

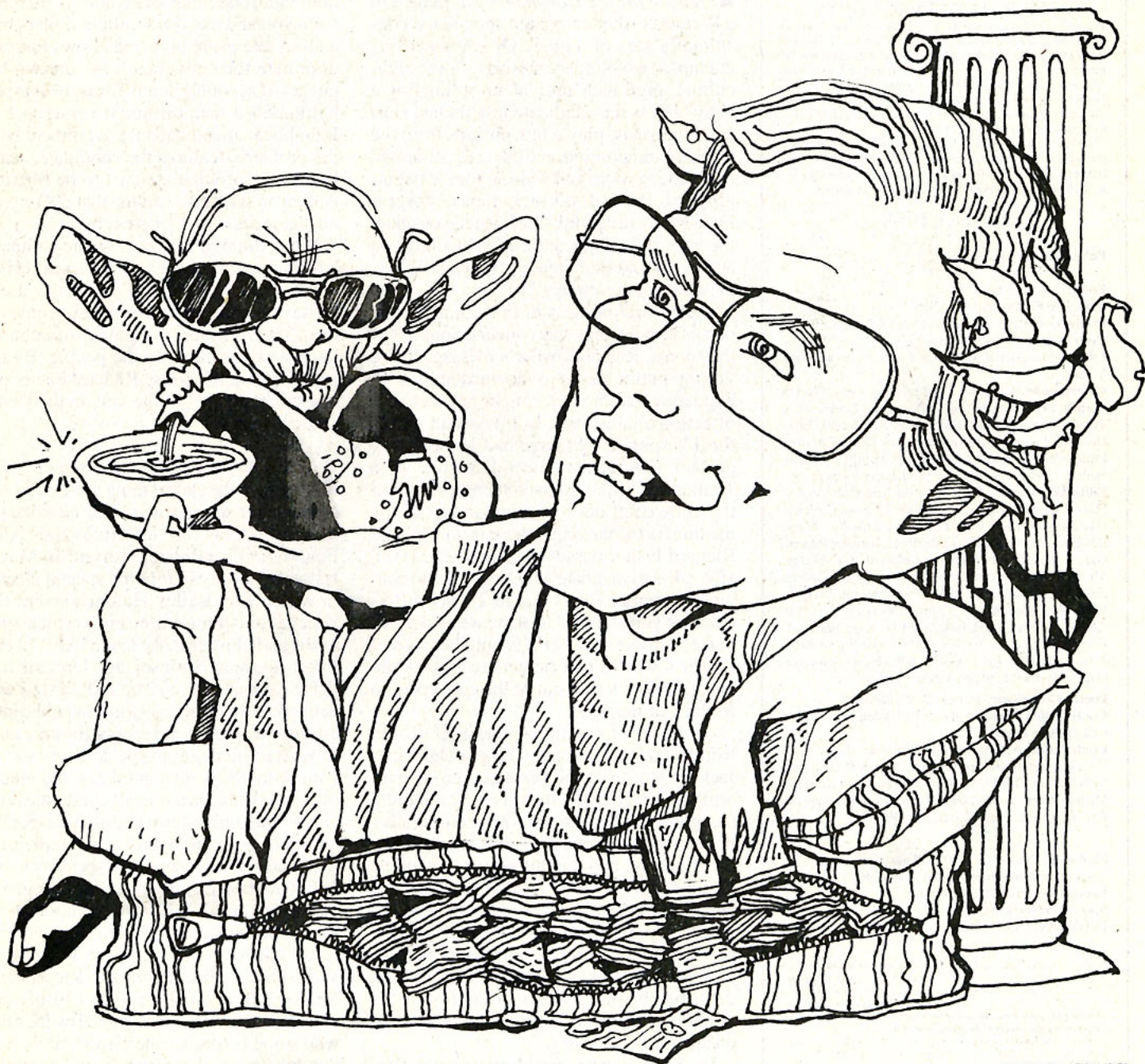
# THE TEXAS Observer

A JOURNAL OF FREE VOICES

MARCH 25, 1994 • \$1.75

**PHIL GRAMM  
AND THE  
MAN BEHIND  
THE BUSH**

*Pgs. 8, 14*



MICHAEL ALEXANDER

## SENATORIAL PRIVILEGE

*Richard Fisher's  
\$3 million campaign*



A JOURNAL OF FREE VOICES

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SINCE 1954

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## EDITORIALS

# Richard Fisher's Undemocratic Conversation

IS WHAT SOUNDS LIKE COPLAND'S *Fanfare for the Common Man*, played in a Richard Fisher campaign spot, some consultant's idea of a joke? Or is it a serious attempt at a subliminal message — the high-culture, high-tech equivalent of hugging a baby? Dress the candidate in a flannel shirt and blue jeans, play a few phrases from the Copland composition, and the voter, disarmed in his living room and waiting for the beginning of the 10 o'clock news, forgets Fitzgerald's insightful: "Let me tell you about the very rich. They are different from you and me." (And Hemingway's rejoinder: "Yes, they have more money.")

If electoral politics in this country now occurs through one-way conversations in living rooms, Richard Fisher's message to the voting public is so over-burdened with hypocrisy that the FCC might have a cause of action against him. In Fitzgerald's time the TV spots might have had Hemingway grousing about his "crap detector," or a Tennessee Williams character roaring about the "powerful odor of mendacity." If the medium is the message, there is no way that Richard Fisher passes the smell test. Here, after all, is a candidate who has set out to convince potential voters that he is "not different from you and me" — that money doesn't make a difference. Yet it is only because of Fisher's wealth that he gets to talk, while his opponent is shut out of the conversation for lack of money.

As Fisher's campaign manager Robin Rorapough (the woman who put Democrat Jack Hightower on the Texas Supreme Court, arguing in private that as a Panhandle Congressman Hightower voted conservative because he represented an ultra-conservative constituency, and that his politics would be broader once elected to statewide office) has said, Mattox has considerable personal wealth, too. But once Mattox spends his first personal million dollars on a political campaign, he will have spent his last. Fisher, described by one political columnist as the "Energizer Bunny of Texas politics," can go on spending endlessly.

His \$2 million personal loan (or candidate-guaranteed loan, as reported on a campaign-funding disclosure) accounted for the bulk of his campaign finances in 1993, when he raised \$2,430,159 to Mattox's \$207,240. When a candidate can write a check for

roughly 10 times the amount that his opponent can raise, that candidate is different from you and me. Two million dollars buys a lot of television time and allows Fisher to dominate the conversation — in two languages. (One of his South Texas media spots, a dumbed-down, bilingual version of the Republican mantra about government being the problem, features the candidate, seated in a group of what are cast to be Mexican American students, warning that *el Congreso nos hace daño* — Congress harms us.)

What Richard Fisher's Senate campaign has amounted to, then, is the antithesis of what Duke University historian Larry Goodwyn calls as "a democratic conversation." It is, rather, the power of accumulated wealth talking to the people. By that power and nothing else Richard Fisher purchased 38 percent of the vote in the Democratic primary.

Once saw Richard Fisher attempt to participate in the closest thing to a Democratic conversation we have devised in electoral politics in Texas — an Industrial Areas Foundation candidates' forum. In May of last year, shortly before the special election in which Kay Bailey Hutchison sent Bob Krueger into semi-retirement as ambassador to Burundi, Fisher spoke to the IAF's El Paso Interreligious Sponsoring Organization (EPISO) convention. The IAF, a statewide network of 10 local, non-partisan public interest groups, provides the only forum I know of where voters get to speak to and extract commitments from candidates and elected officials. Rules provide all candidates with equal time and require that they respond to questions posed to them by IAF representatives and a timekeeper keeps speakers in line. In El Paso last May, Richard Fisher began his conversation with EPISO in flawless and idiomatic Mexican Spanish. (Krueger, as I recall, spoke flawless, pedantic English). When Fisher's time was up, timekeeper Father Ramon Duran told him so, but Fisher continued, until he was again warned by the priest, who stood before a lectern to Fisher's right, that his time had expired. Fisher continued speaking and when the priest again intervened, raised his right hand and gently extended his palm toward the priest, saying in flawless, idiomatic Spanish: "*un momento, Padrecito.*" The diminutive is often the lan-

guage of endearment, but Richard Fisher was speaking the language of power and privilege. And he spoke until he was ready to surrender the lectern to the next candidate. More recently it was by a carefully scripted expensive media campaign, not a Democratic conversation, that Fisher won Hispanic South Texas—although it is hard to explain why some progressive Democratic elected officials such as Appeals Court Judge Gilberto Hinojosa are backing him. And it is by a media blitz, and by paying campaign workers on the ground, that Fisher will conduct his runoff campaign.

