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CHILDREN BEFORE PARTISANSHIP

Q. As a public education advocate, what drives your passion?

A. Working alongside rural Texas teachers and students for over 20 years.

Q. What do you make of the passage of House Bill 3?

A. HB3 is a testament to the capacity for politics to do right by the people. In a highly partisan era, something amazing happened in the Texas House. A consequential bill changing the way we fund public schools passed with overwhelming support; one vote short of a unanimous count. To magnify this accomplishment, we need to remember it follows a previous legislature entangled in a litany of divisive issues and a Texas Supreme Court ruling that found the current school finance system meeting the minimum constitutional standards.

Without a judicial gun to their heads, representatives in bipartisan fashion enacted meaningful legislation that will have a tangible, positive effect on all students.

What inspires me the most is that our elected officials in the House rose above partisan and parochial interests to do right by children. This is a unique group of elected officials. It is a special legislative body. HB3 has proven to be a united effort across regional and partisan lines to shore up the most important function of government; the education of future generations. This is good governance in action.

Q. To what do you attribute the bipartisanship on display with the passage of House Bill 3?

A. It is an article of faith among Texas public education advocates that our legislature had a shift in attitude as a result of the November election. Over a dozen legislators were voted out of office. Others came close to the same

fate despite their conservative political platforms and spending boatloads of campaign money. There's truth to the "scared straight" philosophy and I hope the #blockvote group continues to counter Empower Texans and related organizations.

Before the 86th Legislative Session, the Texas Supreme Court said that the school finance system was awful but lawful and it was the legislature's job to fix it. The day that original decision came out, I was crestfallen. I assumed the court's imprimatur would prompt legislators to follow the path of least resistance – I was scared.

I was wrong. Texas representatives from conservative districts like mine and others from liberal areas like Austin came together for the good of kids. These leaders rose to the occasion.

Q. You've traditionally been hard on politicians when it comes to education policy-making. Does this change things for you?

A. Yes. With that said, there is still bad faith out there. For example, having 3rd graders read 5th grade level passages on a STAAR test drives me crazy and screams sabotage. But the broad notion that our elected officials want to gut public education takes a direct hit with HB3. There are still powerful individuals who want to voucherize the system and syphon tax dollars away from ISDs to support private sectarian schools. But, the almost unanimous passage of HB3 shows that our legislators are people. People under intense pressure from all sides, trying to do right by Texas, trying to leave a legacy of doing good, and certainly desirous of strong results from our public schools – people who care.

The lesson I'm taking from HB3, at least for now, is that taking care of Texas schools – something a lot of us thought would never happen without a court order – is good politics.

Q. History provides us with inspiring quotes about public education. What is your legacy quote that we might find inspiring future generations?

A. "In the end, the givers beat the takers." ~John Kuhn