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**House of Representatives**  
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OF THE  
**Seventy-Seventh Legislature**  
OF THE  
STATE OF TEXAS

BEGUN AND HELD AT  
THE CITY OF AUSTIN  
JANUARY 9, 2001



VOLUME I

**HR 2 - ADOPTED**  
**(by Bosse and Goodman)**

The chair laid before the house the following resolution:

**HR 2**

WHEREAS, Section 9(b), Article III, Texas Constitution, requires that the house of representatives elect a speaker of the house from its own membership; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the secretary of state shall call for nominations from the floor for the election of speaker of the house of representatives for the 77th Legislature and shall recognize every member who desires to make a nomination; that each person recognized shall immediately advance to the front microphone to make his or her nomination in a nominating speech not to exceed five minutes in length; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That after all nominations have been made, nominations shall be closed; whereupon seconding speeches shall be allowed, one for each nomination, in the order in which the nominations were made; and then other seconding speeches shall be allowed in rotation, with speeches in each round made in the order in which the nominations were made; provided that each nominee shall be allowed a maximum of five seconding speeches, none to exceed three minutes in length, and no person shall be considered a nominee unless his or her nomination is seconded by at least one member; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That all votes taken for election of speaker shall be record votes and entered in the House Journal; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That the secretary of state shall announce the results of the election; and if one nominee has received a majority of the votes cast, the secretary of state shall declare him or her to be elected to the office of speaker of the house of representatives; but if no nominee has received such a majority, the two nominees receiving the largest number of votes in the first ballot shall be in a runoff election and the procedure shall be repeated a second time with votes being cast for one or the other of the two nominees, the member receiving the higher vote being declared elected; and, be it further

RESOLVED, That after the election, the oath of office shall be administered under the direction of the secretary of state to the speaker-elect, and the speaker shall thereupon take the chair.

**HR 2** was read and was adopted without objection.

## ELECTION OF THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

The secretary of state announced that the next order of business would be the election of the speaker of the House of Representatives of the Seventy-Seventh Legislature of the State of Texas, and stated nominations for speaker would now be in order.

The secretary of state recognized the Honorable Warren Chisum of Gray County, who placed in nomination for speaker of the House of Representatives of the Seventy-Seventh Legislature of the State of Texas the name of the Honorable James E. "Pete" Laney of Hale County, speaking as follows:

Mr. Secretary, honored guests, fellow members, I rise to nominate a great statesman and a true friend of Texas for speaker of the Texas House.

In preparing for what I might say today, I reviewed recent nominating speeches. Those speeches paid many deserving compliments to Pete Laney.

In the past, many words have been used to describe Pete Laney. But newspaper columnist Dave McNeely recently pointed out that Pete can sum up an issue with a single word. That word is often a simple "nope."

At the beginning of the 74th Legislature, Rob Junell said Laney summarizes Larry McMurtry's story of *Lonesome Dove*. Rob illustrated Laney as our trail boss—always leading in the right direction, always ensuring that we all reach the end of the trail.

To start the 75th Legislature, Brian McCall compared all of us to 149 corks floating in the water. Brian said, as our leader, Laney never holds us under the water. Instead, he allows each of us to rise to the surface and allows the one with the best argument to prevail.

In nominating Pete for the 76th Legislature, Gary Walker likened Laney to Abraham Lincoln and reminded us about Laney's bipartisan leadership style.

Perhaps no one member of the legislature can describe Pete Laney better than Delwin Jones. In 1972, Delwin woke up as an incumbent and found Pete—and let's not forget Nelda—running against him for the house. Delwin came to know Pete and Nelda on the campaign trail that year at every pie supper in the Lubbock area. Delwin Jones was asked his opinion about Pete Laney, and his answer was, "If I wasn't running, I would probably vote for Pete."

On a historical point, Delwin was involved in the redistricting process in 1971. Delwin, I hope you learned your lesson.

I have come to know Pete Laney as a man of wisdom, with commitment, a trustworthy man, ethical, caring, and with high integrity. Pete Laney has shown great loyalty and his undying affection for the State of Texas. Much like our late Lieutenant Governor Bob Bullock, Pete Laney holds God, family, and Texas closer to his heart than anything else.