**W**hile Jim Mattox struggles to raise funds, there exists the widespread belief (briefly discussed by Molly Ivins on p. 19) that Gov. Ann Richards is at least in part responsible for Mattox's difficulties. Though Mattox has proven himself perfectly capable of alienating potential fundraisers, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the Governor, through a series of winks and nods, has sent Democratic funders a message that she does not want Jim Mattox on the ballot in November.

The Governor has good reason to remain angry with Mattox, who in a public assault on her integrity during the 1990 Democratic primary accused her of having used cocaine. That anger should not become tacit support for a putative Democratic candidate whose chief qualification for public office is accumulated personal wealth. Although the Governor's office denies that she is supporting or discouraging any candidacy, it is not entirely clear that is so.

Since the 1990 campaign, in fact, it appears that Jim Mattox has been systematically shut out. Not only did Richards refuse to consider Mattox for the interim appointment to replace Lloyd Bentsen in the Senate last year, early on her office put out the word that association with the Mattox gubernatorial campaign was a liability for potential political appointees in the Richards administration. One member of a labor council complained to the *Observer* that organized labor had been advised against promoting the political appointment of anyone who had supported Mattox in the 1990 governor's race. Last year, before Mattox had officially entered the race and when the capital was full of rumors that the Governor was encouraging Fisher's candidacy and encouraging high-level party workers to support Fisher, it was not difficult to find Democrats close to Richards who would make Fisher's case, albeit in a circumspect fashion. One highly placed political appointee close to Richards commented on the upcoming Senate primary. "You want to know who's already conducting an interesting campaign?" this particular source offered. The answer was, of course, Richard Fisher. And I was told that Fisher was working hard in South Texas and that his message

was worth listening to. "He's the only one really campaigning down there."

Then, on the day after the election, there was George Shipley quoted in the *New York Times*. "Mattox is a loser who ran one of the most barbaric campaigns in Texas history," Shipley said. A telling comment from one of Richards' top political advisers, particularly when considered in the context of Democratic Party politics. Shipley, the most successful and powerful Democratic consultant in the state, has always worked to move the Democratic Party to the right, whether through the promotion of conservative Democrats like Attorney General Dan Morales or the conversion of once-progressive Democratic politicians like Richards into New Democrats. So it is no surprise that Shipley is also on the payroll of Fisher, and that as Fisher's campaign consultant he is exploiting Richards' dislike of Mattox to advance the candidacy of yet another conservative Democrat. As *New York Times* reporter Sam Howe Verhovek wrote, "while the Governor is unlikely to endorse Mr. Fisher in the primary, there is no doubt where her sympathies lie."

Only in a Democratic Party in which money is both the medium and the message could a candidate like Richard Fisher get away with conducting a campaign in Spanish while defending in English his membership in an all-white country club. And although Jim Mattox's defects are abundant, rather than singling out one or a dozen of them, Fisher choose to repudiate Mattox's accomplishments in public life. "I challenge voters to come up with anything positive to remember Jim Mattox by," Fisher told supporters at a post-election gathering in Austin, writing off Mattox's support for such landmark legislation as the Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment Act, Davis-Bacon prevailing wage laws, reform of the Hatch Act, support for the Equal Rights Amendment, co-sponsorship of the Texas Open Records Act and aggressive prosecution of corporations violating anti-trust laws, corporate polluters, and charity hospitals that demand tax exemptions but refuse to offer indigent care. And it is precisely this history that voters should be considering. It is not that Mattox has served but how he has served. As for Fisher, there is little beyond his own admission to the *Dallas Observer* that he voted for Carter, Reagan, Bush and Perot, by which the public can judge him. Although as has been reported in Tim Fleck's *Houston Insider* newsletter and in the *Houston Chronicle*, after voting for Bush, Fisher pursued an appointment in the Bush Administration, where he was sent packing by Bush aide Chase Untermeyer who told Fisher that his association with the Carter Administration, where he had worked for Treasury Secretary Michael Blumenthal, might keep him out of the Bush White

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*Cover art by Michael Alexander*

House. And Fisher not only voted for Perot, he served as an advisor in the Perot presidential campaign.

Fisher did say that he opposed allowing gays and lesbians to serve in the military, and when interim-Senator Bob Krueger earned the distinction of being the only Democratic Senator other than Alabama's Richard Shelby to vote against Bill Clinton's 1993 budget, Fisher said that Krueger had voted correctly. That was a budget that called for the full funding of Head Start, WIC (the women and infant children nutrition program), education reform and increased monies for community policing. The accompanying tax increase provided that the wealthiest 1.2 percent of taxpayers would bear 64 percent of the increase and that approximately 75 percent of the total tax increase would be borne by individuals earning more than \$100,000 per year. Yet it's conceivable that voters will hear little discussion of these public policy issues between now and the April 12 runoff. Copland doesn't thunder quite like Wagner, but another \$2 million will buy a lot of *Fanfare for the Common Man*. —L.D.

# Something Is About to Break

Tallahassee, Florida

**A** LONG YEAR and a half ago, Ross Perot received from his fellow Americans 20 million votes for President. That was the largest vote of no confidence in both the Democratic and Republican parties in modern times.

Then, in a special election in Texas, the personal choice of the Democratic Governor, Ann Richards, for U.S. Senator, a two-time-loser conservative Demopublican named Bob Krueger, was smashed to bits by his Republican opponent for the Senate seat, Kay Hutchison. As Sam Attlessey summarized the outcome in the *Dallas Morning News*, "Mr. Krueger carried only 15 of the state's 254 counties. He lost every region, including Democratic strongholds of East and South Texas. Mr. Krueger even lost his home county of Comal by a 2-1 ratio." Ms. Richards said that if she had it to do over again, she would probably appoint Krueger again. Yet this Democratic governor could have appointed former Agriculture Commissioner Jim Hightower, who would have defeated Hutchison. And this seated Democratic governor — according to our sources — did not even ask Texas Supreme Court Justice Lloyd Doggett, who wanted the Senate appointment, if he was interested. Doggett is now running for the U.S. House of Representatives from Central Texas and of course will be elected.

Ms. Richards obviously carried out the wishes of Treasury Secretary Lloyd Bentsen in picking Krueger to succeed him, and in the act of taking office, Krueger said, concerning Bentsen, "The people of Texas ... would like me to walk in his footsteps." Obviously Bentsen, Richards and Krueger knew as much about the people of Texas as a blind groundhog knows about the Athenian Republic.

Senator Hutchison, Senator Bentsen's successor, was then indicted on charges of illegal behavior in public office, but she has been saved this year by the decision of her prosecutor, the principled Ronnie Earle, to refuse to go to trial against her rather than what he regards, rightly or wrongly, as a grave risk that the judge would bar from the trial the evidence against her and then seal that evidence away from public view. So she got a walk; when Earle refused to go to trial without rulings the judge would not yet make, the judge ordered the newly seated jury to find her not guilty.

**A** few years before all this, the crusading liberal Democratic Attorney General

of the state, Jim Mattox, while running against Ann Richards for governor, had failed — but in truth, had refused — to explain a large sum of money which concerned him personally and which had become available as a result of the friendship and consideration of a leading figure in the Texas savings and loan scandals, which scandals Mattox, the state's leading officer of the law, had failed to either investigate or prosecute, stating that the reason he did not was that the feds were doing it. Richards defeated Mattox for many reasons, among them the obvious, staring questions Mattox did not answer about that sum of money. When Richards appointed Krueger Senator, Mattox tried to run against him, but Richards cut her nemesis off at the pass of modern American pollitics, the large and selfish contributions of rich and selfish persons and corporations. Mattox is running now for the Democratic nomination for the full six-year term in the Senate. The incumbent Kay Hutchison, naturally, is seeking to keep the Senate seat for herself.

Thus we have arrived in the present moment. The Ostensibly Neutral Governor Richards, is in *de facto* political reality, favoring over Mattox for the Senate nomination one Richard Fisher, a follower of Ross Perot and a Republicrat multimillionaire investment adviser who will not trouble himself by handling accounts worth less than \$2,000,000.

In the first primary just concluded, which left Mattox standing against Fisher, only one in six Texas voters bothered to vote. The proportion of voting Americans who favored Perot, one in five, was larger than the proportion of Texas voters, one in six, who bothered to vote at all on who will represent Texas in the United States Senate.

