

The Speaker's Race – My Perspective

by Angela Paxton, GCRW Bylaws Committee

The recent race for Speaker of the Texas House drew the attention of Texans statewide, and I was no exception. In the almost 25 years that I have been married to Ken Paxton, I have been proud of him many, many times – but never more than the last two months as he ran for Speaker. From beginning to end, I was proud of how he executed what I consider to be the two most important duties of an elected official: holding to principle and listening to constituents.

I can personally attest to you that Ken was not looking to be Speaker. We have four children still at home and our income depends on Ken's law practice. But Ken is a good listener. His constituents were clamoring for a conservative for speaker in the aftermath of the November elections. He began talking with other conservative



representatives who were experiencing the same thing. Together they pondered and prayed. And it was as if all at once they agreed: Ken was the one who should carry the banner.

Together we watched as conservative people all over Texas got involved in the democratic process of contacting their elected representatives – many for the first time – and reminded them that the term “representative” was not just a title but a job description. The voice of the people calling for a conservative speaker was so consistent and insistent that many assumed it could only be the work of a powerful political machine. But that was the amazing thing: it

wasn't. It wasn't one organization or group; it was simply the tidal wave of democracy at work, the next step in what the elections of November began. Some members welcomed this involvement; others did not.

The caucus vote on Monday was a watershed event in the speaker's race. 100 of the 101 Republican members were in attendance. A majority would require 51 votes, but even a number near that could be enough to create the momentum necessary for a win on the House floor. Ken and his team needed as level a playing field as possible to win. Unfortunately the meeting was arranged in a manner unfavorable to their cause. It was decided that the meeting would be closed to the public; a secret ballot was not taken; and



the vote began with a call for those supporting Straus to stand. Thirty members did not stand for Straus – almost a third of those present – but we did not have a majority.

Immediately following the main caucus meeting, most of the 30 in opposition met to determine their strategy. Ken volunteered to throw his support to Rep. Warren Chisum, who declined. The group determined to consolidate behind Ken for Speaker and to take the conservative cause to the House floor for a vote. Chisum agreed to support Ken. The rest of Ken's evening was spent determining which

members would deliver the various nominating and seconding speeches the following day.

The following morning we learned that Rep. Chisum had announced his support for Straus a few hours after the post-caucus meeting. The numbers of those willing to stay in the battle dropped to almost half.

A loss on the floor was already expected, but the dramatic change in numbers begged the question of whether a floor vote was in the best interest of the

conservative cause. One-third of the Republicans in dissent over the Speaker's election would have made a loud statement; Ken's team felt that a showing of 15- 17 votes would make the cause look much weaker than it was and is. The decision for Ken to withdraw his name from nomination was initiated completely from within the Paxton campaign and did not include any sort of negotiation with Speaker Straus or his team; in fact, Speaker Straus and his leadership team were notified only minutes before the swearing-in ceremony began.

Noble people can and often do differ with regard to strategy. The outcome of the election was not in question, but Ken and I both understand the dynamics of disappointment, especially when it involves something unexpected. I can only tell you that Ken's motivation at the end of his campaign to serve as a conservative speaker was the same as his motivation for getting into it in the first place, and that was to represent the clearly mandated conservative values of the people of Texas.

Two important things happened on the House floor as a result of Ken's withdrawal from nomination. The first was that Rep. Leo Berman objected to electing the Speaker by acclamation and requested a record vote, giving every representative the opportunity to proclaim their vote and every Texan the opportunity to know how their representative voted. The second was that Ken was able to make a speech of personal privilege. During that speech he made three points in particular that have stuck with me. He urged the people of Texas not to see the speaker's race as an end but as a beginning. He thanked Texans for their involvement in the democratic process and encouraged them to continue to be



involved as the session continued. And he reminded the elected members of the legislature that “the eyes of Texas are upon us.”



Ken and I were both disappointed in the result of the speaker’s election – after all, when you run, you run to win. But it is already clear that the conservative mandate of the people of Texas is having an impact on the direction of the current legislative session. It is no surprise, of course, because “we know that in all things, God works for the good of those who love him, who are called according to his purpose.” We are especially thankful for the encouraging support of Reps. Bryan Hughes, Tan Parker, Jodie Laubenberg, Wayne Christian, David Simpson, Leo Berman, Dan Flynn and Van Taylor. We are thankful for the support of GCRW members and conservatives all over Texas who came together. And we are convinced that this Speaker’s race truly ushers in a new beginning. Maybe State government just got bigger, but in a good way: not from the top but from the base, as you and I and concerned Texans everywhere make our voices heard to our elected representatives.