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## Some DFW lawmakers may pay price for failure of transit bill

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Cluck

Transportation may be the new political battle cry.

Just days after the 81st legislative session ended, work has already begun for the 2011 session, and preparations for the 2010 statewide elections are shifting into high gear.

Behind the scenes, efforts to recruit candidates to run for the Legislature are under way, potentially targeting local lawmakers who didn't back the local-option transportation funding measure that North Texas officials spent nearly a quarter-million dollars lobbying for.

Local officials declared the transportation bill their top priority for the year, and it died in a bitter battle at the end of the session. The defeat forces regional cities and counties to regroup in their quest to fund major rail and road projects in the traffic-snarled Metroplex.

"There could be repercussions," Arlington Mayor Robert Cluck said. "There is a lot of anger out there. I've seen it."

Bills die for many reasons, but some are pointing fingers at lawmakers including Sen. Jane Nelson, R-Flower Mound, and Reps. Kelly Hancock, R-North Richland Hills, and Charlie Geren, R-Fort Worth, for either voting against the measure or not helping the cause enough.

"We needed help in getting it passed, and a number of our local delegates weren't doing that," Tarrant County Judge Glen Whitley said after the measure died.

## **What happened?**

Local officials worked years on a plan to create a pot of funding for local transportation needs. They scrapped a 2007 plan that died because it called for a sales tax. This time, the proposal would have given county officials choices — a driver's license fee, a gasoline tax or an auto registration renewal fee.

"The effort and energy from all the North Texas leaders has been unlike anything I have ever seen.," Fort Worth Mayor Mike Moncrief said. "There was a united voice about these concerns."

Apparently it wasn't enough.

Several lawmakers said their constituents opposed new taxes, so they couldn't support the proposal, which Rep. Vicki Truitt, R-Keller, and Sen. John Carona, R-Dallas, drew praise for trying to shepherd through the session.

## **. . Coming up .**

This is the time of year some campaigns begin, said Harvey Kronberg, editor of the *Quorum Report*, an Austin political newsletter.

"We are definitely in the candidate recruitment stage," Kronberg said. "Names are already being shopped around."

Public challenges to North Texas incumbents haven't evolved, but Republicans and Democrats are kicking off efforts to boost their numbers in 2010. Democrats hope to claim a House majority, and the GOP wants to boost its majority in both chambers.

"We are going to go after offices in every precinct and county in this state," Texas Republican Party Chairwoman Tina Benkiser said. "We're going to keep Texas red and paint it a little redder in 2010."

Democrats want a majority in the House to not only choose the speaker but also be positioned for the next redistricting.

"The 2010 elections are pivotal for Texas Democrats," said Kirsten Gray, a Texas Democratic Party spokeswoman. "Republicans hold every statewide office, and yet they have failed to address major pocketbook issues."

All this comes as some voters may still be frustrated from this legislative session, maybe even in the mood for change.

"There's a lack of leadership in Austin," North Richland Hills Mayor Oscar Trevino said. "They aren't taking responsibility for the problems we are facing in their district. They are elected to lead, and they played games."

## **Didn't have support**

Nelson voted against the local-option bill in the Senate, saying her vote represented her constituents' opposition. Hancock and others have also said they didn't hear support for the measure in their districts.

Geren said he opposed the bill because there was no representation for northwest Tarrant County. Even though Whitley indicated that he would fix that, Geren said Whitley "isn't the county judge forever. I wanted it in legislation."

He defended his actions and Nelson's.

"If they are really mad at her, they ought to try her," Geren said. "I don't believe I'd be dumb enough to do that. I think she had a good session, and I'll stand by her any day she needs me to. I'll also stand by Vicki Truitt."

As for himself, Geren said he didn't fight for or against the measure. "It wasn't my issue to fight for," he said. "It was a pretty complicated bill, and it just didn't work out."

### **Down the road**

Moncrief said it's not "appropriate to talk about revenge," but he noted that "the records, the votes that were cast, those will speak for themselves."

Whether anyone remembers that next year is a different matter. "There is a . March next . rumbling now, but I don't know how intense that will be come . year," Trevino said.

Cluck said he hopes that people don't act rashly.

"Everyone needs to let this cool down a bit before taking brash action," he said. "It's like sending an e-mail when you are angry. You can't retrieve it. Before we hit the send button, we need to cool down and then come back to it."

No matter what, Moncrief said, North Texans were the ones who lost during this session.

"There was a high-stakes game of poker being played with the quality of life of the people," he said. "There are no winners here."

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