

COMMENTARY

Just a few lawmakers make switch to lobbying

By **CLAY ROBISON**
Copyright 2009 Houston Chronicle

Jan. 25, 2009, 11:19PM

AUSTIN — Former Sen. Kyle Janek, an anesthesiologist who hasn't put anyone to sleep (at least professionally) since last spring, is one of Austin's newest lobbyists. But he is an exception, not the rule.

Most former legislators don't become lobbyists.

Even with the opportunity to trade their \$7,200 annual state salaries and insider connections for princely paydays, some don't have the stomach for kowtowing to former colleagues. Most simply have something better to do.

Only about 50 of the approximately 1,300 lobbyists registered so far for this session are former lawmakers, and they include a few from the "class of 2008," those who retired voluntarily or were retired by the voters during the recent election cycle.

Among them are Janek, who resigned from his Houston-area district in midterm last year; former Rep. Fred Hill of Richardson, who retired after 20 years in the House; and former Rep. Pat Haggerty of El Paso, who led a walkout of House members against then-Speaker Tom Craddick

two years ago and paid for it by losing, with Craddick's help, in the 2008 Republican primary.

Janek has five lobby clients with fees worth at least \$260,000, according to his registration with the Texas Ethics Commission.

They include Greater Houston Anesthesiology, the Texas Society of Anesthesiologists, the Sealy and Smith Foundation of Galveston, the Texas Medical Liability Trust and the Texas Charter Schools Association.

Janek also is a vice president of Biophysical Corp., an Austin-based start-up company with a new blood-testing technology. That job doesn't involve lobbying, he said.

Hill, whose strong opposition to revenue limits made him a hero to most local governments (outside of Houston) while he was in the Legislature, has one client so far: the North Texas town of Flower Mound.

"The only people I would consider representing are local governments," he said. "They don't ask for any money. They just want to be left alone."

Haggerty may have starved as a lobbyist had Craddick remained speaker. So far, he has one business client, but with Craddick out of the way, the sky may be the limit.

The number of lobbyists will increase as the session progresses.

Some 1,780 lobbyists registered for the 2007 session.

Advertisement



In matters of money

Being stingy with the state budget came naturally for Craddick, a Republican speaker who represented a conservative West Texas district. Will his successor, Joe Straus, a Republican from an urban district, be much looser with the purse strings?

Maybe not, because his fellow Republicans in the House may not let him.

The budgetary outlook is tight, although not as tight (so far) as it was in 2003, when Craddick, in his first session as House leader, helped slash spending to bridge a \$10 billion revenue shortfall.

Gov. Rick Perry, who will deliver his State of the State speech to the Legislature on Tuesday, will continue to preach belt-tightening, a popular message for conservative Republican voters, who may turn out in large numbers next year for the anticipated primary showdown between Perry and U.S. Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison.

Republican lawmakers, who must face those same primary voters, aren't likely to take a chance on being branded as "big spenders."

The new speaker's biggest chore right now is deciding on his committee assignments. The committee lineup, particularly the chairmen, will help establish his leadership brand.

And with 149 other legislators to try to please, Straus inevitably will disappoint or anger some of

his new best friends, the colleagues who unexpectedly thrust him into the spotlight.

He isn't likely to have his assignments ready until the first week of February, a delay that is to be expected given the abrupt change in leadership. After that, the House can get down to work.

Axing straight tickets?

Let's see, now. Most of the Republican judges in Harris County who were on the ballot in November were ousted in heavy, straight-ticket Democratic voting. A few years ago, Dallas voters booted a bunch of Republican judges in similar fashion.

So, Sen. Dan Patrick, R -Houston, files a bill to prohibit — guess what — straight ticket voting in judicial races.

It won't pass.

But it reminds me that Republicans took over the courts in Harris County in 1994 in a similar straight ticket sweep that unseated many Democratic judges.

I don't remember if any Democrat filed a similar bill then. If so, it obviously didn't pass either.

"Both parties want qualified, experienced people on the bench," Patrick said. "I think judges should be removed from the political tsunamis that come every few years." clay.robison@chron.com

Advertisement





Get Houston Chronicle home delivery for only \$3 a week. **Save 61%!**

Advertisement