As all of us well know after 36 days of court battles, dimpled chads, supreme court opinions, counts and recounts, and Ryder trucks running up and down the coastline of Florida, all of us were glued to the television set, receiving the greatest lesson in civics we have ever received. Most of us have received a better understanding of the Electoral College. And finally after a fine concession speech by Vice President Al Gore, our nation has elected George W. Bush as president. And as provided by our Texas Constitution, Rick Perry

of Haskell County has assumed the role of governor of the State of Texas. Even the senate has elevated the Honorable Bill Ratliff of Titus County to lead them during this legislative session.

But now fellow members, it falls upon us to choose a strong leader for this house—an experienced leader to set the pace for Texas.

In the 74th Legislature, 21 freshmen members arrived on opening day. At the beginning of the session, Tom Craddick reminded us that this was then the smallest freshman class in Texas history. Tom, I stand before you today to report that we have now broken that record. Only 11 of 150 house members today sit in this grand chamber for the first time. Secretary Cuellar, I presume Webb County will search diligently to find someone to soon fill your shoes in this chamber. We desperately need a 12th man or a 12th woman.

The smallest incoming class is a testament to unquestionable and effective leadership over the past eight years. I submit that our leader must again be Pete Laney.

But no matter what we say about Pete Laney, we utterly fail to describe the man without including our beloved Nelda. We all know that as the first lady of the Texas House, Nelda acts like the glue that holds us all together. More than that, we all know she acts like the glue that holds Pete together.

Nelda always seems to lend us a smile in a tense situation. She tirelessly raises funds for Capitol restoration projects by designing Christmas ornaments that sell faster than Pete can sell a used car.

Many of us saw the beautiful Christmas tree with all the presents for needy children. Nelda led this effort. The Lord blessed this great and historic body with Nelda Laney. We would never be the same without her.

Mr. Secretary, I rise today to nominate the husband of Nelda, the grandfather of Austin James Phillips of Lubbock County. I rise to nominate James E. "Pete" Laney of Hale County as speaker of the Texas House of Representatives of the 77th Legislature.

May God bless Texas.

The secretary of state recognized the Honorable Debra Danburg of Harris County, who seconded the nomination of the Honorable James E. "Pete" Laney, speaking as follows:

So what's a mouthy urban feminist from inner city Houston doing seconding the nomination of the most rural, reticent to seek the limelight, and in many ways the most conservative speaker in my twenty years in office?

Well, number one, when I first arrived here as a freshman, Pete Laney was my mentor. He took me under his wing, as he does freshmen of all political stripes, and I remember some of the lessons he taught me. Most vividly I remember, one time, I had some radical idea. I don't remember whether it was passing home equity lending or getting rid of the blue laws, but it was some major change in government. And I just happened to ask Pete if he planned to vote for my bill. His answer to me was, "Do you have the votes to pass it?" Well I had no idea, and he said to me, "How dare you bring a bill up on the house floor and ask members to vote on something that could lose them votes in their home district and not even have a clue whether you've got the votes to pass it?" So one of the first things Pete Laney taught me was

"talk to all the members before you ask them to take a position."

Second is, Pete Laney and I share a lot of the same values. Pete knows that values are bigger than votes. One of his top values is that Pete believes in representative democracy. How many people here have asked Pete's advice on how to vote on something? And he said to you, "Vote your district." He said to you, "Vote your values." He said to you, "Vote your conscience." One of the strongest values Pete Laney has is that he believes in representative democracy.

Another value Pete has taught us all is how to disagree without being disagreeable. Pete Laney understands that our shared experience and our shared responsibility of governance is a bond that all of us have in common. Whether it is Rick Green and Glen Maxey or whether it is Arlene Wohlgenuth and Terri Hodge, the fact that we have shared the responsibility of government means that we have more in common than the ninety-nine percent of the folks out there who don't get involved in public service.