Governor Richards is running scared, as she must, in her quest for re-election despite the challenge of George Bush the Younger. The Richards-Bentsen-Shiple-Slagle Democrats who blamed "voter apathy" for Krueger's electoral humiliation now contend that only Fisher, and not Mattox, can defeat Hutchison in November. The reign of the once-supreme "Texas Democrats" bids fair to end next November with two of the most reactionary Republican senators in the country representing the state in Washington and the Republican ex-President's Republican name-sake son running the state from Austin.

One might well think, as I, for example, do, that Jim Mattox, having lost the governorship in part because of his misdeeds concerning that sum of money, has paid his debt to the

body politic and deserves consideration from the voters in comparison with the indicted, untried, Not Guilty Senator Hutchison. One might have wished, as I for example, do, that the seated Democratic governor, ashamed of her betrayal of the liberal values of her party by her appointment of Krueger and bypassing of, for example, Hightower and Doggett, would have adopted some such charitability toward Mattox for the sake of the people of Texas. But Ann Richards seems to share a certain politically fatal ignorance with her party's President, Bill Clinton. Neither of them appears to know, or, to know well enough to act on the knowledge, that if Democrats don't get the people all-out for them, it's easy for the Republicans to turn the people against them, and that you get the people all-out for you by being all-out for them and all-out against, whenever necessary, the monied interests.

Analytically speaking, the question inherent in the current American political situation is whether the breakup of the two-party system is close and closing. The majority of the Democrats, the liberals, have no power or sway left in the Democratic Party of Robert Strauss, Bentsen, Carter, Mondale, Dukakis and Clinton. Plain, honest people who are not very political, or not political at all, and who spend all their days and some nights trying to make ends meet, have learned and are continuing to learn not to trust the winning politicians of either major party, nor to believe them nor to expect from them any real help in work or pay or housing or justice. Perot formed a movement he would like to lead to the right flank, but the recalcitrance of his followers — three-fourths of them favor single-payer national health insurance, for example, according to a superb recent academic study of them — hems him in somewhat. Some serious thought is occurring in the Northeast, Texas and California about organizing a single national movement composed of the nation's tens of thousands of progressive activists. The sudden increase of interest in new methods of casting and counting votes, such as cumulative voting and the proportional representation systems used throughout Western Europe, arises, too, from the impotence of public opinion and popular action to truly change the arrangements of society as these are controlled now by the giant corporations through the closed, unaccountable, irresponsible two-party system of our country. This year, again, Texas voters are presented tasteless choices by that system. In my opinion, something is about to break — R.D.

# Primary Choices: Dismal, Dubious and Damned

**J**IM MATTOX started the primary race with 80-plus percent name identification and a track record as a state legislator, Congressman and attorney general but Dallas financier Richard Fisher had what could be a more potent asset: personal wealth with which to spread his handsome mug across the TV screens of Texas. Mattox got the endorsement of nearly every Democratic constituent group, but Fisher was the favorite of the chambers of commerce and their house organs, the editorial boards of the great newspapers of this state. Add to that the antipathy with which Gov. Ann Richards regards Mattox, left over from their duel in 1990, as well as the anti-incumbent mood of voters and perhaps it is remarkable that the former attorney general did as well as he did.

When the votes were counted, Mattox finished with 40.6 percent of the million votes cast in the dismal turnout for the Democratic primary, but Fisher's 37.6 percent placed him in a runoff set for April 12. After the unexpected early acquittal of Kay Bailey Hutchison made her the odds-on favorite to win a full term in November (at least by Conventional Wisdom) U.S. Representative Michael Andrews, the other major Democrat in the race, failed to raise the money to carry him beyond his home base of Houston. That left Andrews high and dry as potential high-dollar bettors figured he was going nowhere but back to the Capitol for a lame duck session of health care reform.

Despite his relatively good behavior during the campaign, Mattox spent much of the race responding to questions of whether he was sorry about the conduct of his 1990 race for governor. (In fact, he has apologized to Richards and he actively supported her in the general election campaign.) Fisher, who worked in President Jimmy Carter's Administration, helped create the center-right Democratic Leadership Council, advised Ross Perot during his presidential campaign in 1992 and advertised himself as a "New Democrat," which some find hard to distinguish from an old Republican, and he spent much of the campaign complaining that Jim Mattox was a nasty politician.

Fisher spent more than \$2 million during the primary campaign, while Mattox spent \$270,000. Fisher has signed up George Shipley, the business-oriented Democratic political consultant whose clients include Ann Richards and Dan Morales. Mattox has the challenge of reminding working-class Democrats why they should turn out to vote

for him on April 12 without reminding Richards' supporters why they hate him. And Mattox has problems raising money not only because Richards' supporters are, at best, staying on the sidelines, but because Mattox has given monied interests, with whom Richards is increasingly popular, plenty of reasons not to support him during his populist career. As labor organizer Dee Simpson remarked, "Mattox starts with an image problem, and he can't raise money because of his image problem, but he can't fix the image problem without the money to repackage himself." That's what makes progressive populism such a challenge!

The Senate race will be a major battleground in November, as keeping Hutchison's seat is a key to Republican hopes to close the Democrats' 56-44 advantage in that chamber. Of the 34 seats at stake in 1994, 21 are held by Democrats and 13 by Republicans. The departure of Majority Leader George Mitchell of Maine won't help the Democrats.

In the U.S. House of Representatives, Republicans are hoping to gain more than 20 seats. With conservative Democrats, that swing would remove President Clinton's tenuous operating majority in Congress. Members are leaving at a record pace, with 41 stepping down at the end of this year, and Craig Washington of Houston became the first incumbent to lose a primary election, although his seat will be retained by Democrat Sheila Jackson Lee.

**I**n the race for governor, Ann Richards got more trouble than expected in the Democratic primary from Gary Espinosa of Palestine. Many Democrats dismissed that as a combination of Republicans voting in rural counties, where Democratic primaries still predominate in local races, and Tejanos in South Texas voting for a Hispanic name. A poll conducted for the *Houston Chronicle* and *Dallas Morning News* the week before the primary showed Richards led George W. (Junior) Bush by 52-42 percent, but Republicans believe there is plenty of time — and they have plenty of money — to muddy the waters in that race.

Lieut. Gov. Bob Bullock skated through the Democratic primary, but he will be in an active mode for the general election, getting out the vote to beat H.J. "Tex" Lezar, a lawyer and right-wing public policy activist who worked in the Nixon and Reagan administrations and finished third in the 1990 Republican primary for attorney general.

Attorney General Dan Morales waited for three years to dismantle much of the consumer-oriented organization left by Jim Mattox, but the passing of the filing deadline without a Democratic primary opponent left Morales free to take a more businesslike approach to the state's counsel. While Republican leaders, in hopes of luring middle-class Hispanic voters in the general election, planned to match Cameron County Judge Antonio "Tony" Garza of Brownsville against Morales, the GOP electorate did not catch the signal and Garza ended up out of the money with only 17.4 percent of the vote. Instead, two Harris County district judges, Patricia Lykos and Don Wittig, will run off.

Comptroller John Sharp, who previously announced he was seeking one more term as state Comptroller of Public Accounts, may see the general election as his tuneup for a 1998 race for governor. His only opponent is Teresa Doggett, an Austin accountant who hired Ed Rollins, of New Jersey "walking around money" infamy, as her campaign consultant.

In the race for Agriculture Commissioner, Marvin Gregory, a Sulphur Springs farmer, faces an uphill fight against the good-looking and well-financed incumbent Rick Perry, a former Democrat who was recruited into the GOP in 1990 to unseat Jim Hightower. Gregory, former Hopkins County Republican chairman, switched to the Democratic Party in 1986 when he realized the Republicans were not interested in helping family farmers. He criticized Perry for supporting the North American Free Trade Agreement, which is expected to further undermine small farmers in Texas. He also accused Perry of spending too much time looking out for the interests of large corporate farmers and not being in tune with family farmers. If Democrats want a farmer in that office, Gregory's their man.

In the race for Land Commissioner, Republicans have started attacking Garry Mauro's coastal management plan as Mauro seeks a fourth term. His Republican opponent is Marta Greytok, a business consultant and former member of the Public Utility Commission.

Railroad Commissioner Jim Nugent beat down a Democratic primary challenge from Robert Earley, a legislator from Portland who attacked Nugent on his opposition to trucking deregulation and the commission's poor minority hiring record. Republican Charles Matthews, a former Garland mayor, has crit-

icized Nugent's opposition to deregulation. In the other seat up for election, Mary Scott Nabers, running for an unexpired term, beat David Young of Austin in the Democratic primary and now faces Republican Carole Keeton Rylander, a business consultant and former Austin mayor.

