

News Release

Texans for Public Justice ** 609 W. 18th Street, Suite E, ** Austin, TX 78701

For Immediate Release:
Thursday January 17, 2008

Contact: Craig McDonald, Andrew Wheat
PH: (512) 472-9770

Luxury Cars and Cushy Housing Surface In New Dissection of Texas Political Spending

Austin--During the first half of 2007—which was off-season for Texas political campaigns—state lawmakers and top state officials spent \$9.5 million in political funds. Although this is a fraction of the \$83 million that these officials spent in the preceding election year, it is a heap of money to spend between campaigns. *Capitol Spending*, a new report by Texans for Public Justice, analyzes where politicians blew all this money.

Researchers classified the \$9.5 million in political expenditures into 12 spending categories. The top five categories accounted for 70 percent of all the money: Staff & Consultants (28 percent); Rent Payments (11 percent); Travel & Lodging (11 percent); Administrative/Office (10 percent); and Gifts/Charitable Contributions (10 percent). The report finds huge disparities in the gross amounts spent by Texas officials—as well as in what officials chose to spend this money on.

“This report reveals that many Texas politicians are using political funds to enhance their personal lifestyles,” said Texans For Public Justice Director Craig McDonald. “Some officials spent buckets of money on cushy capital apartments, luxury vehicles and corporate jets. These luxuries are ultimately paid for by special-interests who want access and favors.”

The legislators who reported the largest single political expenditures on housing were: Rep. Beverly Woolley (\$13,200 for 6 months); Sen. Troy Fraser (\$9,750 for 6 months); and Sen. Eliot Shapleigh (\$7,750 for a year). The officials who reported the largest single travel expenditures were: Sen. John Carona (\$61,930 to use his company’s aircraft); Attorney General Greg Abbott (\$29,247 for a Ford campaign vehicle); Sen. Troy Fraser (\$29,247 to Abilene Aero Travel); and Sen. Jeff Wentworth (a \$20,309 Lexus lease).

Big-spending Lieutenant Governor David Dewhurst spent close to \$1.1 million in the first half of 2007. This was almost twice what No. 2 ranked Governor Rick Perry spent (\$585,524). Dewhurst spent 67 percent of his enormous total on Staff & Consultants, including \$392,247 to consultant Buddy Barfield.¹ Governor Perry’s top expenditure categories were: Staff & Consultants, led by \$35,000 to consultant David Carney; and Travel & Lodging, led by a \$13,586 jaunt to Istanbul.

The \$453,598 spent by embattled Speaker Tom Craddick accounted for one out of every 10 dollars spent by House members. The speaker spent 40 percent of his money on Staff & Consultants. The \$60,703 he paid his daughter in the first half of 2007 accounted for a third of Craddick’s personnel expenditures. Craddick spent 15 percent of his funds on Food, Drinks & Events and another 15 percent on Travel & Lodging.

Sen. John Carona was the legislature’s No. 2 spender. Led by his aforementioned corporate jet expenditures, Travel & Lodging accounted for 32 percent of the \$199,023 that Carona spent. Carona spent 19 percent of his funds on Gifts & Charitable Contributions, led by \$14,397 in coin-dealer purchases. Carona poured another 14 percent of his funds into Food, Drinks & Events, including the \$12,263 that he spent on six outings to Italian eatery Maggiano’s.

Other findings of *Capitol Spending* include:

- The six statewide officeholders studied spent an average of \$381,955, compared to a Senate average of \$84,064 and a House average of \$31,048.
- With residences and offices in Austin *and* their districts, lawmakers spent a greater share of their funds on rent. Statewide officials spent a greater share on personnel to reach voters across the state.
- After Carona, the Senate's top spenders were: Robert Nichols (\$154,860), who spent 71 percent of his political funds to repay personal campaign loans; and Chris Harris (\$144,209), who spent 25 percent of his funds on Gifts & Charitable Contributions.
- John Whitmire, AKA Senator Skybox, spent an unprecedented \$19,345 entertaining constituents at Houston Texans and Houston Rockets games.
- After Craddick, the House's top spenders were: Mike O'Day (\$140,266), who won a special election in January 2007; and Regulated Industries Committee Chair Phil King (\$115,138).
- Rep. Jose Menendez's expenditures were not analyzed because he failed to file legally required campaign disclosures.
- Eleven House members led by Garnet Coleman reported improper credit-card payments totaling \$56,663. These lawmakers appear to have violated Texas disclosure law by failing to itemize what or where they bought things on credit.
- Rep. Borris Miles spent half of his money on a remarkable, \$12,941 day-long feast to celebrate the start of the session. Rep. Eddie Lucio was the lone official with the *cojones* to cop to the fact that he spent political funds "meeting with constituents" at Hooters.

Report Updates:

During the time that this report was being written, several lawmakers filed expenditure reports to correct problems cited in this report.

On Jan. 14, 2008, Rep. Jose Menendez filed his missing campaign report that had been due six months earlier. It reported that he spent \$39,143 in the first half of 2007.

While this report was being prepared in late 2007, two House members cited here for failing to itemize credit-card expenditures--Reps. Garnet Coleman and Fred Brown--filed corrected reports to remedy this error.

[Link to the full report](#)

###

[Texans for Public Justice](#) is a non-profit, non-partisan research and advocacy organization that tracks the role of money in Texas politics.

¹ Including \$13,530 to Barfield and \$378,717 to Barfield's AGI, Inc., which has collected a stunning \$2.1 million from the Dewhurst campaign since 2001.