

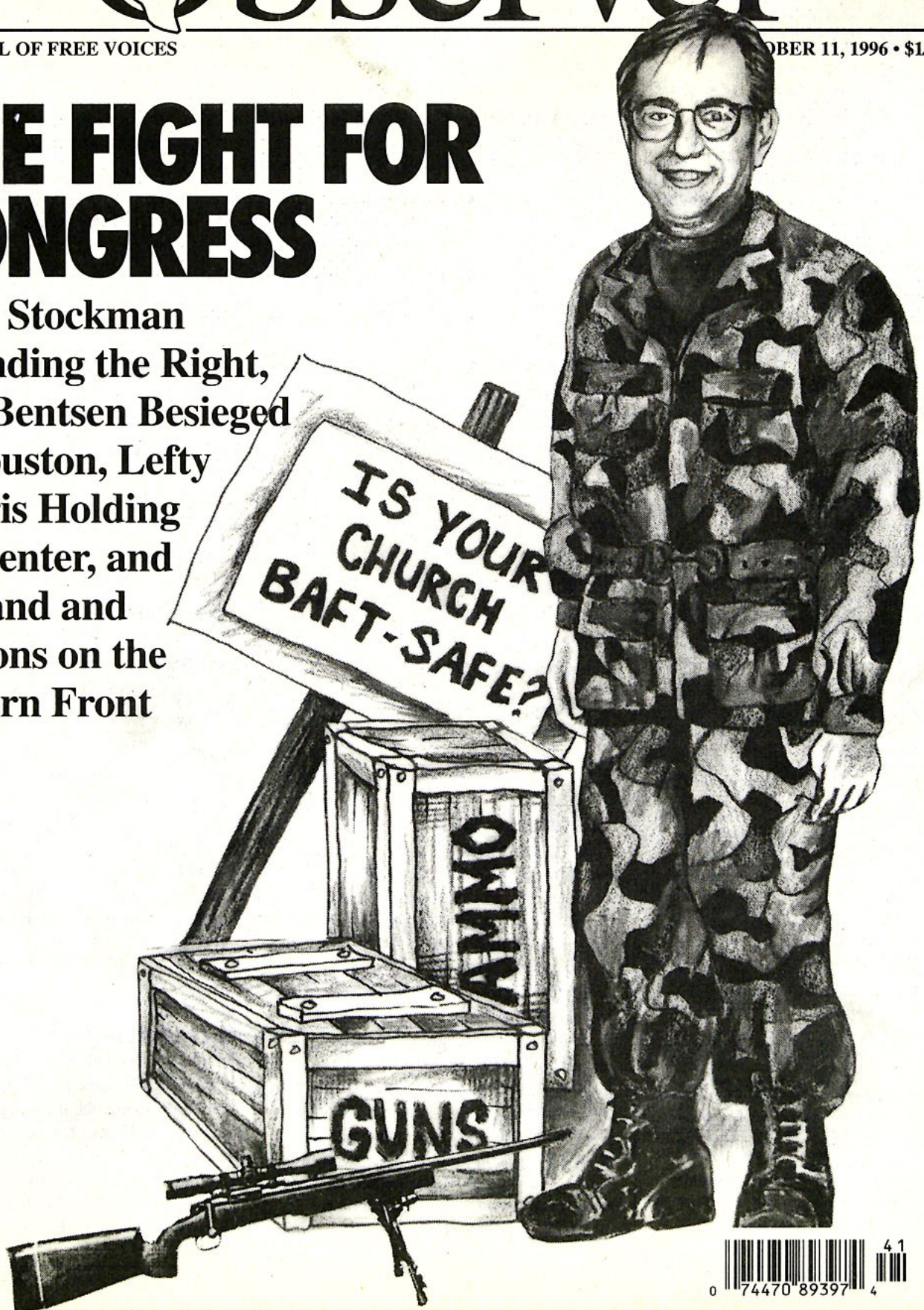
THE TEXAS Observer

A JOURNAL OF FREE VOICES

OCTOBER 11, 1996 • \$1.75

THE FIGHT FOR CONGRESS

Steve Stockman
Defending the Right,
Ken Bentsen Besieged
in Houston, Lefty
Morris Holding
the Center, and
Pouland and
Sessions on the
Eastern Front





VOLUME 88, NO. 20

A JOURNAL OF FREE VOICES

We will serve no group or party but will hew hard to the truth as we find it and the right as we see it. We are dedicated to the whole truth, to human values above all interests, to the rights of human-kind as the foundation of democracy: we will take orders from none but our own conscience, and never will we overlook or misrepresent the truth to serve the interests of the powerful or cater to the ignoble in the human spirit.

Writers are responsible for their own work, but not for anything they have not themselves written, and in publishing them we do not necessarily imply that we agree with them, because this is a journal of free voices.

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DIALOGUE ▶

BE GRATEFUL

I just finished your September 13 issue with all its Clinton-bashing articles. I'm really getting tired of hearing liberals come down on Clinton for not being their knight in shining armor.

Personally, I adore Clinton for stopping the charging hordes of the Christian Coalition and the wealthy Reaganites. Can you honestly say an out-and-out liberal could get elected president today?

If this were the '60s, Clinton would be a full-out liberal.

Instead of griping and complaining, we should be figuring out how to gain power again. We need to stick together, as the conservatives have done, and look for charismatic people who can deliver and ar-

ticulate a populist message without scaring the public. We don't need demagogues.

Until then, we should be grateful to the Clintons (that includes Hillary) for keeping the faith as much as they can and still get re-elected.

*Diane Comer
Dallas*

TELL THE TRUTH

To those so critical of Ronnie Dugger's agonized endorsement of Ralph Nader, I say: Don't blame the messenger. To Ronnie Dugger: Thanks for a courageous and timely stand.

While I was surprised by so many negative responses, I shouldn't have been; liberals have long been in denial about Clinton's

true persona. This incident recalls the classic dysfunctional family: Papa habitually abuses the kids, and when Brother finally turns him in, the other kids turn on Brother as a traitor. "But he's our papa! What would we do without him?" Papa promises it won't happen again; Mama sighs and resolves to give Papa "one more chance."

When in doubt, tell the truth. Finding ourselves in the situation where the truth usually hurts could be a clue that it is time to re-evaluate our own values and the values of those who purport to represent us.

Marianne Wurtele Siller
Lago Vista

BILL'S DEFENSE

In challenging Ronnie Dugger on his home ground, I have to remember the warning (I think Mencken's): "Never get into an argument with one who buys his ink by the barrel."

I am not happy with talk of Clinton as an "evil." I am damned glad he is President. I think he is "good." I shudder to think of Medicare and Medicaid if he had not been president, with the guts to stand up to the Newt and his "train wreck." [...]

When the wowsers and the magnates (and the *Wall Street Journal*) are cursing the "Man in the White House" it is not because they are championing the cause of the people against him. It is because he is doing too much good for their comfort. When they stoop to attacking his wife because they can't get at him it is another good sign.

(By the way, Bill Clinton came within 5 percent of the vote to carry Texas in 1992, so John Barkdull's 60 percent for Dole may be an exaggeration.)

I must apologize to Miss [Alysson] Ford ("Dialogue," September 13) for giving her the idea I had accused the ACLU of the crime of liberalism. I was alluding to the ACLU's successful collaboration with the NRA to gut the president's anti-terrorism bill (no liberalism there). I suggest, however, that if the FBI finds out about a building to be bombed and prevents it (even through wiretaps and tag-gants) it is a good thing.

Ed Cogburn
Houston

NO RESPONSE

If a picture is worth a thousand words, the one you published on August 30 is worth at least thirteen years (Carrie Evans, "Is Anybody Listening?").

Ever since we met Mr. Jacobi in 1983 he has turned his back on the public, our concerns, and our outrage. Your photograph portrays with stunning accuracy the disregard we know all too well of the Texas Low Level Radioactive Waste Disposal Authority for the people of Texas, including its veterans.

Mr. Jacobi and his agency have never faced us or the truth.

No, Carrie, no one is listening.

Linda Lynch
Alert Citizens for Environmental Safety
Hudspeth County

TAKE ME BACK TO TEXAS

Well, it has been fourteen months since I moved from Austin to Miami. I must admit, I do love going to the beach any day I please, or sipping Cuban coffee at a sidewalk café on Ocean Drive. And I do sleep better knowing that my governor is a Chiles and not a Bush (shrub). Those damp-cold Central Texas winter days are behind me now, too.

But I surely do miss Austin during election season. Texans really know how to get into it. Politics in Miami is just not the same. Why, we had an election recently to elect the Mayor of the City of Miami. The winner, a man of dubious background at that, won with little more than 17,000 votes. Yep, in Austin more votes would be needed to elect a sewer commissioner! Unless there is an anti-Castro initiative on

the ballot, or a candidate who wants to lower the tax on piña coladas, there's just not much fire in the old campaign season!

I am grateful to the *Observer* for keeping me informed on what REAL politics and issues are all about in a state that takes the game seriously! Molly Ivins, Jim Hightower, and the entire staff keep me legitimately informed as a true Democrat, a Texas Democrat. But I do get my kicks where I can: during the Republican Convention, I said things to Kay Bailey during her TV speech that were downright blasphemous. I drive by Bob Dole's Bal Harbour condo and am tempted to put up a sign that says "Future permanent residence of Bob and Liddy." And just every now and then, when I see the white-haired ladies walking along the boardwalk on Miami Beach, I fantasize that one of them is good old Miss Ann. But their "New Yawk" accent ruins the whole darn thing for me.

So, thanks again for being there for me, *Observer*. If only Texas would do just one more thing for me, and for America: give us a VICTORY in the Senate, we have all had our Phil!

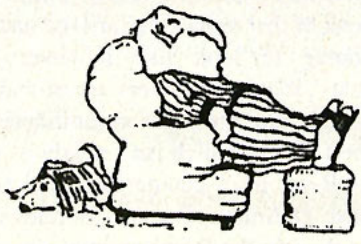
Bill McIntyre
Miami

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Follow the Money

A month before the general election, Texas Democratic Party Chair Bill White is telling the press that there is good news and bad news for Democrats. The good news, according to White, is that President Clinton's numbers are up both in Texas, where a Democratic Party poll has him in a 41-to-41-percent dead heat with Bob Dole, and nationwide, where the President seems to be opening up his lead.

The bad news is that Republican funders are writing off the Dole campaign and moving their money into congressional and state legislative elections. "Republicans are even beginning to spin it that way, saying 'yeah, but watch what happens in the congressional elections,' or 'watch what happens in the state legislative races.'" As White sees it, a lot of Republican funders weren't exactly converted by the Christian fundamentalists who seized the party machinery. Now Dole's fading campaign provides them a rationale to invest in candidates they truly believe in.

Clinton's growing lead, as White and *The New York Times* observe, allow him to fly into districts where Democratic congressional candidates are in tight races. That's what Clinton's three-day Texas tour in late September was all about. Clinton selected East Texas House races the state Democratic Party is most convinced it can win, with a little help from the President: the 2nd District, where former State Senator Jim Turner is running against religious right dentist Brian Babin; the 5th District where John Pouland is struggling in a race with Pete Sessions, the son of the former FBI director; and the 12th District where former state Senator Hugh Parmer and Fort Worth Mayor Kay Granger are in a tight race to replace Pete Geren, the former Lloyd Bentsen aide most people thought was a Democrat until he was elected to Congress and started voting. Clinton had tentatively scheduled a visit to the 9th District, where the Republican Party's most vulnerable congressman, Steve Stockman, faces a challenge from Nick Lampson. But Clinton's schedulers determined that tying up the Gulf Freeway from Houston to Galveston was both bad politics and bad logistics. Lampson, a former Jefferson

County tax assessor-collector, traveled to Houston to join the President.

Texas, the *Times* observed, has always been an exporter of cash for Democratic Party national campaigns. But with Clinton ahead, he was able to serve as a big draw at several Texas fundraisers. The money raised, White said, will be used in Texas races.

If White is correct about Texas Republicans moving their money away from the Dole campaign—and if Dole and Kemp finally recognize that California is a lost cause and shift their California funding to Texas—most of the money Clinton helped raise will be spent on congressional races.

That leaves Senate candidate Victor Morales alone in his Nissan, driving to fundraisers and passing around the red gas can for cash. In April, when the Democratic Party began to return Morales' phone calls shortly after his runoff defeat of Dallas Congressman John Bryant, Morales was briefly flying around the state with Nebraska Congressman Bob Kerrey, the chairman of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee. At the time, Kerrey began discussing how much support the DSCC might provide Morales, and after the Senator returned to Washington there was a tentative promise of \$1.3 million.

None of that money has arrived and it is beginning to look like it never will. Morales' sagging numbers are probably a justification for the decision (or indecision) by the DSCC—which isn't nearly as flush as its Republican counterpart, chaired by Alfonse D'Amato. For the Morales campaign though, the Democratic committee's failure to provide funding has created a self-fulfilling prophecy: with no money, he can't increase his position in the polls, and with low poll numbers, he gets no money.

Morales didn't help his cause by refusing to accept a September 29 debate date with Phil Gramm. With millions in the bank, Gramm is on TV all over the state. The debates, broadcast on PBS affiliates, would have provided Morales the only statewide exposure he is likely to see between now and the election. When asked if he had made a serious tactical error in refusing to accept the debate date, Morales was defensive. "I earned the right to negotiate the debate date, so don't I have a say in it?" he said in an interview at St. Edward's University in Austin. Three days later, Morales said he shouldn't have passed up the debate. The free air time PBS provided the two candidates on the night set aside for the debate didn't draw the viewers that a head-to-head match-up would have.

Morales' hour-long talk to a St. Edward's political science class on September 20 in Austin suggests how frustrated he has become, as a campaign that has logged some 80,000 highway miles is beginning to feel utterly static. Morales spelled out his support of affirmative action (he also suggested that sometime after the year 2000, when Mexican Americans are the majority in Texas, the state's Anglo minority might find it useful), the right of gays to serve in the military, abortion rights, the Brady Bill, and the assault weapons ban. And he explained his opposition to the balanced budget amendment, California's Proposition 187 and other nativist initiatives like Official English laws, and cuts in welfare and Medicaid. Then, in an almost plaintive mode, he engaged the eighty students in the lecture hall: "Tell people what I stand for. Remind them that what they see on television are Phil Gramm's advertisements. Advertisements! You get that? You heard what I said, go tell your friends what I stand for."

—L.D.

The 9th: Stockman's Last Stand?

Democrats Thought They Had the Right Wing Congressman Surrounded—until the Federal Judiciary Sent in Reinforcements

BY LOUIS DUBOSE

Conventional wisdom has it that Democratic Governor Ann Richards was a political anomaly and her defeat predictable. Corporate conservative George W. Bush, the argument continues, is a better match with voters in a state that becomes more Republican with each election.

No one has ever made that claim about Steve Stockman, the once-homeless Michigander who established his Texas residence by living six months in a downtown Fort Worth park, lied about his education and employment history, accepted a possibly illegal \$80,000 contribution from an Ohio mail-order business that ran ads soliciting candidates to run against Beaumont Congressman Jack Brooks—and after two tries was elected to Congress.

Stockman defeated Brooks the same year Bush defeated Richards, and both ran on what Democratic State Chairman Bill White calls the entertainment issues: guns, God, and gays. But while Bush spent the past two years methodically pursuing an agenda ordained by the state's business community, Stockman somewhere confused the Gingrich Revolution with the Militia Movement and has spent the last two years fighting battles on both fronts.

"He is on everyone's most-vulnerable list," said Jonathan Brown, press secretary for Stockman's Democratic opponent, Nick Lampson. Lampson is a former public school teacher who routinely won elections as Jefferson county tax assessor-collector before resigning to run in the Democratic congressional primary race.

Which groups have Stockman on their list? The AFL-CIO, the Texas Federation of Teachers, the Sierra Club, People for the American Way, the Clean Air Trust, and the League of Conservation Voters all think Stockman can be defeated and are working on or funding his opponent's campaign.

How did a Congressman who two years ago was declared "freshman class leader" by the *Washington Post* and last year ranked twenty-fifth in PAC contributions among the eighty-four-member Republican freshman class end up as damaged goods—characterized by *Texas Monthly* as "freshman class clown" and "Congressman Clueless?"

Let me count the ways:

"He has some strange ideas about the truth," said former Beaumont Mayor Maury Meyers, who defeated Stockman in the 1990 Republican primary, only to be beaten by Brooks in the general election. Meyers said Stockman is not only born-again as a Christian, he is born again before each election.

"If you look at the campaigns...the facts about his personal history change," said Meyers, who described himself as "a strong Bob Dole supporter who will vote for Nick Lampson."

