

OPINIONS OF OTHER
NEWSPAPERS

Two weeks critical
in state legislature

DALLAS MORNING NEWS

You get a queasy feeling watching as Texas legislators wrap up their session. The 2007 Legislature ends in two weeks, and the list of items awaiting compromises is daunting:

- Electricity ownership and rates.
- Transportation planning.
- Mandating recorded legislative votes.
- Water conservation and reservoir designations.
- The budget.
- The Children's Health Insurance Program.

Legislators need to find the sweet spot on many priorities if they expect to declare this a session that helps Texans. True, sessions always get tense about now. But even veterans of these wars admit they're nervous.

One reason is that the House resembles an airliner struggling to maintain altitude. Autocratic Speaker Tom Craddick squashed a revolt in January and since has struggled to find a middle ground between his old tight-fisted ways and laissez faire rule. For example, Craddick loyalists last week voted against him on which bills would get to the floor.

The Capitol's urban-rural divide also is complicating things. For instance, rural representatives angry about Rick Perry's Trans-Texas Corridor running through their back yards have forced a moratorium on new toll roads.

That same split is threatening the Senate proposal to designate 19 reservoir sites. Despite the fact that cities and suburbs need new water supplies, rural legislators cite property rights as their reason for holding up the reservoirs.

There's no sense waiting until the 2009 session. That's because the 2010 governor's race will force both parties to play it safe and tempt them to take up issues that rally partisans.

These next two weeks are critical to legislators' resolving urgent problems facing Texas — not to mention earning a strong report card from voters.

Lege finds time to
blow smoke

The Texas House, rushing to wrap up business for the session, finds time to toy with a smoking ban bill.

Texans should be thanking their lucky stars this legislative session is almost over. The end can't come a moment too soon.

Last week yet another bill — an important one with serious implications for the health of Texas workers — becoming a political piñata in the House, as

members played with it and batted it around, dislodging most of its teeth in the process.

The bill, authored by Rep. Myra Crownover, R-Denton, sought to ban smoking in public places, including bars and restaurants. It's not a novel idea: About 30 states have adopted or are considering similar measures, and many Texas cities, including Houston, Austin and El Paso, already have smoking bans to various degrees.

Studies show that second-hand smoke kills more than 53,000 Americans a year, including more than 3,000 Texans. Polls show that a majority of Texans favor a statewide smoking ban in public places. Even the motion picture industry, not usually known to fret over health issues, has just added smoking to sex and violence as a factor in movie ratings.

