



March 29, 2009

Looking back

It's understandable that Speaker Greg Stumbo wants to claim things went better in this session of the Kentucky General Assembly. And in some ways they actually did.

The chaotic end of the previous legislative meeting was an embarrassment, and Mr. Stumbo campaigned for the speaker's job in part by pledging to adopt reasonable operating rules, then follow them. No more last-minute procedural scams. No more clocks that suddenly stop.

So it's difficult to criticize Mr. Stumbo for refusing to change the rules in order to give last-minute attention to such important measures as extra funding for prosecutors and public defenders, new approaches to economic development incentives and a system to oversee mega-projects like the two new Ohio River bridges and the Spaghetti Junction redo at Louisville. But why were these issues still unresolved, late in the session? There was no reason any of them had to be last-minute quandaries.

The Speaker says his chamber was transparent, but the public doesn't know how or why Speaker Pro Tem Larry Clark's personal pique was rewarded -- with leadership's decision to sit on the mega-project bill.

Stumbo publicity claims his first outing as speaker "has widely been called one of the most successful legislative sessions in recent memory." By whom? Those who wanted a paltry, inadequate cigarette tax increase and no broad revenue reform? Those who wanted to abandon state school accountability for three years, sabotage emphasis on writing and narrow the scope of Kentucky's historic education reform? Those who wanted to put critical projects like the Ohio River bridges and Spaghetti Junction fix on hold?

"This has been a highly productive time," Mr. Stumbo insists. Such a claim is absurd, unless one is content with sidetracking bad legislation, including threats to mine safety and social issue mischief.

The best thing one can say about this session is that it might be transitional. Better luck, and work, next time.