The dissimulation worked while Stockman was a anti-abortion activist leading Operation Rescue marches in suburbs on the west end of the 9th Congressional District, which includes Galveston, the NASA Space Center and bedroom communities south of Houston, and the three rusty Golden Triangle towns of Beaumont, Port Arthur, and Orange. Stockman had presented himself to voters as an accountant, a former IBM employee, and a graduate of and computer consultant at the University of Houston's Clear Lake campus. It didn't take too much heavy lifting for the *Beaumont Enterprise* and *Houston Chronicle* to establish that Stockman hadn't graduated from the University of Houston, hadn't worked for IBM but instead worked as a temp for Manpower, which had an IBM contract, and never had been paid as a computer consultant by the University of Houston System. (Meyers even wondered why a guy who listed no income on his 1990 IRS filings would even bother with a résumé.)

STOCKMAN SOMEWHERE CONFUSED THE GINGRICH REVOLUTION WITH THE MILITIA MOVEMENT AND HAS SPENT THE LAST TWO YEARS FIGHTING BATTLES ON BOTH FRONTS.

In February of this year, *Texas Monthly* writer Mimi Swartz filled in some of the gaps in Stockman's biography. A son of two fundamentalist Christian Michigan schoolteachers, Stockman abandoned religion and drifted through life "looking for hot-looking babes; I was the studerino," he told the *Dallas Morning News*. At age twenty-three, he arrived in Fort Worth by bus and settled in at Philip Johnson and Lawrence Halprin's labyrinthine downtown Water Gardens. The dark night of the soul he experienced among the homeless men and drug addicts living there prepared him for a conversion experience that followed a televised sermon.

Stockman had married Patti Ferguson, attended the University of Houston (he eventually did graduate), and become president of the Young Conservatives of Texas, when television again changed his life. According to what Stockman told *Texas Monthly*, it was watching Jack Brooks lean on Oliver North during televised Iran-Contra hearings that led him to run for public office.

But his political ambitions got a real boost from the Suarez Corporation, an Ohio-based mail-order business so angry with a regulatory bill passed by Brooks that it ran newspaper ads and radio spots offering \$80,000 to anyone who would run a "public-minded" campaign against the liberal Democrat elected to Congress in 1954. Some of that \$80,000 would find its way into the bank account of Oliver North himself, who did his standard God-and-country routine at a Stockman fundraiser in January 1990—for a \$25,000 fee and a percentage of the gate. (He drew a crowd of

"(THE CHRISTIAN COALITION) IS THE BIGGEST MARKETING GIMMICK THE REPUBLICANS HAVE FOUND AND IT PERSUADED PEOPLE THROUGH THE USE AND ABUSE OF RELIGION TO VOTE AGAINST THEIR INTEREST."

200, which at \$50 a ticket didn't even cover his speaker's fee.) Stockman lost the 1990 primary, won the 1992 primary and lost in the general election, then in 1994 ran again and defeated Brooks. "The gun issue hurt Brooks," said Ruelle Parker, secretary treasurer of the Port Arthur Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers local. "I don't think that it made our people vote Republican, but I think it made a lot of them stay home." At the same time, Parker said, the Christian Coalition was working for Stockman. "They...had him on their slate cards, and it was a big help for him."

The anti-incumbent sentiment that made Newt Gingrich Speaker of the House also worked for Stockman, who was running against a man elected to Congress two years before Stockman was born.

Brooks spent \$1.2 million to Stockman's \$245,000, yet lost by six percent—in a district that Mike Dukakis and Bill Clinton had carried by comfortable margins. Stockman lost in the eastern industrial end of the district—one of very few places in the state where unions have ever exercised any real influence at the polls—but won in the suburbs south of Houston, where fundamentalist congregations and NASA lunchtime prayer groups provide the structure for grassroots campaigns. "The Christian Coalition does the same thing here that it does in other places," former State Senator Carl Parker said. "It is the biggest marketing gimmick the Republicans have found and it persuaded people through the use and abuse of religion to vote against their interest. It matters here because blue-collar votes were peeled away."

In Washington, Stockman followed the freshman pack, holding the line on government spending and gleefully supporting the two partial shutdowns of the federal government, casting partisan votes for school vouchers, reduced federal spending for public education, diminished enforcement powers for the EPA, and funding cuts for public broadcasting, the NEA and the National Endowment for the Humanities. He has consistently voted against reproductive rights, and with Idaho Representative Helen Chenoweth sponsored a failed repeal of the assault weapons ban.

Late in the current session, Stockman filed a bill that would have weakened the EPA's enforcement powers and lowered reformulated gas standards designed to push the industry to clean up the air. But even the environmental lobbyists, who frantically faxed the bill to news outlets, gave it little chance of passing. "He doesn't have much credibility in the House," said Frank O'Donnell of

the Clean Air Trust. A congressional staff member was less circumspect. "He's a joke on both sides of the aisle and nobody takes him or his legislation seriously."

The bill did attract the attention of the Sierra Club, which found that Stockman received \$38,000 from PACs and employees of twenty-nine major polluters on the Texas Gulf Coast, companies that had paid \$555,300 in Texas Natural Resource Conservation Commission fines for eight hundred air-quality violations over the past twelve years. From outside of the region, Stockman also received \$72,673 in contributions from political action committees that promote national anti-environmental legislation.

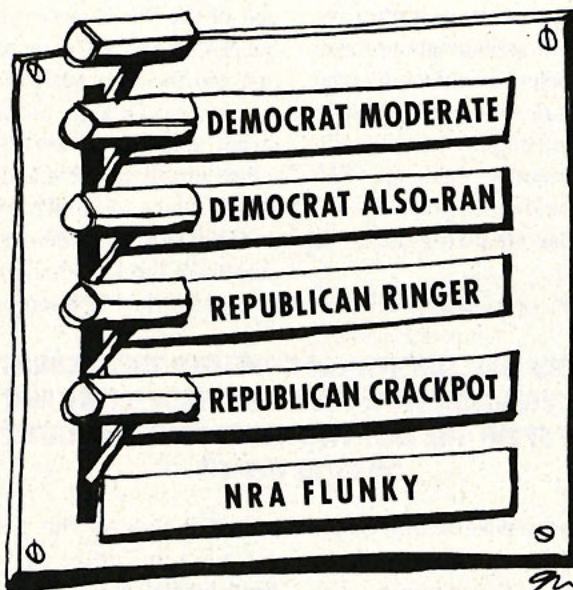
Between the end of the celebrated 100 Days and the Sierra Club study released last month, Stockman was always a bad story about to break. In June 1995, he published an article in *Guns & Ammo*—an odd forum for any member of Congress, even one from a district that claims to have more registered gun dealers than the state of New York—in which he accused Janet Reno of "premeditated murder" in ordering the assault at the Branch Davidian compound at Waco. Stockman also wrote that President Clinton was "not unhappy with the fiery end of the siege at Waco," because it "was to be a lesson to gun owners all over America."

Months before his freelance debut in *Guns & Ammo*, "informed sources" had provided Stockman additional in-

formation on government anti-terrorist activity, and Stockman fired off a letter to Reno, warning of an El Paso military task force preparing to raid militia groups in the U.S.

The "informed sources" Stockman cited appear to be *Soldier of Fortune* publisher Robert Brown and one of the magazine's reporters, who met with Stockman shortly after he took office, according to reports in several newspapers.

Though Stockman claims he didn't recall the meeting with the *Soldiers of Fortune* staff, Larry Pratt, who had set the meeting up for Stockman, did. Pratt, the former director of Gun Owners of America, left the Pat Buchanan campaign after Pratt's association with anti-Semitic white supremacists became too much of an embarrassment even for Buchanan. Pratt, it was widely reported, had spoken at Aryan Nation meetings and other gatherings where he addressed "skinheads, Klansmen and Timothy McVeigh gun-culture heroes like Mark Koernke and Bo Gritz (who is fond of toting up the number of Jews in the Clinton administration)," according to *New York Times* columnist Frank Rich. In Washington, according to the Capitol Hill newspaper *Roll Call*, Stockman helped make Pratt "almost a shadow Congressman."



WITH THE GUN ISSUE OUT OF THE WAY AND NO GAY ISSUE TO EXPLOIT, ALL THAT IS LEFT OF THE STANDARD GUNS-GOD-AND-GAYS CAMPAIGN TRINITY IS, OF COURSE, GOD.

Gun Owners of America, a 150,000-member organization to the right of even the National Rifle Association, gave more money to Stockman than it did to any other candidate running for Congress in 1994 (\$13,472). Stockman, in turn, arranged a meeting with Pratt and House Majority Leader Dick Armey, to push for an immediate vote to repeal the assault weapons ban. He also hired Pratt's daughter, Annamarie, and according to *Roll Call*, had GOA lobbyist Mike Hammond drafting his legislation. Hammond protested that he wrote bills as a volunteer at Stockman's request, not as a GOA consultant.

At home in the 9th District, Stockman's campaign consultant group, "Political Won Stop," appears to have set up shop in Stockman's garage, where a recent altercation with *Houston Press* political reporter Tim Fleck led to Fleck filing a libel suit against Stockman. (*The Hill*, a Congressional weekly, had reported that Won Stop, owned in part by the Republican candidate for the tax-assessor/collector's office vacated by Nick Lampson, was paid more than \$126,000 by the Stockman campaign.) When the *Houston Press* moved on to the coast to verify Won Stop's registered address, Fleck found only a vacant beach house that had been rented in the off-season to one of the Won Stop owners.

The Congressman's close relationship with a political consultant could result in yet another complaint to the Federal Elections Commission, currently investigating two complaints filed against Stockman. The most serious charge concerns the \$80,000 (which is either an illegal contribution or an uncollected debt) that the Suarez Corporation provided Stockman's first campaign.

Stockman's Washington Chief of Staff Corey Birenbaum recently was responsible for even more bad press for his boss. In a letter to *Texas Monthly* writer (and Stockman profiler) Mimi Swartz, Birenbaum suggested that it was by performing acts of fellatio that she got her job at the magazine. (Birenbaum told the *Observer* that he would consider apologizing to Swartz when she apologizes for the article she wrote about Stockman.)

Can any freshman Congressman carry this much baggage into an election? "Nobody ever gave him a chance to beat Jack Brooks," Birenbaum said in a telephone interview. Stockman will have help from the Christian Coalition, though he has tried to distance himself from the organization since it was sued by the FEC, telling the *Galveston Daily News* that in 1994 the Pat Robertson/Ralph Reed group "didn't help because they didn't think I would win." Stockman's wife Patti, however, shared the speakers' platform with Reed at a Christian Coalition banquet at the Republican state convention in May, and thanked the group for its prayers and organizational support. And Stockman's former press aide told the *Wall Street Journal* that the Stockman campaign distributed Christian Coalition voters' guides—precisely the sort of activity the FEC is targeting in its attempt to revoke the coalition's tax-exempt status.

Working with the Christian right will be the gun lobby and, of

course, the petroleum PACs. But Stockman's greatest campaign asset might be the federal bench. Stockman, who might have sensed that he was on his way back to Manpower, Inc. after Lampson won the primary in the spring, had his campaign revived by three Republican federal judges, who invalidated results of primary elections held in three minority districts the Supreme Court decided had been "racially gerrymandered."

Redrawing those three districts, however, meant moving the lines of ten additional districts. Most were substantially changed, as the three-judge panel attempted to create "compact, contiguous" districts. But many thought the court had overreached when it moved a mere 850 residents out of Stockman's district—a minor adjustment that did little to alter racial demographics, but did allow the judges to nullify the primary and schedule a new open election on November 5.

After the court ordered new elections, Democrats in the district followed Carl Parker's lead in putting out the word that Lampson, who had won the primary the judges threw out, was the Party's only candidate. Stockman's office, however, encouraged all comers to join the race. "We're happy with the ruling," Birenbaum said, "and encourage anyone who wants to enter the race to file."

No Republicans filed, but two Democrats did. Geraldine Sam of LaMarque, who won 11 percent of the Democratic primary vote, paid the \$2,500 filing fee for the November 5 race. (Sam has no campaign office and her home phone is unlisted.) So did Gary Arthur Brooks of Uvalde—three hundred miles west of the 9th District, and closer to the Mexican border than the Louisiana state line that serves as the district's eastern boundary. Brooks filed as "G. Jack Brooks," claiming that "Jack" is his nickname.

A district judge disagreed, after Brooks' wife testified (in a suit filed by Lampson) that she never knew her husband's name was Jack. Unable to run as "Jack" and perhaps warned that sooner or later he might have to explain more about his campaign in depositions, Brooks withdrew on October 1.

The AFL-CIO is running TV ads in the district, and Ruelle Parker at the Port Arthur OCAW local said unions in the district will not only turn out the vote on election day, they will be working phone banks and walking neighborhoods for Lampson.

The race is not exactly a classic match between a liberal and a conservative, as Stockman aide Birenbaum describes it. Lampson is progressive on some issues, a staunch defender of Medicare, Medicaid, and education funding, but has defused the gun issue by making voters aware of his own gun inventory—a rifle, shotguns, and handguns—and calling for repeal of the assault weapons bill that retired Jack Brooks, and the Brady Bill, which requires a waiting period before the purchase of hand guns.

With the gun issue out of the way and no gay issue to exploit, all that is left of the standard guns-God-and-gays trinity is, of course, God. "The Christian Coalition," the OCAW's Parker said, "will be working for [Stockman] just like they did in the last election." □

The 25th: Candidate Smorgasbord

BY KAREN OLSSON

It was crowded at the ballot drawing for Harris County special elections last month, as candidates and campaign workers squeezed into a little room in a downtown Houston federal building to determine the candidate order on the November ballot. Beverly Kaufman, the genial Harris County clerk, held out a hat while contestants from seven Congressional races drew numbers; onlookers smiled and pressed themselves against the wall to let others pass by. Someone joked that the 25th District race, with eleven candidates, could use a room of its own.

If Congressional races were restaurants, the 25th District contest would be a Luby's: there's a long buffet of candidates to choose from, and most of them don't look very appetizing. From John Devine, a district judge who once spent a month in jail for blocking the entrance to an abortion clinic and now posts Biblical art on his courtroom walls, to Dotty Quinn Collins, a former teacher who carries a copy of the Constitution in her purse, to doctor and radio host Ken "Dr. Ken" Mathis, colorful right-wingers dominate the ballot.

The district curls around the south of Houston and over to the east of the city, encompassing blue-collar refinery neighborhoods near the Ship Channel and more affluent areas near Rice University; until this year its boundaries, drawn in 1991, gave a slight advantage to Democratic candidates. But when federal judges ordered two Houston area districts redrawn this summer, the boundaries and the partisan makeup of the 25th were altered as well. The court threw out the results of the primaries—won by Republican Brent Perry and Democratic incumbent Ken Bentsen—and ordered open elections.

Ken Bentsen, elected in 1994 by a district that voted 54.4 percent Democratic in statewide races, now faces ten challengers in a redrawn district that voted 50.4 percent Republican. In addition to the eight Republican candidates on the ballot, refinery worker Jerry Freiwirth, a member of the Socialist Workers party, and anti-abortion, pro-school-voucher "Democrat" Beverly Clark are running against Bentsen.

If no candidate wins a majority of the votes in November, the race will go to a runoff December 10 (and given that several state congressional races might not be decided until then, the rest of the country may well end up waiting on Texas to determine which party gains a majority in the House.) For Bentsen, the prospect of a runoff in the new, more conservative district is not attractive. Still, according to *Houston Press* political writer Tim Fleck, "Bentsen has a pretty good chance," even in December. "He's a moderate, milquetoast Democrat—he's not going to inflame anyone to go out and vote conservative."

For all its candidates, the race in the 25th ends up looking famil-

iar: a bunch of Republicans are running against a Democrat who proclaims that he's not as bad as the other guys—but denies that he's a liberal. "Contrary to what some of my opponents seem to think, I have voted for welfare reform," Bentsen told the *Houston Chronicle*. "It just didn't happen to be Newt Gingrich's version."

Bentsen won his Congressional seat in 1994—the year Democrats went out of style—after Mike Andrews stepped down to run for Senate. The nephew of former Senator and Treasury Secretary Lloyd Bentsen, Bentsen had worked as a staffer for Representative Ron Coleman and as an investment banker in Houston before prevailing in the Congressional race over conservative Republican Gene Fontenot, a wealthy doctor who outspent

every other candidate in the nation. It was not a great time to be a freshman Democrat: while other new House members were ballyhooing about the Revolution and smiling for photo ops

with Newt, Bentsen was left in the less glamorous minority, opposing Republican funding cuts for education, Medicare, and Medicaid. Meanwhile he introduced legislation to benefit the district, for instance by allowing local agencies greater control over flood relief projects and by allocating money from the Coast Guard budget to remove abandoned barges from the San Jacinto River.

