

LOBBY WATCH



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The Highwaymen:

October 24, 2001

Perry's Political Tollbooths Line \$1 Billion of State Roads

• Contractors & Governor Paving Way for Highway-Spending Spree.

“Tire tracks all across your back—I can see you’ve had your fun.”

—Jimi Hendrix, *Crosstown Traffic*

In recent years Governor Rick Perry raked in \$235,133 from highway contractors that landed almost \$1 billion in state contracts in the past nine months. It’s enough patronage to make a conservative tax and spend.

This ex-A&M cheerleader barnstormed Texas this summer promoting a road-spending spree. He:

- Hit Harlingen, Laredo and Corpus to unveil \$100 million in expedited road funding;
- Visited Houston to announce an acceleration of a \$952 million Katy Freeway expansion;
- Trumpeted Texas’ \$1 billion transportation budget hike; and
- Is only promoting two amendments on the November ballot—both of which let the state go into debt to lay pavement.¹

The governor covered so much road so quickly that reality did not catch up with him until this month, when the media reported that the Department of Transportation (TXDOT) has shot its wad. For the immediate future, the state will delay rather than expedite road projects.

House Appropriations Chair Rob Junell was reportedly angry that he learned about this budget crunch after lobbyists for the Associated General Contractors.²

TXDOT contractor contributions to Perry are troubling because the governor appoints the three commissioners who oversee TXDOT’s \$2.2 billion annual construction budget.

Perry appointed a friend, ex-legislator Ric Williamson, to the commission in April. While ex-Governor Bush ap-

pointed commissioners John Johnson and Robert Lee Nichols, every member has given Perry at least \$6,000 in recent years.

Perry also is benefiting from contractor expenditures to pass the two road proposals on the November ballot. Highway contractors have contributed \$91,750 in the past two months to the “Yes on 2 & 15” PAC, which Hilco Partners lobby firm created to pass the amendments. The PAC has bought a full-page *Texas Monthly* ad that prominently features Perry’s photo.

TXDOT’s top two contractors, Houston’s Williams Brothers Construction and San Antonio’s H.B. Zachry Co., together have landed an astonishing \$528,570,233 in TXDOT contracts so far this year.

More...

Since 1997, Perry has received \$75,000 from Williams Brothers Chair James Pitcock, Jr and another \$33,000 from H.B. Zachry (most of which came from H. Bartell Zachry, Jr.). In the 1998 and 2000 election cycles alone, Pitcock spent \$239,750 to influence candidates for Texas' statewide and legislative offices.

Pitcock is a political pragmatist, giving all of his state political money to incumbents in the 2000 election cycle.

The only non-incumbents receiving Pitcock money in 1998 ran for open seats. One of these was Democrat John Sharp (\$6,000), who Perry defeated with just over 50 percent of the lieutenant governor vote. Pitcock has since filled this Perry pothole, giving Perry \$50,000 in the 2000 cycle and another \$25,000 since.

Political clout is a valuable commodity for a leading TXDOT contractor that has a history of going over dead-

line and budget. A 1998 *Houston Chronicle* investigation found that the average state highway contractor was penalized for late work 18 percent of the time, while Williams got late penalties 57 percent of the time.³

Most states have the authority to prevent chronically late contractors from bidding on new jobs. But two lobby groups that Pitcock once headed helped prevent Texas from adopting this policy in 1996 and 1997.⁴

Since January, TXDOT Has Awarded Almost \$1 Billion To Highway Contractors Who Gave Gov. Perry \$235,133

Highway Contractor	Base	Donations To Perry*	Value of TXDOT Contracts Awarded Since Jan. 2001	No. of TXDOT Contracts
Williams Brothers Construction	Houston	\$75,000	\$213,128,721	10
H B Zachry Co.	Sn Antonio	\$33,000	\$315,441,512	5
TX Aggregates & Concrete Assn	Austin	\$25,000	NA	NA
Dean Word Construction Co.	N. Braunfels	\$21,683	\$38,246,094	2
Assoc. Gen'l Contractors of TX	Austin	\$19,000	NA	NA
Garey Construction Co.	Austin	\$11,750	\$6,182,454	3
Assoc. Builders & Contractors	Austin	\$11,000	NA	NA
J D Abrams, Inc	Austin	\$8,500	\$45,754,477	3
Austin Industries (Bridge & Road)	Dallas	\$8,000	\$40,360,786	18
Champagne-Webber Inc.	Houston	\$3,500	\$70,423,930	11
Reece Albert Inc.	Sn Angelo	\$3,000	\$38,779,808	6
TX Sterling Construction	Houston	\$3,000	\$2,377,528	1
Young Contractors	Waco	\$3,000	\$39,488,561	12
Zack Burkett Co.	Graham	\$2,700	\$13,485,196	10
Houston Contractors	Houston	\$2,500	NA	NA
Ramming Paving Company	Austin	\$1,500	\$1,614,501	2
Coalition for Better Transportation	Dallas	\$1,000	NA	NA
Hunter Industries	Sn Marcos	\$1,000	\$99,331,074	26
Jones Brothers Dirt and Paving	Odessa	\$1,000	\$22,148,210	7
TOTALS:		\$235,133	\$946,762,852	116

*Perry contributions cover June 1997 through June 2001.

More...

**Road Warrior James Pitcock
Gave Texas Politicians
\$239,750 in 1998 and 2000**

Politician or PAC	Pitcock Contributions
George W. Bush	\$52,000
Rick Perry	\$50,000
Pete Laney	\$20,000
Tony Garza	\$12,500
Clyde Alexander	\$10,000
Asc. Gen'l Contractors	\$10,000
John Cornyn	\$10,000
Bill Ratliff	\$10,000
Todd Staples	\$10,000
Mike Jackson	\$7,500
John Sharp	\$6,000
Ken Armbrister	\$5,000
David Bernsen	\$5,000
Fred Bosse	\$5,000
Buster Brown	\$5,000
David Dewhurst	\$5,000
John Whitmire	\$5,000
Rob Junell	\$2,500
Debra Danburg	\$1,500
Dennis Bonnen	\$1,000
Joe Crabb	\$1,000
Paul J. Hilbert	\$1,000
Scott Hochberg	\$1,000
Steve Ogden	\$1,000
Kyle Janek	\$500
Tracy King	\$250
TOTAL:	\$239,750

¹Amendments 2 and 15 would allow the state to finance road projects with bonds.

See: <http://www.sos.state.tx.us/elections/voter/constitutionalamendments.shtml>

² "Roadwork on Hold As State Fund Runs Low," *Austin American-Statesman*, October 16, 2001.

³ "King of the Road," April 26, 1998. See also the *Chronicle's*: "No Love Lost For Unfinished Bridge," January 23, 1995 and "Penalties Pave Way On Freeway," July 1, 1995.

⁴ The Association of General Contractors and the Texas Good Roads and Transportation Association helped defeat this proposal before a 1996 Sunset Commission and again in the 1997 legislative session.