



GREG ABBOTT (R-TX)

GOVERNOR OF TEXAS

NationalJournal

Life in Brief

Born: November 13, 1957

Hometown: Duncanville, TX

Current Residence: Austin, TX

Religion: Catholic

Education

- J.D. Vanderbilt University, 1984
- B.A., University of Texas, 1981

Family

- Wife, Cecilia
- Daughter

Work History

- Governor of Texas, January 2015-present
- Attorney General of Texas, December 2002-January 2015
- Associate Justice, Texas Supreme Court, January 1996-June 2001
- State Trial Judge, Harris County (TX), 1993-1996
- Attorney, Butler and Binion LLP, 1984-1992

Professional Affiliations

- Chair of the Republican Governor's Association (current)
- Central Texas Chapter of Goodwill Industries
- Governor's Committee to Promote Adoption
- Justice for All
- Honorary State Chairman of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Texas
- Governors' Biofuels Coalition
- Gulf Coast Ecosystem Restoration Council

Electoral Overview

- Won governor's office in 2014 with 60% of the vote; re-elected in 2018 with 56%
- Elected to Attorney General's office three times, with an average of 60% of the vote
- Elected to TX Supreme Court twice (1996, 1998) by large margins

Quick Summary

Law-minded Catholic and Texas GOP insider implements socially conservative agenda supported by Republican base; ambition fueled by serious accident that left him partially paralyzed

- After a short private practice legal career, Abbott seized opportunities to move up the state's judicial and political hierarchies
- Paralyzed from the waist down after being crushed by tree at age 26; first governor since the 1970s to use a wheel chair full-time
- As Attorney General, Abbott teamed with other Republican AGs to oppose the Obama Administration on environmental regulations, voting laws, and other issues
- As governor, has implemented a conservative social agenda and expanded gun rights
- Represents a continuation of George W. Bush and Rick Perry administrations; pro-business social conservative with a national profile, shifting right in-sync with TX GOP base
- Consistent speculation that Abbott will pursue national office like his direct predecessors
- Strong in-state political and financial networks

Approach and Motivations

Skeptic of federal power has oriented his actions based on national leadership; personally defined by accident response and Catholic faith

- Conservative lawyer makes constitutional arguments against federal authority; believes it infringes on states' rights and religious liberty
- Leveraged legal battles with the Obama administration to raise his profile and advance arguments for curtailing federal authority
- Has taken an opposite approach under the Trump Administration, supporting federal policies popular with state GOP base (e.g., stricter immigration enforcement)
- Disability has become a cornerstone of Abbott's appeal to voters; demonstrates personal resolve to overcome challenges
- Catholic faith and personal experience inform deeply conservative outlook on social issues

Policy Positions and Areas of Focus

As AG and Governor, Abbott has championed a conservative social agenda and an expansive view of state authority vis-à-vis the federal government

Firearms: *Supports a broad but not absolute right to bear arms*

- As AG, opposed an NRA lawsuit to lower Texas' concealed carry age to 18; Supreme Court declined to hear the case
- Signed an "open carry" law in 2016, allowing gun owners with concealed handgun licenses to openly display firearms in many public places
- Following spate of mass shootings in 2019, Abbott endorsed "voluntary" background checks for private gun sales

Social Issues: *Conservative Catholic opposes abortion and gay marriage; seeks to defend religious liberty*

- As AG, defended Texas' ban on gay marriage; law formally struck down by U.S. 5th Circuit Court of Appeals
- As Governor, signed several anti-abortion bills into law, including a measure banning primary insurance plans from covering the procedure (women would have to buy separate supplemental coverage)
- Signed law allowing faith-based adoption agencies to decline adoptees that "conflict" with the organization's religious beliefs

Federal Overreach: *Asserting Texas' independence from federal authority*

- As AG, Abbott sued the Obama Administration for imposing environmental regulations on states, "circumventing" state authority
- Ordered suit against the federal government to stop Syrian refugee resettlement in TX in 2015
- Proposed amending the constitution to significantly curtail federal power over states, including requiring 7 out of 9 Supreme Court justices to overturn a state law
- Embraces Trump Administration's flexibility towards states; in 2020, opted to end refugee resettlement in TX under new policy

Core Communities

Ultimate Texas political insider, with connections to key government players and donors; allied with Republican AGs against the Obama Administration and the pro-life movement

