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## Perry tells lawmakers don't pack, more roadwork ahead in new special session on highway funding



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AUSTIN — Gov. Rick Perry became a road warrior again Tuesday, pushing weary lawmakers into a third special session on transportation funding after lawmakers again couldn't agree on a modest boost for the state's highways.

Perry restarted the legislative clock minutes after the House and Senate had adjourned, saying the state urgently needs to address road congestion. He expressed little patience with the impasse.

"Inaction is a Washington-style attempt to kick a can down the road — but everybody in Texas knows we're rapidly running out of roads to kick that can down," Perry said in a written statement.

But the legislative fight has moved from gridlocked roads to gridlock on spending.

Transportation experts now estimate that the state needs \$5 billion a year to keep Texas moving. The proposal that fell apart in the House this week would add less than a billion annually.

And after months of wrangling, relations between the House and Senate have grown increasingly testy. Republicans, who control both handily, have split between fiscal conservatives concerned over government spending and business-backers concerned over growth and infrastructure.

The House created a special committee to look at the issue. The Senate immediately passed the same measure that failed in the House, to siphon part of the state's rainy day fund for the Department of Transportation.

"We're beginning with the House and its working group at the same point where we left it off," said Sen. Robert Nichols, the Jacksonville Republican leading the effort.

Sen. Dan Patrick, R-Houston, had a different term for it: "This is like legislative Groundhog Day."

House Speaker Joe Straus, R-San Antonio, also predicted more of the same. He said he doubted the required two-thirds of House members would support the Senate bill.

"I don't think that you can keep pushing uphill the same bill that was losing support, not gaining, as the summer wore on," Straus said. He has decried the effort to address a major threat to the state's economic health without considering new revenue sources.

"The governor has made it clear that this isn't an issue that he is willing to allow us to step back and take a more comprehensive approach to," Straus said. "So we're here. We should do what we can that attracts the necessary votes — and take it piecemeal if that is what he is asking us to do."

The divisions are deep on any proposal, and getting 100 of the 150 members to coalesce behind any plan will be difficult, Straus said, pledging a "good-faith effort."

During the regular session, legislators rejected any suggestion to hike gas taxes or increase fees on car registrations.

With new revenue off the table, lawmakers looked at existing taxes from the state's oil and gas drilling boom.

The Senate bill would take half of that money, or about \$880 million a year, for new freeways — no toll roads could receive the funds. Voters would have to approve the plan in November 2014, so the proposal wouldn't be on the same ballot as this year's \$2 billion for the state water plan.

The governor threw his support behind the Senate plan, calling it “a significant step toward improving our roads and highways using existing revenue.”

But opponents expressed concern that by diverting the tax money from the rainy day fund, where it currently goes, the state could deplete its emergency savings account. The Senate plan would let a few key budget leaders cut off the spigot for highway funding if the rainy day fund fell too low.

Democrats dislike that Republicans are willing to peel off special money for highways but not schools. And others grumble that the plan has an unreliable funding source and still falls well short of what is needed.

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## HOW A SPECIAL SESSION WORKS

Only the governor determines the topics that can be considered.

The Legislature operates with the same officers and committees, unless lawmakers decide to change them. But rules are different. For instance, senators no longer use the rule requiring that two-thirds of senators support a bill for it to be considered. A simple majority suffices.

Sessions can last up to 30 days, and there's no limit on how many a governor can call.

A 30-day session is estimated to cost the state as much as \$1.3 million.

This will be the 12th special session Perry, Texas' longest- serving governor, has called. That's the most of any governor — Gov. Bill Clements called 11 in the 1970s and '80s.

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 **Michael Wallace** 3 hours ago

Really simple solution. A 5 or 10 cent tax increase on the current gasoline tax. All of it for roads. That way, it is a user fee payment plan. Don't drive? Don't pay anything. Plus the fact that the tax increase removes one hook the oil industry has on the driver. Our roads would not be hostage to the international speculation crude oil market. If a crash occurs, and it can, West Texas and other local fields could dry up (it has happened) and the 'rainy day' funding dries up with it. And no 'special elected leaders' could determine that too much is going for roads.

Tax us.  
Please.

2   0

 **jack frost** 4 hours ago

Small government people spending tax money like a drunk sailor; Perry loves to spend tax money, he lives like a king on our tax money.

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 **NickG** 4 hours ago

Jack, you and I know percisely what your response would've been, had the headline read, "Perry Refuses To Consider Further Highway Funding"! Don't deny it!

0   2

**William Hill** 5 hours ago