

A Fresh(man) Perspective

By the Honorable Linda Harper-Brown

As a Freshman member of the Texas House of Representatives, I am proud to report that my first Session was certainly a victorious one. I have no regrets, and I can stand up strong and say that we achieved everything we set out to do.

We passed a phenomenal tort reform package that ensures all Texans have the healthcare accessibility they deserve. The Texas Legislature was charged with balancing a \$10 billion deficit and triumphed meeting the funding needs of our school children as well as health and human services; and we did it without raising your taxes. We improved our transportation systems, passed a thorough ethics reform bill, put the US Pledge of Allegiance back in the public school classroom and worked to provide homeowners with a fair insurance package.

The Freshman Class of the 78th Texas Legislature has been particularly busy over the past four months, and I am truly honored to have been elected Chairman of this incredible group of individuals. With a voting block of 36 members, the Freshmen are taking our jobs very seriously. We are the largest Class in quite some time, and each Freshman has his or her own specialty and area of expertise. We have a vested interest in our state, our district and every constituent we represent.

The Class has members on all major House committees including twelve Freshman Committee Vice Chairmen and two on the coveted Appropriations Committee. We come together for weekly meetings to discuss hot topics facing the Legislature and to address our concerns as a group. House Speaker Tom Craddick frequently joined these meetings as he values the opinions and concerns of the newest members of his House.

The Freshmen also come together for Class trips, Class dinners, and most recently filmed a video for our troops in the Middle East. The video had words of encouragement, support and gratitude for Texas troops fighting the war in Iraq in acknowledgment of their courageous service to our country.

As a Freshman member of the House Committee on Transportation, I was selected to chair a subcommittee on federal transportation funding. One of the committee's major charges was to ensure our Congressional Delegation in Washington knew Texas was ready to receive our federal transportation funding - today we receive only about 87 cents of highway funding for every dollar of gasoline tax sent to Washington. I rallied almost every member of the Texas House of Representatives - Republican and Democratic, rural and urban - to sign a letter encouraging the Delegation to improve how Texas is treated in this year's twice-in-a-decade federal transportation re-authorization legislation. The letter was sent mid-May.

I look forward to a busy interim, and many wonderful Sessions to come.

Linda Harper-Brown, R-Irving, served as chairman of the Freshman class in the Texas House.