



Editorial: Legislature ends with big achievements and troubling failures



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Published: 27 May 2013 10:37 PM

Updated: 27 May 2013 11:14 PM

After any legislative session, lawmakers want Texans to think they bestowed marvelous benefits upon the state. At the same time, cynics want to complain that legislators did absolutely nothing good for Texas.

The reality is usually more nuanced and interesting. This year's Legislature — even before Gov. Rick Perry called lawmakers back into special session regarding redistricting — is no exception.

The 2013 regular session was a blend of big achievements for Texas and troubling failures. Blended together, the result was a mixed bag for the state.

On the plus side, the session had a more amicable tone than the divisiveness of recent legislatures. Gov. Perry helped make that possible by not introducing contentious emergency items for legislators to resolve immediately.

As a result, lawmakers didn't face brutal partisan battles like those that overshadowed recent sessions, such as skirmishes over voter ID laws. Weary of the fighting, some members worked cordially despite deep differences. Freshmen House members even occasionally sported purple ties to symbolize their commitment to collegiality.

Legislators also owned up to several of Texas' major challenges. This newspaper particularly wants to applaud those who voted to create a new state water fund and invest \$2 billion in it. Voters must approve that fund in a November constitutional election, so one more hurdle remains. But legislators had failed before to create a way to finance Texas' many needed water projects. Not this time.

Legislators also did a good job managing the state's surplus. Naturally, it's better to start any session with enough funds, but extra dollars can lead to a wild scramble for investments.

Some of that happened. Yet legislators focused largely on restoring public education funds that were cut in 2011, investing in the new water fund, increasing higher education scholarship dollars and expanding mental health services.

On the negative side, however, legislators failed in several troubling ways.

They did little to help improve funding for Texas' long-standing transportation needs. Austin set out to deal with transportation and water funding. But lawmakers left roads at the altar. The neglect did the state absolutely no good.

They also rejected the chance to find a middle ground on the number of tests public school students must take. And, in making it easier to graduate from high school, they took a step back from the bipartisan work of the last 30 years to increase academic rigor in Texas.

Finally, legislators failed to curb the onerous practices of the state's payday loan industry. Some Texans may need quick loans, but high fees and interest costs can throw them into never-ending debt. Consumers, unfortunately, must wait two more years for any legislative help.

These failures, along with not pushing hard enough to expand Medicaid, kept this from being a spectacular session. The results were better than recent sessions, but the bag was mixed.

What else Austin got right:

Reformed the Cancer Prevention and Research Institute of Texas to include badly needed safeguards and transparency in CPRIT's grant-making.

Passed the Michael Morton Act, giving defendants broader, clearer access to evidence that could clear them.

Increased transparency of the state budget, making it easier to track funds.

What else Austin got wrong:

Gave some students in grades three through eight exemptions from state testing in key subjects.

Gov. Rick Perry vetoed the "dark money" bill that would have required more outside political groups to disclose their donors.

Failed to pass serious ethics legislation, including making it harder to go from the Legislature straight into lobbying.

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Claudia DeLaughter Stravato 1 hour ago

The Texas Legislature is "eat up" with corruption in the form of lobby running government! It has always been that way, but is worse now. With no vision or leadership from the top, however, should we expect more?

Because of his unanticipated longevity, Rick Perry CONTROLS Texas government, He calls the shots and kicks ass! Look at his contributors and you can know in advance what measures will pass. Every member of every Board or Commission has been appointed by him at a high cost to the appointees. Again, he calls ALL the shots with elected AND appointed officials in Austin. Look at the last minute passage of on-line courses. Check his contribution list for that one too!

Everyone knows he is "in bed" with the lobby because the poor thing still wants to run for President. Until he is gone, the State of Texas will drop even lower in all standards that enhance the quality of life. We are critically close to becoming a 3rd world country.....maybe even a "banana republic," thanks to the runaway, personal ambition of Rick Perry.

Reply

+1



Biff Loeder 2 hours ago

The typical Republican Party in action in Texas.

Continuing to make Texas better and better...and far superior to anything and anywhere that is fashioned and mishandled by the Democrats.

Heck, you'd have to be blind and dumb not to face that reality!

Reply

[1 reply](#)

-1



Beth Dawson 2 hours ago

Show me how, Biff. I am open to facts.

Reply

+1



Beth Dawson 3 hours ago

The typical Republican Party in action in Texas.

I am proud to say MY State Senator tried to get the payday loan bill passed.

Republican Representatives, however, were making too much money from the poor.

<http://info.tpj.org/reports/pdf/PaydayReport.mar2011.pdf>

<http://www.texasobserver.org/republican-senator-accuses-colleagues-of-being-shills-for-payday-lenders/>

<http://www.citizensforethics.org/blog/entry/payday-lenders-2012-update>

in other words, Texas republican Representatives simply represent the highest bidder.

Reply

+1



paul 4 hours ago

How a state that is LAST in healthcare for its citizens not to expand Medicaid is criminal. Do they have a better idea? NO their plan is NOT TO GET SICK and if you do DIE QUICK it doesnt suprise me that so called CHURCH PEOPLE turn their back on the elderly, disabled ,children and the poor.

Reply

+2



Fred Goodwin 5 hours ago

Why must the Lege "help" people who avail themselves of payday loans?

Anybody with half a brain knows what a usurious scam those outfits are. No one is pointing a gun at the heads of people and MAKING them take out a payday loan.

There's no legislative cure for stupid.

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Danny 3 hours ago

That's true and I do agree with you that anyone with a half a brain should know to stay away from these businesses. However, Loansharking is illegal for a reason and this is nothing short of legalized Loansharking. I don't want them in our state conducting business. There should be some costs and laws for doing business in Texas for these scam businesses.

Reply

+2



David 7 hours ago

As for transportation they probably did not fund it properly in order to get more toll roads built.

Reply

+3



Dwight Harrison 14 hours ago

The left wing bigots continue and the circulation at the DMN continues to dismantle just like the country under Ohomo.

Reply

[2 replies](#)

-6



John Roach 12 hours ago

Couldn't have said it better myself. Although I prefer "The Big Orange" or "Obummer".

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-5



A M 11 hours ago

"Ohomo"...how can anyone with at least an 8th grade education take you seriously?

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