

The Dallas Morning News

OPINION

Letters for Saturday

08:16 AM CST on Saturday, January 6, 2007

We need recorded votes

Re: "Rules Is Rules – But nothing says dedication like an amendment," Wednesday Editorials.

Thank you for the strong endorsement for a constitutional amendment to require all nonceremonial votes be recorded by the name of each Texas senator or representative. This basic principle of the democratic process is long overdue in our Legislature.

All substantive votes are routinely recorded in Congress, at the local level and in 40 other state legislatures. Why should Texans be deprived? It is impossible to evaluate the performance of legislators whose votes are not recorded.

Having the Legislature debate this option every session is a waste of their time; it's a waste of citizens' time to have to advocate for such accountability every session.

The League of Woman Voters of Texas joins numerous other organizations and individuals in strongly supporting a constitutional amendment requiring recording of all nonceremonial votes.

Linda Camin, chair, Recorded Votes Committee, League of Women Voters of Texas, Dallas

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OPINION

Editorials

Rules Is Rules: But nothing says dedication like an amendment

06:40 AM CST on Wednesday, January 3, 2007

Texas House members are about to jump back in the wrestling ring with their familiar bugaboo of voting transparency in the lawmaking process.

When they last took on the issue, in 2005, House members made a strong early showing but then got all jittery at the prospect of passing meaningful voting reform.

Here's hoping that enough members have grown some ethical spine since then and are ready for the next round, when the 2007 lawmaking session begins next week.

Their first test will be the adoption of rules that govern how and when they will be required to hold an on-the-record, roll-call vote on legislation (as opposed to the common practice of anonymous voice votes).

Two years ago, members adopted rules allowing a single representative to call a record vote, as opposed to the previous threshold of three. It was an important signal that members better understood their obligation to put more of their votes clearly, openly and unashamedly in the official record.

By the end of the 2005 session, though, the House refused to take the ultimate step and pass a Senate-approved bill requiring record votes on all measures, not just the ones singled out for special attention.

The public should have every expectation that this session's House rules will hold fast to – if not improve on – strides made last time toward a more transparent voting process in the Capitol. Strong rules are a significant indication of support for open government.

It's important to consider, however, that internal House rules are just that – guidelines that members adopt for the lawmaking process. They may be changed, as deemed necessary or expedient, by future Legislatures.

That's why the real open-government test for lawmakers will be action on a proposed constitutional amendment or state law to make record votes mandatory for every substantive piece of legislation approved in the Capitol.

The House needs its rules; the public needs something more permanent to ensure that the lawmaking process in the Texas Capitol remains accessible and transparent.

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