

*Dallas Morning News*

## **Editorial: Texas Legislative Leaderboard**

01:09 PM CDT on Friday, June 5, 2009

### The Big Three

Secession talk and other political posturing dominated Gov. **Rick Perry**'s headlines, and he sometimes seemed distracted by fellow Republican and future challenger Kay Bailey Hutchison. In his day job, Perry helped push school accountability reforms in the right direction and got the Legislature to upgrade homes for the mentally disabled. We regret he left federal stimulus money on the table when it could have beefed up the

Lt. Gov. **David Dewhurst** struck an early sour note by making the explosive voter ID bill his marquee agenda item, which scored points with his Republican base. His Senate settled down to business and took the lead on crafting a solid budget. The best news in the money plan was for higher education. And his chamber produced a better school accountability bill than the House.

Keeping the lawmaking machinery oiled was rookie GOP Speaker **Joe Straus**' challenge. Focused on a pledge of even-handedness in a House with a close partisan split, he did well enough, except for a pileup over voter ID at the end. Next time we'd expect more of a leadership agenda on overriding state needs.

### The Pit Crew

If Straus was the driver, he needed an efficient pit crew. His top hands, Republicans all, moved things along with smooth teamwork. They include budget man **Jim Pitts** of Waxahachie; Plano's **Brian McCall**, who scripted a nonpartisan calendar; and Fort Worth's **Charlie Geren**, who made sure the House's wheels wouldn't come off.

### The Heavy Lifter

Dallas GOP Sen. **John Carona** was pumped up by challenge. He carried North Texas' priority local-option transportation plan through the Senate, despite party pushback. After hostility in the House sunk the plan, he didn't hesitate to challenge top leaders to carry more of the burden on tough issues. Meanwhile, he passed the most bills out of the Senate, making a mark on transportation and homeland security.

### Educator in Chief

From rewriting the public education code to working on a new rule for automatic college admissions, Sen. **Florence Shapiro** was all over education issues. The Plano Republican mastered her assignment as head of the Senate Education Committee. And she showed rookies how to hold their own in floor debates.

## Higher Educator in Chief

As if constructing a mobile, House Higher Ed chairman **Dan Branch** had to balance the goals of building research universities, tempering the Top 10 rule for high school grads and containing tuition costs. The Dallas Republican made the most headway by passing the plan to develop more Tier One universities.

## The Deliverer

Sen. **Royce West** snared a law school for downtown, putting a legal education within financial reach of more local students. The Dallas Democrat secured the school for the UNT branch, which already boasts a campus he delivered for southern Dallas. West still needs to develop a broader statewide vision, but the man produces for his constituents.

## Master of the Mike

Rep. **Rafael Anchía** speaks with authority, and the House listens. The Dallas Democrat used this gift to articulate the compelling reasons that clean air and energy efficiency should be priority items for an urban area. A leader for his party on the emotional voter ID, he deals from a position of calm and reason.

## The Fixer

At the session's beginning, Gov. Perry told legislators to upgrade state homes for the mentally disabled and do it fast. Sen. **Jane Nelson**, chair of Health and Human Services, got on it and produced legislation to improve the care at the facilities, where fight nights got them on the national news. The Flower Mound Republican once again proved herself a problem solver.

## The Doctor

Some issues, like how much to spend on Medicaid, no one wants to tackle. There's never enough money and way too many complexities. That's where GOP Sen. **Bob Deuell** earns his pay. The Greenville physician stepped in once again to guide the Senate through the maze of health spending.

## Highlights to lowlights

**A survivor:** Unlike Tom Craddick's other Democratic pals, Dallas Rep. **Helen Giddings** did not get pushed aside when colleagues toppled the GOP speaker. She cheerfully worked the floor as always, particularly helping southern Dallas' development prospects by securing a needed change in the land bank law.

**Angry-dog lawmaking:** Irving Republican **Linda Harper-Brown** was in the head of the House pack in tearing down a regional priority, the local-option transportation plan. Her

own priority was legislation to take apart TxDOT. The bill became a monstrosity, and there were few mourners when it died.

**Bullying pulpit:** A committee spectacle not worth repeating – snarling GOP Sen. **Chris Harris** of Arlington grilling the head of UT's investment arm until the man quit on the spot. It might have scored points with somebody, but not with us.

**Head of D-FW's freshman class:** Mesquite Democrat **Robert Miklos** got the assignment of chairing the House's first subcommittee on capital punishment. The former prosecutor was a quick study and up to making a contribution despite rookie status.