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To the Honorable Members-Elect of the Texas House of Representatives, 82nd Legislature

I'm writing to express my opposition to the proposal being made that the Republican caucus meet before the Legislature convenes and select a single Republican nominee for Speaker as they do in Washington.

Fifty years ago this month I became a member of the Texas House. I served six terms as a member and was elected Speaker in 1972. I have either actively participated in or closely observed every Speaker's election since 1961. During those 50 years, it has never been proposed that a political party caucus should have the authority to select a single nominee for Speaker of that party as is now being proposed.

The Texas Constitution provides that: "The House of Representatives shall, when it first assembles, organize temporarily, and thereupon proceed to the election of a Speaker from its own members." When the House convenes there is no Speaker and there are no House rules. After they are sworn in there are 150 members with one vote each, whether they are Republican or Democrat. The first thing they must do is "organize temporarily" and establish the procedure for electing the Speaker.

At this point in time, a member of the House could offer a proposal to the House that the party caucuses would meet and choose their nominees for Speaker to the exclusion of any other nominees of the same party. If this were adopted by a majority vote of all the members of the House, the proposal would have legal effect which it doesn't presently have.

Traditionally, the House has provided that any member may nominate any other member of the House as a nominee for Speaker, if the nomination is seconded by at least one other member. This procedure authorizes the nomination of any number of members of either political party. This has been the practice since I first came to the House.

At the time I was elected Speaker there were 139 Democrats, 10 Republicans and one vacant seat in the House. I received the votes of 68 Democrats and 9 Republicans for a total of 77 votes. My opponent received 65 votes, all Democrats. Six Democrats and one Republican

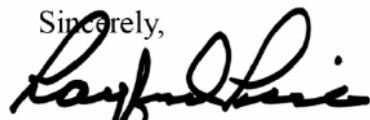
did not vote. If we had been foolish enough to follow the proposed caucus procedure, I could have lost my election for Speaker even though I had the support of a majority of the members. If the six Democrats who did not vote in the election had voted in the caucus for my opponent, the caucus vote would have been 68 votes for me and 71 votes for my opponent thus eliminating me as a nominee for Speaker even though I had the support of a majority of the members.

This coming session there will be 101 Republican and 49 Democrat members. Under this caucus proposal, 51 Republican votes in the Republican caucus would have the ridiculous effect of electing the next Speaker even though 99 members may prefer someone else as Speaker.

I have no problem with the members of both political parties meeting in caucus before the session begins and discuss issues including who should be elected Speaker, if they so desire. However, a majority of a political caucus has no right or authority to direct how any member will cast his vote. That is the right and duty of each individual member. I cannot believe any member would agree to give up that right and duty as is being suggested.

I would urge you to follow the same procedure for nominating candidates for Speaker that has been used by the House for at least fifty years. You should be electing a Speaker of the Texas House not the Speaker of a political party as they do in Washington.

Sincerely,


Rayford Price