

Much Activity, Little Progress on Annexation

Annexation was a hot topic this session with many lawmakers eager to reform annexation law. Although many senators and representatives introduced legislation in an attempt to do so, very little was accomplished on this front.

One of the culprits was the divisiveness of suburban legislators. During the session, legislators eager to curb a municipality's annexation powers often found themselves at odds with each other over issues such as payment in lieu of annexation and self-determination in the subsidence question.

No one doubts that the annexation issue will continue to loom over the proceedings of the next legislative session in 1999. By then, suburban legislators will have had the opportunity to channel their efforts into a more focused agenda, in order to take advantage of their growing political influence.

The seeds of their burgeoning power became apparent early in this session when Sen. Michael Galloway (R-The Woodlands) bulldozed opposition to pass his Kingwood disannexation bill. Although the bill did not pass the House, the singular accomplishment of getting the bill out of the Senate was a red flag to municipal officers everywhere, indicating a willingness to fight on the part of the citizens of the extraterritorial jurisdiction.

Another indication of the Kingwood backlash was the success of legislation that would prohibit a municipality from holding city elections until all voters inside the city limits are eligible to participate. Earlier this year, Kingwood residents were denied this right when the City of Houston held elections while the annexation of Kingwood was still being reviewed by the Justice Department.

With the 75th Legislative Session now behind them, the citizens of Texas can be assured that, although not every potential annexation reform was actualized, an important step was taken. Community leaders were able to identify the points of most vicious contention, as well as the points of most subtle, but important, concern. During the next two years, these concerns will provide the blueprint from which, one hopes, will come more useful dialogue on annexation.