

# Many want Gov. Perry to add to special session's agenda

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AUSTIN – The special work session for legislators beginning Wednesday is likely to be short, but not necessarily sweet.

Advocates for unfinished business, ranging from expansion of the Children's Health Insurance Program to lowering homeowners insurance, are disappointed the governor won't tackle what they see as pressing needs.

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Among those leading the charge, Sen. Eliot Shapleigh, D-El Paso, is urging Gov. Rick Perry – the only one who can set a special session agenda – to let more children into the subsidized insurance program.

"Texas is ground zero in America's health crisis," he said. "The money is in the budget. Now, it's time for Governor Rick Perry to take responsibility."

But Perry, a Republican, has made it clear he wants a quick fix and for the Legislature to leave town – hopefully, he said, in-and-out in four days.

"We clearly believe that the issues that we're going to address are the ones that have to be taken care of," he said.

Everything else will be left for the 2011 regular session.

But backers of some of these issues promise – and it won't be hard in Austin's 100-plus degree weather – to keep up the heat.

"We'll continue to put pressure on the governor," said Alex Winslow, executive director of the consumer-oriented Texas Watch.

## Insurance review

He said the insurance lobby has fought off legislative review of the Texas Department of Insurance for 16 years, and now the governor is willing to let it pass until 2011.

"We know that homeowners are paying more and getting less for their insurance," he said.

And Winslow warned, as if the governor might not be keenly aware, "without a doubt, there is political potency in this issue."

Meanwhile, Perry, gearing up for a re-election campaign, plans to attend anti-tax "Tea Parties" around the Fourth of July. And he's been lining up fundraisers to try to match the bulging coffers of his probable rival, Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, who has knocked his leadership.

Hutchison spokesman Hans Klingler said the narrow agenda and slender goals that Perry has set is more proof of that.

"Texas is a great state to live, raise a family and do business. But to keep this a reality long into the future, a leader is needed who will tackle problems such as our transportation system, property taxes and growth of government not with nearsighted reactions but a long-term vision," Klingler said.

Perry spokesman Mark Miner disputes all that, citing the accomplishments of small business tax cuts and college financial aid that the Legislature passed in its regular work session that ended June 1.

"The special session the governor called is to extend the operation of five critical agencies and help reduce gridlock by continuing to provide options for financing our state's highways," Miner said.

Perry has narrowly tailored three topics for the special session: issuing highway development bonds that already have voter approval; reauthorizing five state agencies – including the Texas Department of Insurance and Texas Department of Transportation – to continue their operations; and approving private-public toll road agreements that had been negotiated by local authorities and TxDOT.

## Stalled

The insurance and transportation agencies were due for overhauls, but they and the other issues got caught up in a protracted and contentious fight over requiring voters to show identification before casting a ballot.

The last thing the governor wants, especially in a challenging campaign season, is a session filled with partisan rancor and few accomplishments.

Expanding health care and voter ID are "incendiary and quite explosive," said LBJ School of Public Affairs professor Sherri Greenberg, a former House member. "The agenda had to be limited, unless you want another train wreck."

Many lawmakers recognize that.

"Democrats feel we should be dealing with unemployment, CHIP, and insurance reform, but if he doesn't put them on the call, no one can force him," said Rep. Jim Dunnam of Waco, who heads the House Democratic Caucus.

Sen. Tommy Williams, R-The Woodlands, had championed voter ID during the regular session and said he would like to continue working on it.

But he said it wasn't a necessity for this time and is happy to complete what the governor has given lawmakers and then head home. "That's what's in the best interest of the state," he said.

Rep. Vicki Truitt, R-Keller, pushed hard during the regular session to allow voters to approve tax increases for transportation projects.

She said the special session call is too narrow to reconsider it – and its supporters need more time for grassroots organizing anyway.

But Rep. Garnet Coleman, D-Houston, and 74 other House lawmakers have signed a letter asking Perry to add children's health care. Coleman favors a measure that died during the regular session to add roughly 80,000 children to the health insurance plan at a two-year cost of \$38 million.

#### SPECIAL SESSION AGENDA

What the Legislature will take up Wednesday in its 30-day special session:

- A safety net measure to allow agencies such as the Transportation and Insurance departments and the Racing Commission to keep operating. The departments would be shuttered later this year without the legal authority to continue.
- Authorization of \$2 billion in road-building bonds already approved by voters.
- Extension of the Transportation Department authority to work with regional mobility authorities. Together the groups work out agreements on how to prioritize, finance and build roadways.