Before he was elected as our speaker, Pete Laney seldom went to the microphone on a bill other than to announce he was holding a committee meeting. And he rarely voted on bills as chair of the Committee on State Affairs. And he never once held a press conference before he was elected as our speaker, but one of the reasons I am proud today to second the nomination of Pete Laney is that every time I see him quoted as our speaker, I know I am about to read whatever he says with a sense of pride. Because he is my speaker and because he is our speaker, he has foregone the desire of mouthing off about his personal opinion. He bears the burden and he bears the responsibility of speaking for us all.

That is why you will see two colleagues before you as diverse and different as Warren Chisum and Debra Danburg, proud and united in our ardent support of Speaker Pete Laney's re-election. Thank you.

The secretary of state recognized the Honorable Jim Keffer of Eastland County, who seconded the nomination of the Honorable James E. "Pete" Laney, speaking as follows:

Mr. Secretary, fellow members, honored guests, ladies and gentlemen. There are three successful and wise men debating their occupations—on which occupation was the oldest. There was a surgeon, an architect, and a politician. The surgeon went first and he said, "Well, in the Bible we'll read that Adam's rib—Eve was taken from Adam's rib—that took surgery, so obviously medicine is the oldest profession." Well, the architect is next and he says, "Well, you'll remember also in the Bible that order was created out of chaos. That took foundation. That took texture, fine lines, angles. So you see that architecture must be older than medicine." The politician sensing his turn said, "Yes, gentlemen, but do you remember who created the chaos?"

And politicians do create chaos. Statesmen create calmness. Pete Laney is a statesman. Pete Laney has the fairness, as we have heard, to allow debate—critical debate, serious debate—on issues that affect our districts on this house floor. He has the patience to work with a very complex and diverse house membership. Finding common ground on issues is Pete's

forte. And also one of the qualities that I admire most, and one thing that I have learned on this house floor, is that when we have disagreements—and we will and we do—on this house floor that we disagree with respect.

Pete Laney is bipartisan, and I know using the B-word evokes a lot of emotion from a lot of different people, and mostly negative, but I've come to see that bipartisanship is action, not just words. And I think the greatest illustration of bipartisanship by Speaker Laney was in this very chamber not too many weeks ago when he introduced our favorite son, President-elect George W. Bush, to our nation.

The next day, Leslie and I went by to his office to wish him a job well done, and during that discussion he told us that we wouldn't believe the hateful e-mails, the hateful phone calls, the hateful faxes that he was getting from around the country because he, a Democrat, dared to stand up and say something nice about George W. Bush, a Republican. And amidst this criticism I asked the speaker, "Well, under these circumstances would you do it again? Would you stand up for George Bush?" And his answer to me was, "Certainly, I would. George Bush is a friend of mine, and it was the right thing to do for this country."

And with that as my example, I am honored to second the nomination of James E. "Pete" Laney to the office of speaker of this house for the 77th session of this Texas Legislature because Pete Laney is our friend and it's the right thing to do for Texas. God bless each and every member and God bless Texas. Thank you.

The secretary of state recognized the Honorable Robert Puente of Bexar County, who seconded the nomination of the Honorable James E. "Pete" Laney, speaking as follows:

Secretary Cuellar, colleagues, and guests, I am honored to have the opportunity to second the nomination of James E. "Pete" Laney as speaker of the Texas House of Representatives of the 77th Legislature.

When I was twelve years old, I took a tour of the Capitol with my school group. I was in awe of this place and the men and women who served Texas as members of this legislature. I would never have imagined that thirty years later, I would stand here before you to nominate Pete Laney as speaker, a man who easily embodies everything that impressed me all those years ago.

Under Speaker Laney's stewardship, the principles of reason and fairness have reigned in this house. With his guidance, this body has embraced changes in its rules and procedures that ensure that all members are given ample opportunity to participate in the legislative process and determine what is best for their constituencies and for the State of Texas. For Speaker Laney, your ability to pass legislation is a function of your talent and hard work rather than your party affiliation or your legislative connections. No matter the specific issue or piece of legislation, it is the best interests of Texas citizens that control Pete's actions, not political gain or a desire for power.

