

KIRK WATSON BIOGRAPHY

Kirk Watson is Founding Dean of the Hobby School of Public Affairs at the University of Houston. There, he leads a team that puts creative public policy to work for the world.

For three decades, Watson has been immersed in public policy, spanning local and state government in Texas. He served in the Texas Senate for over 13 years, leading on a wide range of issues including education, health care, transportation and government transparency. And he was a member and vice-chair of multiple standing and special committees, including those overseeing state finance, education, higher education, nominations, and the Sunset Advisory Commission. His peers elected him President Pro Tempore of the Senate in 2019.

Watson was first appointed in 1991 by Gov. Ann Richards as Chair of the Texas Air Control Board, the agency charged with addressing air quality issues in Texas. He was Vice-Chair of the committee that oversaw the creation of the Texas Natural Resources Conservation Commission, now known as the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

He was elected mayor of Austin in 1997, where he won praise for bringing different political sides together around transformative environmental and economic development initiatives. In 2012, serving the Austin area in the Texas Senate, he led the effort to build a new medical school at The University of Texas at Austin. After an unprecedented show of support by local voters, the Dell Medical School became the first medical school in nearly 50 years to be built from the ground up at a top-tier research university.

The school was just one of the 10 Goals in 10 Years that Watson laid out to positively impact the health and economy of Central Texas. As a result of this vision, a new modern teaching and safety-net hospital was built in the region, and the community came together to develop a center for world-class brain health treatment, research, and education. As a result of his efforts, Watson has been honored by the Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute, NAMI Austin, and the American Medical Association, which recognized his contribution to health care with the prestigious Dr. Nathan Davis Award for Outstanding Government Service.

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

He has served as Chair of 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 also chaired the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, the primary transportation planning agency for Central Texas.

Among many other recognitions, Watson was honored multiple times in *Texas Monthly* magazine's analysis of the state's best legislators. In 1998, the magazine described him as "a man with a vision of what the community wants—and the moxie to carry it out."

He is a recipient of the prestigious President's Citation from The University of Texas at Austin and the Pro Texana Medal of Service from Baylor University. The Baylor Line Foundation (formerly the Baylor Alumni Association) named him a Distinguished Alumnus. Austin Community College awarded him an honorary degree. The Freedom of Information Foundation of Texas gave him its Open Government Lawmaker of the Year award, and the Texas Press Association named him a Friend of the First Amendment for "his steadfast support of free speech and open government." He also has been named Austinite of the Year by the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce, and he received the W. Neal Kocurek Award for Healthcare Advocacy from People's Community Clinic.

Watson graduated from Baylor University and ranked 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.