Treasurer Martha Whitehead, the former Longview mayor, who apparently wants to get back to the Piney Woods, since she has promised to do away with her office, beat Grady Yarbrough, a Flint teacher, in the Democratic primary, and now faces David A. Hartman, an Austin banker, who defeated Mike Wolfe, a Houston high school student, for the Republican nomination.

On the Supreme Court, René Haas pushed conservative Justice Raul Gonzalez into a runoff for the Democratic nomination. Newspapers have joined Gonzalez in criticizing Haas, a former district judge from Corpus Christi who has committed the unpardonable sin of getting support from plaintiffs' lawyers. Money from plaintiffs' lawyers, in the eyes of the business community, is tainted. Money from corporate defense lawyers, who bankrolled Gonzalez's campaign, is OK. Haas has criticized some of Gonzalez's positions on issues affecting women and families. The Republican candidate, Oliver Kitzman, has said he will step aside if Gonzalez prevails, which gives you an idea why many Hispanic Democratic elected officials support Haas.

The high court's most conservative justice, Nathan Hecht, got by his Republican opponent, Charles Ben Howell, the former Dallas appeals judge who beat Hecht in a 1986 GOP primary. Hecht will face Alice Oliver Parrott, chief justice of the 1st Court of Appeals in Houston. She turned down an appointment as federal district judge to make the race and beat Michael Westergren, a Corpus Christi district judge.

In the Democratic primary for Place 3 (the seat Lloyd Doggett is giving up), Jimmy Carroll, Chief Justice of the 3rd Court of Appeals in Austin, defeated Margaret Garner Mirabal of the 1st Court of Appeals in Houston. Carroll, a moderate, will face Republican Priscilla Richman Owens, a Houston lawyer.

On the Court of Criminal Appeals, conservative Presiding Judge Michael McCormick turned back a challenge from Charles F. Baird, a moderate judge who has four years remaining in his term on the court.

In the Democratic primary to succeed Chuck Miller in Place 2, Betty Marshall, chief of Tarrant County District Attorney's appellate division, faces a runoff with Gene Kelly of Universal City, a former military judge who is widely viewed as trading on his famous name. In a Republican runoff are Sam Bayless of San Antonio and Sharon Keller of Dallas.

Judge Charles F. (Chuck) Campbell, unopposed in the Democratic primary, faces

Republican Stephen Mansfield, an insurance company lawyer, in November.

## U.S. Representative

Democrats currently hold a 21-9 advantage in the state's Congressional delegation. They may be able to regain the 23rd District in South and West Texas from Republican Henry Bonilla, but several other marginally Democratic seats are vulnerable.

In the 2nd District, Donna Peterson, an Orange Republican business consultant, will get a third try at unseating moderate Representative Charles Wilson. Peterson held Wilson to 56 percent in both of the last two elections, and the Lufkin Democrat should be able to pick up an 11th term representing Deep East Texas after a Democratic primary win with 67.7 percent of the vote against Edgar J. Groce of Cleveland.

In the 5th District (East Dallas-Central Texas), progressive Representative John Bryant, D-Dallas, appears in good shape to defeat Republican Pete Sessions, son of former FBI Director William Sessions, in a Democratic district.

In the 9th District (Southeast Texas), Representative Jack Brooks, 70, of Beaumont, seeking his 22nd term, drew 71.1 percent of the Democratic primary vote to defeat Geraldine Sam, a LaMarque schoolteacher. Steve Stockman, who held Brooks to a 54-percent majority in 1992, won a rematch by beating two challengers in the Republican primary, but this is still a solidly Democratic district.

In the 10th District (Austin), while Congress is losing an eloquent liberal in Craig Washington of Houston (see the 18th District), Lloyd Doggett is on his way to fill the gap. The Supreme Court justice and former state senator easily won the Democratic primary to succeed moderate Jake Pickle, but he will face the winner of a Republican runoff between Jo Baylor, a real estate consultant, and Bryce Goodman, a real estate appraiser. Growth in Travis County from high-tech industry has Republicans hoping for a sea change, but Republicans in this and other local legislative races are likely to still be drowned.

In the 11th District, Chet Edwards, D-Waco, has steered a moderate course with some veers to the right, particularly in his support of a balanced budget amendment and leadership of the freshmen reform movement. His seats on the Armed Services and Veterans Affairs committees have helped his district, particularly Fort Hood, but the district is marginally Republican, which should keep him engaged as he faces Republican James Broyles of Moody.

In the 13th District (Panhandle), William M. "Mac" Thornberry, a Clarendon lawyer, got 71 percent of the vote in a three-way Republican primary for the right to take on Democratic Representative Bill Sarpalius of Amarillo, who is seeking a fourth term.

Sarpalius is expected to be attacked for his support of President Clinton's budget package and tax increases, which makes him vulnerable in a Republican district.

In the 14th District (South Central Texas), Jim Deats, a Blanco rancher, beat Ed Baker of LaGrange in the GOP primary for the right to take on conservative Democratic Representative Greg Laughlin of Victoria in a marginally Republican district, although Laughlin ran 30 points ahead of President Clinton in 1992.

In the 15th District (Lower Rio Grande), Representative Kika de la Garza of McAllen got 60 percent of the vote to beat two Democratic primary challengers. He faces a rematch with Republican Tom Haughey, a San Juan pastor, who got 40 percent of the vote in 1992 and won a three-way Republican primary in the solidly Democratic district.

In the 16th District (El Paso), Representative Ron Coleman got 63.4 percent of the Democratic primary vote to defeat Mike Crowley, a lawyer. A GOP runoff will decide whether Dick Bowen or Bobby Ortiz will challenge Coleman in the solidly Democratic district.

In the 17th District (West Texas), Phil Boone, a business productivity consultant from Abilene, beat two other Republicans for the right to challenge conservative Democratic Representative Charles Stenholm of Avoca, who was criticized for his vote in favor of a House version of the budget bill that included tax increases and budget cuts. But otherwise Stenholm is as stout as a Congressman could be in a district that only gave Bill Clinton 34 percent in 1992.

In the 18th District (Central Houston), the downtown establishment bought itself a Congresswoman in Sheila Jackson Lee, a City Council member who, with the help of large amounts of cash from downtown businessmen and Representative Craig Washington's indifferent campaign efforts, unseated the liberal Congressman who dared to oppose NAFTA, the space station and the super collider. Washington entered the campaign with a record of concern for the dispossessed but little cash and a reputation for poor constituent services, which is why he will leave Congress at the end of the year, because the dispossessed didn't show up to vote. Lee is expected to be a politically-correct liberal in the House, but she knows there are lines she had better not cross. Jerry Burley, a teacher at Hempstead High School, filed as a Republican but this is one of the state's most Democratic districts.

In the 23rd District (South-West Texas), Democrat Rolando Riós, a San Antonio civil rights lawyer, is expected to turn up the heat on his challenge of Representative Henry Bonilla, a Republic television executive from San Antonio who beat Albert Bustamante in 1992 after a Republican Justice Department investigation softened up the Democratic incumbent. National Democrats have made

recapture of the heavily Hispanic district, which goes from San Antonio to Laredo and up to El Paso and normally votes Democratic, a high priority, but Republicans are staking Bonilla as a rising star, which gives him access to campaign funds.

In the 25th District (Central Houston), there was no surprise that Ken Bentsen Jr., an investment banker, former Harris County Democratic chairman and liberal nephew of Lloyd Bentsen, made the Democratic runoff in this race to succeed U.S. Representative Mike Andrews. But Beverley Clark, a former Houston City Councilwoman, made the runoff as she swept past former state representative Paul Colbert and Carrin Patman of the Congressional pedigree. Clark, the only African American in the race, also ran a "family values" campaign and got support from abortion opponents and other conservatives. On the Republican side, Gene Fontenot, a physician, outpolled the more moderate Dolly Madison McKenna, a businesswoman who lost to Andrews in 1992. The district still leans Democratic.

In the 29th District (Houston), Gene Green never stopped campaigning after he beat Ben Reyes in the 1992 Democratic primary and it showed on March 8 as the Democratic Congressman beat Reyes and the Houston Hispanic machine as well as the downtown business establishment that singled Green out for his vote against NAFTA. Green stayed with organized labor, which was instrumental in electing him in 1992, and criticism of his votes against the free trade agreement, and the Brady Bill, which establishes a five-day waiting period for gun purchases, fell short in a district that was 60 percent Hispanic and 10 percent black. Green ended up with 30 percent of the Hispanic vote while Reyes got 20 percent of the Anglo vote, according to a survey conducted for KPRC-TV Channel 2. Reyes can still endorse Harold (Oilman) Eide, who filed as a Republican, but the downtown boys have taken their shot at Green — and missed, much to the relief of the unions.

