



## Analysts: Session's demise hurts Blanco

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BATON ROUGE -- Many political onlookers forecast Gov. Kathleen Blanco's "Santa Session" as "ill-advised" but possibly a way for her to gain political support.

But the bottom fell out when more than one-third of House members refused to raise the cap on spending and allow the use of about \$2 billion for raises, roads and economic development.

A successful legislative session could have brightened the governor's re-election chances, analysts said, but this one did nothing to help her politically.

"When you look at the laundry list of things she wanted and what she actually got, it doesn't bode very well for the governor," said Albert Samuels, assistant professor of political science at Southern University.

"She was going to have an uphill battle anyway, considering what her poll numbers are," he said. "Of those who were thinking about running against her, nobody was scared off by this session."

After it blew up and solidified partisan support and opposition, even her supporters had a hard time putting a good face on it.

"I think this session made the Democratic legislators and the state party stronger," said party director Chris Whittington.

"Republican legislators may think they had their way in the session by voting down several issues," Whittington said, "but they will be in for a rude awakening in April when they come back after having to explain to their constituents why they didn't think teachers, policemen, deputies and firefighters deserve raises now when the money was available."

But House Republicans, who blocked the governor's plan to spend \$2 billion, said it did more to strengthen their party.

James Quinn, executive director of the state Republican Party, said Blanco's failure "shows a problem with leadership. She picked the agenda and the timing, but she didn't consult them (Democrats) or us. She didn't do the things a governor should do."

Blanco "is having trouble getting along with people," he said, which was shown by her ignoring the advice of some of her supporters and their opposing her moves.

Pollster Verne Kennedy of Pensacola said "she had made a little progress between last spring and this fall -- up 5 percent -- but, obviously, this session is not going to help her."

"On a basic re-elect question, the last survey showed 25 percent" would vote for her, he said. "Before, it was 20 percent. That's absolutely hardcore support. She's down to her core."

But Kennedy says he's seen some strange things happen and "it's too early in politics to know anything for sure. Look at what happened in New Orleans with Ray Nagin and Bill Jefferson.

"The unlikely can happen," he said. "I don't think it will."

Kennedy said he has run several scenarios with possible candidates that he would not name.

"She could be anything from re-elected to running fourth," he said.

Like many others, the Council for a Better Louisiana and the Public Affairs Research Council urged Blanco not to call the special session in December.

CABL President Barry Erwin and PAR President Jim Brandt said they aren't surprised at the legislative uproar that blocked the governor's plan. "Is this her political obituary? The answer is no," Erwin said.

The failed plan "hurts her in the short-term, but I don't necessarily believe it knocks her out in the long-term," he said. "We've had special sessions that failed," and her political survival depends on how the governor recovers in the regular session.

"At the end of the day, I don't think the state is necessarily worse off" not spending all the money, in December, Erwin said.

Brandt said Republicans shouldn't be able to take the blame or the credit for blocking the expenditures.

"It is a mistake to suggest it was just partisan politics," he said. "A number of us questioned this. Is it absolutely devastating to the governor? No. Many of the things she suggested will be done."

To get the pay raises and other things the governor must do things differently, he said.

"If she regroups, takes time to develop a strategic spending plan for the state and has adequate input from the Legislature and the public, she can move forward," Brandt said.