Bentsen is promising to continue in this moderate vein—"We're running on our record," says his campaign manager Pat Strong. It's a record of local improvements and tempered opposition to the Contract With America, putting the Bentsen campaign right in line with the "Not As Bad" platform of mainstream Democrats. With so many candidates running against him, Bentsen's main charge is that they're all Republicans. To explain the difference between his candidacy and that of moderate Republican challenger Dolly Madison McKenna, for instance, Bentsen points not to her specific positions but to her party affiliation: "If she were Congresswoman, her first vote would be for Newt Gingrich for Speaker of the House."

As for welfare reform, Bentsen says that although the bill he voted for (the one signed by Clinton) isn't perfect, "most people in my district believe we needed to try to make a change," and Democrats will improve the legislation if elected. What about critics from the left? Bentsen maintains that they don't exist in his

IT'S A RECORD OF LOCAL IMPROVEMENTS AND TEMPERED OPPOSITION TO THE CONTRACT WITH AMERICA, PUTTING THE BENTSEN CAMPAIGN RIGHT IN LINE WITH THE 'NOT AS BAD' PLATFORM OF MAINSTREAM DEMOCRATS.

"MCKENNA HAS WORKED HARD TO ANGER RELIGIOUS CONSERVATIVES, DEVINE HAS WORKED HARD TO ANGER THE MORE MODERATE SIDE OF THE PARTY, AND I'VE WORKED HARD TO GET US ALL WORKING TOGETHER."

district. "It's mostly from the media you hear the Democrats have drifted too close to the center," he says, "and not from too many rank-and-file Democrats that I talk to."

Of the Republican candidates, the three most prominent are Devine, Perry and McKenna, all of whom argue for a scaled-back federal government and lower taxes. Though none of these three lead with a social agenda, their positions on abortion are what differentiate them most sharply. Former anti-abortion activist Devine defeated Democratic Judge Eileen O'Neill two years ago after an unsuccessful write-in bid against her in 1992 (his "Christianity in American Law" campaign nonetheless earned the largest number of write-in votes in Harris County history). "I hope that God supports me in this race and I believe that he does," Devine told reporters in August when he announced he would run against Bentsen, adding that "this decision to run was the result of a lot of prayer." It was probably also the result of worldlier backing from Dr. Steven Hotze, an influential conservative activist who pledged his support for the judge.

Closer to the center than Devine, Houston attorney Perry won the GOP primary and the endorsements of a number of Texan Republican Congressmen; he supports a balanced budget, welfare reform, term limits, school vouchers, and limits on abortion but not a constitutional amendment banning it. (His campaign manager George Hammerlein describes him as "personally pro-life.") "I was willing to take on this race when the going was tough, my grassroots and fundraising support is far superior, and I have the strongest background in the district," Perry says. "McKenna has worked hard to anger religious conservatives, Devine has worked hard to anger the more moderate side of the party, and I've worked hard to get us all working together."

Former banker McKenna claims to represent "the sensible center." Though gaining enough votes to win as a pro-choice Republican won't be easy, she argues that this election will give her a better shot, since she can bypass the more conservative primary vote. McKenna could well make it to the runoff without the support of religious conservatives, but in that event, says state Republican party chair Tom Pauken, "I don't know if Dolly can hold the Republicans together or not."

The other Republicans in the race are two religious conservatives, Dotty Quinn Collins and Ron Meinke, two moderate doctors, Ken Mathis and John Sanchez, and lawyer Lloyd Oliver, a one-time Democrat who wants to abolish the IRS. "With all the Republicans running, we could wind up battling one another and getting Bentsen reelected," said Pauken. This is surely what the Bentsen

campaign would like to see happen, while the hope of the Republicans is to make it to the runoff and then solidify support for one candidate.

Because of redistricting, much of the discussion surrounding the race has been about demographics and strategy rather than campaign issues. University of Houston political scientist Richard Murray sees Bentsen as well-served by the new boundaries, arguing that the addition of upscale areas around Rice bodes well for the incumbent because of his appeal "among well-educated, moderate and independent voters, especially female voters." The new district, says Murray, "is about evenly split between partisans (40 percent Republican, 40 percent Democratic), but Bentsen has a big edge among the 20 percent of the electorate who are ticket-splitters." The Perry campaign has countered with its own voter study by a Virginia consulting firm, which calls the new district "strongly Republican" and likely to vote for Perry.



At the ballot drawing in September, the candidate who drew last place was a lanky, curly-haired man in a light-colored suit. Refinery worker and union activist Jerry Freiwirth, who ran for Houston mayor in 1993 as the Socialist Workers party candidate, is eleventh on the ticket. "Working people have no voice in this election, as in most elections," he says. "I believe that working people and small farmers have zero representation....

The current cutbacks and layoffs are just a foretaste of what's to come." Freiwirth's chances in this election are less than slim, but in a race likely to be won by whichever moderate candidate does the most pussyfooting for the swing vote, he sounds pretty good. □

Karen Olsson is an Observer editorial intern.

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District 14: How Far Right Is Right?

BY MICHAEL KING

Detective novelist Mickey Spillane, having long since mislaid any distinction between himself and his supermacho fictional creation, Mike Hammer, used to announce cheerfully to interviewers who asked about his politics, "I'm so far right, I'm right out the window!"

Voters in Texas Congressional District 14 will be considering a kindred spirit this year in Ron Paul, the one-time Libertarian who defeated turncoat Democratic incumbent Greg Laughlin in the Republican primary—despite Laughlin's voluble support from his new colleagues, including House Speaker Newt Gingrich, who made a fruitless visit to Texas last spring to campaign on Laughlin's behalf. Paul, a former Republican Congressman (1977-1984) and the Libertarian Presidential nominee in 1988, faces Charles ("Lefty") Morris, an Austin attorney. Morris describes himself as a "moderate" Democrat—his cagey campaign slogan is "Lefty is Right!"—and has emphasized campaign finance reform (he accepts no PAC money), balancing the budget, and the undeniable credential that he is *not* Ron Paul.

Running as the anti-Paul has definite advantages. Paul has been associated with one or another extreme right movement for many years, and the Morris campaign has been gleefully digging up and publicizing Paul's own statements and positions. "We just have to get his ideas out," Morris told the *Observer*, "and people will know what he really stands for, and they won't support him." Morris garnered headlines by quoting Paul's dismissive (and implicitly racist) writings on the career of the late Barbara Jordan. ("The University of Texas affirmative action law professor Barbara Jordan is a fraud...an empress without clothes...the archetypical half-educated victimologist."—*The Ron Paul Political Report*, 1992.) Morris noted that in 1994, Paul signed the "Proclamation for the Separation of School and State" of an organization calling itself the Separation of School and State Alliance—the proclamation demands an end to any and all government involvement in education: "Government must be prohibited from compelling school funding, attendance, and curriculum." Morris cited *The Ron Paul Survival Report*, which in 1993 counseled "Frightened Americans" (frightened, that is, of the federal government) on how to move their wealth out of the country, recommending books on the subject, and noting that—for the truly frightened who also happen to be truly loaded—Peruvian citizenship could be purchased, for a mere twenty-five grand.

Most recently, the Morris campaign has been running a televi-

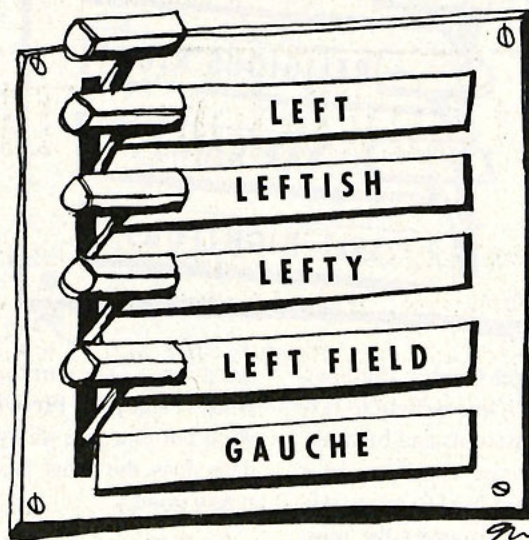
sion ad featuring Ron Paul, 1998 Libertarian presidential candidate, speaking to a NORML convention (the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws), where he advocated the abolition of anti-drug laws. "If we want to get rid of the drug dealer," says Paul, "let's get rid of the drug dealer by getting rid of all the drug laws." (Paul's own attack ads have described Morris as a greedy attorney who sues widows out of their life savings.)

Paul has responded to Morris' attacks, not very convincingly, by accusing him of taking Paul's past statements "out of context," and that Paul's real message is simply that the federal government is too big and too expensive, and that most federal laws and programs—whether they concern the economy, education, or drugs—would be

better and more efficiently handled at the state or local level. As that response indicates, despite his long career as a right-wing polemicist, this time around Paul has been running a fairly soft campaign, content to recite what have become mainstream Republican mantras—lower taxes, no gun control, term limits, abolition of the Department of Education—and to let the Morris campaign spend its energies reading up on his old newsletters. Paul may well believe that the Morris strategy will backfire—in the primary, the hapless Laughlin also hit him hard for his libertarian attitudes towards drugs—or even that Morris is doing him a favor by indirectly disseminating his more outrageous doctrines for him. "The whole Peruvian passport thing was in response to terrorism,

like the Achille Lauro incident," Paul told the *Observer*, "when it seemed that having a second passport might save your life....In fact, when Morris brought it up, people were calling me, asking where they could buy the books." (The Achille Lauro incident, when terrorists seized a cruise ship and murdered a Jewish-American passenger, occurred in 1985. Paul published his warnings to "frightened Americans" in 1993.)

What is more curious about Paul's current brand of hystero-libertarianism is how easily it slides into what has become the Republican mainstream. With the exception of his stand on the legalization of drugs—a position occasionally discussed in conservative journals, but never permitted to leak into law-and-order Republican campaigns—Paul's opposition to the IRS, gun control, the U.N., the N.E.A., foreign aid, affirmative action, abortion, welfare, etc. etc., might as well be excerpted from the Republican



THE NOTION THAT IN PAUL'S CAPITALIST NEVER-NEVER LAND, ONLY THOSE WITH PROPERTY—LOTS OF PROPERTY—WILL HAVE RIGHTS, CANNOT SHATTER THE LIBERTARIAN DREAM OF ENTREPRENEURIAL EMANCIPATION FROM THE AWKWARD, CLUMSY, AND NECESSARY BUSINESS OF COMMUNITY AND SELF-GOVERNMENT.

platform or Bob Dole's stump speeches. Where Paul departs from Republican orthodoxy—as when he attacks (in very general terms) corporate welfare, or questions the wisdom of anti-drug laws—is when he becomes most interesting. On the drug question, for example, Lefty Morris has put himself in the curious position of standing to the “right” of Ron Paul—calling for more border guards, more funding for school anti-drug propaganda (D.A.R.E.) programs, and asking specifically for an F.B.I. office in Victoria. The latter is more pork barrel than drug policy, but it's also a vivid illustration of the Democratic Party trying to outflank the Republican right by standing on its own head.

Thus far, this is a campaign with little to say about foreign policy, but there too Paul has been interesting in the past—probably the only contemporary Republican, in a throwback to the old isolationist days, to oppose the “War Party” in Congress. In public, he's been confining himself to attacks on the U.N. and American intervention in Bosnia, but he told the *Observer* he opposes U.S. policy in Iraq as well—and not for the conventional Republican reason that we didn't attack Hussein hard enough. In his writings, Paul has

condemned the military “pursuit of empire,” specifically as represented by George Bush's Gulf War, and subsequent international interventions, including the current Clinton debacle: “We should not be involved,” Paul says, “in fomenting revolution in Iraq.”

Paul is a monetarist and a property-rights absolutist, believing fervently that the gold standard and the abolition of government will usher in a new golden age of personal freedom and universal prosperity. Asked how the environment, for example, might be protected in the entire absence of government regulation, he answers inevitably, “Property rights. If you pollute, just as if you dump garbage on my property, you're violating my property rights.” And in the absence of government, who enforces property rights? “I can call the garbage police.” How will he pay for the “garbage police”? “Sales tax.” We are on a roll of blissful economic abstraction, and the notion that in Paul's capitalist never-never land, only those with property—lots of property—will have rights, cannot shatter the libertarian dream of entrepreneurial

See “District 14,” page 25

The 5th: Two Candidates, Three Judges

BY MICHAEL KING

The most important factor in Texas' 5th District Congressional race might well be the undeclared candidates—i.e., the Republican federal judges who recently redrew the district to the disadvantage of the Democrats. Having ruled unconstitutional the neighboring 30th District (of Democrat Eddie Bernice Johnson), the judges tinkered with the 5th just enough to reduce its Democratic majority from 55 percent to 52 percent.

This would matter less if the incumbent, fourteen-year Congressman John Bryant, were running for re-election. Instead the relatively unknown Democrat who would succeed him, John Pouland, finds himself running uphill against Pete Sessions, the right-wing Republican who has been dogging Bryant long enough to make himself a district-wide name. Pouland, a lawyer, is a long-time Democratic activist (former Chairman of the Dallas County Democratic Party) who most recently worked as the Executive Director of the Texas General Services Commission and as a Regional Administrator for the U.S. General Services Administration. Sessions, perhaps best known as the son of former FBI Director William Sessions, was a District Manager for Southwestern Bell (he retired, at 37 years of age, in 1993), and has been the Vice President for Public Policy for the National Center for Policy Analysis, a conservative think-tank.

For Pouland, the question seems to be whether he can overcome

his relative obscurity quickly enough to compensate for Sessions' higher name-recognition; for Sessions, whether his hard-right campaign, which nearly upended Bryant in the Republicans' watershed 1994 election, can be revived to capture a district traditionally more Democratic than the state as a whole.

Pouland himself is predictably confident, resting his hopes on the apparent resurgence of the Democratic Party in the wake of Bill Clinton's big national lead. “I don't have as much name I.D. as my opponent,” Pouland told the *Observer*, “but fortunately I'm running in a marginally Democratic district in a better than marginally Democratic year.” With congressional campaigns just getting underway, Pouland says his own polls—when the voters are made familiar with his record and positions—are encouraging. “I'll say this: in a poll where people are given information about [Sessions'] positions and mine, I beat him by ten points,” Pouland said. He added that Bill Clinton, running roughly even in Texas, is currently six points ahead in the district. Sessions' campaign says their own polls show their candidate with a comfortable lead, and they point

to national press handicapping the 5th District as one likely to fall to the Republicans in 1996. (Charles Cook, writing recently in Washington's *Roll Call*, described the Democratic claim on Texas' 5th and 12th Districts as "history.")

The judicial redistricting also created "special elections," open to all comers. But Pouland's chances recently received a boost when Democrat William Foster, defeated in the Democratic primary, who had registered to run again, instead withdrew and endorsed Pouland. That left only two candidates in the race, and eliminated the possibility of Democrats splitting their votes or a December runoff. Pouland and Sessions will face each other directly over the political future of the 5th District. However, by eliminating straight-ticket voting in the special elections they created, the federal judges also provided a likely advantage to Republicans running in traditionally Democratic East Texas.

Thus far, the campaign rhetoric has been mostly unremarkable, as reflected in an eye-glazing recent headline, "Candidates for 5th District seat favor balancing federal budget." Pressed a bit, the candidates are eager to make distinctions. Pouland says the crucial question is "how we balance the budget—whose ox gets gored." He has opposed corporate welfare and tax loopholes for the wealthy, and he emphasizes his differences with the current Republican Congress. "My opponent supported the Gingrich budget," said Pouland, "that would increase out-of-pocket Medicare costs as well as premiums for seniors, and would cut education funding, and would provide a tax cut for some Americans who don't need it." Pouland says he wants to "share the pain" of balancing the budget, "and not make it a political payback for special interest groups.... That's the most fundamental division between us right now." "Sessions," adds Pouland, "believes in supply-side economics, and I do not. He supports Newt Gingrich and I do not. He's pro-life, and I'm pro-choice." Stealing a bit of Republican thunder, Pouland has also come out strongly in favor of term limits—including term limits for federal judges—and declares that if elected, he will stay in Congress no longer than six years. Of his opponent he says simply, "He's going to be Bob Dole on taxes, and Pat Buchanan on immigration."

In his 1994 campaign, Sessions ran hard against the Clinton health care plan, attacked Bryant viciously for supporting what Sessions described as "the gay rights agenda," and signed on with Dick Armey's 17-percent flat tax. This year he's taking his cues from the Dole/Kemp campaign, calling the Dole 15-percent tax cut "the number one issue."

"The most important thing the people of this district need," Sessions told the *Observer*, "is a tax cut, so that the money that they've worked for, they can put back in their own pocket.... A tax cut is what we need..." Asked if that also meant that he supported—as a way of getting more money into the pockets of voters—an increase in the minimum wage, Sessions answered, "I am absolutely opposed to an increase in the minimum wage." More remarkable than his position was his reasoning: "These people [of the 5th district] don't make the minimum wage. These people get up and go to

work every day, and have jobs they've been working for many, many years. The number of people who make the minimum wage is not predominant in the district."