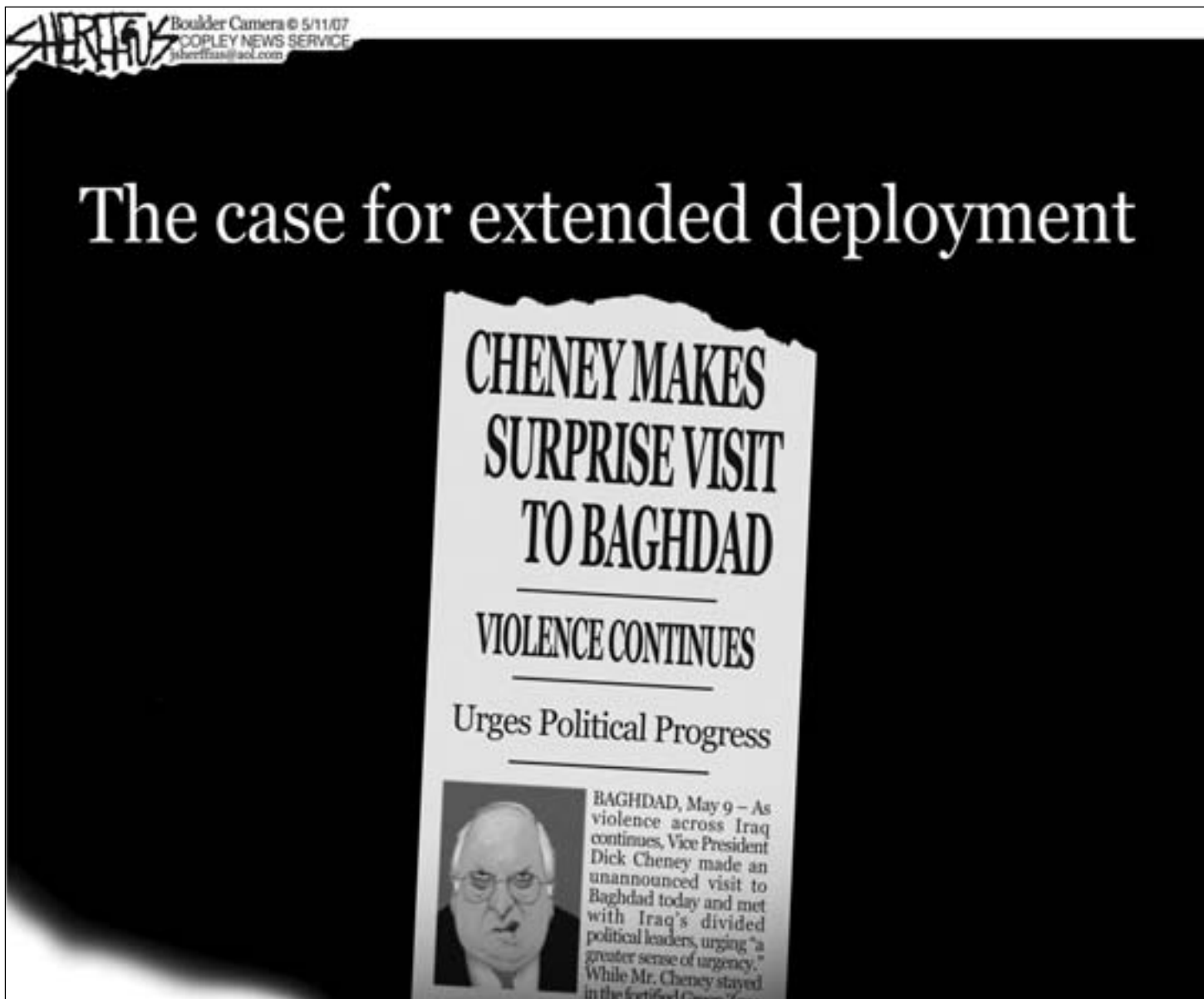
"This bill does not tell anybody whether they should or should not smoke," Crownover said. "It's about not killing the employees of the state of Texas. There is no acceptable level of secondhand smoke."

But the bill was soon festooned with enough amendments and exceptions to almost bury it. The most egregious of these is an amendment by Rep. Burt Solomons, R-Carrollton, that puts the decision on whether to ban smoking in the hands of the owners of an establishment.

Other amendments exempted cigar bars; bingo halls; VFW halls; private clubs and property leased by a religious group or veterans group for religious services or fundraising activities. And just in case the House hadn't spent enough time and taxpayers' money on the subject, one member, a smoker, declared herself discriminated against and jokingly proposed criminalizing both the sale of tobacco and the act of smoking in Texas. Her amendment was killed.

Sen. Rodney Ellis, D-Houston, who has a companion bill in the Senate, is pragmatic about the basket-case bill, noting that it will need "a lot of work" but deeming it a significant achievement to get any kind of bill through the House. He vows to fix it in the Senate and send it to the conference committee. "No matter how ugly that puppy is, we can clean it up and send it back and it could grow up to be a Great Dane," Ellis said. Now there's an optimist.

-- The Houston Chronicle



COLUMN

Finally, a family resting place

Mount Carmel Cemetery wasn't my favorite place to visit. When we first started, I was too young to understand where we were going.

When I got a little older and protested, my parents told me our family went to the cemetery out of respect to the dead.

All our deceased family who had passed away in Chicago were buried in the Hillside, Ill., cemetery near the North Side.

