

The Almanac Of American Politics

Texas District 13 Rep. Mac Thornberry (R)



The farther west one travels in Texas, the browner the land gets and the smaller the towns get, until you arrive at counties containing only a few hundred people each—plus quite a few more head of cattle. At that point, the land rises nearly 1,000 feet in elevation, up steep hillsides from the gullies along the rivers that for most of the year are just tiny trickles, to the tilted tableland that makes up the High Plains of West Texas. The winds here sweep down from the Rockies, the land is barren except where irrigated, often with the now dangerously depleted waters of the Ogallala Aquifer. The land alternates between grazing

areas and cotton fields. But here and there in this demanding environment—sticky-hot in the summer, swept by north winds from Canada in winter, always threatened in “Tornado Alley”—comfortable cities have been built to house the people and businesses that bring forth some of the nation’s most abundant oil, natural gas, helium and other elements from the earth.

The 13th Congressional District of Texas covers more than 40,000 square miles, from the New Mexico border to just north of Dallas, and it includes 42 counties and parts of two others. The population of this region has been either in decline or stagnant for nearly three decades. In the 1990s, the district registered a population increase of just 5%, the smallest gain of any Texas district. From 2000 to 2007, growth in the district was less than 1%. Around Wichita Falls is the agricultural land of the Red River Valley and one of Bell Helicopter’s V-22 Osprey plants. Sheppard Air Force Base, a medical facility and pilot training center, was hit hard by cutbacks in the 2005 base review.

The area produces cotton and milo, a variety of sorghum, and is home to one of the nation’s oldest cattle auctions. The area was long dominated by Texas Anglos, but Latinos lately have been moving here in large numbers to work in the fields or in crop processing. Today, the district is 21% Hispanic. Much of the High Plains economy is based on natural resources. The largest city here is Amarillo in the heart of cowboy country. It is the center of the largest natural gas development in the world, and is—not Chicago—the windiest city in the United States. Just outside town is the Pantex plant that secretly assembled the nation’s thousands of nuclear warheads and was the epicenter of American defense in the Cold War. Its 16,000 acres have been used to dismantle some disarmed weapons and now maintain the remainder of the arsenal. Settled by Confederate veterans, the valley was heavily Democratic through the 1970s. The High Plains was for years more Republican. Both parts are now solidly Republican. The 78% that George W. Bush won here in 2004 was his third-best performance in the nation. GOP presidential nominee John McCain won 76.4% in 2008, his second-best district in the nation, behind Alabama’s 6th District.

2008 Presidential Vote

McCain 181,456 (76%)
Obama 53,837 (23%)

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R+29

Population	
Population 2007	652,282
Change since 2000	0.1%
Urban	69.9%
Area size	40,403 sq mi

Work	
Private	71.9%
Government	19.1%
Self-employed	8.7%
Blue collar	27.9%
White collar	51.3%
Khaki collar	1.5%
Other	19.3%
Median income	\$40,384
Median home value	\$75,900

Age	
Median age	35.8 yrs
Over 65	13.7%
Under 18	25.5%

Education	
High school degree	79.2%
College degree	18.0%
Graduate degree	5.4%

Race/Ethnicity	
White	70.0%
Black	6.0%
Hispanic	20.5%
Asian	1.3%
Native Am.	0.6%
Hawaiian	0.0%
Two+	1.4%

Ancestry	
German	12.6%
Irish	9.8%
USA	8.7%
English	8.3%
French	2.0%

Rep. Mac Thornberry (R)



Elected: 1994, 8th term.
Born: July 15, 1958, Clarendon.
Home: Clarendon.
Education: TX Tech. U., B.A. 1980, U. of TX Law Schl., J.D. 1983.
Religion: Presbyterian.
Family: Married (Sally); 2 children.
Professional Career: Legis. cnsl., U.S. Rep. Tom Loeffler, 1983–85; Chief of staff, U.S. Rep. Larry Combest, 1985–88; Dpty. asst. secy. of state for Legis. Affairs, 1988–89; Practicing atty., 1989–94; Rancher 1989–94.

