

Reuben Senterfitt, who presided over the house of representatives in the 52nd and 53rd legislatures, converted the state to the use of a unified budget. Before Senterfitt's first term as speaker in 1951, the legislature had enacted separate biennial appropriations bills for the judiciary, state hospitals, institutions of higher education, and other components of the state government, plus a host of other special-purpose appropriations bills. Following conferrals by Speaker Senterfitt with Governor Allan Shivers and Lieutenant Governor Ben Ramsey, however, the 52nd Legislature implemented a revised procedure whereby biennial appropriations for the state government were consolidated within one general appropriations bill. Senterfitt also instituted procedural rules to prevent the unified budget from being circumvented. The reform is one of several that have significantly improved the appropriate process over the last few decades.

Senterfitt was born in San Saba County on June 18, 1917, the son of a rancher and pecan grower. He attended a tiny elementary school, staffed by only two teachers, in Pecan Grove and then advanced to San Saba High School, where he participated in debate and was valedictorian in 1935. After high school, Senterfitt went to The University of Texas and pursued the study of law. While at the university, he was editor of the Texas Law Review.

His first term as state representative came in 1941 during the 47th Legislature. Less than three months after a called session of that legislature, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, and with the consequent arrival of World War II, Senterfitt joined the navy. He saw duty in the South Pacific, eventually being promoted from ensign to lieutenant junior grade, yet he managed to simultaneously continue his legislative career. In 1945, Senterfitt set a legislative record by traveling some 8,000 miles from the South Pacific to attend the opening of the 49th Legislature.

Senterfitt served seven consecutive terms in the house and was speaker his last two terms. As a freshman legislator in 1941, he was co-author of an act that resulted in establishment of the M. D. Anderson Hospital in Houston, the state's premier cancer research hospital. Later, he served as chairman of the military and veterans' affairs committee. Having a keen interest in veterans' affairs due to his service in World War II, Senterfitt was the house sponsor in 1949 of legislation creating the state's veterans' land program. Senterfitt was an advocate for the creation of the Texas Legislative Council and the Legislative Budget Board. He also supported the pay-as-you-go constitutional provision and the Gilmer-Aikin school reform. His two terms as speaker facilitated, besides the aforementioned reforms in the appropriate process, the passage in 1953 of legislation authorizing construction of the Dallas-Fort Worth turnpike.

Since making an unsuccessful bid for governor in the 1956 Democratic primary, Senterfitt has retired from seeking further state office. He has participated in local government, however, serving as attorney for the city of San Saba from 1955 to 1960 and for San Saba County from 1962 to 1963. Still a resident of that community, where he practiced law for 50 years and retired, Senterfitt was listed in the third edition of Who's Who in American Law, the seventh edition of Who's Who in the World, and the 19th edition of Who's Who in the South and Southwest. He devotes much time to his ranching interests and many public service activities. He is a life fellow of the Texas Bar Foundation and past president of the San Saba Chamber of Commerce and the San Saba Rotary International.