

# ☆☆☆ News Release ☆☆☆

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## Lawmakers Flunk Their Own Contributor-Disclosure Law

- **Legislature Scores 58% On Big-Donor Disclosures**
- **Republicans Outperform Democrats**
- **31 Legislators Show Zero Effort**

Austin, Texas – Texas lawmakers collectively flunked a test of their own campaign reform law, which requires state candidates to use their “best efforts” to report the employers and occupations of individual donors of \$500 or more, a Texans for Public Justice report card found.

In its new report, “Ain’t Nobody’s Business,” TPJ graded how well the 181 lawmakers elected as of November 2004 complied with this reform, which took effect in January of that year. Lawmakers reported receiving a total of more than \$17 million in individual contributions of \$500 or more during 2004 and 2005. A standardized test developed by TPJ found that lawmakers collectively flunked disclosure, adequately disclosing the employers and occupations of just 58 percent of their large-donor cash.

“It’s outrageous that Texas lawmakers flunked a disclosure law of their own making,” said TPJ researcher and report author Omair Khan. “Texas school children perform much better on the TAKS test—which is not of their own creation.”

The report provides letter grades for every lawmaker elected as of November 2004. Just three senators and eight representatives aced disclosure. Meanwhile, 13 senators and 89 representatives flunked the exam.

**Senate Report Cards**

Grade	No. of Senators	Percent of Senate
A's	3	10%
B's	7	23%
C's	3	10%
D's	5	16%
F's	13	42%
<b>TOTALS:</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>100%</b>

**House Report Cards**

Grade	No. of Members	Percent of House
A's	8	5%
B's	17	11%
C's	16	11%
D's	20	13%
F's	89	59%
<b>TOTALS:</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100%</b>

Republican lawmakers adequately disclosed 64 percent of the \$10.6 million in large contributions that they received. While this score was remedial, it outperformed Democrats, who scored a disclosure grade of just 48 percent on the \$6.4 million in large contributions that they reported.

Thirty-one lawmakers routinely left the occupation and employer fields blank every time they reported a large donation. Sen. Judith Zaffirini (D-Laredo) set the record, reporting \$226,400 in large contributions with nary an occupation or employer. Rep. Kino Flores (D-Palmview) led the House, reporting \$110,100 in all-blank large contributions. Five lawmakers failed to report the employer and occupation of Texas' No. 1 contributor: Houston homebuilder Bob Perry.

Even legislators who did not routinely leave these fields blank sometimes lost disclosure credit for reporting misleading or vague employers or occupations. Several lawmakers identified billionaire Wal-Mart heiress Alice Walton—whom *Fortune* magazine ranks as the planet's 20<sup>th</sup> richest person—as a businesswoman, an investor or a rancher.

Starting on January 1, 2005, Texas law required candidates to use their “best efforts” to report large donors’ occupations and employers. Candidates meeting the “best efforts” standard must document at least one request for the mystery donor’s information. The Texas Ethics Commission has the authority to fine violators \$5,000 or three times the amount involved, whichever is greater. Alternatively, the commission can treat incomplete disclosure reports as late reports, which face a civil fine of up to \$10,000.

“Our lawmakers’ ‘best efforts’ aren’t good enough,” said TPJ Director Craig McDonald. “To think otherwise is to surrender to what President Bush calls the ‘soft bigotry of low expectations.’ Perhaps lawmakers who flunk disclosure should not be ‘socially promoted’ to another term.”

Full report: <http://www.tpj.org/reports/disclosure/index.html>

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