



ON THE HOME FRONT

DFW aims to outdo Houston in the battle for legislative bucks.

AS THE 81ST REGULAR SESSION OF THE Texas Legislature convenes in Austin this month, North Texas is poised with potentially more influence and power over the state's purse strings than ever before.

The perception—and likely truth—is that, over the last number of years, the legislative delegations from Houston and its surrounding areas have had more sway in Austin to bring home the bacon for their part of the state; that ultimately can mean more money for roads, mass transit, you name it.

“So much of your success or failure at the Legislature, it's no secret, depends on how the money is spent,” says Larry Casto, chief lobbyist for the city of Dallas. “The perception has been that Houston does do a better job at that.”

Part of the secret of the Houston area's success is that its collective municipalities, counties, and civic organizations come together in a united front, along with their legislative leaders, with a clear, specific agenda. They know what they want, they stick together, and they get it. But another secret has been getting its key representatives in Austin appointed to the committees that control the budget.

“What Texas has not done frequently, relative to Congress, are local earmark appropriations. There are some, but it's not as common as you find in D.C.,” says Casto. “However, you're starting to see more of that—communities going right after an appropriation to help with local projects. And, if Texas starts making that practice more common, you certainly need to be positioned with the local delegation so you're not left out.”

One not-so-secret weapon Casto and others hope will aid Dallas-Fort Worth this year is the appointment of state Rep. Dan Branch, a Republican representing part of North Dallas and

the Park Cities, to the Legislative Budget Board. That's a joint Senate and House committee that has major influence over the state budget.

“DFW is the nation's fourth-largest metro area, is home to one-third of the Texas population, and generates one-third of the state's revenue,” says Branch. “It's critical we have a seat at the table when state funds are being allocated. The greater Houston area ... has traditionally been very successful in securing state funds, in part because they have had more representation on the key budget-writing committees.”

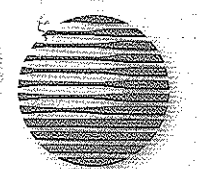
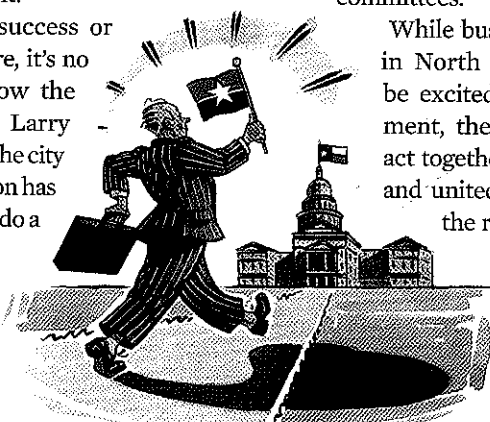
While business and civic leaders in North Texas have reason to be excited by Branch's appointment, they're also getting their act together by presenting a tight and united legislative agenda for the region. According to the

city of Dallas' 2009 legislative agenda, the top items are regionally based and have broad support. They include:

- › supporting new funding sources to build and expand regional mass transportation;
- › protecting North Texas' reservoirs and water resources;
- › generating local revenue by ensuring the sale prices of real estate transactions are made public in order to determine a property's fair market value for property tax purposes; and
- › establishing the University of North Texas Law School, which would be the region's only public law school, to be located in Old City Hall in downtown Dallas

So now the test begins to determine whether North Texas' newfound opportunity and unity will yield results where they really count—in dollars and cents for the home front.

Webb is director of corporate communications and corporate social responsibility for Mary Kay Inc. Previously, he was chief of staff for Dallas Mayor Laura Miller and an investigative reporter for CBS 11.



DFW'S TOP LOBBYING INTERESTS IN AUSTIN

Name of entity	Number of lobbyists
AT&T	119
Energy Future Holdings Corp.	38
Luminant Holding Company LLC	22
Oncor Electric Delivery Company LLC	21
City of Dallas	18
Tarrant Regional Water District	14
Verizon Select Services Inc.	13
City of Irving	13
BNSF Railway	12
TXU Energy Retail Company LLC	11
Cottonwood Financial Ltd.	11
Hillwood Development Company LLC	11
Rent-A-Center Inc.	11
BEPCO L.P.	11
North Texas Tollway Authority	10

—DAVE MOORE

Source: D CEO analysis of Texas Ethics Commission data

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