It is because of his character that, in supporting Speaker Laney, I look not only to the past, but to the future and the difficult session that lies ahead. In a time when our hard-forged bipartisan relationships will be tested, it is important to have a leader that will help us find our common ground. I know Pete Laney will do that.

When we talk about all that Speaker Laney has done, I think it is important to talk about some specifics. I won't even try to talk about all his accomplishments, but I think one example is fitting in light of the story I've told about my childhood. To Speaker Laney, our children are our greatest asset. Under his leadership, the 76th legislative session marked the passage of many measures designed to benefit our youth, including increases in teacher salaries, increases in state aid for school facilities, programs, and textbooks, and increases in aid for children's health care.

As I think back on that tour of the Capitol I took as a child, it is my hope that today, as we begin the 77th legislative session, there is a child sitting in the gallery hearing about the outstanding leadership and service of our speaker. A child that, through measures like those passed last session, will develop his or her tremendous potential. A child that, like me years ago, is filled with awe and inspired to serve this great state as a future member of the Texas Legislature.

With great respect, on behalf of myself and the rest of the Bexar County Delegation, I rise to second the nomination of a wonderful leader and friend, Pete Laney, as speaker of the house of representatives.

The secretary of state recognized the Honorable Yvonne Davis of Dallas County, who seconded the nomination of the Honorable James E. "Pete" Laney, speaking as follows:

Mr. Secretary, members and families and fellow Texans. It is with honor that I stand to second the nomination for West Texas's James E. "Pete" Laney for speaker of the Texas House of Representatives.

Our common destiny has brought us to this 77th session of the Texas Legislature. As we begin this session we also begin this third millennium with all of its opportunities.

It is critical that we have leadership that is visionary, persuasive, and strongly embedded with a righteous sense of justice.

Without justice, our freedom is threatened. The Texas House of Representative needs leadership that is just and fair. The Texas House of Representatives needs James E. "Pete" Laney.

James E. "Pete" Laney has breathed life into the words of Bernard Montgomery, a British field marshal, who wrote, "Leadership is the capacity to rally men and women to a common purpose with character which inspires their confidence."

We know character, not just circumstance, makes a man or a woman. We also know that James E. "Pete" Laney has the character and the capacity to rally the men and women of this distinguished body behind a common purpose for the citizens of our great State of Texas. He has demonstrated his ability to help his colleagues develop their vision and potential for greatness.

Our cause is one—we must help one another if our leadership is to be successful and we must have leadership that understands this oneness.

In James E. "Pete" Laney we have that leadership.

If we were to revisit John Maxwell's book *The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader* we would find that Speaker Laney has: Character, Charisma, Commitment, Communication, Competence, Courage, Discernment, Focus,

Generosity, Initiative, Listening, Passion, Positive Attitude, Problem Solving, Relationships, Responsibility, Security, Self-Discipline, Servanthood, Teachability and Vision.

While leadership is a great responsibility, we are responsible for the world in which we live and find ourselves.

Therefore, I proudly stand and second the nomination for James E. "Pete" Laney who embodies these 21 qualities of leadership, and who understands just and fair leadership, for the speaker of the Texas House of Representatives of the 77th Legislature. There is no one better qualified.

The secretary of state recognized the Honorable Pat Haggerty of El Paso County, who seconded the nomination of the Honorable James E. "Pete" Laney, speaking as follows:

Mr. Secretary, members, families of members, guests. This is the seventh time I've gone through this process. I want to tell you that the last six times I sat where you're sitting today and said, "How in the world do they choose those people to get up and make those speeches?" As I stand here today, the only thought going through my mind is, "How do they choose those people to make those speeches?" And who would listen to me if I got up and made a speech, anyway? The people that have been here longer than I have are much brighter, much more intelligent. Even those that are starting their second session today have already learned everything there is to know about state government. So I figured that the only people I was going to be able to address today were the eleven new people that Warren Chisum mentioned earlier. You're not smart enough yet to know me, okay?

