

LOCKE LIDDELL & SAPP'S SEN. JOHN WHITMIRE NAMED BY TEXAS MONTHLY AS ONE OF TOP 10 LEGISLATORS OF 2003

What Texas Monthly says about Sen. John Whitmire:

STEADY AS HE GOES

John Whitmire, Democrat, Houston, 53

The lofty title Dean of the Texas Senate is bestowed each session on the senator with the longest tenure and carries with it the unspoken responsibility of protecting the chamber's dignity and traditions. As with English kings, however, the line of succession does not always produce someone suited to the job. Carlos Truan, the previous occupant of the post, was the George III of deans, and when the mantle fell upon John Whitmire this year, the first thing that came to naysayers' minds was his nickname: Boogie. Remember the final scene in *Animal House*, when we find out what the future holds for the frat boys? John Belushi's grinning mug flashes on the screen, and we're asked to believe that his character grows up to be a U.S. senator. No less improbable was Whitmire's transformation from class clown to steadfast statesman.

He was the reliable anchor that kept the Senate from drifting off into the partisan storms roiling the House. When Democratic colleagues wanted to stage a divisive assault on the Senate's austere version of the budget, Whitmire convinced them that offering floor amendments would weaken Senate solidarity in later negotiations with the House, whose bill was even more miserly. When Democrat Mario Gallegos wanted to show an inflammatory video during the budget debate of several constituents talking about the effects of cuts, Whitmire argued that it was an unprecedented practice that would destroy decorum.

How did Whitmire earn such respect? A few weeks into the session, watching partisan vitriol sweep the House, he invited his colleagues to a Thursday-morning breakfast-no shoptalk allowed-that brought the Senate together and solidified his stature as dean. Never was his role more important than on the second day of the Ardmore adventure. During a meeting of Whitmire's Criminal Justice Committee, a hotheaded Republican fumed about the absent House sponsors and questioned why the committee should hold hearings on their bills. "You're fixing to walk out of this meeting because they walked out, and before you know it, it's a feeding frenzy," Whitmire said, announcing his intention for senators to go forward with business as usual. And as usual, they did.