

Star-Telegram

Was that the real Texas Gov. Rick Perry?

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A man calling himself Rick Perry addressed the Legislature on Tuesday. That's the same name used by the Texas governor.

He said many things that indicate he might have been the real Gov. Perry: a sweet reference to his wife, a lot of bragging about how well the Texas economy is doing and how it's the envy of all other states, a push for stricter limits on state spending, a proposal for tax cuts, complaints about Washington. You know, the usual.

But this Rick Perry also proposed spending \$3.7 billion out of the state's rainy-day fund and not letting that fund build up to its projected \$12 billion during the next budget cycle. That's just the opposite of what Perry said last session, when he wanted to make the rainy-day fund untouchable.

What's more, the guts of his proposal made a lot of sense and probably will get bipartisan support among legislators. It was enough to make your head swim.

This new Perry fellow pushed a plan he said "will support critical water and transportation systems across our state, addresses our needs both short-and long-term, and ensures both water and traffic will continue to flow in Texas for generations to come."

He wasn't specific about exactly how to use that \$3.7 billion. It could be by direct spending of rainy-day money on water or transportation projects. Or, there has been talk about setting up infrastructure "banks" through which the state could guarantee bonds for those same projects, reducing finance costs and stretching the rainy-day dollars to cover more new infrastructure construction.

It's up to the Legislature to flesh out this idea, and a lot will depend on the details. But the big-picture version is intriguing.

That's not to belittle the other points in Tuesday's speech. The man who sounded more like the old Perry wants \$1.8 billion in "tax relief" during the next two years.

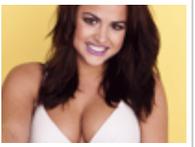
Again, no specifics about how to do that, but also an idea worth building some details around.

He also made another pitch for spending public money to send students to private schools.

That never has been a good idea. Texas should be doing more to improve its public schools, not draining more money out of them.

In the end, these guys were probably both Rick Perry -- a little bit of good, a little bit of bad and still the governor.

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