

State Rep. Todd Hunter Makes Texas Monthly Best Top Ten

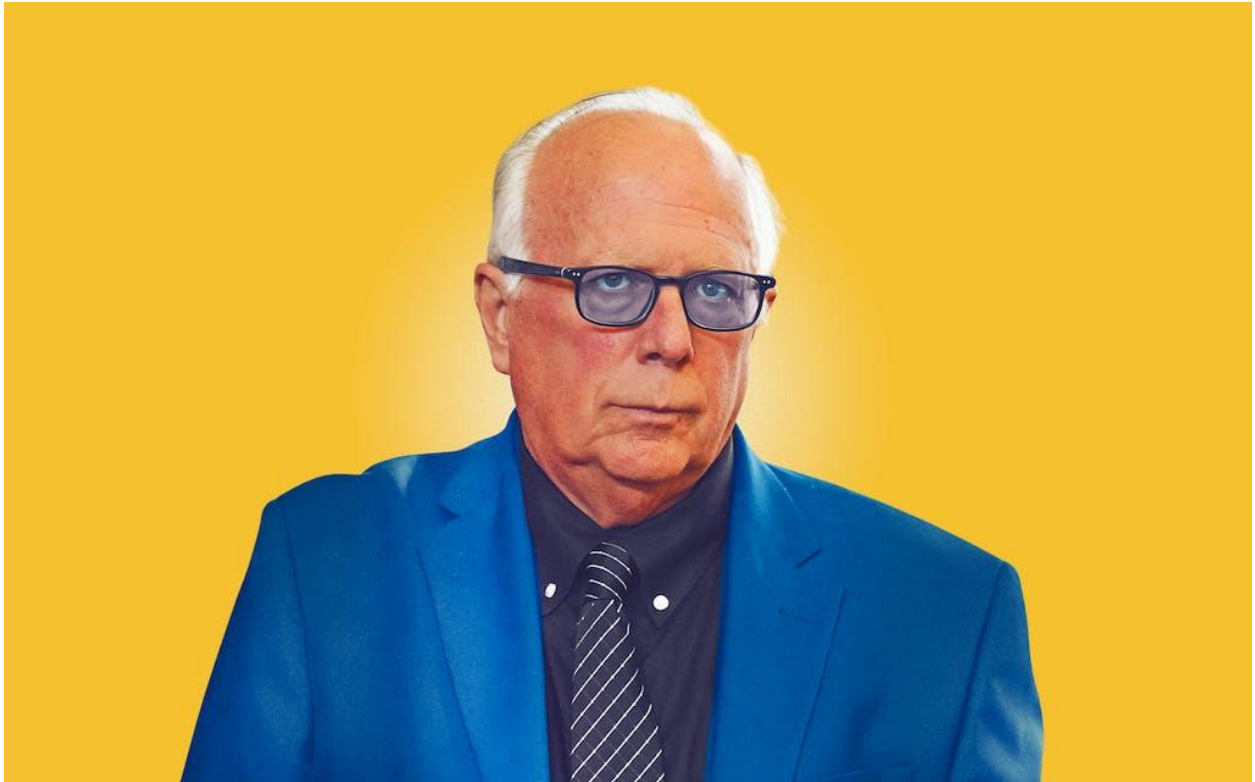


Illustration by Neil Jamieson; Photograph by Bob Daemrlich

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Rep. Todd Hunter

R–Corpus Christi

In years past, as the longtime chairman of the all-powerful House Calendars Committee, which controls which bills make it to the floor, Hunter was one of the lower chamber’s biggest players behind the scenes. This session he was thrust into the spotlight while performing a different role. As chairman of House State Affairs, he had to handle some of the session’s most high-profile bills. Hunter’s committee heard hours of testimony from drag queens imploring him to help defang the Senate’s antidrag bill—and then switched to consider arcane presentations about electric-grid reliability.

Hunter’s committee was sent bowls of dog food by the Senate, and it typically made them less unpalatable. But it was the electric-grid bill that brought out the fight in Hunter. When it arrived in the House, Senate Bill 7 seemed to be an enormous cash grab by companies that use fossil fuels to generate electric power, at the expense of those who use wind and solar energy. Hunter rewrote the measure, then introduced it on the House floor **with a speech** that sounded in parts like one that could have been given by Bernie Sanders.

“The owners’ box seems to be up there,” he said, pointing at the gallery where lobbyists sit, “when it should be down here,” pointing to the House floor. He had capped the cost of the bill. He had tried, he said, to center taxpayers and consumers in the discussion. His bill was supported by the Sierra Club *and* the Texas Oil and Gas Association, which shocked even him. “I had to reread the bill to make sure I was for it,” he said.

A cynic might doubt the sincerity of Hunter’s populist tone. Some of his legislation gave generous concessions to various industries and their lobbyists, too, particularly House Bill 5, a package of corporate subsidies. But among powerful committee leaders in the House, there are no angels. An unfortunate number of other chairmen disgraced themselves this session. Hunter made bad bills less bad, which is sometimes the best that one legislator can do.