## State Senate

Democrats hope to pick up three seats and possibly a fourth this year, which would return them to a two-thirds majority in the Senate next year. A new redistricting plan that forces all 31 senators to run this year is expected to give new Democratic majorities in District 2 (Northeast Texas), District 6 (Houston) and District 22, the Central Texas seat held by Republican Sen. David Sibley of Waco. Mike Martin of Galveston is rated an excellent chance to beat first-term Sen. Jerry Patterson of Pasadena in Gulf Coast District 11.

Races to watch include:

District 1 (Northeast Texas): Moderate Republican Sen. Bill Ratliff of Mount Pleasant faces George Lavender, a conservative Democratic Texarkana radio station owner

who got 57.6 percent of the vote to beat the progressive candidate, Valinda Hathcox, in what could have been a swing district.

District 2 (Northeast Texas): David Cain, a moderate Democratic state representative from Dallas, is the favorite in a marginally Democratic district. Richard Harvey of Tyler won the Republican primary for the open seat.

District 6 (Houston): Mario Gallegos, a state representative, and Roman Martinez, a former state representative, will meet in an April 12 Democratic runoff after Martinez ran first with 38 percent and Gallegos got 25 percent in the four-way primary. Wanda Howell Lewis filed as a Republican but this should be a solidly Democratic district.

District 11 (Galveston Bay): Democrats have high hopes that Democrat Mike Martin, a progressive state representative from Galveston, will unseat freshman Sen. Jerry Patterson, a hard-right Republican from Houston, in what should be a Democratic district.

District 20 (Lower Gulf Coast): Sen. Carlos Truan of Corpus Christi should win re-election but anti-abortion activist Rex Moses of Aransas Pass, running as a Republican, could make it interesting.

District 22 (North Central Texas): Sen. David Sibley, a Waco Republican, helped Lieut. Gov. Bob Bullock avoid gridlock in the 1993 session, so Bullock is disinclined to try to unseat him, but grassroots Democrats believe Margaret Ross Messina, a Granbury lawyer and the wife of the Hood County Attorney, can beat Sibley in this largely rural and normally Democratic district.

District 24 (West Texas): If any Democrat can hold this district it is conservative Sen. Bill Sims, who moved to Paint Rock from San Angelo after redistricting. He faces Hugh Shine, a former state representative from Temple who lost to Chet Edwards in a 1992 Congressional race. Although it might seem a fine distinction, progressive lobbyists say there is a difference between Sims and Shine.

District 25 (Hill Country West): Sen. Jeff Wentworth of San Antonio, a relatively moderate Republican seeking re-election in the redrawn district, got 60 percent of the vote against former San Antonio City Councilman Van Archer, an anti-tax activist, in the GOP primary; Wentworth faces Democrat James Saunders, a San Antonio lawyer, in what should still be a Republican district.

District 30 (Northwest Texas). Sen. Steve Carriker, a moderate Democrat from Roby, has a rematch with Tom Haywood, a Wichita Falls tax consultant who was narrowly defeated in 1992.

## State House

The primary election brought little change in the Texas House of Representatives, where Democrats hold a 91-59 majority but conservative Democrats and Republicans still hold the reins. Before the primaries, half of

the 150 House members were unopposed for re-election and there were primary races for only 46 of the remaining 75 seats. Republican Jim Tallas and Democrat Tony Parra were the only incumbents defeated in the primary. Tallas of Sugar Land was a victim of a backlash against his opposition to term limits in District 26 while Parra, who had a generally progressive voting record in his only session, was brought low largely by his opposition to consolidation of water districts in El Paso District 75 and his outsider status in the Democratic Party.

Among the moderate-to-progressive Democrats who survived primary challenges were Betty Denton of Waco; Pete Patterson of Brookston; Al Price of Beaumont; Vilma Luna of Corpus Christi; Irma Rangel of Kingsville; Sergio Muñoz of Mission; Rene Oliveira of Brownsville; Eddie De La Garza, Edinburg; Roberto Alonzo of Dallas; Jesse W. Jones of Dallas; Yvonne Davis of Dallas, Leticia Van de Putte of San Antonio; Sylvia Romo of San Antonio; Scott Hochberg of Houston, who beat three challengers; Kevin Bailey of Houston, who beat two Democratic challengers; Harold Dutton, Houston, who beat two challengers;

Bob Hunter, an Abilene Republican, survived the *Observer's* endorsement in District 71 and Joe Pickett, a moderate Democrat and former City Council member, outpolled the more progressive Lupe Casillas-Lowenburg, who had the support of organized labor in District 79.

In District 24, the seat given up by progressive Democrat Mike Martin, Craig Eiland and Deborah January-Bevers, both Galveston trial lawyers, face off in the Democratic runoff. January-Bevers, who received the endorsement of the Texas Women's Political Caucus, is the more progressive candidate.

In District 31, the seat given up by Robert Earley, Fletcher Kelly, a Sinton engineer who got the AFL-CIO endorsement, faces Judy Hawley, a Portland teacher, in the Democratic runoff.

In District 46, the seat given up by Libby Linebarger, Charles Soechting of San Marcos, who got AFL-CIO support, faces Alec Rhodes, who got TWPC support. There is no Republican in the race.

In District 75, Gilbert Serna, an El Paso Community College trustee, and Margarita Sanchez, a longtime Lower Valley activist, will meet in a Democratic runoff after Representative Tony Parra finished third in the primary.

In District 90, progressive Representative Doyle Willis of Fort Worth was forced into a runoff with Lon Burnam, a progressive environmentalist and North Texas director of Citizen Action.

In District 95, Nelda Faye Harris of Forest Hills faces Glenn Lewis of Fort Worth in

**Continued on pg. 22**

# Our Man in Washington: Senator Phil Gramm

BY DAVID SEGAL

JUDGING FROM statements on the floor of the Senate, Phil Gramm has been in a terrible mood for over a year. The source of his irritation: Bill Clinton's tax increase and vision of a more active government. "I believe that hundreds of thousands of Americans will lose their jobs because of this tax bill," Gramm said last August. "Three-and-one-half years from now my guess is that the President will be one of them." He called Clinton's deficit trust fund proposal "fraudulent," and labeled the tax increase "one of the great electoral betrayals that I have personally witnessed." In a less generous moment, he compared the administration's philosophy of governing to that of Cuba under Castro and North Korea under Kim Il Sung.

Measured against Gramm's past fulminations, Clinton has gotten off easy. A veteran practitioner of sharp-elbowed, shin-kicking Texas politics, Gramm is unabashed about his penchant for hardball. "I didn't come to Washington to be loved," he's fond of saying, "and I haven't been disappointed." During the Bork hearings back in 1987, the Texas senator referred to Judiciary Committee members Edward Kennedy and Joe Biden as "the people who cheated in college."

*U.S. News & World Report* reported that last year, when Senators Dave Durenberger and James Jeffords voted in favor of a campaign finance reform bill, Gramm entered the headquarters of the National Republican Senatorial Committee, which he heads, looked at the portraits of the 44 Republican senators in the lobby, and ripped the photographs of Durenberger and Jeffords off the wall. "They're not Republicans anymore," he told onlookers.

As a member of the opposition these days, Gramm's snarling style is winning attention. Other Republicans have struggled to make their mark under a president skilled at usurp-

ing traditionally conservative positions on social issues and straddling the center on nearly everything else. Not Gramm. Beginning with the budget battle last March, the former economics professor has been a one man pocket of legislative resistance with a two step strategy: draft an alternative, then get nasty. Without even a committee chairmanship to his name, he has parlayed his unique mixture of smarts and venom into a profile that at times rivals party leader Robert Dole's. His intransigence and facility in the policy fray have made him the unofficial leader of the GOP's just-say-no-pack. And in that role, he's already having an effect. By consistently outflanking him on the right, Gramm has become known in GOP circles as the person who makes Dole think twice about accommodating overtures from the White House. "They keep their eye on one another," says Dan Cass, of the Project for the Republican Future, a think tank. "Gramm is not one of the guys waiting for Dole to pass out the talking points before he speaks his mind."

Gramm isn't quiet about his presidential aspirations, either. His vast war chest alone—rumored to be nearly \$4 million strong—assures he'll be a serious candidate. Detractors say he's not telegenic, and has a weird accent and a style that won't sell outside of Texas. Note, they say, that Gramm's first brush with the national limelight—his droning '92 Republican National Convention keynote—was a disaster. His supporters point out that the last person to bomb a big convention speech was Bill Clinton; Carter's accent was no less regional; and as for looks, remember Nixon? They also point out that judging by his poll numbers, Gramm is the most popular politician in the country's second largest state, a state comprised of the very sorts of Southern, sun belt, and suburban voters that the GOP will need in order to have a prayer in '96.

