

KIRK WATSON BIOGRAPHY



Kirk Watson has been described by Texas Monthly as “A man with a vision of what the community wants, and the moxie to carry it out.” He has been immersed in public policy in Texas for the past three decades, serving first as an appointee of Gov. Ann Richards before being elected mayor of Austin in 1997. First elected to the Texas Senate in 2006, he represented the Austin-area for 13 years.

Watson has been selected to be the Founding Dean of the University of Houston Hobby School of Public Affairs and will start in that position in May 2020.

Watson’s policy experience spans local and state government. As Senator, he championed education, health care, transportation and government transparency. During his tenure in the Senate, he served as a member and vice-chair of multiple standing and special committees. Most recently he was Vice-Chair of the Senate Committee on Nominations and also served on the committees overseeing State Finance, Education, Higher Education and the Sunset Advisory Commission. His peers elected him President Pro Tempore of the Senate in 2019.

In 2011, Senator Watson laid out 10 Goals in 10 Years to positively impact the health and economy of Austin and Travis County. The results have been transformative, including the creation of the Dell Medical School and a new modern teaching and safety-net hospital, Dell Seton Medical Center, both at the University of Texas. The American Medical Association recognized Senator Watson's contribution to health care with the prestigious Dr. Nathan Davis Award for Outstanding Government Service in 2017.

Building on those and other successes, Senator Watson launched a community-based effort to develop a center for world-class brain health treatment, research and education and has been honored by the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute and NAMI Austin for his leadership.

In his book, *Austin Unlimited: The People, Place, Passion and Prospects*, Watson chronicles the economic evolution of Austin through the lens of his time in public office.

Prior to elected office, from 1991 to 1993, Watson served as Chair of the Texas Air Control Board, the state agency that was charged with addressing air quality in Texas. He was Vice-Chair of the committee that oversaw the consolidation of the Texas Air Control Board with the Texas Water Commission creating the Texas Natural Resources Conservation Commission, now known as the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

He also has served as Chair of both the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce and the Texas Advisory Board of Environmental Defense, and he has been a member of the Executive Committee of the State Bar of Texas. He has chaired the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, the primary transportation planning agency for Central Texas.

Among many other recognitions, Senator Watson has been named one of the state's "10 Best Legislators" by Texas Monthly. He is a recipient of the prestigious President’s Citation from the University of Texas at Austin. Watson also received the Pro Texana Medal of Service from Baylor University and the Baylor Line Foundation (formerly the Baylor Alumni Association) named him a Distinguished Alumnus. The Freedom of Information Foundation of Texas gave him its award as the Open Government Lawmaker of the Year and the Texas Press Association named him a Friend of the First Amendment for “his steadfast support of free speech and open government.” He’s also been named Austinite of the Year by the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce and received the W. Neal Kocurek Award for Healthcare Advocacy from People’s Community Clinic.

Senator Watson graduated from Baylor University and graduated first in his law school class at Baylor Law School. He has been named an outstanding young alumnus of Baylor, Young Baylor Lawyer of the Year, and the Outstanding Young Lawyer of Texas. He was most recently of counsel at the law firm Husch Blackwell LLP.