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HK: First blush reaction to Abbott's special session plan

Get the “must do” done first and then bloody up the House in preparation for primaries

Governor **Greg Abbott**'s announcement today that he would call a special to pass the *Sunset Safety Net* bill first and then add nineteen issues to the call is strange to say the least. Why put Sunset first and then add the poisonous issues afterward? At the very least, keeping the conflict alive takes some of the narrative off Trump who is an increasing distraction to national Republicans who are trying to stay afloat.

Clearly property taxes and maybe bathrooms are among Abbott's magic nineteen. We here at *Buzz Central* are willing to bet that revisiting **Huberty**'s school finance plan won't make the cut of truly significant special session issues. After all, that legislation actually moves toward solving a problem.

If this was anything other than political stuntsmanship, he would pre-announce his intentions in order to allow members and stakeholders to have ongoing conversations and negotiations. A responsible Governor would lay out some position papers or bill drafts and hearings could begin even before the call.

Frankly, the “mystery” around the future special session call suggests a collaboration with **Patrick** who has little to worry about in terms of support from a *Senate* he now clearly dominates. One Machiavellian friend suggests that this announcement is a deal that seals Abbott's re-election effort without a challenge and that Patrick, who already dominates the microphone is happy to remain in place. And even if the “Abbott 19” all fail, the losers may emerge the political victors.

The “proof” such as it is, is that the intended killing field is the *House* where the timing and nature of the likely issues sets the stage for candidate recruitment by the usual suspects seeking to take Straus out.

Theoretically, the House could pass the Sunset Safety Net bill and adjourn sine die but when confronted with the kind of issues Abbott is likely to push, such an act would seem as irresponsible as killing the budget of bathrooms and leave incumbents even more vulnerable. While the first responsibility of most presiding officers is to protect their members, the Abbott-Patrick collaboration looks uniquely intended to hot box Straus.

Straus should never be under-estimated.

He has successfully fought off **Tim Dunn** and the **Wilkes** and raised the reputation of the House in comparison to the more docile Senate. He has not been completely successful and six terms is a long time to keep members land-locked, but there is no question that he and his collection of “reasonable” Republicans (as opposed to the “movement” variety) will have a serious set of challenges to face.

There is much chest thumping in the business community about sending a message to lawmakers but there has been little evidence that it has been received. The special session consumes valuable time and resources and keeps the business interests off balance. And no one really believes that the message sent by this last session suggests that Texas is really any longer an inviting place to bring a new diverse workforce or a business.

The cities, local governments and public schools will again be in the crosshairs and will have fewer defensive tools at their disposal than they would in a regular session.

And if there is anything left to be done on abortion or immigration, they too will likely surface.

Notice has been served and the cloak of mystery around what Greg Abbott stands for has been somewhat pulled back. It does not feel like the same Governor that make pre-K a priority last session. Instead, it reinforces the narrative that despite his promise to House Republicans to cover their backs in the 2016 primary if they stuck with him, he disappeared.

By Harvey Kronberg

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