

Texas Press Clipping Bureau

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DOES IT MEAN A NEW POLICY?

An Associated Press dispatch from Austin, dealing with the first meeting of the Highway Commission since the resignations of Chairman Lanham and Commissioner Burkett and the appointment of their successor, makes particular mention of the absence of former Governor Jim Ferguson and of the presence and activity of R. J. Anks, chief engineer of the department.

Both of these statements may have quite a bit of significance. For one thing, that in reference to Mr. Ferguson, may mean an entire departure from former policy so far as he and the Highway Commission are concerned, for it will be recalled that prior to the suit against the American Road Company and the startling revelations that came out in that trial, Mr. Ferguson attended practically all sessions of the commission and advised with its members, for the purpose, as he explained it, of "protecting his wife's administration and of insuring an economical operation of the department." Perhaps Mr. Ferguson intends now to let the commissioners handle the affairs of the department without the benefit of his advice. Or what is, perhaps, more logical in the situation, the two new commissioners accepted appointment only on condition that they be allowed freedom of action and the right to handle highway affairs as their own judgment and experience dictated.

This latter conclusion, too, seems borne out somewhat in the reference made to Mr. Hank. The State highway law makes of the chief engineer the executive officer of the department. He is the man responsible for the organization of

the department for its supervision and for the execution of the policies formulated by the board. His is supposed to be the expert engineering advice on which the commissioners are expected to rely for their guidance. On his shoulders are supposed to rest the major responsibilities for the proper execution of highway contracts, the proper functioning of the departmental organization, the supervision and maintenance, etc. By law, he was made the real operating head of the Highway Department. But recent events have shown that Mr. Hank, as chief engineer, was shorn of a great deal of this authority; not by law, but by the policies pursued by the commission which appointed him. Even the dispatch, which made particular mention of his presence and the active part he took in the discussions of the first meeting, pointed to the fact that formerly he rarely attended a session or was rarely called in for advice.

All of which may mean that a new day has dawned for the Highway Department of Texas. It may mean that the new commissioners intend to operate the Highway Department as a business man should operate it; to formulate the policies; award the contracts to the lowest and best bidders; transact such business in open session, and leave the execution of the policies to chief engineer; holding him accountable therefor. If such is done, business practices will supplant political considerations in the handling of highway funds. At least, the new commissioners have started well.—Fort Worth Star-Telegram.