Texas Republican Establishment: *Over the past two decades, Abbott has enjoyed close personal and professional relationships with the most prominent Texas politicians*

- Appointed to Texas Supreme Court by then-Gov. George W. Bush in 1995
- Hired current Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) to be state solicitor general in 2003; close personal friends
- Supported by personal friend and then-Gov. Rick Perry in the 2014 election

Texas Business: *Fundraised huge sums from the state's wealthiest individuals and companies, and promotes their interests*

- Abbott's top career donors are all TX-based billionaires, representing a variety of sectors from the state's huge economy including oil, construction, and financial services
- In the 2018 election cycle, Abbott received numerous contributions of \$100,000 or greater from TX-based corporations, ranging from investment firms, to the state's largest electric utility, to global telecom giant AT&T
- Secured foreign investment in TX and promoted TX energy on a trip to India

Republican AGs: *United opposition to Obama Administration environmental goals*

- Joined forces with then-Oklahoma AG Scott Pruitt to sue Obama's EPA multiple times over climate regulations
- Part of a coalition of red-state AGs that banned together against Obama's Clean Power Plan

Pro-Life Groups: *Allied with social movement*

- Formerly served in leadership capacity at Justice for All, a pro-life advocacy group
- Speaks at pro-life events and demonstrations (e.g. Texas Rally for Life)

Relevant Financial Information

Abbott's campaigns are supported by a variety of TX industries and wealthy individuals; continues to receive payments from injury settlement

Biggest Interest Group Donors (career)

- Texans for Lawsuit Reform: \$920,000
- Border Health PAC: \$652,000
- Texas Association of Realtors: \$400,000
- Good Government Fund of Fort Worth: \$361,000
- Texas Optometric Association: \$313,000

Biggest Corporate Donors (career)

- Q Investments (Fort Worth, TX): \$871,000
- Ryan LLC (Dallas, TX): \$610,000
- AT&T (Dallas, TX): \$418,000
- North Cypress Medical Center Operating Co. (Cypress, TX): \$405,908
- Hillco Partners (Austin, TX): \$370,000

Biggest Individual Donors (career)

- Syed Javaid Anwar, CEO, Midland Energy (Midland, TX): \$2 million
- Kenneth Troutt, Chairman, Mount Vernon Investments (Dallas, TX): \$1.5 million
- James Pitcock, CEO, Williams Brothers Construction (Houston, TX): \$1.4 million
- Harold Simmons, Owner, Contran Corporation (Dallas, TX): \$1.3 million
- Robert Rowling, CEO, TRT Holdings (Dallas, TX): \$1.3 million

Political Donations

- Abbott donated \$675,000 to his own 2002 campaign for Attorney General

Personal

- Following the tree accident, Abbott sued the homeowner and a tree repair company for damages
- Settlement worth \$11 million, with payments continuing through 2022

Publications, Media, and Speaking

Prolific writer, speaker, and tweeter is a common presence on conservative and business-focused cable outlets

Publications: *Abbott has written numerous op-eds criticizing the Obama Administration, praising Texas' low-tax economic approach, and calling for voter ID laws and immigration enforcement; published book in 2016*

- Books: *Broken But Unbowed: The Fight to Fix a Broken America*
- Favorite Outlets: Local papers (e.g. Austin Statesman), Washington Times, National Review, CNBC
- Favorite Subjects: Tax cuts, voter ID laws, Obamacare, TX business opportunities, immigration

Media: *Frequently discusses hot-button issues on cable news outlets; promoted book in 2016*

- Preferred Outlets: Conservative cable outlets (e.g. Fox News), business-focused outlets (e.g. CNBC), Bloomberg, local TV
- Favorite Subjects: Federal regulatory overreach, disaster relief, sanctuary cities, TX business opportunities
- Social Media Habits: Active personal Twitter account in addition to official account

Speaking: *High-profile Governor addresses friendly groups in Texas and meets with leaders abroad to promote TX economy; embarked on tour of 19 TX cities in 2016 to promote his book*

- Favorite Subjects: Abortion, restricting federal authority, constitutional amendments, personal narrative, TX business opportunities
- Preferred Audience: Texas college commencements, pro-life groups, gun rights groups (e.g. NRA), conservative think tanks (e.g. Texas Public Policy Foundation), foreign leaders

