

# QUESTIONS FOR PETE LANEY

*Q: In a recent interview with Texas Monthly—which was billed on the magazine's cover as "Pete Laney: The Exit Interview"—Evan Smith asked you about your future plans. You replied that one thing you knew you wanted to do was "work with young folks who are of voting age, or fixing to be of voting age, to try to encourage them to give themselves to public service in some way, whether it be on the local level, state level, or national level." What do you have in mind?*

**A:** My idea to encourage participation could manifest itself in many different ways—on college campuses, in the classroom, in civic organizations. My greatest hope is to expose young people to the opportunity to understand how fulfilling public service can be.

When I decided to run for office, I understood generally what it meant—I knew that I would have the responsibility to represent the needs and opinions of those who elected me. What I didn't recognize was how fulfilling it would be. Representing oftentimes means helping—and there's no greater or more rewarding service than helping your fellow citizens.

I think because of tuition deregulation and the war in Iraq, young people today want to be more involved, but they don't always know how to go about it. I want them to know that there are many ways to participate in the process.

*Q: You were first elected to the Texas House of Representatives in 1972, the same year that the LBJ School graduated its first class. What effect have LBJ students had on state government?*

**A:** The LBJ School and its students have impacted state government. Students and graduates have shaped and will continue to help shape public policy at all levels of government. As the school continues to thrive, their impact will continue to grow.

*Q: The LBJ School has a new dean, Jim Steinberg, a former deputy national security advisor to President Bill Clinton who most recently served as vice president and director of foreign policy studies at the Brookings Institution. In his article in this issue (p. 5), he outlines four basic goals for the school: It*

**BY JAMES E. "PETE" LANEY**

*James E. "Pete" Laney served as Speaker of the Texas House of Representatives from 1993 to 2003. A lifelong resident of Hale Center, a small farming community in the Texas Panhandle, Laney was first elected to the Texas Legislature in 1972. He will retire in January 2007, when his current term ends. Laney received a bachelor's degree in agricultural economics from Texas Tech University.*

*needs to become (1) increasingly international in orientation, (2) increasingly interdisciplinary, (3) increasingly integrated with new technologies, and (4) increasingly oriented toward leadership. If you were the dean of a public policy school, what would you emphasize?*

**A:** If I had to pick one, it would be leadership—leadership not only in government, but leadership in the corporate and private sector. Leadership doesn't always mean being elected to office; it can also mean staffing elected and appointed officials, working in an administrative agency, or working in the private sector. With leadership comes a sense of responsibility and stewardship. We need leaders in all areas of our public and private sectors who understand what it means to be good stewards of our resources. Our global community is small and getting smaller. Decisions that are made at every level of government and within the private sector have a ripple effect. Education is linked to economic development; economic development is linked to the gross national product (GNP); GNP is linked to foreign trade; foreign trade is linked to world policy. It's important to have men and women in leadership positions who understand their responsibility in the chain of cause and effect.

*Q: Legions of LBJ School graduates have served in government, but comparatively few have run for public office. What could public policy schools do to better prepare students to stand for elected office?*

**A:** I think public policy schools are doing a good job of preparing students for elected office and providing a solid foundation for public service. But I think it's incumbent on public officials to do a

better job of involving graduates in policy-making and inspiring them to seek elected office.

*Q: By all accounts, the Texas Legislature, like Congress, has become more polarized in recent years. Districts are drawn to elect candidates who appeal to one end of the political spectrum or the other and debate is more contentious. If we are to return to an era of collegiality and cooperation, what skills are most needed from aspiring public servants?*

**A:** In order to continue the legitimacy of public service and elective office, we need to restore the honor of serving. When our forefathers wrote the Texas Constitution, they framed it so that members of the Legislature would be "citizen" legislators, meaning they would serve every other year for 140 days and go home to live among the people who elected them. Our government works best when it reflects the views of all the people, and it reflects the views of all the people when they participate in the electoral process. We're going to have to hold our elected officials accountable. Elected officials need to be good stewards of the public trust. There's a disparaging view of elected officials as "politicians" who are mired by political scandal and political rhetoric.

During my tenure as Speaker, the Legislature's approval rating was high because we had individuals who worked together for the greater good. Respect, compassion, cooperation, and courage are just a few of the character traits needed to return to an era of collegiality. We must foster respect for differing opinions, compassion for those in need, cooperation to work together, and courage to make tough decisions to solve tough public policy issues.