

## Special Commentary: Why the Texas House Needs A Conservative Speaker

The leadership should reflect the values of the majority principles

by Dave Welch

Many much more articulate Texas conservatives have already shared why we need a change of Speaker in the Texas House, however I will add my voice as well. For those involved in the “inside baseball” of lobbying at state or federal legislative bodies, an old adage is well known - the most important vote cast by a member of a House of Representatives is the first vote. That vote is for its Speaker. The Speaker position carries with it the gavel and power – too much power in my opinion – to determine the course of committees and legislation, hence the outcome of the policies our government will produce.

I signed the letter calling for this change along with other conservative leaders in Texas because of the blatant sellout of the Republican majority and principles by Speaker Joe Straus. While the flaws in his record are many, the most offensive and “deal breaker” lack of principle is reflected in his [100% rating by the National Abortion Rights Action League](#), the most radical, pro-abortion organization in existence. That cannot be achieved by being “pro-choice” but rather only by voting pro-abortion.

In addition, the following list of offenses are “highlights” of those [compiled by former state GOP party vice-chairman David Barton](#) before the 2010 state GOP convention and provide ample cause for change:

- [Speaker Straus](#) just joined with Democrat John Sharp to [host a fundraiser for Democrat incumbent Patrick Rose to defeat conservative Republican challenger Jason Isaac.](#)
- [Texans for Economic Development \(TED\)](#) is a pro-gambling PAC run by the former head of the State Democratic Party...[The Straus family gave \\$80,000 to TED.](#)
- [Parent PAC](#) also targets conservatives in the Texas House (and on the State Board of Education), having spent almost \$1 million to remove conservative Republicans. [Several of Straus’ Republican lieutenants wrote out large contributions to Parent PAC.](#)
- [Speaker Straus’ political director is Gordon Johnson, a Democrat lobbyist who ran TED...](#)
- Concerning the Speaker’s selections for committee heads, Democrat House member [Rene Oliveira](#) is a big tax and spend liberal, receiving an abysmal 35% rating from Texans for Fiscal Responsibility. Nevertheless, [Speaker Straus made Oliveira Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee...](#)

- Control of redistricting for the next ten years is at stake in this election, and at a time when Texas is expected to gain 4 new U. S. congressional seats as well as draw improved prospects for Republican state legislative districts, Speaker Straus made Delwin Jones (former Democrat, and the most liberal Republican in the House) Chairman of the Redistricting Committee.
- Speaker Straus inexplicably appointed liberal Democrat state representatives Mike Villarreal, Abel Herrero, and Aaron Pena to head legislative redistricting subcommittees...
- Straus Republican lieutenants Charlie Geren, Jim Keffer, and Byron Cook aired a radio ad supporting Democrat Mark Homer over conservative Republican Kirby Hollingsworth, helping the Democrat to a narrow win.
- Straus Republican lieutenant Jim Keffer did a mail piece for Democrat Mark Strama to help him defeat his Republican opponent.
- Straus lieutenants Dan Branch and Jim Pitts are helping Democrat Ellen Cohen against her Republican challenger, doing events with her in her district.

He also "scored 52 percent on the Heritage Alliance conservative index. That's the lowest of all current House Republicans and lower than 8 Democrats." A similar Democrat margin of majority would grant the same right to choose leadership that reflected their party's governing principles and platform. They do not and Straus is ostensibly not a Democrat.

Only a very short memory is required to be reminded that Republicans lost the majorities in the U.S. House and Senate and nearly so in the Texas legislature not because they were too conservative but because "moderates" regularly torpedoed conservative legislation. What we have learned over and over again is that when Democrats hold power – they protect it ruthlessly. When Republicans govern – they compromise.

That failed legacy must stop and stop now. Given the track record of Straus as a legislator and as Speaker, the Tidal Wave of 2010 propelled by the passionate call back to limited government, fiscal responsibility and moral law deserves better leadership.

While many will call for conservatives to cool our jets and not be "divisive" right now, there is one more election battle to fight for pro-life, pro-marriage, pro-family, pro-free enterprise values prior to the 2011 Texas legislative session. A super-majority representing the above values should choose a leader to preside over them who also shares those values.

I urge our pastors across the state as well as all citizens who believe in these principles to join us in contacting your State Representative with a respectful message that they support a candidate for Speaker who has the legislative and leadership record that reflects their mandate.

*(Note - [Liberty Institute](#) has confirmed that both pastors and churches may advocate a position regarding the choice of Speaker as it is not promoting or opposing a candidate on the public ballot.)*

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