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# Special session's dirty secret

Whatever the problem, Perry thinks the answer's school vouchers  
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HILLSBORO — Advocates for our state education system are bracing for the distinct probability of a school voucher provision being sneaked into an omnibus school funding bill at the very last minute of a special session — take it or leave it.

This might surprise Texans, since there is no groundswell of support for vouchers. But the power structure in Austin is highly responsive to a cadre of activists, religious zealots and investors who see differing reasons for replacing the state education system with private-sector schools.

Dr. James R. Leininger of San Antonio has invested millions in the voucher movement. His vast contributions to candidates (with Gov. Rick Perry being high on his list of receivers) only tells part of the story. He has been instrumental in developing nonprofit “think tanks” and “research institutes” which have been charged with making public schools look bad and producing “research” that makes vouchers and privatization of education look good.

## The players

| A quick glance at the Web

site of one of those groups, the Texas Public Policy Foundations, is revealing. Just look at the board of directors. It includes Wendy Gramm (wife of former Sen. Phil Gramm), and Fritz Steiger of Bentonville, Ark., who is the president of Children First, a well-funded pro-voucher group.

Of course, Leininger is on the board with Brooke Rollins (president) who, incidentally, was tapped by Gov. Perry to serve as his deputy general counsel. She later served as the governor's policy director, managing the policy division and all policy issues including education — and insurance.

Leininger and like-minded contributors accompanied the governor on the “working holiday” in the Bahamas to discuss public school policy.

For those legislators who say that they are personally opposed to vouchers but would vote for a “limited” voucher provision to get the bill

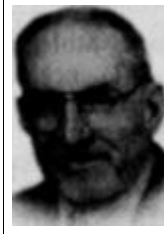
through: “Limited” is all the voucher troopers need.

Meanwhile, on the altar of school finance reform with priorities as demonstrated so far, a lot of children stand to lose. After all, 88 percent of all Texas school districts benefit from the system dubbed “Robin Hood” by its opponents and the 12 percent who have to share their wealth keep, on average, more than \$1,000 per student than those who receive.

The real problems with school funding are a lack of commitment and low priorities placed upon public education by the Texas Legislature and the governor. Texas has the wealth and means, but lacks the leadership and courage to do what is right.

Texas is second from last in state taxes collected. If one feels overtaxed, then many must be paying, comparatively, very little. It takes courage and commitment to reform the tax structure, especially when it means taxing the big money interests.

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