He is already campaigning hard. Gramm now leads his likely rivals in visits to New Hampshire, having been there six times since Clinton's election. And heading up the National Republican Senatorial Committee allows him to do favors and supply funds to Republicans around the country, all of whom will provide a ready network come campaign time.

"You have to ask, concretely, who can

really get 25 percent of the vote in Iowa, who can do well in New Hampshire, who can go South and do respectably," says Republican guru Bill Kristol. "Gramm will be formidable."

And in the meantime, he will be ubiquitous. An acknowledged master of the art of visibility, Gramm runs the most effective public relations office in town and has an unparalleled thirst for press. "The most dangerous place to be standing in Washington," goes the Hill adage, "is between Phil Gramm and a TV camera." More importantly, Gramm long ago learned one of the immutable laws of life on Capitol Hill: The quiet, often tedious work of legislating is rarely enough to land you on "Meet the Press." Ambitious congressmen need a knack for the soundbite and a gift for the partisan snipe. "He's good at playing the game," says a White House official. "The press know they can go to him for the biting quip."

Congressmen need, also, to know how to answer questions with a subtext that says, "I stand with normal people on this one, and I reject the perverse values of inside-the-beltway Washington, which caused this problem in the first place." Gramm has that skill in spades and unlike, say, Newt Gingrich, who is quotable but usually comes off like a lightweight with a grudge, the Texas senator shows up with charts and facts to buttress his one-liners with hard evidence. He is mean enough to be entertaining and smart enough to be credible. On any number of issues—health care and crime come to mind—he pulls in more headlines and talk show spots than colleagues who've been toiling on the topic for years.

With Republicans struggling to define themselves in the age of Clinton, the state of the opposition in coming months and years could look more and more like Gramm. He is suited to the moment; with fewer substantive differences dividing the administration from the GOP, he's good at making the remaining differences seem mortally significant, and good at arguing that Clinton is faking it when the President overlaps with Republicans.

Moreover, no one is better at pushing a major thrust of the GOP's message: anti-government populism. "I have a philosophy of free enterprise," Gramm told me in an inter-

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*David Segal is an editor of The Washington Monthly. Research assistance for this article was provided by Adam Marcus and Stryk Thomas. Reprinted with permission from The Washington Monthly. Copyright by The Washington Monthly Company, 1611 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009, (202) 462-0128.*



**Phil Gramm at his NRA fundraiser in New Orleans, 1988**

view. "I believe that government is the problem." The party's ornery apostle of freer markets and lower taxes, Gramm's sermons invariably conclude that government should be scaled back — not because it doesn't do anything right, but because it *can't* do anything right. This irredeemable incompetence means there are no ways to improve government, so the more we dismantle, the better, and the sooner we choke off its supply of funds — the sooner, in other words, that we cut spending and reduce taxes — the better. With characteristic lack of subtlety, this message is often animated by class resentments. Gramm likes to say he's for "the people who pull the wagon," while the Democrats keep piling the wagon with more freeloaders. "We're the only nation in the world where all our poor people are fat," he said in a speech about recipients of federal aid.

When *should* government spend money? Use the Dickey Flatt test, Gramm suggests, something he introduced to the world during his keynote speech at the last Republican National Convention. Flatt, you might remember, is the stationery store owner from Mexia, Texas, whom Gramm described as the breathing emblem of the hard-working, tax-paying bedrock of this country. "Whether you see Dickey Flatt at the PTA or the Boy Scouts

or at his church," Gramm said, "try as he may he never quite gets that blue ink off the end of his fingers." Lawmakers should keep Flatt in mind when wondering whether to vote for a program and ask if the expenditure is "worth taking money away from Dickey Flatt." That, Gramm explained, is unlikely: "Let me tell you something, there aren't a lot of programs that will stand up to that test."

It's not surprising to hear a Republican in high dudgeon about government incompetence, but having Phil Gramm lead this particular cause is, shall we say, ironic. Why? For one, Gramm is a living rebuke to the notion that government is merely in the way. The government helped bring him into this world (he was born in a military hospital), funded his upbringing (his father was an Army master sergeant), paid for him to attend private school (with the GI insurance money Gramm's mother received when her husband died), and even picked up the tab for graduate school (thanks to a National Defense Fellowship). After getting his Ph.D., Gramm got a job at Texas A&M, which is state-run, was elected to the House of Representatives, and then to the Senate. In sum, Phil Gramm joined the government's rolls the first day of his life and has never left.

Then there's his paper trail. You'd think

Gramm would be waging a guerrilla war to scale back government spending. He isn't. What's typical is his sponsorship of Orrin Hatch's bill to create an Office of Dietary Supplements in the National Institutes of Health to test vitamins, herbs and minerals.

Regardless of the bill's merits, this didn't sound to me like the sort of program that would pass the Dickey Flatt test. But there was one way I could be sure: Call up information in Texas and then ask the man himself.

"No, that would not pass the test," says Dickey Flatt, from his store in Mexia, 40 miles east of Waco. "I bet that idea came from some private organization that's giving the Democratic Party something like 16 zillion dollars so the government will do the job and they won't have to."

When you turn down the volume, parse his plans and check his votes, you realize that much of what Gramm wants would expand the government, sometimes in ways that are worth considering, and invariably in ways that contradict what he claims are his fundamental beliefs. The key, it turns out, is to watch what he does rather than listen to what he says, and to understand that Gramm's overriding ethos has little to do with Dickey Flatt or fiscal conservatism or any principle larger or more dignified than his own political ascendance.

**T**ake deficit reduction. Thanks to the Gramm-Rudman law and his "cut spending first" mantra, Gramm has earned a reputation as an honest-to-goodness deficit hawk. G-R established a series of incremental spending-reduction targets over a period of years and set up an axe that would hack across-the-board cuts if legislators were unable to meet those targets. This made for good press, but it's a witless way to reduce deficits and this particular effort was unse-rious. It's witless because, as Michael Kinsley argues, there's no reason to cut everything equally if some programs could take a hit more readily than others (Why cut Head Start the same as the sugar subsidy?). And it was unse-rious because it didn't include the largest government program of all, Social Security. In 1990, once Congress realized it couldn't keep pace with G-R's schedule — and realized how ugly across-the-board cuts would be — it voted itself out of the Gramm-Rudman noose.

Since then, Gramm has posed as a kind of budget martyr — I tried, dammit, but my colleagues wouldn't make the tough decisions. "Shortly after the 271 representatives and 63 senators patted each other on the back for passing G-R in 1985," Gramm wrote in a *Washington Times* op-ed, "the slippage began. Some challenged it in court. Others tried to exempt favorite programs from its consequences." On other occasions he moaned, "Balancing the budget is like going to heaven: everybody wants to do it. They just don't want to do what you have to do to make the trip."

Had Gramm offered up his own favorite programs? Quite the opposite. Gramm may be the guy with the gun to Congress' head screaming "Diet!" but there aren't many law-makers in either chamber better than he is at raiding the fridge. The National Taxpayers Union Foundation's survey of all bills sponsored by members during an 18 month period starting in January of 1991 found that there were only three representatives in either chamber who had failed to sponsor a single bill which cut spending. Gramm was one of them, and the only Republican (Bob Kerrey and Robert Byrd were the other two). The bills he did back, if enacted, would have added a total of \$8.3 billion to the deficit.

(These facts so clearly gave the lie to Gramm's public posings that the senator's staff summoned the authors of the study up to the Hill for a stern chat and suggested they never publish anything like that again — advice they ignored.)

"I'm carrying so much pork, I'm beginning to get trichinosis," he told a local paper in a more candid moment. He has backed billion-dollar Texas pork projects like the Superconducting Supercollider and the Space Station. This past session he fought three bills that would have ended the government's million-dollar mohair subsidy, and has sup-

ported the Gulf of Mexico Preservation Act, which would cost \$200 million in the next five years. He pushed for the plant stress lab at Texas Tech (\$100 million a year), and netted \$500 million for the National College of D.A.s in Houston. Those expenditures are hypocritical given his rhetoric, but they at least make pork barrel sense. "I'm going to work for tight budgets, I'm going to reduce spending," Gramm says. "But once spending levels are set, I'm going to fight to see that Texas gets its share."

Then how to explain all the bills with specific cuts that Gramm dodged? He didn't support a repeal of the Helium Act, for instance, which would have ended the government's \$34 million a year helium extraction and reserve program (a holdover from the 1920s when helium sources were scarce and the government thought it might need the stuff for blimps). He wasn't on the bill to cut foreign assistance, and passed on repealing the Davis-Bacon Act, a move that would allow open bidding and competition for federal contracts and save the government \$2.5 billion over the next five years. Last session there were 77 bills in the Senate that contained specific cuts to the budget. Gramm was on just two.