The congressman from the 13th District is Mac Thornberry, a Republican first elected in 1994. His great-great-grandfather, Amos Thornberry, a Union Army veteran and staunch Republican, moved to Clay County, just east of Wichita Falls, in the 1880s. A year after Amos died in 1925, his son bought the cattle ranch that Mac Thornberry, his brothers and father now run. From the window of his ranch house, writes *The Texas Techsan*, "as far as the eye can see is the Golden Spread of Texas for which this part of the state is named. There are no buildings, no roadways, no signs of life. Gaze out long enough and you begin to think you can actually see the curvature of the earth." After college and law school in Texas, Thornberry worked for Texas Republican Reps. Tom Loeffler and Larry Combest. He returned to practice law in West Texas, and in 1994, challenged Democratic Rep. Bill Sarpalius, whom he attacked for voting for President Bill Clinton's budget and tax package. He also profited from news stories that said Sarpalius failed to pay a company that moved him to Washington, and then accepted a fee for speaking at the company's convention in Las Vegas. Thornberry won 55%-45%.

In the House, Thornberry has compiled a solidly conservative voting record, though he has a pragmatic streak and is hardly the most ideological in the Texas delegation. His hard work on defense and homeland security

Election Results:

<i>2008 General</i>			
Mac Thornberry (R)	180,078	(78%)	(\$789,264)
Roger Waun (D)	51,841	(22%)	(\$13,211)
<i>2008 Primary</i>			
Mac Thornberry (R)	Unopposed		
Prior Winning Percentages: 2006 (74%), 2004 (92%), 2002 (79%), 2000 (68%), 1998 (68%), 1996 (67%), 1994 (55%)			

issues has earned him a reputation as one of the brainiest and most accessible lawmakers on those issues. In March 2001, he sponsored a bill to create a homeland security agency and the next year, played a key role in the establishment of the new executive branch department.

In 2009, he took over as the ranking Republican on the Technical and Tactical Intelligence Subcommittee of the Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. He earlier criticized delays in integrating computer networks and intelligence analysis into the new Homeland Security Department. On the Armed Services Committee, he has championed missile defense and called for better coordination of military space programs and on the Intelligence Committee he helped to enact new rules for the handling of terror suspects and detainees in 2006.

On domestic issues, Thornberry has pressed for repeal of the estate tax repeal and also tax credits to encourage production of oil in marginal wells. In 2008, he proposed a "No More Excuses" energy plan to develop several new sources of energy.

Military veterans

% of pop. 11.5%

Office Information

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Committees

House Armed Services Committee (3rd of 25 R): Strategic Forces; Terrorism, Unconventional Threats & Capabilities.

House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (3rd of 9 R): Oversight & Investigations; Technical & Tactical Intelligence (Ranking minority member).

Group Ratings

	2007	2008
ADA	5	5
ACLU	--	18
ITIC	--	86
NTU	81	71
COC	85	89
ACU	100	92
CFG	89	82
FRC	--	100

NJ Ratings

	2007 Lib.-Con.	2008 Lib.-Con.
Economic	6 - 93	6 - 93
Social	0 - 91	9 - 85
Foreign	0 - 72	8 - 89
Composite	8 - 92	9 - 91

Key Votes

Increase minimum wage	N	2007
Expand SCHIP	N	2007
Raise CAFE standards	N	2007
Bail out financial markets	Y	2008
Share Immigration data	Y	2007
Foreign aid abortion ban	Y	2007
Ban gay bias in workplace	N	2007
Repeal D.C. gun law	Y	2008
Withdraw troops 8/08	N	2007
No operations in Iran	N	2007
Free trade with Peru	Y	2007
Overhaul FISA	Y	2008