By way of elaboration, Sessions described his campaign as addressed to "middle-class" Texans, although his definition of the term seemed moral rather than economic: "'Middle-class' is what we're talking about. I define middle-class as a husband and wife, children. I would define the middle-class as people who get up and go to work every day. I would define the middle-class as somebody who has a hope and dream of trying to make himself better, and willing to go to work and get it done." (For the record, the per-capita annual income of Sessions' district is just over \$11,000; the median household income is \$24,000.)

Sessions says he is not concerned that the Dole tax-cut plan has not as yet resulted in a dramatic improvement in Dole's own popularity: "The people in this district support the tax cut, whether or not they like Dole or Clinton." He believes the federal budget, even with the tax cut, can be balanced with additional cuts in expenditures. Sessions said he would abolish the Departments of Education and Commerce, because "they've outlived their usefulness and their mission. We don't need somebody in Washington telling Texans what to do." Ditto for immigration reform: saying he supports Governor Bush on the issue, Sessions said many legal immigrants, who expect to be hurt by the pending withdrawal of federal assistance, will be helped by the Republicans, because "many of them work for a living, and they need a tax cut."

Saying only that he supports "fair trade—what's good for [other countries] is good for us," Sessions declined to take a position on NAFTA or GATT. Similarly, although he has campaigned as "pro-life," Sessions was reluctant to say he was opposed to all abortions. "I'm on the right side of the ledger, which is to say I'm pro-life.... The issues relating to abortion are this: am I for parental notification—that answer is yes; I am not for funding abortions with tax-payer dollars; and I would vote that partial-birth or late-term abortions should not be legal."

Sessions' campaign position was considerably enhanced by the judicial redrawing of his district, but he says the federal courts—which otherwise should not do so—only intervened after the Legislature refused to act. He says he supports the idea of minority representation in Congress. "I have a strong desire for minority representation; my wife is Hispanic, and she understands the need of free people to have free elections. The bottom line is that I do not believe, and she does not believe, and most Texans do not believe, that lines should be drawn based upon the color of a person's skin."

The outcome of the 5th District election may well be crucial to the Democrats' hopes of regaining a majority in the House. Party spokesman Joe Cutbirth calls the race a "bellwether" for the party's grassroots campaign in Texas, and says Pouland's experience as a "retail campaigner" will make the difference. "We feel very comfortable," said Cutbirth, "in saying that John's going to win that seat." □

"MY OPPONENT SUPPORTED THE GINGRICH BUDGET," SAID POULAND, "THAT WOULD INCREASE OUT-OF-POCKET MEDICARE COSTS AS WELL AS PREMIUMS FOR SENIORS, AND WOULD CUT EDUCATION FUNDING, AND WOULD PROVIDE A TAX CUT FOR SOME AMERICANS WHO DON'T NEED IT."

Alliances in Public Schools

BY GEOFF RIPS

And Moses went to the mountaintop. And it consisted of 600 parents, teachers and principals advocating a new kind of school reform. And they burned with a fire that would not be consumed. And it was good.

On September 20, Texas Education Commissioner Mike Moses met in Austin with 600 leaders of the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF) from around the state to discuss the recent past of the Alliance School initiative created by IAF organizations and negotiate its future state funding.

The Alliance Schools form a network of public schools in Texas. This network was created by the community organizations of the IAF network in 1992, in an effort to restructure low-performing schools serving low-income and working families across the state. In a few short years, 93 percent of the 89 Alliance Schools showed significant improvement in performance on the state's standardized TAAS test.

This was accomplished not by drilling children to pass the test. It was achieved by instituting a sea-change in the schools' very culture. Through door-to-door organizing, house meetings, block meetings, parish and school meetings, IAF leaders made many of these schools the centers of their communities and, in so doing, put the communities at the center of change in their schools.

The Austin meeting with Moses—"From here, he looks like a healthy Boris Yeltsin," said one man at the back of the room—was put together by the Texas IAF organizations, as part of their ongoing dialogue with state leaders about continuing and increasing the state's Alliance School funding (called the TEA "Investment Capital Fund") during the next legislative session.

In 1992, then-TEA Commissioner Skip Meno provided a small amount of discretionary funding to aid several schools in the process of restructuring—a process initiated by IAF leaders in their communities.

In 1993, the IAF leaders worked with Meno to convince the legislature to provide \$2 million in extra funds for low-performing schools that had become highly motivated to change dramatically through direct parent and community involvement. The designated Alliance schools received extra money for teacher and parent training and supplies. Just as important, the Alliance schools won agreement from the Texas Education Agency to relax certain restrictions in order to provide more flexibility in their school transformation efforts.

In 1995, the IAF leaders returned to the legislature with many more Alliance schools, looking for increased funding. They came away with \$5 million for the current biennium. From this pool, the education commissioner makes grants to schools that meet certain criteria. (Not all schools receiving the funds are associated with the IAF Alliance School project.) These include a commitment to campus deregulation and restructuring in partnership with school staff, parents, community and business leaders, TEA, school dis-



▲ Mike Moses

Alan Pogue

trict officials and a non-profit, community-based organization designed to develop and organize parents and community leaders over school accountability.

With more than ninety Alliance schools organized around the state, IAF is meeting with Moses and key legislative leaders to maintain and increase fund-

ing for the coming biennium. The IAF organizations in San Antonio, Dallas, Houston, the Rio Grande Valley, Austin, Eagle Pass/Del Rio, El Paso, Fort Bend County, Fort Worth, and the Golden Triangle anticipate doubling the number of schools with which they will be working over the next two years.

Prior to a "kitchen-table" meeting between Moses and 120 leaders from these organizations to discuss future funding, a number of leaders from among the 600 assembled came forward to testify to the importance of the funding and the progress their restructuring initiatives have brought to their schools.

Rosemary Maciel, principal of Valley View Elementary in Pharr, said her school serves 832 students, all bused in from the *colonias*. Conventional wisdom would not give students with that kind of portfolio much chance of success on the state's TAAS test. But with the restructuring undertaken as an Alliance school, Maciel reported that the students' test scores improved 30 percent and the school was recognized for its achievement by TEA. She told Moses the Alliance funding was also being used for adult literacy classes at the school to enable parents to help their children with school work.

Priscilla Martinez, principal of Lamar Middle School in McAllen, reported that the seemingly impenetrable problem of middle school achievement has been tackled head-on at four Alliance middle schools in McAllen. These schools showed a 20 percent jump in math scores over the past year.

In addition to improved test scores, Valley Interfaith leader Father Alfonso Guevara pointed out that, "seeing parents and teachers

THE IAF ORGANIZATIONS AND ALLIANCE SCHOOLS TEACH PARENTS, TEACHERS, AND PRINCIPALS TO RELATE TO EACH OTHER IN NEW WAYS, TO RESTRUCTURE THEIR RELATIONSHIPS BEFORE RESTRUCTURING THE SCHOOLS THEY CARE ABOUT.

working together to improve schools, our children are getting the best civics lesson ever."

An area superintendent from the Houston ISD came to the meeting to testify that several of the Alliance schools in Houston had won the Mayor's Award for Excellence, with one school being cited by TEA as exemplary. He also credited the Metropolitan Organization (the IAF organization in Houston) with forcing local officials to create alcohol-free zones around schools and creating an opportunity for the city to put health clinics in several Houston schools.

Catherine St. John, a teacher at B. H. Macon Elementary in Dallas, told Moses, "In 16 years of teaching, nothing has given me the energy like working with Dallas Area Interfaith [DAI] Alliance School parents and other teachers. They are teaching us to hold ourselves accountable."

Pamela Craddock, a parent of students at Dallas's Elishu M. Pease Elementary, said, "Dallas Area Interfaith taught us as parents that we have power." Her mother, Ruby Scott, a grandmother of Pease Elementary students and Dallas Interfaith leader, then got up to talk about "the importance of parents, teachers, and school administrators coming together for one common cause. When schools come together as Alliance schools, then we see education reform."

Zavala Elementary of East Austin is a flagship Alliance school. Over 90 percent of its students are low-income. Its turnaround is legendary, moving from 66th of sixty-six Austin elementaries in test score ranking in 1991, to a place among Austin's elementary elite. Zavala principal Loretta Caro reported that only 7 percent of the school's students passed the TAAS writing test in 1991. In 1996, 93 percent passed. Working closely with former Zavala principal Al Mindiz-Melton, Austin Interfaith organized parents and community members to play a key role in completely restructuring the campus.

The Zavala experience is mirrored in a number of Alliance schools. In Dallas, Roosevelt High School is experiencing a similar turnaround. Once one of the lowest performing schools in Dallas, over a three-year period Roosevelt has moved into the top quarter of Dallas schools. Where only 15 percent of the students once passed the TAAS math test, 70 percent passed last year. Principal Melvin Traylor testified that the Alliance School initiative led to complete restructuring of the school and the Alliance funding provided for teacher and parent training to achieve the changes. Twenty-five core team members meet daily for lunch at the school to provide continual evaluation and planning. They are also working with the elementary and middle schools that feed into Roosevelt.

In Eagle Pass, Alliance School parents and the IAF Border Organization fought to open a clinic in their elementary school. In Port Arthur, the parents and teachers of DeQueen Elementary used part of their Alliance funding to put together an after-school program combining academics, the arts, and newspaper and science clubs. Dunbar Elementary in Beaumont saw a 56 percent increase in writing scores between 1995 and 1996. Barbara Truesdale, principal of Ysleta Middle School, talked about her school's 28 percent jump in math scores and 27 percent jump in writing scores in the past year, calling Alliance affiliation "the chief factor in improving TAAS scores."

What's the secret? Hard work. A commitment to building a new school culture that includes parents as full partners in the process. Continual education of parents, teachers, principals and other community members. The Alliance schools learn from each other. Parents and teachers at Roosevelt High traveled to San Antonio to learn about successful teaching strategies used there. Every year the Texas Interfaith Education Fund (allied with the IAF) sponsors a statewide education conference, bringing in one thousand parents and teachers to meet with cutting-edge educators, including Howard Gardner, Ted Sizer, Debra Meier, and Robert Moses.

But most important, the IAF organizations and Alliance Schools teach parents, teachers, and principals to relate to each other in new ways, to restructure their relationships before restructuring the schools they care about. Paula Miller, a Fort Worth ISD administrator, told Moses that the Alliance schools "are giving us a new vision of parent involvement. How often do you hear about 850 parents gathering when they're not angry to discuss school issues?"

There is more. As Ernesto Cortes, Jr., founder and Southwest Regional Director of the IAF, explains it in his paper, "The IAF and Education Reform," the process "is about developing people's confidence in their own competence. It is central to any good teaching of adults or children. It is a process which stimulates curiosity, inquiry, judgment, and mastery of new areas of understanding. It recognizes that people can only learn confidence through competent participation: we learn by doing.... This kind of action enables citizens to open schools, change the nature of schools, create job training programs...and by so doing re-create and re-organize the way in which people, networks of relationships, and institutions operate."

Or, as Alicia Solis of El Paso testified (in Spanish), "Through my relationship with the Alliance Schools, my ex-husband doesn't recognize this woman who can sit at a table and discuss issues with the city council, the school board, the mayor, and the Texas Education Commissioner."

Was Mike Moses convinced? "What you have done in organizing parents and teachers is create powerful relationships," he told the meeting. "Powerful relationships precede powerful performance. The Alliance Schools have built powerful relationships, and that has produced the kinds of successes we've been hearing about today."

Did he commit himself to asking for increased funding for the Alliance Schools? "I want public schools to be successful," he said. "And I want to thank you for building a constituency for public schools.... I obviously support you because I'm here. We will continue to be advocates for funding education programs, particularly for the Alliance Schools. We will do all we can and continue to be an advocate for your work."

Is that a yes? It was a firm non-commitment. He said he would rather under-promise and over-deliver than the reverse. But this legislative cycle is still young. There will be more meetings with the leaders of the Alliance Schools. □

Former Observer editor Geoff Rips is an unabashed admirer of the Alliance School's work to restructure public schools.

Snooze Along With Me...

Gee, just four weeks to go until Election Day, and you can feel the excitement sweeping the nation. BobDole—whose wife calls him BobDole, whose friends call him BobDole and who calls himself BobDole—created a thrill recently by pitching off a dais, fortunately without hurting himself. But so far, that's been it for electric moments. I'm waiting for President Clinton to smash a guitar on-stage to get our attention.

The election seems to be having a salutary effect on members of Congress; they've just rushed to require health insurers to pay for at least a forty-eight-hour hospital stay for new mothers and their babies. And House Speaker Newt Gingrich, who is always whining about Clinton's stealing Republican ideas, has come out foursquare against allowing those convicted of spousal abuse to buy guns—one of Clinton's Chicago proposals. And of course we're all sleeping more soundly at night since the Defense of Marriage Act (sponsored by Representative Bob Barr, who is himself not with his first wife) was passed, forbidding marriage between those of the same sex. God only knows what that might have led to—maybe people getting married more than once.

On the negative side, the House, where physicians are still somewhat scarce, decided to go into medical practice in order to outlaw late-term abortions. Members put their numerous years of medical training together and decided when the health and life of mothers they have never seen is or is not threatened. A most impressive performance.

Then, we had a great environmental moment when the Prez declared a nice chunk of southern Utah to be a national monument. Anyone who has ever been to the red rock country of Utah (and if you haven't, you should go) knows how unique and fabulous it is. But that set off a firestorm of protest from Utahans, one of who announced it was like living in Russia, where the government can just come in and grab your land. Senator Orrin Hatch, showing his deep grasp of property law, declared it the biggest land grab in history.

Excuse me, but whose land are we talking about here? As it happens, the land in question belongs to the people of the United States. We own it. It is not owned by the

foreign mining companies that want to turn it into a giant coal pit.

OK, if we can't find a burning domestic issue, how about foreign involvements? Anyone understand why we've been bombing Iraq again? On a scale of one to ten, how much hope have we got for Bosnia? These are ripe and juicy questions and might even lend some heat to our presidential campaign, except for the one thing: even though no one is sure that what we're doing is working, no one has any better ideas, either. You don't exactly see a chorus of knowledgeable experts leaping up and chanting, "Hey, we know just what to do about Saddam Hussein!" And if anyone knew just what to do about Bosnia, we'd have given him the Nobel Peace Prize by now.

So is this it? A contentless, vacuous campaign dominated by vigorous discussion of school uniforms and teen smoking? Some pundit opined the other day that a campaign of modest initiatives is just what the country is in the mood for, on account of we don't trust government much anymore and so don't want to see it try anything significant. Like social and economic justice.

I have a modest proposal along the lines of "Physician, heal thyself." Let's give our elected representatives a ringy-dingy and suggest that they start by...cleaning up politics. Natty notion, eh?

You may recall that the last time we checked in on campaign finance reform, in June a year ago, Clinton and Gingrich rose on a stage in New Hampshire and shook hands on the idea of a bipartisan commission to reform campaign financing. But almost immediately, the two fell out after Clinton released a draft proposal to the public. This caused Gingrich's office to have a cow: Anybody knows you don't do a deal like that in public (I guess because it's none of the public's busi-

ness), and Clinton was just doing a cheap publicity stunt, and Gingrich could not be expected to deal with someone who worked in bad faith like that. And that was the end of that chapter.

Personally, I believe in the revolutionary principle that the American people are not fools. It has not actually escaped our notice that corporate special-interest money is pouring into the presidential campaigns like Niagara, through the back door known as "soft money." And as this "soft money" piles up, so do the favors owed by our politicians to such generous benefactors as Archer-Daniels-Midland, the trial lawyers, the insurance companies, the banks, Wall Street, the steel industry, the auto manufacturers, the sugar growers, etc., ad nauseam.

What's really sickening is that we get ripped off for so much by these penny-ante contributions. Oh, I grant you that it seems like a lot of dough when you look at it in the aggregate—something like \$350 million in soft money this year alone. But look what the special interests get in return: they give millions, but they get back billions. Billions of dollars of special tax breaks, billions of dollars in subsidies, billions of dollars in tariff protections and price supports. And, of course, every billion dollars some corporate donor gets away with in tax relief and corporate welfare leaves the rest of us with an additional billion to pay in taxes so we can build schools, pay teachers, repair bridges and roads, keep health clinics open, provide Head Start for poor kids, and so on. The politicians get millions for their campaigns, and we get stuck with billions in taxes. It's nuts!

It's actually worth getting excited about. □

Molly Ivins, a former Observer editor, is a columnist for the Fort Worth Star-Telegram.

War for Oil?

In our government's latest Iraq Attack, both President Bill Clinton and GOP nominee Bob Dole were unified in their public declarations that the military strike was necessary to "humiliate Saddam Hussein."

