

John Wesley Marshall, who succeeded to the speakership in the 31st Legislature following the resignation of Austin M. Kennedy, presided over the house of representatives during the four called sessions of 1909 and 1910. The last of those sessions produced an extensive reform of the state penal system, occurring in the wake of journalistic exposes, charges by successful 1910 gubernatorial candidate Oscar B. Colquitt, and the findings of a special legislative committee. These muckraking investigations of Texas prisons had reported chaotic financial affairs, poor food and clothing, atrocious sanitation, and the abuse and even murder of inmates. As a consequence, in 1910, the 4th Called Session of the 31st Legislature passed an act placing state corrections institutions under the management of a board of gubernatorial appointees assisted by a prison auditor. The act also placed restrictions on punishment of inmates, provided for upgraded medical service and sanitation, and abolished the corrupt system by which convict labor had been contracted to outside employers.

A native Texan, John Wesley Marshall was born in Jacksonville on February 23, 1869. His family moved to Grayson County in 1879, where he was educated in the public schools of Whitesboro. Marshall subsequently entered business with his father, operating a Whitesboro hardware store. Eventually, the younger Marshall became mayor of the city, serving two terms in that capacity. While mayor, he was instrumental in establishing the First National Bank of Whitesboro.

In 1908, Marshall was elected to the Texas House of Representatives, where he served a single term as legislator and became speaker shortly after the 31st Legislature convened in its 1st called session. He was a member of the committees on appropriations, banks, public lands, and internal improvements, and was among those representatives who successfully called for the resignation of Speaker Kennedy. A staunch prohibitionist in a legislature that was sharply divided over the liquor issue, Marshall in his election managed to receive almost unanimous support from both sides in the Kennedy controversy.

After his term in the legislature, Marshall moved to Sherman and entered the real estate business. A prominent civic leader in that city, he headed two local trade associations in the fields of building and finance. He also chaired the board of trustees of now-defunct Kidd-Key College for 14 years, and during the administration of Governor William P. Hobby, he was appointed to the board of regents for the teachers college system. Marshall died in Denison on November 22, 1944.