

Local lawmakers reflect on the good, the bad, the ugly

BY ANNA M. TINSLEY

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Fake cardboard tombstones lined the Texas Capitol last week, memorializing many of the bills that died this session.

Among those put to rest were two hot-button issues by local lawmakers: the local-option bill designed to fund North Texas transportation projects and a proposal to require Texans to show photo IDs to vote.

Local lawmakers have varied memories of the session. Here's a look at their highs and lows:

Sen. Wendy Davis, D-Fort Worth

Best: Enacting legislation to protect the state's consumers from sudden increases in their electricity rates.

Worst: Not being able to address more pocketbook issues such as curbing college tuition or holding down home insurance rates.

Other: "The concerns communicated to us by our constituents formed the basis of our agenda, which I am proud to have carried and advanced through the passage of meaningful legislation. I am also pleased to have set a tone of trust and respect with my Senate colleagues."

Sen. Chris Harris, R-Arlington

Best: Getting the University of Texas at Arlington an extra \$6 million in funding from 2007 and extra funding for UTA's nursing program and Smart Hospital.

Worst: Not passing a constitutional amendment to dedicate all excess toll revenue to transportation projects.

Other: . we did pass a . "While some things did not pass . balanced budget without raising taxes. We did pass legislation that will provide the criteria that will hopefully help Texas add a number of Tier 1 schools to the state."

Sen. Jane Nelson, R-Flower Mound

Best: SB 642 to improve oversight and quality of care at state schools; SCR 77 to approve a settlement reached with the federal government to resolve its query of Texas state schools.

Worst: The lack of a House vote on voter ID, which led to the death of some bills, and "the long shadow" the federal government cast over this session.

Other: "Texas is one of five states with positive cash flow because previous legislatures made tough budget decisions. We are not immune from the problems facing other states."

Rep. Lon Burnam, D-Fort Worth

Best: HB 978, giving more protections against discrimination in the workplace to disabled Texans; fighting bills "rooted in racism and xenophobia."

Worst: The deaths of a bill to expand the Children's Health Insurance Program and a local-option transportation fee.

Other: "Most of the good bills that died were casualties of the right-wing obsession with passing voter suppression legislation this session that would have disenfranchised poor, elderly and minority Texans."

Rep. Charlie Geren, R-Fort Worth

Best: Changing the House speaker; SB 90, helping children who move to Texas with their military family with the transition.

Worst: "I didn't have any disappointments. I had some bills that didn't make it all the way through, but that's part of serving."

Other: "I think we put together a good team that ran the . in the manner Speaker [Joe] Straus said he was going to. All members . House . got hearings and if they could sell their legislation, it got to the floor. I'm . I'm . . sorry voter ID didn't pass. I'm sorry some road funding didn't pass. looking forward to the next session."

Rep. Kelly Hancock, R-North Richland Hills

Best: Addressing balance billing, creating a mediation system for patients hit by unexpected medical charges not covered by insurance.

Worst: "In the last few critical days of the Legislature, in order to avoid voter ID reform, the Democrats decided to hold up hundreds of . Important pieces of legislation with both local and statewide . . bills. impact died because of this."

Other: "This session was a historical one. There was a true sense of togetherness in getting the state's business done."

Rep. Phil King, R-Weatherford

Best: HB 469, which created incentives for building clean coal power plants in Texas. "With this, I believe Texas will be the first place in the world to build a 'future generation' plant."

Worst: "The long list of important legislation that failed the last week of the Legislature when the House Democrats held their five-day filibuster."

Other: "Fiscal conservatives, although in the minority, held the line against growth in government, additional taxes and protected the state's rainy-day fund."

Rep. Diane Patrick, R-Arlington

Best: HB 130, to create a voluntary grant program to give full-day pre-kindergarten programs to at-risk children.

Worst: "It was disappointing to see that many good ideas and high-quality legislation died on the calendar as a result of political game-playing."

Other: She accomplished her main goals: passing the pre-kindergarten bill, addressing "public school finance and reform public school accountability, and [securing] \$5 million to expand UT-Arlington's highly regarded nursing program."

Rep. Paula Pierson, D-Arlington

Best: Expanding Texas' newborn screening program to include tests for 52 disorders, a measure named for a child who died before his first birthday from a treatable disease for which he was not screened.

Worst: Watching her bills to boost funding for school facilities and promote business growth die.

Other: "There is a new dynamic in the House, with a new speaker and many new members, and in this new House, the will of the people of North Texas is strongly represented."

Rep. Mark Shelton, R-Fort Worth

Best: Passing a measure to create a private insurance pool for children who don't have private insurance.

Worst: He had hoped "partisan bickering" was over and was disappointed by the parliamentary maneuvers that ultimately prevented a vote on the voter ID bill.

Other: "In making every decision, I referenced the . I feel that my vote record closely . . . correspondence of my constituents. reflected the opinions and desires of the people of District 97."

Rep. Todd Smith, R-Eules

Best: A bill letting those in consensual teenage relationships ask a court to be removed from the sex-offender registration list.

Worst: . my . "Despite my efforts to find consensus . friends on the other side of the political aisle chose to kill an entire calendar of important bills rather than simply debate a thoughtful, balanced version of the voter ID bill."

Other: Other than the voter ID fight, he said "the House functioned well despite the fact that neither political party had a meaningful majority."

Rep. Vicki Truitt, R-Keller

Best: Passing bills to give some retired school employees supplemental payments and protect their investments and update rules and rates for their retirement system.

Worst: That the local-option measure died.

Other: Lawmakers "lost valuable time and important bills during a crucial, closing week of the session due to parliamentary delay tactics employed by House Democrats to avoid a vote on voter ID legislation. My [local-option measure] died on the calendar when they turned a four-hour agenda into a five-day ordeal."

Rep. Chris Turner, D-Burleson

Best: Passing his bill to create a dedicated lottery scratch-off game to benefit services for Texas veterans.

Worst: Failure to pass meaningful insurance reforms.

Other: "I was impressed by the level of bipartisanship in the House and the ability of members, regardless of party identification, to work together on issues affecting the daily lives of people of our state. I was disappointed at how much power the special interests continue to wield."

Rep. Marc Veasey, D-Fort Worth

Best: Measures to provide tuition benefits for children of soldiers sent to war zones and protect neighborhood schools from being renamed against the will of their community.

Worst: The Republican push for voter ID.

Other: "The tensions in the House this session were much . [Straus] and I just won't . . . less toxic than during my first two sessions. . . everyone, including the far right and left, will . . . agree on many issues. But . . . agree that the chamber ran more smoothly under the new speaker."

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