First, let me congratulate you for becoming part of Texas history. Because when Goolsby gave you that desk, he allowed you to get your picture taken that's going to be on that wall. And a hundred years from now, God willing, there are still going to be tourists coming through and they're going to see pictures of people that went on to become judges and congressmen and senators—lieutenant governors and governors. And your picture's going to be in that group with them. And they're going to look at their hometown and there you're going to be. Secondly, when you took your oath this morning you could look around the room. You could see doctors, you could see lawyers, you could see Ph.Ds, you could see people that barely made it out of high school. And you could see some of the wealthiest people in the State of Texas in this room, and you could see some that are waiting for that next legislative paycheck to make it to the end of the month. But I want you to forget all of that because once you get rid of the wealth, once you get rid of the education, because you now have a red and a green light on your desk, you are the equal of every man and woman in this house. And there is only one currency here. There is only one currency, please do not forget this. The only currency you have in this house is your word. And if you say "Yes," you'd better press a green light. And if you say "No," you'd better press a red light. Because the word will get out in this place. Staff has a rumor here that when they're really bored they go down to the basement and they stand on the stairs, they start a rumor and then they try to beat it to the fourth floor.

The first time your vote is not correct, it'll be on the fourth floor. So this



morning, what I am here to tell you is I am supporting a man because he is very, very wealthy in the currency of this house. Pete Laney is starting into his twenty-ninth and thirtieth year in this place. I doubt very seriously if you could find anyone in this room, or anyone whose pictures are on those walls for the last fifteen sessions, that would tell you that he ever gave his word and went back on it. For that reason, to you eleven who don't know him yet but will, and to all the other hundred and thirty-eight of you that are going to make your decision this morning, please put your faith in a man who has all the currency in what this house counts the most: a word of honor.

Mr. Secretary of State, I move that nominations cease and that the chief clerk of the house of representatives be instructed to cast the vote of all members of the house of representatives for the Honorable James E. "Pete" Laney of Hale County for speaker of the House of Representatives of the 77th Legislature and shall cause same to be entered in the house journal. And that the Honorable James E. "Pete" Laney of Hale County be unanimously elected speaker by acclamation, with any member being permitted to cast a "Present" or "Nay" vote by providing such information to the journal clerk. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

Representative Haggerty moved that nominations cease and that the chief clerk of the house of representatives be instructed to cast the vote of all members of the house of representatives for the Honorable James E. "Pete" Laney of Hale County for speaker of the House of Representatives of the Seventy-Seventh Legislature, and that the Honorable James E. "Pete" Laney of Hale County be unanimously elected speaker by acclamation, with any member being permitted to cast a "Present" or "Nay" vote by providing such information to the journal clerk.

The motion prevailed without objection.

The secretary of state directed the chief clerk to cast the ballots of all members for the Honorable James E. "Pete" Laney for speaker of the House of Representatives of the Seventy-Seventh Legislature of the State of Texas.

On the motion to elect the Honorable James E. "Pete" Laney of Hale County for speaker of the House of Representative of the Seventy-Seventh Legislature of the State of Texas, the chief clerk cast the ballots of the members as follows:

Yeas-Alexander; Allen; Averitt; Bailey; Berman; Bonnen; Bosse; Brimer; Brown, B.; Brown, F.; Burnam; Callegari; Capelo; Carter; Chavez; Chisum; Christian; Clark; Coleman; Cook; Corte; Counts; Crabb; Craddock; Crownover; Danburg; Davis, J.; Davis, Y.; Delisi; Denny; Deshotel; Driver; Dukes; Dunnam; Dutton; Edwards; Ehrhardt; Eiland; Elkins; Ellis; Farabee; Farrar; Flores; Gallego; Garcia; George; Geren; Giddings; Glaze; Goodman; Goolsby; Gray; Green; Grusendorf; Gutierrez; Haggerty; Hamric; Hardcastle; Hartnett; Hawley; Heflin; Hilbert; Hilderbran; Hinojosa; Hochberg; Hodge; Homer; Hope; Hopson; Howard; Hunter; Hupp; Isett; Janek; Jones, D.; Jones, E.; Jones, J.; Junell; Keel; Keffer; King, P.; King, T.; Kitchen; Kolkhorst; Krusee; Kuempel; Laney; Lewis, G.; Lewis, R.; Longoria; Luna; Madden; Marchant; Martinez

