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## Statements of Reality

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Sometimes the simplest statement – a string of words – can paint a picture of reality. Our elected representatives in Austin can choose words to enlighten us or display unfortunate political play. In either case, the public statements chosen by our legislator's are reflections of reality.

An example of a statement hitting a "reality" homerun by a legislator was made during the 82nd Legislative Session. Expressing his frustration with the legislature's lack of political will to address the tax structure that continues to underfund public education, he said, "We cannot kick the can down the road on everything." Pushing the broken system of financing schools into the lap of the 83<sup>rd</sup> Legislative Session in 2013 is now a reality.

Other statements can catch you so off guard, you have to read them twice before their message sinks in. Republicans and Democrats worked together and extended a rare hand across the political aisle to support an amendment friendly to education by Representative Donna Howard (D) of Austin. The purpose of the amendment would have made future surplus dollars in the state's rainy day fund available for public schools with growing enrollments.

Unfortunately, a campaign ensued to strip the amendment from legislation. When asked why erase the bipartisan agreement made previously in the House, the leading legislator said, "It just slipped by, a lot of us didn't realize what it did until it was too late." His pursuit to keep future surplus dollars in the rainy day fund and out of public schools eventually mustered enough partisan support to kill the amendment.

It is hard to believe it has been one year [July 2010] since the Make Education a Priority initiative started under a 10' x 10' tent on a Farm to Market road in Aledo Texas. The objectives of creating public awareness about school finance and uniting school districts across Texas proved successful.

As this grassroots movement gained statewide attention, a number of Texas legislators provided statements of support upon request. Of the letters received, there was one that stood above all others.

While under the tent in the sweltering heat, a Texas senator delivered a personal letter. She wrote about her commitment and passion for public education. Her letter included one highlighted sentence - a seven word statement. In bold letters, she said, "**I promise to Make Education a Priority.**" The letter was dated July 1, 2010; ten months before the unexpected ending to the regular session.

There are statements that stand the test of time. This is one of them. In the final hours of the regular 82<sup>nd</sup> Legislative Session, these seven words held true as she stood firm and filibustered a flawed budget bill. Her promise to make education a priority was kept when she brought public attention to the fact

that for the first time, a state budget would not fund its legal commitment to public schools and instead, changed the language to alter the state's funding obligations in the future.

The simplest statements made by legislators can be powerful. Certain statements are so profound; the issue at hand becomes clearer. Other statements can catch you so off guard, it requires you to read twice in disbelief. And then, there are statements that stand the test of time. Ultimately, actions speak louder than words. Looking back on the 82<sup>nd</sup> Legislative Session and the pursuit to protect quality education, no one can argue the difficulties shared by all involved.

One thing is for certain. If change is to occur, education must be found as the highest priority – a statement of reality.



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