

(3)

CLEANING UP THE HOUSTON SHIP CHANNEL

While my consumer protection proposals leaped from the starting blocks and quickly achieved a stunning victory, my environmental protection proposals enjoyed no such easy and overwhelming success. Like consumer protection laws, pollution controls were out of favor with the business leaders whose lock on political campaign funding sources ensured their control of the state's public policy agenda. These issues likewise were not high on the priority list of a rural-dominated legislature.

Our consumer law reform initiative enjoyed several circumstances that helped us overcome these adversities. We benefited from embryonic statutes, a passive bureaucracy, a lack of unanimity among the businesses affected, and from the "bad guy" image of the target of our reforms.

When we devised the Deceptive Trade Practices Act, we were overhauling a statutory Model T to make it a modern race car. Our proposals for consolidating enforcement of consumer laws under the attorney general met no resistance from state enforcement staff or local prosecutors, all of whom were happy to rid themselves of a job they were ill equipped to perform. Our ability to recruit the retailers as allies for our consumer reforms marginalized our natural opponents in the business community and helped remove potentially large obstacles. We focused our rhetoric on ridding the state of sleazy rip-off artists who were conning old folks and minorities.

We enjoyed no such benefits when we attempted to muscle our way into the pollution control game. The companies poisoning our air and water were not fly-by-night operators. They were the mainstay of their local areas' economies and a major factor in Texas' economic health. Almost all of the polluters were national or international corporations facing the risk of government antipollution restrictions in other states as well. Their