Built in 1901, Mount Carmel was the final resting place of many Italian families.

As Daddy drove through the curling maze of narrow roads, we passed names that ran the gamut from bishops to gangsters, from famous to infamous and those of just plain folks.

On the way to where my grandfather was buried, Daddy passed one of the Mount Carmel's most well known residents.

His plain and unadorned headstone read simply, "Alphonse Capone 1899-1947 My Jesus Mercy."

Ironically, just a few bends of the road away from Capone was the grave of his successor Frank "The Enforcer" Nitti.

Each time Daddy passed the mausoleum inscribed with the Genna family name,

Mom told us the Genna's were her childhood neighbors.

Three of the brothers met an early death, gangland style, during Prohibition.

Passing row after row of names etched on stones protected by angels, crosses, and saints, we arrived at my mother's family's plot.

A large granite headstone resting on a horizontal granite slab marked the location.

Atop the horizontal stone was a large cross. Next to it were two large urns for flowers. At the foot of the graves was a hard stone bench.

If Grandma Providenza took the monthly trip to the cemetery, she sat there quietly.

With tears running down her cheeks, she stared at the cameo photographs and mourned the losses of her husband, her daughter and her son.

On July 11, 1956, we added Grandma's name to the headstone.

In 1960, Daddy, Mom, Johnny and I moved to Southern California. The climate and environment proved a blessing to my parents who both lived for three more decades.

Their final resting place became, not Mount Carmel, but Forest Lawn Cemetery in



ANTOINETTE JACKSON

Mangia!
Mangia!



Chiarenza family homestead in Garden Grove, 1962.

Cerritos.

In December 2006, during our last visit to California, my husband and I were on our way to visit Forest Lawn.

We got to talking and somehow missed our freeway exit.

Instead, we continued to the Disneyland off ramp, gateway to our old neighborhood.

We made our way past the amusement park, then turned south and in two miles, parked in front of my parent's home.

I got out of the car, walked up to the end of the driveway and stared at the house. In the stillness of the morning, I imagined I could hear young children riding their bicycles and balancing on skateboards along Fredrick Drive.

I could almost smell the orange blossoms from the groves that surrounded us when we first moved to Garden Grove.

I remembered how Daddy removed trees in the back yard. He always said if a tree did not bear fruit, it was a "babu tree" and dug it out. I wondered how tall the fig and fruit trees he planted had grown.

Looking at the front of the house through watery eyes, I envisioned my mother sitting at the kitchen window. There was probably a pot

of soup simmering on the stove in back of her in preparation for the evening meal.

As the years passed, Mom was less able to get outdoors and her chair at the kitchen table became her window to the world.

She watched as Daddy pruned the night blooming jasmine and pulled weeds from around the rose bushes that lined the driveway.

Before he went in, he always picked Mom a rose or a gardenia to fill the kitchen with its wonderful fragrance.

Now the beautiful flowers they loved were gone and short green bushes were planted in their place.

Daddy would have called them "babu" or worthless.

Did the new owners chop down the backyard fruit trees too, I wondered?

With every beautiful memory, another tear rolled down my cheek and, in a few minutes, I realized it was time to go.

"I'm glad we didn't go to the cemetery where my parents are buried," I told my patiently waiting husband.

"I'm glad we came here, where my Mom and Dad lived," I said reflectively.

Mom's Oxtail Soup

One of Mom's favorites, this soup is thick enough for a stand-alone one-dish meal.

- 3 pounds oxtails
- 4 quarts water
- 1 package onion soup mix
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 1/4 cup barley
- 20-ounce package frozen stew vegetables

In a separate frying pan, brown oxtails. Transfer them to a large soup pot and cover with water.

When liquid comes to a boil, skim the surface of foam.

Add onion soup, seasonings and simmer for about 2 hours.

Add barley and continue cooking for about 45 minutes.

Twenty minutes before the end of the cooking time, add frozen vegetables.

Continue simmering until meat and vegetables are both tender.

Serves 4.

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