

# Dallas lawmaker Terri Hodge could go out on a high note

12:00 AM CDT on Monday, June 1, 2009

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AUSTIN – Most lawmakers view the finish of a legislative session as a time for relaxation and recharging.



OLMEX BRIDGE  
TO GWLADDE

ERIN TRIEB/Special Contributor

**Rep. Terri Hodge**, D-Dallas, says she's 'at peace with everything' that has happened during her time as a state lawmaker.

But for Dallas Democratic Rep. Terri Hodge, today's adjournment marks the end of her refuge from public corruption charges.

Her trial is expected to begin in Dallas some time this summer, separate from former City Council member Don Hill and the 14 others who were indicted in the wide-ranging City Hall corruption probe.



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**Rep. Terri Hodge** took a candy break, perhaps her last, on the next-to-last day of the legislative session Sunday.

Though she's facing the possibility of a felony conviction that would send her to jail and forfeit the seat she loves, Hodge sees her upcoming legal fight as a chance at vindication rather than a path to prison.

"I have kept things in perspective," Hodge said. "I know what I've done, and I know what I haven't done. I understand that people have a job to do ... but I know that in the end, if there is justice, when I'm given the opportunity to be heard, I'll be fine."

Hodge's demeanor and looks support her words.

When she was indicted in 2007, she shed pounds from stress. Now, she's complaining about gaining weight.

And after a year when she had one-sided, verbal confrontations with former Dallas Mayor Ron Kirk and Sen. Royce West over what she felt was a conspiracy to keep her from becoming a delegate to the Democratic National Convention, Hodge has forged new relationships with lawmakers on both sides of the aisle, even those she used to treat with disdain.

Hodge said this session has been the most successful political run of her career.

"I've been at peace with everything," she said. "I know that in the end, the people who sent me here will be as equally as proud of what I've done as I am."

Rep. Roberto Alonzo, D-Dallas, agrees that Hodge has made political strides.

"She's benefited from the new speaker and different environment in the House," said Alonzo, co-chairman of the Dallas-area delegation. "She's been able to work it to her advantage."

Rep. Harold Dutton, D-Houston, worked with Hodge on several legislative issues.

"Terri is not the best negotiator," Dutton said. "But she's a pleasure to work with. When Terri sets out to do something, she's going to try her best to get it done."

### Criminal justice measures

Even under a Democratic speaker, Hodge, whose district includes parts of downtown, northeast and southern Dallas, has never been a high-profile legislator.

As a House member, she has focused on the disenfranchised and has been an advocate for reforming the criminal justice system. Her work to properly rehabilitate inmates has become one of her passions.

"It's probably a driving force for me," she said. "For me, the justice system has not worked. I want this system to be fair, regardless of your race, your creed, your color or your economic status."

Among the bills she has carried this year are legislation that would allow Dallas to relocate the 2,200-inmate Dawson State Jail to allow development along the banks of the Trinity River and a measure to allow corrections officials to restore good-conduct time to inmates.

Both bills are before the governor.

Hodge says her proudest accomplishment was her work on reforming the "law of parties" – even though the measure fell apart in the last moment in the Senate.

The bill stems from the 2007 commutation of a death sentence for Kenneth Foster, who drove the getaway car during a crime spree that resulted in a shooting death. He was 90 feet away from the murder in the car but received the death penalty.

When it appeared the bill could collapse because of concerns from Gov. Rick Perry, Hodge took a cup of tea and sat on a bench outside of the Capitol, where Perry's car was parked.

She waited an hour to confront him. They later set up a meeting and got on the same page.

"I stalked his vehicle in order to see him," she said.

Hodge says she has also learned to use parliamentary tactics that other legislators have employed for years.

"I took the time to learn how to amend other bills," she said. "I learn how to amend bills in the Senate to accomplish the task that I needed to in order to pass my bill."

And, she and West noted, she put aside their differences to work on legislation.

A final memento?

On Saturday, just days before lawmakers returned home, Hodge was on the House floor getting members to sign a photo of the Capitol that legislators get to commemorate the session.

It could be a memento from her final days as an elected official.

This summer, she'll stand trial on charges that she accepted free rent and utilities for an apartment owned by developer Brian Potashnik and exchange for her support for his low-income housing projects. The trial was delayed for the length of the legislative session.

If she's convicted of a felony, she would have to resign or be removed from office. But Hodge has maintained that she has done nothing wrong.

"I guess I was in the wrong place and at the wrong time, but it has not affected me doing my job and any way," she said. "It's probably a driving force for me to do more."

She said she looked forward to clearing her name but declined to address the specifics of the case or her legal strategy.

"When my day comes on this matter, given a fair opportunity in the courts and I think I will be given that, I will be fine," she said.

As Hodge awaits her day in court, at least five contenders are eyeing a run for her seat, plotting campaigns that are contingent on her being found guilty after trial. Hodge was re-elected last year with little opposition, despite being under indictment.

"There are some people who would like to see me from this seat who knew they could not get this seat from me at the ballot box, but they know if I'm convicted of some felony offense I have to leave this seat whether I want to or not," she said. "But when I leave this seat, it will be because the people of the district will make the determination that I have not done what they have asked me to do."