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Filibuster on transportation bill threatened in Texas Senate

Senator says lawmakers went behind his back to strip out North Texas transit funding

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Patsy Spaw, secretary of the Texas Senate, on Sunday handles bills ready to be signed by Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS/Harry Cabluck



AUSTIN — A Dallas state senator threatened a filibuster Sunday to kill a massive transportation bill before the 140-day biennial legislative session ends today.

Sen. John Carona, R-Dallas, alleged that key lawmakers worked behind his back to keep language for local-option elections for transportation funding out of the overall bill. He accused some colleagues of backstabbing, trickery and political cowardice.

"I feel very passionate about this," Carona said.

The bill had not come up in the Senate by late Sunday. Carona predicted that Dewhurst would bring it to the Senate floor today.

Carona implicated fellow Republicans at various levels of government for killing a provision that would provide funding "desperately needed in our urban areas."

He took swipes at Gov. Rick Perry, Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst and House Speaker Joe Straus for lacking the political courage to rally for the measure. He called Sen. Glenn Hegar, R-Katy, "deceitful and dishonest" in his work as a lead negotiator on the bill.

"Sen. Carona's distortions sadden me because not only are they patently false, but because he is also attempting to reinvent history," Hegar said in a statement.

Carona expressed revulsion at comments by some lawmakers that those who support the local-option provision didn't want to vote on it if it had no chance of passing because they were worried about the issue being used against them in the next election, regardless of how they voted.

"Every issue in the Senate can't be decided on a 31-0 vote," Carona said. "There are times when we as a Legislature are expected to act as leaders."

Carona promised that there is a list of 81 House members who signed on to vote for a local-option provision, but he declined to release it publicly.

Work goes on

Despite the drama in the Senate, bills flew through both chambers at a fast clip Sunday. Lawmakers sent more than 80 bills to Perry's desk, including one establishing the University of North Texas at Dallas College of Law, the first public law school in Dallas.

Rep. Lon Burnam, D-Fort Worth, delivered a "personal privilege" speech calling for the ouster of the presiding judge of the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals, who is facing a judicial conduct hearing this summer for allegedly failing to allow an after-hours appeal from an inmate who was executed hours later.

Burnam, who filed a motion to begin legislative impeachment proceedings against Judge Sharon Keller, had earlier indicated that he might press for a House vote on the motion. But, with one day left before today's adjournment, Burnam said he decided to drop plans for the House vote but wanted to "educate" members on the details of the case.

Tough breaks

Carona and Burnam weren't the only lawmakers struggling to accept that a major legislative goal was dead for the session. Negotiations on several measures fell through over the weekend, sometimes because of amendments hastily attached to them days ago.

Arlington Republican Sen. Chris Harris had faced minimal opposition to a bill aimed at changing which parent has to pay attorney's fees in certain child support lawsuits. Harris said the impasse was over some amendments added by other senators that Harris had approved.

He had hoped that the House conferees would relent before the midnight deadline Saturday. It didn't happen.

Harris said he plans to file the bill again next session.

Staff writer David Montgomery contributed to this report.

Bill update

Bills from local members sent to Gov. Rick Perry on Sunday.

Domestic violence: HB2240 creates an offense of continuous family violence so that several instances can be treated by authorities as a felony, from Sen. Jane Nelson, R-Flower Mound

Pipelines: SB686 would allow drilling companies to place natural gas transmission pipelines along state highway rights of way instead of through neighborhoods, from Sen. Wendy Davis, D-Fort Worth, and Rep. Rob Orr, R-Burleson

UNT law school: SB956 establishes a public law school in Dallas, from Rep. Dan Branch, R-Dallas, and Sen. Royce West, D-Dallas

Clean coal: HB469 would extend tax credits of up to \$100 million each for the first three companies developing three so-called clean-coal plants in Texas.

Other bills **Sales tax:** HB1801 adds backpacks and other school supplies to items exempt from sales tax during the annual tax-free weekend on clothing in August.

Parking: SB52 increases penalties for repeat offenders of illegally parking in spaces reserved for the handicapped.

Vacant buildings: HB3065 gives cities in Dallas, Tarrant and Harris counties the option of requiring property owners to register vacant buildings on a special form.

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