Well, Saddam is a bloodthirsty dictator and is certifiably bull-goose crazy, but it seems to me that we hardly humiliated him. Indeed, it's arguable that he won, since he got what he wanted in the factional fight among the Kurds, and his prestige in the Mideast as a stand-up guy against "Yankee Imperialism" was enhanced.

Meanwhile, what did we gain? Our country is now even more entangled in the ancient feuds between Iraqis, Kurds, Iranians, Turks and a host of other nations we can't even find on the map. Our prestige in the mideast went down, and—did you notice?—not one single ally joined with us in the action.

So why did the U.S. reach out to slap Saddam at this particular time? Politics, of course, since the move helps Clinton look strong as commander-in-chief. But, there's another big factor that the establishment media didn't cover: oil.

Call me a cynic, but isn't it a curious coincidence that this is the very month that Iraq was to be allowed by the United Nations to start shipping 700,000 barrels a day of their crude oil into the international pipelines?

This flow of Iraqi crude was not altogether welcomed by the world's oil giants, who have been enjoying high gasoline and other fuel prices because of relatively tight supplies. More oil could have lowered prices at the pump...but we'll never know, because, after our Iraq Attack, no Iraqi oil will be allowed to flow.

Analysts now say our gasoline, diesel and heating oil will cost more this fall. The real winners are the oil companies—stock prices for Texaco are up \$3, Exxon is up \$2.25, Mobil is up \$2.37.

PARTIES FOR SALE

Twenty-six million dollars.

That's how much major corporations spent last month to sponsor, host and otherwise BUY the political conventions of the two big parties. While the TV cameras kept panning

from one state delegation to another on the convention floor, the only delegations that really mattered were ones you never saw on TV—the ones from Big Oil, Tobacco, Insurance, Banks and all the rest, ensconced way up in the sky boxes, wining and dining the political bigshots of both parties.

This year's conventions were a political grabfest where corporate executives and lobbyists could gain access to—and favors from—Washington's top officials.

How plugged in was big business? Direct to the presidential nominees themselves. A lobbyist whose firm represents such companies as Budweiser, ABC/Disney and Chrysler, was Bob Dole's senior convention advisor in San Diego. The co-chair of Bill Clinton's Chicago convention is a partner in a corporate firm that handles Sears Roebuck, Quaker Oats and Sara Lee. Indeed, Clinton's campaign manager comes straight out of a lobbying firm that represents Bell-Atlantic, Lockheed and Sony. Every one of these special interests have recently received tax loopholes, subsidies and regulatory advantages from Washington, and they want more, which is why they are partying so gaily with the parties.

AT&T, for example, was a \$100,000 sponsor of both the Republican and Democratic bashes. Is the phone giant merely being patriotic? Hardly. It's working both sides of the political coin because, next year, the fat, juicy contract to provide phone service to the entire federal government is up for grabs, and AT&T wants to be on the good side of whichever party is in charge of awarding that baby.

You see, after the party is over, all the fat-cat sponsors cash in.

MISINFORMATION HIGHWAY

The corrections column of a small newspaper noted: "Our paper carried the notice that Oscar Hoffnagle is a defective on the police force. Mr. Hoffnagle is, of course, a detective on the police farce."

Well, it doesn't take a detective to realize that the job-creation claims of razzle-dazzle companies racing down the Information Superhighway are more than defective—they're a farce. Yet, everyone from Bill Gates to Bill Clinton insists that American workers have to get with it, get educated and retrained so you can keep up with America's growing computer industry.

Outfits like Microsoft and Intel are being hailed on Wall Street and in Washington as "The New Titans" of American industry—our economic hope for the future. Two decades ago, most of these computer whizzes didn't even exist, but today the combined value of their stock is greater than GM, Ford, and several other "old-fashioned" manufacturing giants.

The new Information Age companies created a fresh batch of millionaires and billionaires, but don't expect much for you working stiffs. Not only do the rank-and-file jobs in this industry offer only mediocre-to-miserly pay, very few jobs of any kind are created by these hot new Titans. Microsoft and Intel, the two superstars of the industry, employ only 48,000 people. Ford employs more than three times that, and GM—with 350,000 U.S. employees—hires seven times that.

Microsoft and Intel's few jobs are a cruel joke in an economy that hires 114 million people and has more than 12 million more unemployed. Indeed, computer processing and electronics manufacturing combined offer barely two and a half million jobs, and both the number of those jobs and their pay are on the decline.

This is our future? It's not high-tech hype we need from industry and politicians, it's good jobs at good pay. □

Jim Hightower is a former Observer editor and Texas Agriculture Commissioner. His new nationwide radio show broadcasts daily from the Chat & Chew Cafe in Austin, Texas, where he continues to preach the populist gospel.

READERSHIP SURVEY

Help us shape the *Texas Observer* of the future. Tell us what you think. Tell us what you like and don't like, where you want us to go or not go. Each issue of the *Texas Observer* brings information and opinions from us to you. Now we would like to hear from you. We've made a few changes in the *Observer* lately and are planning to make a few more. We want to make the *Observer* better and you are our most important voice. Please take a few moments to complete this questionnaire and drop in in the mail or simply fax it to us. By mail: *Texas Observer*, 307 W. 7th St., Austin, TX 78701; By fax: 512-474-1175

1. Are you a subscriber?

- Yes No

2. How long have you been subscribing? _____

3. If you are not a subscriber, where did you obtain this issue?

- Newsstand/Bookstore
 From a friend
 Received sample in mail
 Library
 Other _____

4. Considering all the times you pick it up, how much total time do you spend reading a particular issue?

- Less than 15 minutes
 15-29 minutes
 30-59 minutes
 1 hour or longer

5. How often do you contribute to a conversation something you read in the *Texas Observer*?

- Frequently
 Occasionally
 Seldom
 Never

6. As a subscriber, do you intend to renew your subscription?

- Yes No Undecided

7. If you do not subscribe, why not?

8. Would you like to see more or less coverage of the following areas:

	More	Less
National politics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
State politics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
State legislature	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Labor issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Environmental issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Feminist issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Military issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consumer rights issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Agricultural industry	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Civil rights	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Individual profiles	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Investigative journalism	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Union news	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Minority issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Government	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Foreign business	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Foreign politics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Individual columns	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Urban issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Rural issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Corporate influence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Literature/Fiction	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Poetry	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Film reviews	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Music reviews	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Theatre reviews	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

9. If you were the editor of the *Texas Observer*, what changes, if any, would you make in the paper?

READERSHIP SURVEY

10. Please tell us how often you read the following departments or subjects and how you would rate them.

Departments	Always	Usually	Occasionally	Never	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
Cover story	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Features	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Dialogue	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Editorials	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Molly Ivins	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Jim Hightower	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
James Galbraith	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
John Ross on Mexico	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Media Criticism	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Book reviews	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Poetry	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Film reviews	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Music reviews	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Theatre reviews	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Afterword	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Political Intelligence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Subjects	Always	Usually	Occasionally	Never	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
National politics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
State politics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Legislative coverage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Labor/Union news	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Environment	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Civil rights	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Minority issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consumer rights	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Investigative journalism	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Literature	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Foreign issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Corporate influence	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

11. Please tell us in your own words why you read the *Texas Observer*.

12. If you had to attach a political label to yourself, which one of these would come closest to describing you?

- Ultra conservative
- Conservative
- Moderate
- Liberal
- Radical
- Republican
- Democrat
- Populist
- Socialist
- Other _____

13. Do you consider yourself an activist?

- Yes No

In what area (politics, environment, etc.)?

14. What is your age?

- Under 20 50-59
- 20-29 60-69
- 30-39 Over 70
- 40-49

15. What is your household annual income?

- Less than \$20,000
- \$20,000-\$39,999
- \$40,000-\$59,999
- \$60,000-\$89,999
- More than \$90,000

16. What other publications do you subscribe to:

- The Nation
- The Progressive
- Mother Jones
-
-

16. Where do you live? (City, State)

Post-Tenure Review Blues

Like the Austin American-Statesman, I get more conservative as the issue gets closer to home. I back the socialists in Europe, the liberals in Washington, and Democrats in Texas.

But at the University where I work, I favor discipline, hard work, tough standards, and existing institutions.

Such as tenure, for instance.

The Texas Legislature, in the person of Mt. Pleasant Republican Senator Bill Ratliff, is causing worry and turmoil with a proposal that would require something called annual "post-tenure review." Ratliff's idea would place responsibility for this review in the hands of faculty and students. University of Texas Chancellor Bill Cunningham has made a counter-offer, whose essence is a five-year review cycle, with a process involving faculty and, if needed, outside referees.

It is not as though post-tenure review is a new or even a threatening idea. In my school, we prepare three reports each year. We are evaluated each year, by a committee of faculty peers, and eligibility for pay increases depends on ranking. The difference is that under the new proposals there would be the possibility of dismissal if the review process goes badly two years running. Technically, this would not be the end of tenure. But it would look a lot like the beginning of the end.

There are good liberal reasons to oppose this. Tenure protects academic freedom. It discourages extremist political and religious groups from ganging up on professors. And it is part of what makes for a serious university in America—if you care about recruiting top faculty to Texas in the future.

And the fact is, tenure is not mainly a liberal institution, but mainly a conservative one. It protects quality and preserves a hierarchy of authority. Right-thinking conservatives, who really care about standards, discipline, traditional values, and teaching, should speak up against proposals that might compromise the tenure system. Here's why.

First, tenure is efficient. Professors love security and work for lower salaries than we might have earned elsewhere—in exchange for secure jobs. But this is only part of it. Faculty also work harder because of

tenure. My colleagues do a great many tedious university chores, for no extra pay, chores that are neither research nor teaching and that they could neglect without penalty. They do it because they expect to be around for a long time, because collegial relations matter to them, because they feel loyal to the institution, and because they don't think the paid staff would do it right. In this way, tenure saves big money, for the University and for the State of Texas.

Absent tenure, universities would have to pay top faculty the way investment banks pay top traders. And they would get the same kind of loyalty and volunteerism—none at all.

The suggestion that student evaluations should become part of the formal basis for dismissal of professors sounds like throwback from the days of the counterculture. But if our state's leading conservatives force this one through, the consequence is plain. Grading will be corrupted. Professors who feel at risk, for whatever reason, will make a simple bargain with their students: an "A" for an "A". Faculty with principles, who refuse to offer that bargain, will be taking a risk with their careers.

Teaching will suffer for another reason: competition for assignments. Small optional seminars get better student ratings than required intro classes. Professors with tenure (and clout) will be even less willing to teach those large and risky classes than they are now.

A five-year renewal process, for its part, will weaken existing standards for that initial tenure decision. Right now, tenure is tough to get. Junior faculty are given an intensive review after five or six years of teaching and research, with detailed reports from peers inside and outside the University. In weak cases, one often hears the argument that a struggling young faculty member will surely become productive, "if only" he or she is given a few more years. The prospect of a five-year review will make this apologetic argument stronger.

Periodic recertification presents another

problem: faculty likely won't cooperate with it. I would not sit on such committees; can you imagine doing this, and then leaving Texas for some other university, with such a thing on your record? Would any self-respecting professor outside the state of Texas agree to write post-tenure reviews of Texas faculty? I don't think so. Practically, the burden would fall on small groups of in-state collaborators. And who would collaborate? The frightened bunnies who themselves feel most at risk.

Do university faculties have poor performers on them? Of course. Can a university get rid of poor performers? The answer is yes, even if they are tenured. I have seen it happen. There is often an element of personal tragedy in such cases, and usually the humiliating formal procedures, which already exist, are not used. Dealing with such situations, preferably with tact and discretion, is what academic deans are hired to do. The pre-screening of colleagues for dismissal is not a proper role for faculty members; to make it a duty would poison the internal atmosphere in many departments.

Are there are ways to improve faculty performance? Yes: rigorous annual merit review is a very good thing. If such reviews are not already universal, the Legislature can insist on them. Student course evaluations are a spur to better teaching, particularly if they are published. University presidents should also hold academic deans and department chairs to account for the quality of the programs they manage.

But the ideas of making tenure conditional on annual reviews by faculty and students or on a five-year recertification are half-baked. Regents who really care about standards in Texas universities should send both proposals back to the drawing boards. And legislators who care about higher education in Texas should keep their powder dry for the time being. □

James K. Galbraith won the Texas Excellence in Teaching Award in 1990.

Coming of Age

Women who must wait
for years
or tasks
to be accomplished
live in rooms made dusk
by dark
and paint-flecked shutters.
We pace along the bands
of sun
and shade,
our candle flames
drawn out
paint streaks
like tattered battle banners.
At night we loose
our citron-scented hair
then knot it tightly
to our napes each day.
We gnaw to shards
the tiny bones
of quetzal, lark and parrot
to glue to reliquaries.
On spider looms we weave
their drifts of feathers
to dream like Icarus
on narrow beds.

The words we trace
on brittle
moth-wing pages
sift silence
on our mouths
and dust
upon our fingertips.

We measure magnitudes of stars
in tortoise-mottled mirrors
while ivy tendrils
force apart
the stones
that dam
our drying river's source.

Along the Acequia

She appeared one June
Dragging a rope-tied rock
Her earth-kite she said.
In her red dress, she sat
Dangling her legs in the irrigation
ditch.
She shook her fist at passing cars
Combed her hair with a forked stick
Ate wind-fall apricots
And blew cottonwood fluff from her
lap.

By the time I kicked off my shoes
The apricot trees were leafless
And she had gone,
After washing her feet in harvest
water,
Her earth-kite held lightly.

—MARTHA BLACK JORDAN

Martha Black Jordan was born in Mexico City, where she still lives. She has read at the Council of the Americas and St. Mark's Poetry Place in New York; at the *Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes* in San Miguel de Allende; and on radio in Washington, D.C. Her translations and poems have been published widely, appearing in such journals as the University of Hawaii's *Manoa*, *California Quarterly*, and *Revista R y D Mexico*, as well as in the popular volume *If I Had My Life to Live Over I Would Pick More Daisies* (Papier Mâché Press). She is the author of a bilingual

book of poetry, *Manos en Agua/Hands in Water* from Ediciones El Tucán de Virginia.

These poems consider the lives of women in language both deliberate and haunting—women contained or set apart, grounded women who shake their fists, and find their own ways to distill the silences surrounding them. In an earlier poem, she wrote: "We are fluent in the language of distance." Her work continues to probe deep parts of lives which sometimes feel too remote.

—Naomi Shihab Nye

The Smoked and the Sublime

Meditatin' the Meaning of Barbecue

BY PAUL JENNINGS

SMOKESTACK LIGHTNING:

Adventures in the Heart of Barbecue Country.

By Lolis Eric Elie.

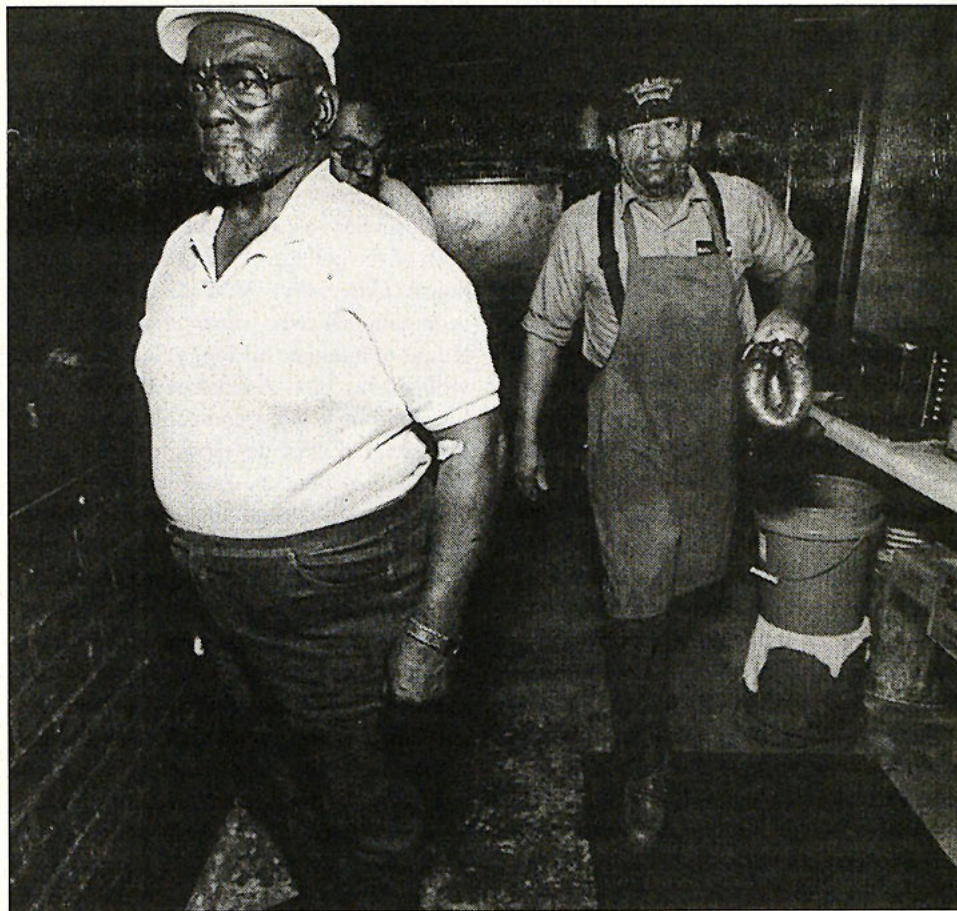
Photographs by Frank Stewart.

Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

224 pages. \$35.00.

A slab of ribs is a miserable cut of meat—tiny slivers of flesh concealed in a mass of bones and muscle, difficult to season, easy to burn, almost more trouble than it's worth. The distribution of the various parts of a slaughtered pig has always been a pretty good indicator of where a particular group of people stood in the general scheme of things, and ribs have usually been reserved for those occupying the low-rent district of the food chain. In the South, that meant mostly Negroes. In other areas of the country, meat packing plants sometimes just threw them away, and more than one famous barbecue place has its roots in the willingness of some cash-strapped entrepreneur to sift through the scrap barrels found outside the factory gate.

The transformation of the rib into a mouth-watering delicacy is thus a tribute to the genius and perseverance of generations of African-American cooks. And the recognition of this genius turns out to have some surprising social consequences. A really good ribs joint is likely to be the most integrated restaurant in town, since, as the *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* notes, "more than any other cuisine, barbecue draws the whole of southern society." The experienced barbecue traveler, the *Encyclopedia* goes on to point out, is always on the lookout for parking lots where pickups are parked next to expensive imports—the object being to find the one place in town where people from all races and income-tax brackets eat together. Barbecue, along with gospel music and the blues, remains one of the most accessible gateways to African-American culture



▲ Bob Wells, Bob's Smokehouse in San Antonio

Frank Stewart

for non-blacks; and for many white adolescent males in small southern towns, going across the tracks for good barbecue remains a minor rite of passage.

In Texas, the story of barbecue becomes more complex and subtle. Here the great Southern barbecue tradition runs smack into the descendants of German and Czech sausage makers in Central Texas, who turned the scraps from their butcher shops into a profitable sideline. From South Texas comes a whole new palette of spices. Traveling west across Texas, the change becomes apparent as soon as you cross Highway 77. The heat in the sauce moves up a couple of notches, beef and sausage start appearing on the menu, and the pitmen are just as likely to be white or His-

panic as black.

By the time you hit Kreuz Market in Lockhart (mysteriously misspelled in the book as "Kreutz") and sit down to a piece of melt-in-your-mouth beef served on butcher paper along with saltine crackers, a fresh avocado and chilies, and a Big Red soda pop, you realize you are dealing with something new, something that has emerged out of a welter of different, often conflicting, cultures and transcended all of them—a rare work of culinary art designed to satisfy not only the intellectual faculties of the human spirit, but the digestive ones as well.

Lolis Eric Elie, author of *Smokestack Lightning: Adventures in the Heart of Barbecue Country*, is a true student of barbecue, in the sense that he starts off knowing almost

nothing about the subject. Elie, a native of New Orleans, columnist for the *Times-Picayune*, and former road manager for Wynton Marsalis' band, confesses that his inspiration for the book did not have its origins in a lifelong passion for barbecue. "I was looking for some other way to earn my living," Elie tells us in his introduction, "preferably one that required no résumé, no job application, and no regular hours." Together with Frank Stewart, a photographer who was traveling with the Marsalis band at the time, Elie started pitching the idea of an upmarket barbecue book to publishers. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, in its infinite wisdom, bit.

The suspicion that this might turn out to be a frat-boy tour of barbecue country is not exactly dispelled by the coffee-table format of the book or its postmodern typography. As the pair cruise around the country outfitted with a beat-up Volvo and a Motel Six budget, Stewart snaps the pictures (which by themselves make the book worth buying) while Elie provides a learned commentary that includes, for those readers who may have dozed off during their freshman course in anthropology, a brief summary of Claude Levi-Strauss' *The Raw and the Cooked*.

Stewart, on the other hand, takes on the role of the wisecracking and irreverent sidekick, and he gets most of the good lines in the book. One running gag is Stewart's insistence that none of the barbecue they sample is as good as that found in the southside Chicago neighborhood where he grew up. About halfway through the book they finally make it to Chicago where, the interested reader should note, barbecue is usually served through a barrier of plexiglass separating the server from customer—although it is far from clear as to which of the two parties is in greater need of protection.

Predictably, the visit to Chicago is one disaster after another: the legendary ribs turn out to be dry, a famous pitman is now in the pesticide business, the Volvo is towed by the Chicago police, and Elie is humiliated at a local dance club by his inept dancing ("Move like you're having sex," his dancing partner tells him in a moment of frustration). The book teeters briefly on the edge of a precipice: Stewart becomes entangled by ghosts from his adolescent past, Elie retreats into a deep funk, and the reader is just about fed up with the both of them.

But after a while, *Smokestack Lightning* starts to grow on you. The fact of the matter is that barbecue is interesting in ways that other categories of American food—cheeseburgers, to take one example—are not. Its varieties run from South Texas *barbacoa* to the snoot sandwiches of East St. Louis, and Elie guides us through all these places with an elegant, if sometimes emotionally detached, style. He wisely provides plenty of space for his cast of characters to speak for themselves. It's quite a crew: Remus Powers, Ph.B. (Philosopher of Barbecue), founder and dean of the college of Barbecue for Greasehouse University; Maurice Bessinger, a segregationist who once argued that attempts to integrate his Piggy Park restaurant violated his First Amendment rights since his religious beliefs "compel him to oppose any integration of the races whatever"; Joe Wynn, an Alabaman transplanted to South Carolina, who thought that region's famous mustard sauce "looks like baby shit" and opened his own barbecue place in Spartanburg in order "to bring some sanity and respect to the word 'barbecue.'" Elie even provides a surprisingly sympathetic portrait of those middle-class, middle-aged, middle-everything white guys with \$2,000 smokers who spend their weekends at barbecue contests trying to duplicate the results produced on a regular basis by your average Central Texas meat market.

For the most part, though, the people we meet are plain-spoken, hard-working, over-all-wearing men (and a few women) who suffer few illusions about the rewards awaiting those willing to spend a lifetime in

pursuit of this stubborn craft. Short-timers and quick-buck artists need not apply. As a result, the future of barbecue remains uncertain, despite its current popularity. Creating good barbecue remains a time-consuming, back-breaking chore that has so far resisted all efforts of the corporate types to break the process down into franchisable components that can be carried out by teenagers working for the minimum wage—witness the late and unlamented McRib sandwich. Still, the changes are coming: a recent survey revealed that 40 percent of the commercial barbecue places in South Carolina now use electric cookers. Elie seems to take these kinds of statistics a little too personally, and concludes his epilogue by pondering on his "ironic longing for something that has passed."

Frankly, reflections on the irony of barbecue can only take you so far. At some point, all books of this genre have to deal with the one really big question: where can you get some good barbecue? Elie takes a break from his elegiac musings long enough to provide a fairly respectable set of recommendations, at least as far as Texas is concerned. If you can afford only one high-priced barbecue guide book this season, pick this one up, glance at the pictures, and then go to the back of the book and start figuring out how you can work your way down the list of places in every important barbecue state.

Even South Carolina. □

Freelance writer Paul Jennings regularly rides the barbecue trail from Houston to Austin, and knows whereof he eats.

JENNINGS' TEXAS BARBECUE HALL OF FAME

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208 S. Commerce
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(512) 398-2361

Louie Mueller Barbecue
206 W. 2nd Street
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(512) 352-6206

New Zion Missionary Baptist Church
2601 Montgomery Road
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Southside Market
1212 Hwy 290
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Williams Smoke House
5903 Wheatley
Houston
(713) 680-8409

Note: Not all of these places are listed in Smokestack Lightning, and the list reflects the reviewer's well-known prejudices in both food and ambiance [i.e., funky]. —P.J.

Into the Factory of Death

A Vegetarian Artist Looks Upon Modern Slaughter

BY AMANDA TOERING

DEAD MEAT.

By Sue Coe.

Intro. by Alexander Cockburn.

Four Walls Eight Windows.

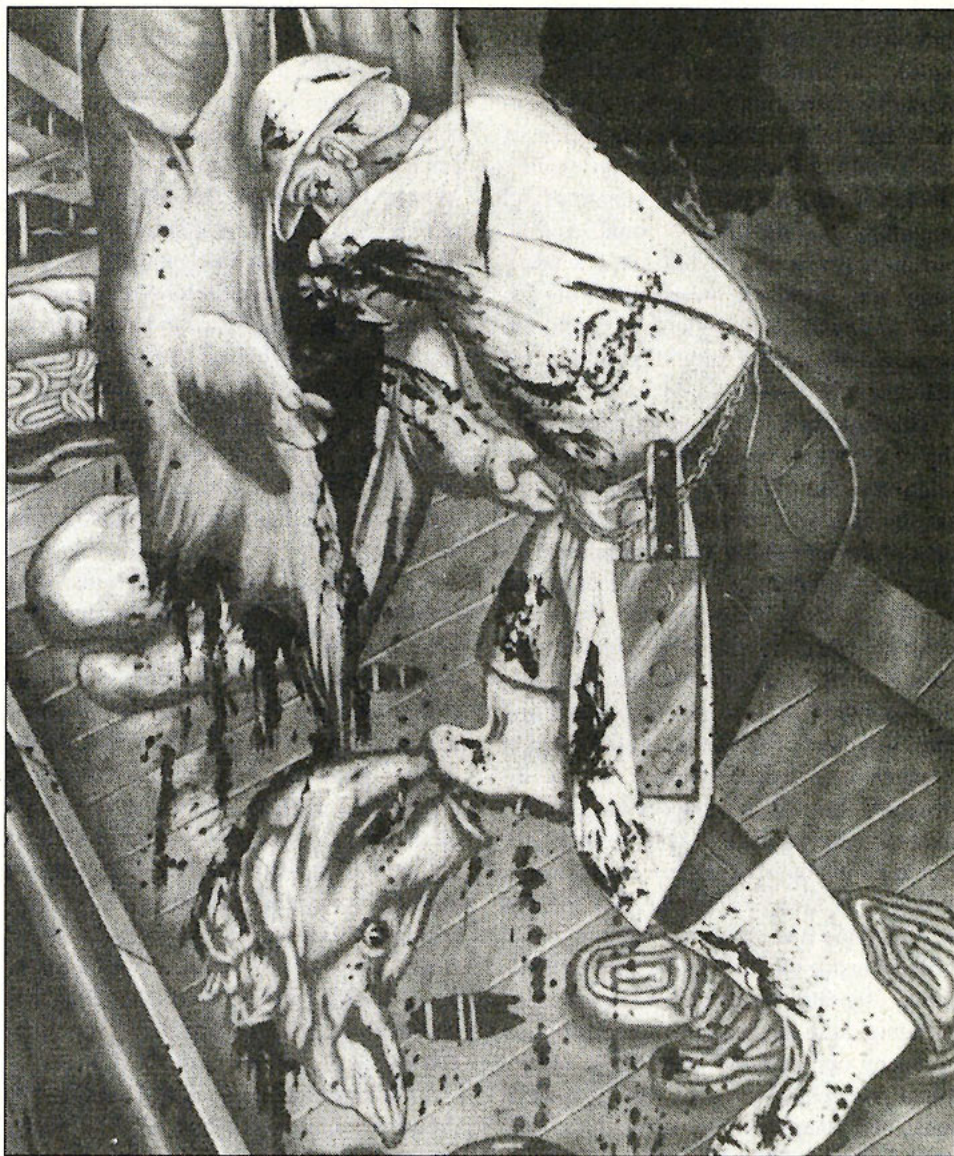
136 pages. \$40.00.

I am not a preachy vegetarian. Meat has not touched my plate or palate for some years, but I do dine willingly and nonjudgmentally with carnivorous companions. I don't proselytize while they chew, nor do I moo at the table. This may soon change.

In my case, vegetarianism was simply a peaceful, principled, meat-free existence. Like any good "-ism," it required more time spent pondering than acting. Now, thanks to British artist Sue Coe's aptly titled *Dead Meat*, my down pillows squawk with cries of vengeance, and my sole pair of leather shoes clomps on tile floors like cloven hooves.

Coe—also a vegetarian—spent several years making the killing-floor circuit among slaughterhouses in the U.S. and England. The result is this unnerving but impressive collection of graphically stark sketches, accompanied by Coe's own journalistic observations. (Alexander Cockburn's informative, and extremely thorough, introductory essay on the history of the meat industry spans the first thirty-five pages of the book.)

The premise of *Dead Meat* is quite literal. Coe captures in her sketches a blood-bathed world that is gloomy, dark and surrealistic. Her characters—shrieking animals, sometimes half-dead, and the manic line workers who shadow them—would feel right at home on the film sets of Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* or Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*. Coe's figures have sad, unbelieving eyes and detailed frowns. Misery—of the animals and the workers—is a constant. Heads hang, tongues hang, limbs hang, carcasses hang. Coe approaches her *mise-en-scène* with little delicacy; no concession is granted to the potential churning stomachs of squeamish



"Cut and Run," from *Dead Meat*

Sue Coe

readers like myself. Those of us who, at the sight of something icky, have intestinal reactions akin to an unbalanced washing machine in the middle of a spin cycle, are a captive, if mesmerized, audience.

Dead Meat might easily rank with Mapplethorpe and Madonna as a quick fix for the voyeuristic, but its many layers cannot be tamed by a cursory thumb-through. Coe's drawings are intricate, detailed, and

complex. Hectic and crowded slaughterhouse scenes are captured in candid stills, like frames of a film, often with bloody subplots unfolding in the background.

For example, "Cut and Run" depicts a slaughterhouse worker, wearing a butcher knife in a holster at his hip, elbow-deep in the abdomen of a hog suspended from a chain. The hog's severed head falls to the floor as the man plucks out the animal's in-

nards; other animals' entrails lie at his feet. Interestingly, the slaughterman casts no shadow on the wall behind him. His victim does.

Not all of Coe's sketches are this straightforwardly grotesque. "Modern Man Followed by the Ghosts of His Meat" depicts a contemporary figure shadowed on a dark night by the spirits of his own sustenance, long since digested and forgotten. While he despairingly clutches a McDonald's bag to his chest, the phantoms of meals past (pigs, goats, sheep, cattle, chickens) trail behind him, sneering and laughing at some darkly comic karmic punchline. In a nearby butcher's window hang less fortunate incarnations of this motley crew. A lone piglet peers from the back seat of a nearby car with a vanity plate that reads: "MEAT."

This kind of unobtrusive, emotional tweaking of a reader's conscience is, thankfully, relatively rare in Coe's work. No one should register surprise when Coe addresses the undeniable fact that animals arrive at a slaughterhouse alive and leave it in chunks. Indeed, arguments on this very point are what one invariably expects from an animal-rights activist who has spent a little too much of her free time observing mass slaughter. But Coe does little outright evangelizing, instead focusing on the inevitable—but often unnecessarily—cruel treatment to which live animals are subjected during their stays at the meat motels. While it is always apparent that she has very definite and strong opinions on what goes on inside the plants, Coe uses detailed, frank, sensate observations rather than pleading, stop-the-madness rhetoric to accompany her sketches. (Coe spent several years researching the book. She persuaded meat and slaughterhouse companies, who were understandably reluctant, to allow her entry into the factories to see how the animals are actually killed and processed. On the occasions when company officials refused, with the help of other workers she posed as a prospective worker herself.)

Coe's descriptions of cattle with eye infections, sheep with exposed intestines, pigs with unnatural growths, are almost disturbingly matter-of-fact. In one instance, she describes the killing of a young calf, or "veal": "One stunned veal swings towards us, hanging upside down, chained by the

legs. I have seen a lot of animals not properly stunned before throat cutting, but this one is stunned. It's a misconception that animals are dead at this stage. It's important that the heart pumps the blood out of the animal, once its throat has been cut....The tongue hangs out of the mouth. The man cuts the carotid artery. Because of the weight, this hole becomes elongated, looking like the throat has been cut, but it has not. The blood comes out like a red glass rod, a moving, solid rod. The next stunned veal is waiting to come down the line. I am thankful not to be splattered with blood, but notice my shoes are covered, and I am standing by slivers of flesh. The veal then swings along the line, with a slight push, and the blood continues to drip. The veals wait in line to be decapitated and to have their hooves cut off by power tools. As I watch, I see one veal that is about to be decapitated—alive. Although almost completely drained of blood, this veal has come out of the stun, which means there was not enough electricity or the...bolt did not hit the right point."

