



## Life In Brief

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**Current Title:** Governor

**Political Party:** Republican Party

**Born:** November 13, 1957

**Birthplace:** Wichita Falls, TX

**Religion:** Roman Catholic

**Ethnicity:** White/Caucasian

**Marital Status:** Married

**Education Summary:**

- University of Texas, BBA, 1981
- Vanderbilt University School of Law (TN), JD, 1986

**Family:**

1 child

**Work History:**

- District Judge, TX State 129th District Court, Houston
- Former Adjunct Professor of Constitutional Law, University of Texas Law School

## Quick Summary

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**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

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**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 Position 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)

**Political History**

- Justice, TX Supreme Court, 1996-2002
- Attorney General, TX Office of the Attorney General, 2002-2015
- Member, Governor's Committee to Promote Adoption
- Member, National Association of Attorneys General
- Director, Board of Directors, Governors' Biofuels Coalition, 2015
- Executive Committee Member, Executive Committee, Republican Governors Association

**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 Javid 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

## **Professional Affiliations**

- Vice President for Legislative Affairs, Justice for All
- Honorary State Chair, Big Brothers Big Sisters, 2004

## **Awards**

- Protect-Her Award, New Friends New Life, 2013

## **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

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### 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

## Contact Information

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**Main Office Address:** State Insurance Building Suite 151-B, 1100 San Jacinto Boulevard, Austin, TX 78701

**Phone:** (512) 463-2000

**Contact:**

<https://gov.texas.gov/apps/contact/opinion.aspx>