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Former Ambassador, Texas Senator, and long-time cattle, oil and gas businessman Teel Bivins of Amarillo passed away on Tuesday. His services were held today. We reprint this eloquent article with permission. It originally ran in Tuesday's *Dallas Morning News* by William McKenzie, Editorial Columnist.

TEEL BIVINS: THE LATE GOP SENATOR LED WITH SKILL AND GRACE

There was a period in the middle 1990s when the Texas Legislature really hummed. And while top figures like then-Gov. George W. Bush, Lt. Gov. Bob Bullock and Speaker Pete Laney helped make that happen, there was a cohort of legislators that equally made the place work.

In the Senate, Republicans Teel Bivins, Bill Ratliff and David Sibley and Democrat John Montford operated like the Four Horsemen. Bullock could give them an assignment, and, chances were, they would get the job done.

Sadly, one of those Four Horsemen, Teel Bivins, passed away yesterday after a debilitating illness. At 62, he was way too young to die. Before he died, though, Bivins made his mark.

You don't get to be chairman of the Senate's finance and education committees, which Bivins was at different points in his career, without having the skills to tackle difficult subjects. Whether it was school finance, crafting a budget or launching charter schools, Bivins was a big player, working late into the night with Bush, Bullock, Laney, Ratliff, Sibley, Montford and many others.

But it wasn't just the issues that made him stand out. Rather, it was the way in which he approached his work, which was true of the rest of his cohort. He knew his brief, he argued his position gracefully and he could pass legislation. We still have some players like that in the Senate, but the place today is more partisan and lacks the same nucleus of legislators. After Montford left, Bivins, Ratliff and Sibley were the veterans who took issues that dealt with budgets, schools, taxes, whatever, and worked to find the center of gravity. They didn't always succeed, like with the Bush-led push to overhaul school finance laws. But they did more often than not.

And they did it with a natural grace. Bivins often was along the rail of the Senate chamber, talking easily with staffers and reporters, never flummoxed by a question or espousing an angry conservatism.

Perhaps that was because Bivins didn't derive his entire identity from the place, although he served there for 15 years before President Bush appointed him ambassador to Sweden in 2004. (Within three hours of his death, Bush released a statement praising his late colleague.) He instead was rooted deeply in the Panhandle, where his family had been in the ranching business for decades.

I remember once visiting him in his office in Amarillo, where I had gone to research water issues. It was late May 2000, and I didn't know too much about how the subject played out in the Panhandle. After my meeting with him, I had a roadmap of people and issues to pursue.

It was no different when calling him on the phone in Austin or visiting with him in the Legislature. As with Republican Senators Sibley and Ratliff, and Democrats Rob Junell and Paul Sadler in the House, you just had a sense of confidence in him.

I thought about that a lot when covering him and the Legislature during that period. When I was in school at the University of Texas in the middle 1970s, the Legislature seemed like an outpost of good ol' boys managing the affairs of an awakening giant. By the middle 1990s, the Legislature was a grownup place, where adult leaders helped navigate a sophisticated state.

Teel Bivins was a big, big part of that evolution. As Texans, we owe him our gratitude.