Hamburger-chomping Americans cling loyally to the sentimental notion that their meat matures in green valleys or in fields awash in amber waves of grain, with plenty of open acreage to roam and romp and play happy little livestock games. *These* are the blissful idiots targeted by Sue Coe's pen, not the line workers with the visible blood on their hands, whose only ulterior motives are to support their families. Coe makes a point of noting that the consumer with the bottomless wallet, who believes that good steaks are born in shrink-wrapped packages, allows the horrors of the slaughterhouses to continue by not asking questions and not caring to look closer.

E. coli, Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease—the dreaded human equivalent of "Mad Cow" disease—and other food-borne illnesses are serious threats these days. (More recently, the recent American Cancer Society warned against a diet heavy in animal fats—especially red meat.) Although neither Mad Cow nor CJD have been detected in the U.S. so far, the fact that U.S. agribusinesses have for years relied upon ruminant feeding (the practice of feeding livestock a feed mix that contains byproducts of other—possibly infected—animals) makes the consumption of animal products a tricky proposition. The meat industry re-

cently volunteered to temporarily ban ruminant feeding, but this is small reassurance in light of the average eight- to ten-year incubation period of CJD.

The threat of such diseases can also be greatly increased by unsafe slaughtering practices, and by the use of diseased, crippled and generally unhealthy animals for feedstock—a point Coe would have surely made had the mad cow threat been recognized during her slaughterhouse stint. (For those whose first instinct is to trust frequent claims that U.S. butchering practices are as safe as they could be: note that few advances in meat inspection have been made since the Food and Drug Act of 1906, and there is strong political and industry pressure to weaken even these safeguards.)

Sue Coe nobly refrains from emphasizing health concerns as her primary argument; she acknowledges these questions, but the intestinal well-being of meat eaters does not motivate her crusade. Still, anyone who is not moved toward more careful and conscientious carnage consumption by Coe's bloody sketches would do well to adopt Alexander Cockburn's reasoning: never eat a dead animal unless you know how well it lived.

As for me: I'll stick to carrots. □

Freelance writer Amanda Toering is also the Circulation Manager for the Observer.

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"District 14," from page 11

emancipation from the awkward, clumsy, and necessary business of community and self-government.

Beneath the headline battle over drug laws and welfare, little of this actually serious debate will find its way into the 14th District campaign. Instead, we will be treated to comic vignettes like the momentary coupling of Ron Paul and Steve Forbes, the flat-tax buccaneer, who showed up at the Austin Marriot last month to endorse Paul as well as Teresa Doggett, the Republican sacrificial lamb to her namesake, Lloyd, in the 10th District. As Teresa proposed her own homemade flat tax and waved a spine in the air, challenging her opponent to a debate—"he's not afraid of a woman, is he?"—Forbes beamed his goofy beam, and Ron Paul cleared his throat and said he had no objection to a flat tax, as long as it was a *low* flat tax. "We need to get rid of the capital gains tax, and the in-

heritance tax," said Paul. "We have to get rid of the idea that the government somehow has a *right to our* money." The audience, full of well-heeled Forbes partisans—none of whom appeared to be hurting in the pocketbook, any more than the trust-fund millionaire and his friends at the podium—applauded enthusiastically, and went forth happily armed with the patriotic notion that they could have a country without a government, or at least any government that they had to *pay* for.

So it will be tax cuts vs. drug police in the 14th District.

Beyond these mutually garish headline opinions, more useful for soundbites than public policy, Lefty Morris' commonsensical defense of public education, campaign finance reform, and *proven* government programs like Social Security, Medicare, student loans and so on, begin to make him sound like a wild-eyed radical in the present electoral context of knee-jerk, anti-government cynicism. Campaigning at the

opening of a new Democratic Party headquarters in LaGrange, Morris quietly defended his party's record, but acknowledged that the alienation of many of Americans from any sense of identification with their government had made it easier for the nuttier ideas of Ron Paul to flourish.

"We have to work at remaining a party, and a government, of *all* the people." Morris said. "We have to regain the confidence of the people." □

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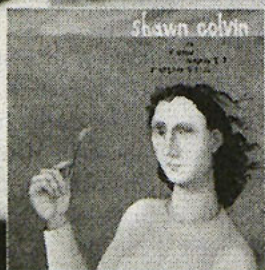
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From Sherlock To Kinky

BY LARS EIGNER

*THE LOVE SONG OF
J. EDGAR HOOVER.*

By Kinky Friedman.
Simon & Schuster.
238 pages. \$23.00.

Here is another load of kosher *corn noir* from the foremost Texas Jewboy, Kinky Friedman, and just the thing for reading aloud to adversaries who are recovering from abdominal surgery. While it is not really possible to send up a genre that is already pretty much a parody of itself, that hasn't stopped the Kinkster's list of detective novels from getting near the double digits, any more than it has stopped him from issuing alleged country music albums. While the novels lack the tender lyrical quality of musical offerings such as "Wild Man from Borneo" and the penetrating psychological insight of "The Ballad of Charles Whitman," they are nonetheless worth a shot if you are hoping to bust a stitch.

The novels detail the exploits of private investigator Kinky Friedman, a person bearing an uncanny resemblance to the author, with the exception of being brain-damaged enough to persist in living in New York City. The Bandera Home for the Bewildered appears to have sunk all its advertising budget into product placement in Friedman's novels, and that is probably where you have been (or out of state, which amounts to the same thing), if you really have no idea who Kinky Friedman is. But if you are like me, you probably lost track of the Kinkster and a lot of your underwear some time in the Seventies, and when the fog lifted about 1983 things just weren't the same. Evidently somewhere in there the Kinkster slipped off to New York, no doubt to get to the bottom of great Talmudic mysteries—such as whether there is such a thing as a *pareve* enchilada—and took up

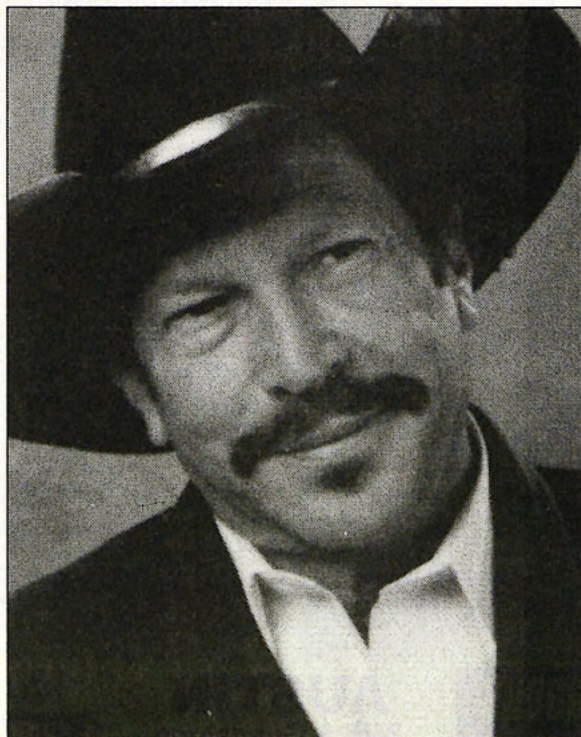
residence in Greenwich Village, where the detective portion of his being remains.

The result is a strange brew of genres—like Ernie Kovacs directs "Hee-Haw," or the Judds meet the Sex Pistols—and it turns out for once to be really funny. The Kinkster is a two-minute-egg, tact-challenged private eye with a lesbian dance class in the attic and a considerable amount of boiler-plate shtick that can pretty much be cut-and-pasted from one volume to the next. This is not really so bad, depending upon whether one prefers one's gags running, or at a brisk walking pace. In *The Love Song Of J. Edgar Hoover*, the leggy blonde appears on page fourteen, and her problem has just got to be one of three things: cheating husband, missing husband, falsely-accused husband. She's got to have a husband, because in spite of the Kinkster's every effort to let us know that there is more to him than meets the eye in baggy trousers, he doesn't get the girls. From there it is only a matter of time until little green men, the men in black, and the singular British sauce come into it—not to forget the German sausage-stuffing machine

that dares not speak its name.

While there is little doubt that Kinkster the author would like to pay *fromage* to Sherlock Holmes, the world of cheesy detectives moves on as much as the real world. You're about to get around to learning the *lambada* just when everything has turned into *macarena* (which, by the way, seems like it ought to have something to do with braiding wall-hangings, or else some place where Ralph the Swimming Pig has got a new gig). If you try to do Holmes, you get detectives à la Mickey Spillane played by Jack Nicholson or Humphrey Bogart; and if you are not careful, one day you go to the mirror and you are looking Tom Selleck or Telly Savalas in the eye. Actually it seems possible that these are the kind of books Holmes himself would have written—if Watson had not always been hiding the tincture of Andes and the syringe. Holmes had his Persian slipper, and the Kinkster has a puppet head on the refrigerator. The puppet head contains the key to the door downstairs and is thrown down to clients when they call. This lets them know the kind of operation they are dealing with, if they haven't caught a clue from the neighborhood. And for all the New York sophistication that tossing keys down entails, it is very clear that the Kinkster cannot shake his Texas roots, as evidenced by his Texas-shaped ashtray and the bull's horn he drinks from as he tries to get to the worm at the bottom of the Jameson's bottle.

I am always a little wary of going too much into the plot of detective novels, but in this case the reader has little trouble staying ahead of Kinky the detective, although Friedman the author is ahead of both. Detective novels never have been the locked-room sort of puzzles that Christie and Sayers made of the mystery novel. You can go right back to Conan Doyle, and see how few of the Holmes pieces really are whodunits, and a lot turns—so far as the reader's attention span goes—on whether one finds the company enjoyable. You gotta be-



▲ Kinky Friedman

Jody Rhoden

lieve that someone who names bodily functions after disgraced former presidents has got his heart in the right place, even if you don't generally find sex and race jokes funny, or are allergic to cigar smoke.

Kinky is, as the old Texas saying goes, "muy meshuga," and you have to take it that way or leave it. In fact, the really scary stuff about this particular volume is that the further out the Kinkster gets, the more the book seems like yesterday's headlines. Perhaps in an attempt to make his wild plot twists plausible, the Kinkster relates his version of what the FBI really was doing to Martin Luther King, Jr. It is the same story I have heard told in leftist circles for years—but this is the first place I have seen it explicitly in

print. The FBI does not like to lose and does not like to be wrong. Ah, but those were all things that happened in the bad old Hoover days, right? It is not like the FBI, in this day and age, would do anything like continuing to follow and harass the one person in America that we can be certain did not have anything to do with the Atlanta pipebomb, right?

Of course, the fact that they are out to get you doesn't mean that you aren't paranoid, so just for the record, I wish to assure the Kinkster that the little Aryan kids who kick the back of your seat on airplanes do it to everyone—or at least they do it also to fags who are only Jewish by surgery.

Judging the whims of the American consuming public is a chancy thing. I for one don't see why songs like "Get Your Bis-

cuits in the Oven and Get Your Buns in Bed," or "They Ain't Makin' Jews like Jesus Anymore" didn't ring the bell at the top of the charts, or why Kinky doesn't try to make it on the "Have your credit card ready" video circuit like Ray Stevens. Maybe people would never be sure whether it was Frank Zappa or Groucho Marx—at three in the morning I sometimes can't tell Stevens from the AbFlex ads. But these novels seem to be doing the Slim Whitman thing in Europe—although I don't know how you translate a line like "Beauty is in the eye of the beerholder"—and it looks like the Kinkster is about to break out at last. □

Lars Eighner's recent books are Gay Cosmos and Pawn to Queen Four.

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“Che It Out Loud!”

El Vez en El Valle: Rockin' Revolution in Harlingen

BY ABEL SALAS

The box office window of the Harlingen Municipal Auditorium sports a poster of the man himself: a low-slung pompadour and the pencil-thin mustache mark an almost pretty face, thin and bordering on gaunt, nothing at all like the baby-fat-faced face for which Elvis is fondly remembered.

He is *El Vez*: the Latino Elvis, the ultimate Elvis impersonator. The poster pictures him, in subtle sepia tones, with an automatic rifle held in both hands, arms outstretched above his head, a pair of stylized *bandolero* bullet belts crisscrossing his chest. He has come to Harlingen on the far south leg of what's being billed as the “Rock & Revolution Tour '96.” Also on the playbill are the “lovely Elvettes” and the “Memphis Mariachis.”

El Vez, the Elvettes, and the Mariachis have arrived on the weekend preceding the annual commemoration of Mexican Independence Day, *el diez y seis*—the 16th of September. For several weeks, radio spots and ads in the Valley dailies have hyped the arrival of El Vez, in honor of the holiday.

Inside the auditorium, the El Vez entourage is full tilt into an anthem in memory of farmworker and labor organizer César Chávez. Dressed in a camouflage-colored, bell-bottomed pant suit, El Vez enters, flanked by two stunning go-go girls carrying plastic sub-machine guns—the Elvettes, back-up singers who are also “masters of martial art and expert guerrilla warriors,” according to the running commentary provided in an exaggerated, kitschy accent by “el Rey” himself.

Behind the King and his fetching bodyguards are the Memphis Mariachis: two guitar players and a percussionist, also wearing camouflage jump suits. On either side of the stage hang two bright red banners, bearing the United Farm Workers



▲ *El Vez*

eagle, and El Vez also sports the emblem, wrapped high around his left arm.

The raucous anthem finally culminates in a rollicking chant: “César Chávez! César Chávez! César Chávez!” Draped behind the stage, back-lit by glowing mauve and pastel lighting effects, is the largest Mexican flag I have ever seen indoors—as large as the one furled and unfurled daily by the Mexican Army in Mexico City’s *Zócalo*.

As the show begins, most of what seems to be a fairly thin crowd is silent. They seem at a loss at first, unsure how to respond either to the brazen camp or the not-so-subtle political overtones.

Harlingen is a small city, perhaps half an hour from the border. And though the population is primarily Mexican-American,

I’ve never had the sense that the town glories in its ethnicity. Elementary schools are, for the most part, named for people like Jim Bowie, Davy Crockett, Ben Milam, Sam Houston, and William B. Travis, all notorious Mexican-haters. Growing up in that sort of a context, I imagine, might not make me too gung-ho about being brown.

These are my thoughts as El Vez prepares to unveil himself yet again, amid a cloud of smoke and the sound of helicopters. The stage lights dim as the Elvettes circle the stage, shining flashlights into the air and toward the audience, heightening the tension in anticipation of another sighting.

When he appears this time, El Vez is more sedate. He’s dropped the camouflage, and is voguing in red patent-leather pants, his

fingernails painted jet black. He carries a towel for those hyper-sweat moments that leave him drenched and the audience, on a good night, aching for more. Gauging the crowd, El Vez sits down on the stairs leading down from the stage into the audience. Assuming an intimate, story-telling posture, he introduces the next tune with an anecdote, recounted in the cheesy Mexican accent.

"When I was a *leetle* Elvis impersonator back in Monterrey, I was *thees* big. But with my hair, I was *thees* big," he jokes. The audience responds warmly.

The act is vintage Robert Lopéz. Lopéz is a hybrid product of the 1980s Los Angeles punk underground, a fertile time both for performance art and Chicano rock. And "El Vez"—Lopéz' alter ego—is a stylized, glamrock incarnation of both the former and the latter. Using a deft combination of camp, humor, an admirable voice and rock solid musicians, El Vez has become a cult icon—while deftly acknowledging in his act the very real and pressing issues he sees confronting Latinos in the U.S.

After one more of many costume changes, El Vez returns with what he likes to call the "El Vez Disco Medley": "Heartbreak Hotel" becomes "Quetzalcoatl," and "In the Ghetto" becomes "En el Barrio." These are followed by "You Ain't Nothin' but a Chihuahua" and even a twisted version of the macarena. For sheer pomp and spectacle, the show rivals a musical ice capade. El Vez wears velcro pants and several shirts in metallic lamé. A quick flick of the hand and his pants are on the floor. Voilà!—another pair underneath and a new color to match the next shirt.

The climax comes during El Vez' sexy strip number, executed behind a cloth scrim held up by the Elvettes, who have added depth and harmony throughout with back-up vocals and stage presence to spare. On the white sheet held up before the drum kit is the unforgettable portrait of Che Guevara. Through the scrim El Vez, in silhouette, performs a tease, finally reappearing in skin-tight leggings color-coded green, white and red. The Mexican eagle, a serpent in its beak and perched on cactus, is printed visibly on his pants, just over the crotch. Launching into a parody-cum-march, El Vez calls up the Old South of the

Memphis Elvis—but with a comic difference. Strains of "Oh, I wish I were in the land of cotton..." drift in over the speakers. The Elvettes are suddenly operatic, with "Glory, glory hallelujah!"