He stuck instead with the *faux-courage* of across-the-board cuts and caps by backing no fewer than six G-R-style bills. "There's nothing in the federal budget that doesn't look good to somebody," says Bowman Cutter, a special assistant to the President at the Office of Management and Budget. "The easiest thing to do is legislate caps and avoid all the heat for specific reductions. But it's a pure symbol vote. It simply puts you on record as being against big deficits."

Judged by ardor alone, Gramm must truly want a balanced budget, but he's simply unwilling to pay *any* political price to achieve it. Which leads him to a position masterfully calibrated to an enduring truth about many American voters: namely, that their fervor about the need to reduce the deficit is matched only by their belief that their own programs should not be touched.

**G**ramm's deficit demagoguery isn't surprising to anyone familiar with his career. His first race in 1976 was a quixotic run against then-Senator Lloyd Bentsen when Gramm was 33, a Democrat, and an unknown economics professor. A dogged and combative campaigner, he poured \$50,000 of his own money into his campaign and crisscrossed the state charging that Bentsen "has no principles and no business representing the people of Texas in the U.S. Senate." Gramm also peddled an alarmism about foreign policy that seems vintage 1960: "We have lost Asia. Spain and Portugal could fall to the communists at any moment. And two mainstays of the Atlantic Alliance, Italy and France, could become

communist satellites through free elections."

He was resoundingly defeated. The following day he announced he would run again, this time for the 6th Congressional District seat which would soon be vacated. Gramm's main competition in the primary was one of his former students, 25-year-old Chet Edwards. The race heated up when Gramm accused the Edwards camp of floating the rumor that Gramm's first child was conceived out of wedlock (Edwards has long denied the charge). Gramm told crowds that his opponent was a lousy economics student; Edwards then showed reporters the "A" Gramm had given him. A pivotal moment came when "Tiger" Teague, the conservative Democrat who was stepping down from the seat, became irked that Gramm was implying that he and Teague were close. "I am not pleased that Phil Gramm said he worked for me," Teague said, and later called a press conference to mount an attack on Gramm's integrity so vicious that it actually won voters to Gramm's side. Edwards came up 115 votes shy in the primary and Gramm went on to win the general election with 65 percent of the vote.

In Washington, Gramm seemed hell-bent on alienating everyone. His first speech in the House was made on Republican time to attack a Democrat-supported bill and included a belittling assault on an argument offered by Jim Wright, who was then the head of the Texas delegation as well as the majority leader. Gramm drafted an alternative budget soon after the House Budget Committee passed its own. Later, he shmoozed his way back into Wright's good graces and then used Wright to land a seat on the Budget Committee, reassuring all concerned that he could be a team player. As Wright recently told *The Texas Observer*, "Phil Gramm told me and others that if he were favored by a Budget Committee assignment he would make his arguments within the committee and then would close ranks and back whatever budget resolution the majority crafted." Instead, Gramm perpetrated a now notorious double-cross. Sitting in on Democratic caucus budget meetings Gramm reported the party's budget strategy to David Stockman, then Reagan's budget director. He also collaborated with Stockman on Reagan's first budget, soon to be christened Gramm-Latta, and helped line up conservative Democrats behind it. The Budget Committee declined to renew Gramm's membership at the end of 1982.

Gramm decided to switch parties and instead of simply announcing the shift and retaining his seat he resigned and ran in a special election. He has made no small amount of political hay about the guts required to take this kind of chance, and he has a point. But then again, at the time of the election, his district, like much of Texas, had been swept into the GOP by Reagan. Moreover, then-Governor Bill Clements made the timing

especially felicitous for Gramm by calling for an election a scant six weeks after the announcement, not enough time for an opponent to launch a genuine challenge. The move also made savvy political sense. As Robert Draper wrote in *Texas Monthly*, it allowed "Gramm to recast himself as a political martyr who had been driven out of the Democratic party, rather than be seen as a traitor to the party." Gramm won without a run-off, taking 55 percent of the vote.

When John Tower stepped down from his Senate seat in 1984, Gramm pounced. His opponent in that race was Lloyd Doggett, a liberal Democrat in the state Senate. The campaign revolved around one issue: Doggett, who had the support of the gay community, had received an unsolicited \$500 contribution from a gay group which had held a fundraiser featuring a male stripper. "Gramm learned about this in June," says a former Doggett staffer, Kate Fain, "and that's all he talked about until November." Gramm's radio ads didn't demur: "Lloyd Doggett actively sought and received the endorsement of gay and lesbian groups. . . . Homosexual groups in San Antonio even had the poor taste to hold an all-male strip show to raise money for Doggett. Their magazine ran his picture taking their money." The tag line read: "Friends of Phil Gramm paid for this because Phil Gramm supports traditional family values."

There were also TV ads of the Gramm family on a fishing outing enjoying family values, but the Ozzie and Harriett imagery came with a strange twist: Harriett was hidden. Gramm's wife, Wendy, is of Korean descent and the most you could see of her in these spots was the back of her head. "We'd watch these ads," says another former Doggett staffer, David McKenna, "and we'd be wondering, 'Hey Phil, where's Wendy?'"

Even after Doggett returned the \$500 contribution, the gay stripper issue would not go away. Between the withering attacks and Reagan's coattails, Gramm beat Doggett by 18 points.

Gramm's ties to the Reagan Administration helped to make him a prominent player in budget deals and the best known member of the Texas delegation. His most renowned handiwork was Gramm-Rudman, but he also spent tremendous energy at home converting Texas Democrats to Republicans and pushing GOP candidates. His advocacy was often hard to distinguish from self-puffery; a common line was that "a vote for [insert name] is a vote for me." When his long-ago rival, Chet Edwards, sought Texas' 11th Congressional District seat, Gramm said in a commercial, "The bottom line is this: I can and will work with Hugh Shine. I cannot and will not work with Chet Edwards." Edwards won, and Gramm's presence proved a mixed blessing for many of those he supported—in 1990, for instance, 13 of the 16 state and national candidates he campaigned for lost.

**A** CENTRAL FACET of Gramm's career — from spying for Stockman to securing two consecutive terms as head of the Republican Senatorial Committee — is a genius for making himself a player. Under Reagan, when tax cuts were the only game in town, Gramm helped engineer the seminal 1981 tax-cutting budget. Through the late eighties and early nineties when deficit reduction was the hot problem, Gramm's name became synonymous with the solution. Clinton's arrival has revealed how good Gramm is at updating his genius to the times. Now that welfare and health care reform seem imminent, Gramm has emerged with some interesting plans. On welfare, for instance, he has come up with an idea that is so filled with a liberal, let's-try-something spirit that it is hard to believe he actually thinks it would work. In a speech which included, naturally, plenty of snipes about the evils of greater government, he laid it out at a meeting of the GOP faithful in January:

"We are capable today with our computer technology to have every welfare mother in America come in and take a one-hour test, and we can design a home study, computer-generated, computer-proctored study program for her, tailored to her needs and we can make her check contingent on her completing that course work and developing the skills at home with her children that will make it possible for her to break the welfare cycle, and I want that provision to be the law of the land."

Is Gramm suggesting that we give welfare mothers computers and modems, or that we hire more bureaucrats and give them computers and modems? Either way, would *this* pass the Dickey Flatt test?

"That is just an *awful* idea," says Dickey Flatt. "Absolutely *awful*. Somebody has to show the welfare recipients how to operate the computers. So you need more bureaucrats. Then you need operators to teach these bureaucrats. That just means more government."

Mr. Flatt would no doubt also flunk Gramm's original health care plan. "People would be hunting Democrats with dogs by the end of the century" if Clinton's health plan passes, Gramm warned at a September press conference unveiling an alternative of his own. The problem, as he sees it, is that the plan would entail an explosion of regulations and the loss of consumer choice.

Oddly enough, Gramm's plan is wide open to similar charges. By trumpeting competition and consumer choice to keep costs down, Gramm gives it the patina of free market conservatism. But look what's underneath. Gramm would require that insurers provide employee policies that are "guaranteed renewable" with "premiums that could not be raised based on the occurrence of illness." Because Congress has steadfastly refused to regulate the insurance industry in the past, that means not just new laws, but new bureaucrats to oversee those new laws.

