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While Perry Campaigns, Who's in Charge in Texas?

by Ben Philpott | 6 hours ago

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KEYWORDS: David Dewhurst, Texas Governor Rick Perry, Perry for President



Enlarge photo by: Bob Daemrich

August 14th, 2011: Presidential hopeful and Texas Governor Rick Perry during campaign stop in Waterloo, Iowa

Gov. Rick Perry, campaigning in Iowa again today, heads back to New Hampshire and South Carolina later this week. But while Perry's out of state, who's in charge in Texas?

With Perry gone, Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst assumes the role of chief executive. If both are out, the president pro tem of the Senate takes over. But in the months immediately after a regular legislative session, no matter who's in charge, there's often little to do.

"It's not on autopilot, but it's pretty routine, especially the first year of the biennium," said former state Rep. Talmadge Heflin, who

served on the House Appropriations Committee in 1999 — the last time a Texas governor was out campaigning for president.

"It's kind of like if you were paid twice a year," Heflin said. "When you first get your paycheck, there are a lot fewer questions you have to answer than in the fifth month."



Audio: Ben Philpott's story for KUT News

When those questions arise, an extensive bureaucracy kicks into gear. And Perry has more appointees in place to handle issues at every level of government than any other Texas governor has.

"Now, it's not to say the governor is not needed," Heflin said. "Certainly, there are questions that come up where the governor is needed."

And it's not like Perry won't be back in the state at all. He's scheduled to return to Austin in the next week or so — and there's bound to be plenty things waiting for his signature.

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