Fischer; Maxey; McCall; McClendon; McReynolds; Menendez; Merritt; Miller; Moreno, J.; Moreno, P.; Morrison; Mowery; Naishtat; Najera; Nixon; Noriega; Oliveira; Olivo; Pickett; Pitts; Puente; Ramsay; Rangel; Reyna, A.; Reyna, E.; Ritter; Sadler; Salinas; Seaman; Shields; Smith; Smithee; Solis; Solomons; Swinford; Talton; Telford; Thompson; Tillery; Truitt; Turner, B.; Turner, S.; Uher; Uresti; Villarreal; Walker; West; Williams; Wilson; Wise; Wohlgemuth; Wolens; Woolley; Yarbrough; Zbrank.

Absent-Hill.

The Honorable Henry Cuellar, secretary of state of the State of Texas, then declared the Honorable James E. "Pete" Laney of Hale County to be the duly elected speaker of the House of Representatives of the Seventy-Seventh Legislature of the State of Texas.

### COMMITTEE APPOINTED

The secretary of state announced the appointment of the following committee to escort Speaker-elect James E. "Pete" Laney to the speaker's rostrum for the purpose of the taking of the constitutional oath of office by the speaker-elect: Representatives Uher, chair, Alexander, Goolsby, Hamric, Hodge, Hunter, T. King, Longoria, Marchant, Pickett, Rangel, and West.

Speaker-elect Laney and his party were escorted to the speaker's rostrum.

### OATH OF OFFICE TAKEN BY THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

The Honorable James E. "Pete" Laney of Hale County, having been escorted to the speaker's rostrum, took the constitutional oath of office as speaker of the House of Representatives of the Seventy-Seventh Legislature of the State of Texas, which was administered by the Honorable Jack Hightower, retired justice of the Supreme Court of Texas as follows:

"I, Pete Laney, do solemnly swear, that I will faithfully execute the duties of the office of speaker of the Texas House of Representatives of the Seventy-Seventh Legislature of the State of Texas, and will to the best of my ability preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States and of this State. So help me God."

### INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS

The secretary of state recognized the Honorable Tony Goolsby, who introduced the following members of the speaker's family: Nelda Laney, his wife; KaLyn Laney, his daughter; Jamey and Ronald Phillips, his daughter and son-in-law; Austin James Phillips, his first grandson; J Pete and Melonie Laney, his son and daughter-in-law; W. G. Laney, his father; and Helen McQuien, his mother-in-law; and Carol, John, and Scott McQuien, Nelda Laney's sister-in-law and nephews.

### ADDRESS BY SPEAKER LANEY

Representative Goolsby recognized the Honorable Tom Uher of Matagorda County, who introduced Speaker James E. "Pete" Laney.

Speaker Laney addressed the house as follows:

Mr. Secretary, members of the house, distinguished guests, families and friends, thank you. I am truly grateful to you, the members of the house, for

your continued support and for giving me the opportunity to serve as your presiding officer.

I once again pledge to serve the members of the house and the people of Texas in a way that continues to build respect and support for the work we do here.

It is an honor to welcome all of you to this first legislative session of the 21st century. This 77th regular session marks another milestone for the house of representatives: This session will establish the longest period in our state's history without a special session. Through the hard work, long hours and dedication of the men and women who serve here, we have been able to complete our official business during regular sessions for the past eight years. It is my hope—and my goal—to complete our work again without the need to return in a special session.

We have had favorable circumstances for avoiding special sessions. We have been fortunate to have had a booming economy . . . an economy that brought ever-increasing revenue to our state treasury. And that growth in revenue helped us provide better pay for teachers, better health care for children, improve our criminal justice system and make more highway improvements. We also used a portion of our revenue growth to provide tax relief for individuals and families and a portion went toward reducing state debt which saved millions of dollars in future interest payments.

Two years ago, I stood here and told you my greatest concern was that we manage our budget surplus wisely and responsibly. I am proud to say that we accomplished that goal.