Family and Personal Background

Lifelong Texan and Republican suffered devastating injury at age 26, fueling his ambition; strongly influenced by his wife, daughter, and Catholic faith

- Native Texan is the son of Goldwater Republicans, grandson of a rural preacher
- Excelled in high school; won track meets, participated in mock trial, and was voted Most Likely to Succeed
- At UT-Austin, Abbott met Cecilia and they began attending Catholic mass together
- Nearly killed by a falling tree while jogging; after an excruciating and lengthy ordeal, Abbott was left paralyzed from the waist down
- Credits the accident with increasing his drive making him more appreciative of life
- Displays comfort with his disability and embraces symbolism associated with it; launched gubernatorial campaign on the 29th anniversary of his injury
- Converted to Catholicism in 1987
- Adopted daughter at birth; has said that this experience informs his pro-life views

Hobbies

- Houston Rockets basketball fan

Criticisms and Controversies

Abbott has been criticized for his reaction to a 2015 military exercise and legal positions

Jade Helm Exercises

- In 2015, Gov. Abbott had the TX State Guard monitor a U.S. military training exercise called Jade Helm, held in TX and other states
- Conspiracy theorists had spread the idea that the exercise was cover for a federal government takeover
- Abbott received bipartisan criticism for his reaction
- Former CIA Director Michael Hayden stated in a 2018 interview that Russians spread misinformation about the exercises, and that Abbott's decision might have proved the effectiveness of such tactics to them

Personal injury settlement position

- Sought to restrict payments for personal injury settlements while on the TX Supreme Court
- Supported TX legislature's decision to cap noneconomic awards for medical malpractice
- During his first run for governor, critics noted that Abbott has received millions of dollars for a tort claim, including for noneconomic damages such as physical and mental anguish

Ruling on chemical location disclosure

- As AG, Abbott ruled that state government agencies should withhold the location of dangerous chemicals from the public; decision went against previous state practice
- Issue gained prominence in TX following the explosion of a fertilizer plant in 2013
- Justified the decision based on concern that malicious actors could use the information
- Suggested that concerned citizens should ask companies themselves about the location of dangerous chemicals

COVID-19 Response

The governor of America's second-largest state was slower to respond than some of his peers and local governments in TX; beginning gradual reopening of economy

Actions: *Gradually implemented restrictions seen in other states, with local governments taking the lead; began to reopen state economy in late April*

- Issued a disaster proclamation on March 13
- Issued statewide stay-at-home order that went into effect on April 2; prior to that, local governments in large population centers had already issued their own orders
- Announced the closure of schools for the remainder of the school year on April 17
- Signed an executive order on April 17 allowing retail businesses offer "retail to go" services beginning April 24; allowed to bring items to customers' cars
- Established "Strike Force to Open Texas," consisting of top state politicians, medical officials, and business owners
- On April 20, announced a mobilization of state National Guard to run mobile COVID-19 testing sites
- In Phase 1 of the state's opening plan, Abbott is allowing some Texas' businesses to reopen on May 1 under certain restrictions:
 - Malls (no food courts or play areas), retailers, movie theaters subject to 25% capacity limit
 - Allowed to increase to 50% capacity in rural counties with less than 5 confirmed cases
- Businesses will have new protocols, such as disposable menus at restaurants and mandatory space between movie attendees
- Abbott may allow businesses including gyms, barbershops, hair salons, and bars to open May 18 depending on disease data

COVID-19 Response (Continued)

Statements: *Paints a cautiously optimistic picture that Texas has avoided worst of the outbreak and can re-open its economy*

- Referring to re-opening the economy and saving lives, Abbott said "we can do both"
- While offering sympathy for families of COVID-19 victims, Abbott believes that the numbers of infections, hospitalizations, and deaths in Texas represent an overall encouraging picture in comparison to hardest-hit areas
- Declared that state oil industry would rebound from historic drop in prices and stated his intention to support the industry through difficult times
- Highlighted increases in state's testing capacity; called the strategy "effective" at providing information to local decisionmakers

Reception

- Move to reopen states' economy criticized as premature and reckless by Democrats
- Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick and other state Republicans have consistently pushed Abbott to reopen the economy
- President Trump praised Abbott's plan to reopen the Texas economy on Twitter