RN, MSN; Director and Instructor at Sul Ross Univeristy

Donna M. Kuenstler is Director and Instructor of the Vocational Nursing Program at Sul Ross State University. Donna has been in the position since 2001. She is also the Clinical Instructor for the LVN to RN Transition Program with Midland College. She has been a practicing RN in the West Texas region since 1992. Previous jobs held include: staff nurse, charge nurse, Director of Home Health, and Interim Chief Nursing Officer for Big Bend Regional Medical Center; and coordinator of student internship experiences throughout Brewster, Jeff Davis, and Presidio counties for the West Texas Area Health Education Centers.

Many years of experience in working with patients, families, healthcare providers, and students gives Donna a unique understanding of the health-related challenges, both historic and current, facing the citizens of the predominately rural Big Bend region. In her role as a nurse educator, Donna works closely with local hospitals, clinics, and private practices to train and supply the vital nursing workforce for an area of Texas considered at high risk for a continuing and severe shortage of nurses.

Donna Kuenstler holds a Bachelor of Science degree from University of Texas Health Science Center School of Nursing and a Master of Science in Nursing with a specialty in Nursing Education from the University of Phoenix. She is a member of Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing, Texas Association of Vocational Nurse Educators, and the National Federation of Licensed Practical Nurses.

Kathi Masonheimer; Community Development Director, Brady/ MuCulloch County Chamber of Commerce

Kathi Masonheimer is the Community Development Director for the Brady/McCulloch County Chamber of Commerce. She joined the Brady Chamber in May of 2010 and manages the Chamber, EDC, Tourism, and Industrial Foundation.

Prior to these services, she was the Executive Director of the Palestine Area Chamber of Commerce in east Texas. While in Palestine she served as the District 1 Councilperson from February 2007- until her departure in May of 2010.

Kathi has served on numerous boards and delegations including Texas Midwest Community Network, Brady Historic Theater Board, Palestine Main Street, Palestine CVB, and Palestine Downtown Association.

She attended Abilene Christian University and Cisco Junior College. She recently completed her third year of Institute for Organizational Management in Los Angeles and will graduate in July 2012. She has been married to her husband Jamie for 14 years and they have 4 children.

Bryan Tucker; City Manager, Childress, Texas

For the past three years, Bryan Tucker has been serving as the City Manager of Childress, Texas. He is the past owner of JC Fiber, an underground construction company, and the current owner of Jachin Construction, a residential construction company.

He is an active volunteer speaker for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. He is a past volunteer for Mission Arlington and a current member of the Texas Tech Letterman's Association. Tucker received two bachelor's degrees in Marketing and Management from Texas Tech University.