"Since Elvis was from the South and he did this song, I'm going to perform my own version because I'm from the South too—way south, south of the border. But since I live in Los Angeles, it's called "Look Away, Look Away, East L.A." As he marches across the stage, El Vez waves patriotically yet another Mexican flag from side to side.

For an encore—which the crowd enthusiastically demands—El Vez returns with a political take on the Bachman Turner Overdrive anthem, "Takin' Care of Business." The band has donned red t-shirts bearing a black, Che-like mug of El Vez himself. Above the portrait, the shirts exhort, "CHE IT OUT LOUD."

In this version, the BTO rocker has become a celebratory reminder that immigrants don't come into this country to take somebody else's jobs. By and large, they do the work that no one else is willing to do. "Takin' care of business everyday! Takin' care of business, *orale!*"

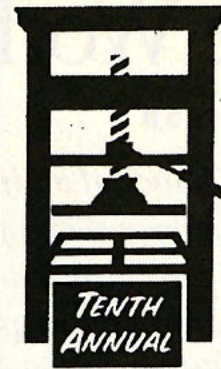
As the crowd heads for the lobby, I ask an Hispanic member of the audience what he thought of the show.

"It wasn't what I expected, but it was good. Different. I mean I'm a real Elvis fan. But I liked it," he concludes.

Others, non-Latinos, haven't waited around for the encore. They numbered perhaps no more than ten, and appeared to be Winter Texans or local retirees, complete with Bermuda shorts and those ubiquitous Hawaiian print shirts. If they were looking for yet another version of the "real Elvis," they left disappointed.

But the real *El Vez* is in the lobby, signing autographs and selling CDs (the newest is titled, "G. I. Ay, Ay! Blues"). Photos, commemorative stamps, locks of hair, the enterprise is pretty exhaustive. The small crowd gathered near the merchandise table seems honestly sold, on something they hadn't expected to see. □

Austinite Abel Salas recently ended an exile on the border to work in Houston for the band La Mafia.



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As the World Sparkles...

BY KAREN OLSSON

(Scene i: The Chance of a Lifetime. Early morning, September 17. Commerce & Navarro Streets, San Antonio. On three sides of the intersection, people linger around the Pik Nik grocery and wait for the bus. On the fourth side is a large, beige, fortress-style building, with a long line of young women winding around its perimeter. Inside the building is the Planet Hollywood restaurant, where open auditions are being held for "Sunset Beach," a daytime soap opera produced by Aaron Spelling. The sky is grey. A light rain has just ended. The air is heavy with the smell of makeup. Enter OBSERVER REPORTER...)

REPORTER IS FRANTICALLY STRUGGLING TO FINISH HER BANANA AS SHE HURRIES TOWARD LINE OF SOAP OPERA HOPEFULS, WHIPS OUT NOTEBOOK.

REPORTER: (BEGINS ASKING QUESTIONS TO WOMEN IN LINE) ...So, why are you here?

WOMAN #1: (WHAT A DUMB QUESTION!) To try out for Aaron Spelling's new TV show! It's a great opportunity...

WOMAN #2: The chance of a lifetime!

WOMAN #3: A chance to get on TV!

WOMAN #1: (RUSTLING THROUGH DUFFEL BAG FULL OF MAKEUP) I've done some modeling...

WOMAN #2: ...a few commercials

WOMAN #1: ...and musical theater.

WOMAN #3: My agent sent me down here.

WOMAN #1: (PULLING NEWSPAPER CLIPPINGS OUT OF FILOFAX) This is me when I won the Universal Royalty Texas Pageant.

WOMAN #2: These are my head shots...

REPORTER: (BACKING AWAY) Um, neat...

WOMEN: (IN UNISON, WAVING PHOTOS) ...it's the chance of a lifetime!

REPORTER: (CHANGING SUBJECT) So what do you think they're looking for?

WOMAN #1: They said in the casting call, "attractive, physically fit...dynamic..."

WOMAN #2: You know, be unique,

have sparkle...you may or may not be their look. You never know—it's the *chance of a lifetime*...

REPORTER: (MUTTERS) Quit saying that!

WOMAN #2: Pardon?

REPORTER: Never mind...(TURNS TO BOUNCER STANDING BY THE DOOR) So what do you think of all this?

BOUNCER: (SHAKING HIS HEAD) You don't want to know...

REPORTER: No, really...

BOUNCER: I think this is...

(BUT BEFORE HE CAN FINISH HIS SENTENCE, OUT RUSHES PLANET HOLLYWOOD PR WOMAN, INDEX FINGER OUTSTRETCHED.)

P.H.P.R.W.: What did I tell you about speaking to the press!

(All present appear stricken with guilt and fear. Fadeout.)

(Scene ii: It's All About Sparkle. Inside Planet Hollywood. Leopard-print carpet, zebra-hide decor, potted palms. A baby carriage and a spaceman suit hang from the ceiling. Ten chairs are lined up to face a string of booths; behind the chairs the movie Sister Act is playing on a small screen—closeup on Whoopi Goldberg in a nun's habit. Standing by the booths are CASTING AGENT, a short, squat, gravelly-voiced woman with a cap pulled down over her head, and NBC REPRESENTATIVE, a thirtyish woman wearing jeans and a Sunset Beach t-shirt. As REPORTER sits down to watch, ten young hopefuls are ushered in from outside.)

CASTING AGENT: (PACING BACK AND FORTH) Come on in girls, where it's

cool and you can sit down. Life gets better in a hurry, doesn't it? (WOMEN LAUGH APPRECIATIVELY, BEAM AT CASTING AGENT.) Now, I want you all to stand up one by one and tell me your name and where you're from.

WOMAN #1: My name is Shelbi Jones and I was born and raised in Lubbock...

(Young hopefuls introduce themselves in turn, continue to beam. Afterward casting agent and NBC rep confer for approximately twenty seconds.)

CASTING AGENT: Well ladies, it's that simple. Now if you'll follow that man right there, he'll show you where to go... (POINTS TO MAN STANDING BY STAIRS, HOLDS BACK ONE PERSON FROM THE GROUP) You, come this way.

(The one woman is issued a script and assigned a time to read. The others are escorted out a door on the bottom floor and given plastic "Sunset Beach" visors as souvenirs. They stand outside, disgruntled. Meanwhile, back inside...)

REPORTER: ...But how do you pick that one girl out of ten?

NBC REP: We're looking for fresh new faces, for sparkle, dynamic personalities. Someone with a wholesome, healthy look.

REPORTER: (CONFUSED) Sparkle?

CASTING AGENT: Of course she has to be pretty, but beyond that it has to do with personality, a certain sparkle, a certain snap—it's just something you know. It's that sparkle.

REPORTER: (STILL CONFUSED) Huh, sparkle...

(DASHES INTO BATHROOM, MURMURING) ...sparkle... (LOOKS INTO MIRROR) ...do I have sparkle?

"OF COURSE SHE HAS TO BE PRETTY, BUT BEYOND THAT IT HAS TO DO WITH PERSONALITY, A CERTAIN SPARKLE, A CERTAIN SNAP—IT'S JUST SOMETHING YOU KNOW. IT'S THAT SPARKLE."

(OBVIOUSLY NOT)

...sparkle, sparkle....

(EMERGES FROM BATHROOM, SEES SECURITY GUARD) ...What do you think it is? What are they looking for?

SECURITY GUARD: Well, if you ask me it's mostly about looks and a good body.

(Fadeout.)

(Scene iii: Sparkle, Qu'est-ce Que C'est? Upstairs at Planet Hollywood. Spaceship theme room: portholes on the walls frame recessed display cases containing movie costumes; additional decorative objects include a motorcycle, a miniature train, and a very large egg. A man stands behind a video camera. Next to him are two script-readers, a man and a woman, while employees of the local NBC affiliate sit near the door drinking cappuccino and taking polaroid shots of each woman who auditions. OBSERVER REPORTER sits in a chair against the wall, still mystified by the selection process.

AUDITIONING WOMAN enters, trying to mask her nervousness with a "confident smile." NBC people take her photo and position her in front of the camera, attaching a microphone to her dress.)

MALE SCRIPT-READER: Ready?

AUDITIONING WOMAN: (GLANCING DOWN AT SCRIPT) I think so...

(WAITS FOR CUE, THEN BEGINS READING, IN AN UNFORTUNATELY NASAL VOICE, FROM "BILLY & CAITLIN AUDITION SCENE"...) Billy, I thought... I didn't know what to think. You stopped coming by, you didn't return my calls, I couldn't figure out what I'd done... What did I do?

READER/BILLY: Nothing...it wasn't you.

WOMAN/CAITLIN: Then what was it? I was worried sick...Why do I get the feeling I should still be worried?

READER/BILLY: It's...complicated.

WOMAN/CAITLIN: (IN THE SAME WHINY TWANG) Billy you're not...is this about telling me you don't love me anymore?

READER/BILLY: No, God, no...I just...

WOMAN/CAITLIN: It's another woman, isn't it?

is 11:30 a.m., and 410 women have been brought in so far.)

CASTING AGENT GIVES FAKE SMILE TO REPORTER. REPORTER RETURNS FAKE SMILE.

CASTING AGENT: (NODDING TO REPORTER) Have you got everything you need?

REPORTER: Oh, almost. Can I watch just a little longer?

CASTING AGENT: Well, as soon as you get everything, I need you to go, because I've had a lot of people wanting to watch this who I haven't let watch.

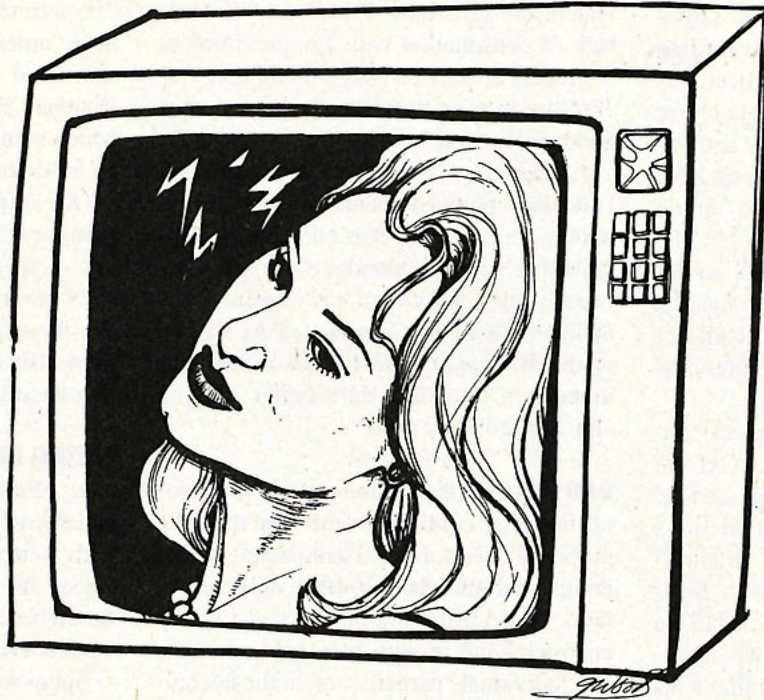
REPORTER: (UNDER HER BREATH) You're not...is this about telling me you don't love me anymore?

(Planet Hollywood PR rep hands reporter a visor as a parting gift. Reporter heads downstairs for the exit.)

MAN ON STAIRS: (MISTAKING REPORTER FOR AN AUDITIONER) See you in Hollywood!

(Reporter exits, clutching her visor, as the song "Ruthless People" blares from the speakers. Fadeout.)

Sparkly Observer writer Karen Olsson has written for Civilization, Washington's City Paper, and other publications.



(As they continue reading, REPORTER watches the video image on a small TV screen in front of the camera. She is struck by how much it looks like a real soap opera.)

REPORTER: (TO HERSELF) Amazing... But I still don't know what sparkle is...

READER/BILLY: This woman I was with?...She's...

WOMAN/CAITLIN: Oh, God. Pregnant?!

READER/BILLY: What?! No!...I mean, I don't...nah, couldn't be.

WOMAN/CAITLIN: How can you be sure? Are you saying you two never...(SLEPT TOGETHER)?

(The taping continues. Fadeout.)

(Scene iv: Say Goodbye to Hollywood. Downstairs again. NBC REP and CASTING AGENT continue to screen women. It

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POLITICAL INTELLIGENCE ▶

GUT CHECK TIME. "I run this campaign on my gut," says would-be Senator Victor Morales—but is he still using his head? Morales made the "gut" remark at an Austin press conference, trying to explain why he hadn't accepted Phil Gramm's invitation to a September 29 debate. According to Morales' internal organs, the date was "unsuitable...still too early"; a date closer to election day would "encourage and excite" people and give Gramm "less time for damage control after I whooped up on him." But Morales' gut feeling left the badly underfunded challenger with no debate at all, after Gramm refused to consider any other date. (Instead, each candidate was featured in a solo, hour-long interview on statewide public television.)

Morales had called a Capitol press conference to promote his proposals to reform Congress and campaign funding, and he began by pointing to an equation on a blackboard: "PACS + Perks = Gramm." (When he tried to erase the equation, however, it only smudged, which seemed like a bad omen.) Morales' reforms would include bans on soft money, requirements that a PAC's name reflect any and all corporations it represents, and limits on how many days Congressmen are absent from work. "Kids gone nine days [at Poteet High School where Morales teaches] will flunk. We need to 'pop' Congressmen who don't show up for work."

Unfortunately, the candidate's reform plan was mostly lost in the headlines generated by his off-the-cuff remarks, when he referred to Republican Congressman Henry Bonilla as a "wannabe-white" and a "coconut: white on the inside, brown on the outside." Hispanic Republicans were quick to denounce the remarks as racist, and the next day, Morales released an apology for his poor choice of words.

Just shooting from the gut, apparently.

EARTH TO KAY... Speaking of skipping class, Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison must

have played hooky during a couple of meetings of the Senate Intelligence Committee, to judge from her analysis of the current situation in the Middle East. Commenting on the CNN "Morning News," Hutchison criticized President Clinton's lack of consultation with Congress before the recent attacks on Iraq, adding that voters "love it, of course, when he goes against Saddam Hussein."

Abandoning relatively safe ground, Hutchison plunged ahead, soberly analyzing the conflict, "We don't like the Ayatollah either, [and] this may be a conflict between the Ayatollah Khomeini and Saddam Hussein." Commented Al Kamen in the *Washington Post*, "If so, put your money on Saddam. He's better looking and, besides, he's alive."

GAG RULES. Obstructionism and procedural haggling continue in the matter of the proposed Sierra Blanca radioactive waste dump: last month two state agencies in favor of licensing the dump tried to deny environmental groups, local governments, and individuals participation in the upcoming licensing hearing. According to Sierra Blanca Legal Defense Fund (SBLDF) board member Erin Rogers, thirty-five groups and individuals requested party status in the hearing; the Texas Low Level Radioactive Waste Disposal Authority and the Texas Natural Resources Conservation Commission urged the State Office of Administrative Hearings (SOAH) to refuse thirty of them.

"People who will be affected by this dump, who have tried their hardest to be heard and to participate according to the rules, are getting the run-around and being shut out," said Raymond Tellez, Mayor Pro Tem of El Paso. "Texas is hoping to silence opposition little by little."

After the August public hearings in which proponents and opponents of the dump voiced their arguments, the two state agencies objected to all Mexican parties

(including the State Congresses of Chihuahua and Coahuila), to environmental groups such as the Sierra Club, Greenpeace USA and Greenpeace Mexico, to Presidio and El Paso counties, and to other organizations and individuals. The SOAH judges have ordered another set of hearings—scheduled for October 21 in Austin, and October 23 and 24 in Sierra Blanca—in which many of the applicants will argue to be included in the licensing hearing.

One difficulty for applicants in this ongoing pre-hearing process, says Rogers, has simply been determining the rules: "We never knew what the procedure was. We thought all this would be resolved in Sierra Blanca August 6... We've been getting the rules as we go along."

EATING UPWARD. Acting as his own bagman, President Clinton concluded his whirlwind tour through Texas last month with a stop in Houston's River Oaks—since, in the words of that legendary fundraiser, bank robber Willie Sutton, "that's where the money was."

Sponsored by Houston restaurateur Tilman Fertitta, the "Lone Star Extravaganza" (which cost Fertitta \$100,000 and raised almost \$1.5 million) event was apparently designed to mimic the workings of the political food chain. For the party faithful, a \$1,000 donation earned you the right to stand outside on the Fertittas' lawn in a light rain and sample some corporate barbecue. A \$10,000 contribution got you underneath the Fertittas' carport, where you could personally thank the President for standing up to welfare mothers, between bites of beluga caviar and smoked salmon.

For \$50,000, lobbyists and heavy-hitters could sit down with Bill for a little dessert and coffee. The *Observer's* highly-placed sources weren't placed quite highly enough to witness events at this level, so to find out what goodies were served up there, you'll just have to wait for the next session of Congress. □