



Written by [Kurt Hyde](#) on January 10, 2013

## **Straus Elected Speaker of the House in Texas, Simpson Bows Out**

State Representative Joe Straus (R-San Antonio) was elected Speaker of the Texas House of Representatives as the first order of business in the 2013 legislative session. He fended off a challenge by Representative David Simpson (R-Longview), the state representative who made national news last session with his TSA Anti-Groping bill. The Speaker of the House vote was by acclamation rather than a roll-call vote. Representative David Simpson (R-Longview) had earlier indicated he would stay in the race up to a roll call vote, but changed his mind at the request of a number of his supporters. In his withdrawal speech, Simpson said:



If fear of retribution were not so very real, conscientious support for an alternative choice for Speaker would not cause such trepidation. But since it is, and absent a certainty of winning this contest, at the request of my colleagues, I withdraw my candidacy.

Alice Linahan, Director of Women on the Wall (WOW), said she spoke with a number of state representatives who indicated fear of retribution if they voted for Simpson. The speaker's office in Texas has become a powerful position appointing 72 percent of the committee chairmen. Many people consider the choice of speaker to be one of the most important votes in a legislative session. In the Texas Legislature, a chairman of a substantive committee can keep a bill from passing by never holding a hearing on it. If a bill has a hearing and is favorably voted by the substantive committee, it's then forwarded to the Calendars Committee which decides if and when to schedule it for consideration on the floor.

Numerous informed sources told *The New American* there are plans to submit some rules changes that will decentralize power. The proposed rules changes will look something like:

"No Committee Chairman could serve on the Calendars Committee" and

"If a measure has 76 or more co-authors the Calendars Committee must submit it to the House Floor for an up or down vote within 7 to 10 days."

These rules changes specifically address some of the bureaucratic roadblocks that were used to bottle up the TSA Anti-Groping bill in the previous session. A floor vote on these reforms could take place sometime between Thursday, January 10 and Monday, January 14. Citizens are being mobilized to urge their legislators to vote yes on them. Rules for obtaining signatures of legislators to over-ride a committee chairman who is blocking a bill by failing to act on it are fairly common in legislatures. The U.S. Congress calls it a discharge petition.

WOW sponsored a two-day program in Austin called Keep Texas Strong — Speaker Showdown. It was



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attended by numerous conservative groups, such as Texans United for Reform and Freedom (TURF), Lone Star Tea Party, The John Birch Society, Immigration Reform Council of Texas (IRCOT), Stop the Magnet, Clear Lake TEA Party and others. It featured such well-known speakers as Pat Caddell, Brandon Darby, and Anita Moncrief.

Because the overflow crowd of spectators interested in the speaker's race exceeded the capacity of the Texas House of Representatives Gallery, many of the spectators had to watch via closed circuit TV in a nearby location.

*Photo of Texas Speaker of the House Joe Straus: AP Images*



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