Each of us may have had different priorities. And each of us, including myself, may have wanted some portions of the budget to be different. But I believe we can all be proud that we used the surplus to make investments in our future—investments to strengthen our economy and improve the quality of life for our citizens, especially for our children who represent the future of our state.

As we begin this session today, we face an economic future that—according to the comptroller's estimates—is not as certain or prosperous as it appeared two years ago. We all hope this is just a brief pause in our economic growth. We know a slowing economy places greater demands on government services and slows revenue growth. We must manage the coming budget with even greater caution because of this uncertainty.

In addition to the budget, there is much to be done during this session.

Fifteen months ago, I appointed a select committee to examine all aspects of life in rural Texas. Their findings confirmed many of the problems facing non-urban areas: the lack of jobs, lack of access to health care, with little growth and in some areas, even economic decline. The committee's recommendations give us a starting point to develop a meaningful rural policy. These areas contribute to the prosperity and quality of life in our state and rural Texans should share in that prosperity.

Over the past year and a half, we have all had time to listen to the concerns of citizens in our home communities. Many of us have heard the same issues raised by our citizens.

They want us to continue improving the quality of our schools. There

is concern about salaries and health insurance for teachers. Our citizens, especially seniors, worry about the high cost of prescription drugs. Population growth is dramatically increasing the demand for water for our cities, for agriculture and for economic development. Traffic congestion has become a serious problem in more parts of our state. And air pollution in urban areas threatens the health of our citizens and has consequences for many businesses and industries.

These are all serious and complex problems that demand our attention. They will not be solved in one legislative session. But we must use all the resources available to us and work with officials at all levels of government to make progress toward addressing these issues.

Texans are also concerned about protecting the privacy of their personal information, especially medical information. I hope the house will enact privacy legislation this session but we should take care not to create unintended problems for commerce or the news media's ability to report the news.

In recent years, the legislature has made great progress toward making health insurance available to uninsured Texans, especially to children of working families. We know we can and should do more to increase participation in our health insurance programs. We can accomplish that by reducing barriers and eliminating unnecessary red tape.

Last session, the house overwhelmingly passed a bill to improve campaign finance reporting and disclosure. That bill did not become law. But it should become law and we should try again.

There has been a national focus on campaigns and elections in the past year. There is concern over the amount of money needed to run for public office and where that money comes from. There are a number of ways this issue can be addressed. One simple way to reduce the cost of campaigns could be to shorten the length of the campaign season, which is longer in Texas than in any other state. Moving the date for the primary elections for state and local offices closer to the general election would reduce the cost of running for office in Texas.

In this session, we must redraw the districts for the legislature, congress and board of education, based on new census figures. Redistricting is always a difficult task for any legislative body but I am confident we can get the job done efficiently and without disrupting our other legislative business. And, we must accomplish the job in a way that serves the best interests of our citizens.

On December 13th, I stood on this podium, in this historic chamber, and introduced to the nation the man who will soon become our next president of the United States. I simply said that George Bush and I didn't always agree but we could always work together because we respected and trusted each other. Governor Bush and I always knew that our differences were less important than the needs of our citizens. And we knew partisanship did not solve problems.

I enjoyed working with Governor Bush, Governor Richards, and the other governors I have served with. And now, I look forward to having that same relationship with our new governor, Rick Perry, and with our new lieutenant governor, Bill Ratliff. I expect the members of the house to continue the same productive relationship with the senate and the governor's office that we have enjoyed in recent sessions.

There is really only one thing that I ever ask of members and all of you have heard it before: represent your district. That may sound simple but there will be times when you will find it the most difficult challenge you have ever faced. Our fellow citizens have placed upon us the serious responsibility of making difficult decisions on their behalf, decisions that will affect their families, their livelihoods and their communities.

You are the only voice and the only vote in this house for the people in your district. If you don't speak for them and vote for them, no one else will. As speaker, I will make certain you have every opportunity to represent your district in the legislative process.

I want to thank the members of my family for their support and their patience that make it possible for me to serve in the house. I could not do it without them. And, I thank you, members, for giving me the honor and privilege of serving as your presiding officer.

I'm ready to go to work, so let's get started.