Additional regulations await employers. "When my momma gets sick, I want her to see a doctor, not a bureaucrat," Gramm draws in town meetings around the country. But if Gramm's momma is like millions of other Americans and has a pre-existing condition, her son's plan would acquaint her with quite a number of bureaucrats. Gramm would place those with pre-existing conditions in a high risk pool, then allow insurance companies to bid for their business. These individuals would be required to pony up one-and-a-half times the average premium charged to healthy persons in the area. What if an insurance company charges someone seven times the area average? The government picks up the difference.

Of course, that could get expensive because Gramm hasn't given insurance companies any incentive not to gouge customers (and by extension, the government). Worse, insurers have a great reason to broadly define what constitutes a pre-existing condition and send as many people as possible to the high risk pool. This is a little like telling the defense industry that they get to decide how many fighter planes we need, then allowing them to charge whatever they want to build them.

Hence, the scheme would occasion either a vast transfer of wealth from Washington to the insurance industry, or, as is far more likely, it would occasion tough federal oversight and more regulations. In fact, this high-risk pool would have to look a lot like a single payer system because it would result in people paying identical sums for coverage and would require government intervention to control costs. All of which explains why conservatives hate Gramm's plan. "He would create a new national health care system for high risk people," says Stuart Butler, director of policy studies at the Heritage Foundation. "It would have far less choice and far deeper federal involvement than Clinton's plan. This is not what you'd expect from Phil Gramm."

Indeed, other elements of the plan entail intrusion on a scale that makes Clinton seem positively libertarian. "Financially capable" persons (200 percent of the poverty level) who choose not to purchase at least catastrophic insurance and end up needing care will have their wages garnished by the government over the course of seven years. Also, anyone getting federal assistance who smokes, drinks excessively, or is overweight will have to pay more for insurance. Without checking dumpsters for empties and fingers for nicotine stains, it's unclear how the government would know.

Given his alarms about the Clinton plan, it's hard to figure what Gramm had in mind when he drafted his own. Whatever it was, he's forgotten it. Latching on to the current GOP vogue, Gramm has scaled his plan back to minor tinkering and add-ons to the pre-

sent system and joined the "there is no health care crisis" chorus.

This shift is extremely revealing. It suggests that the point of his original plan was not so much to expand health care coverage to the country's 37 million uninsured but to abrade the Administration and win some headlines. After all, if back in November Gramm was focused on the health care system enough to draft a plan to revamp it, he should have noticed *then* that the system wasn't in crisis. It's not as though there was a crisis five months ago and now it's over. There is a more likely explanation: Gramm's original plan — which had laudable ambition—was generating few co-sponsors and little press. He saw an opportunity when Bill Kristol quickened some Administration pulses in early January with a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed outlining the "there is no health care crisis" thesis. Shortly after the piece was published, Gramm met with Kristol and soon dumped his first plan in favor of Kristol's tiny bag of reforms (like malpractice legislation). Sure enough, mini-Gramm, as the plan is now known, has made its author a player on health care. Dole, who also used to agree that something had to be done on health care, boarded the no-crisis train in late January.

**M**ini-Gramm may turn out to be a rare miscalculation for its creator, primarily because Clinton's State of the Union speech devastated the no-crisis line. "That speech reinforced the hand of moderate Republicans," says Senator Dave Durenberger. "These are Republicans who've been involved with health care reform since the seventies, who believe we've got a real problem." It now looks as if John Chafee will be the GOP's point man in the coming legislative debate.

But once again, Gramm is trying to sell himself as the party's conservative big thinker on the day's hottest issue. It's a line that often is hard to buy. His ideas may come cloaked in the *gravitas* befitting a Ph.D. in

economics, but the underpinning doctrine is usually nothing more esoteric than Tell Dickey Flatt What He Wants to Hear. For instance, on both of the day's thorniest economic problems — deficit reduction and the savings and loan collapse — Gramm's diagnoses resurrect that cheery and dubious motto of the '80s, "We can grow our way out of the problem." Asked how President Gramm would reduce the deficit, he recites Republican boilerplate about the need for a line-item veto and a balanced-budget amendment and adds, "I always begin by pointing out that the economy is growing and that growth is generating between \$60 and \$90 billion in new revenues. The key, if you're going to deal with the deficit, is that you'll benefit from these new revenues." And here he is in an interview with John McLaughlin in January of 1989, one year after optimistic estimates of S&L losses were at \$100 billion and a federal bailout looked absolutely inevitable:

*"There is a hole out there. How big it is, \$30 billion, \$50 billion, somebody has to pay for it. And the person that I am committed to seeing not paying for it is the taxpayer."*

How is that possible? asked an incredulous John McLaughlin.

*"If we can get private investors to come in and invest private capital, if we can see the recovery in the Southwest which has started continue — that is, if we don't have a national recession that nips our recovery in the bud — then I think we've got a fighting chance ... of working through this without the taxpayer having to pay for it."*

History has not been kind to that Disneylandish forecast, and Gramm, without question, knew better. "By 1989, there wasn't a sane person on earth who thought taxpayers were going to dodge this bullet," says Steve Pizzo, author of *Inside Job: The Looting of America's Savings and Loans*. "And every day the Phil Gramms of Congress denied the size of the problem and refused to close down the thrifts, we lost millions. At one point, \$30 million a day."

One of Gramm's gifts is repackaging this kind of pandering as heroism. On the Hill, where he's notorious for stealing credit for bills and ideas he didn't think of, there's a word for it: Grammstanding. Last year, the *Dallas Morning News* gave Texans a behind-the-curtain look at some of his methods when nine former Gramm staffers supplied the newspaper with internal memos from the senator's office. One concerned Gramm's visit to the Brooke Army Medical Center (BAMC) in San Antonio. The memo stated that "We have tried to create a 'BAMC funding scare' while feeling comfortable that BAMC is safe from the budget knife." The funding scare was designed to cast Gramm as the knight who rescued BAMC from oblivion but Gramm knew that the hospital would not have its funding slashed because Pentagon officials had told him so privately a few days before his visit. The senator's press office later told the *Morning News* that the word "not" had been omitted from the memo: "The sentence should read 'We have not tried to create a BAMC funding scare. . .'"

**E**VEN BY WASHINGTON's jaded standards this is cynical stuff. Another memo contained instructions on how to capitalize on the senator's wife, the same wife who had been hidden in those family-values commercials: "The Asians are our natural constituents, philosophically and because of Wendy. This should be an easy sell; we need to continue to activate them, especially financially."

The key phrase here is "easy sell." Gramm likes Democrats to believe he's dangerous because he is an ideologue, but the real problem is that beyond hucksterism and ambition, he is devoid of ideology. Eyeing a run for the White House in '96, he's virtually required to lob shots at the Administration; anyway, lobbying shots is now part of the GOP's job. But another part of the job is offering the public viable alternatives to Democrat ideas. For Gramm, that work is inseparable from self-promotion and leads him to sell plans that will score him points — or contradict his core philosophy — rather than move the debate forward or actually improve people's lives. It's telling that Clinton's real trouble on health care has come from a Democrat, Jim Cooper. It's also telling that these days Gramm isn't sure if he's the guy who wants to reduce spending or pay for a Dietary Supplement Department at NIH, shrink the government or wire the inner city for Internet, solve the health care crisis or disavow it. The shame is that there are few politicians today who are as smart as Gramm or as good at connecting with the kind of voters the country will need to accomplish real reform. Understanding how to "activate" Dickey Flatt, however, is not the same thing as leadership. □

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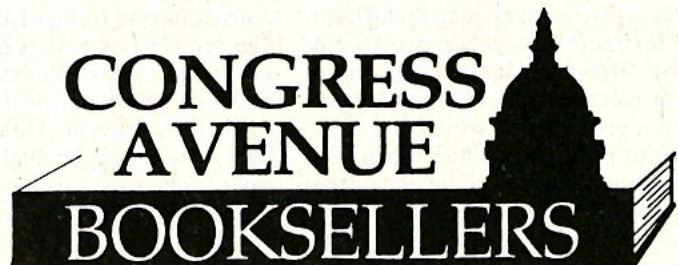
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# Karl Rove: The Man Behind the Bush

BY ROBERT BRYCE

**T**HE SIGNAL TO END the press conference was almost imperceptible. It came from a pale, balding man in his mid-40's wearing a dark suit. He nodded to a woman in George W. Bush's entourage and she walked over to the candidate. Moments later, as newspaper photographers ran ahead of the newly announced candidate, the pack was hustling out the door of the conference room of the Austin Omni Hotel. A few steps behind the pack walked the man who had signaled the end of the press conference—Karl Rove. On the steps of the Omni, Rove abruptly stopped the candidate to introduce him to a man from New York.

"How are we doing on the schedule?" Bush asked Rove as they moved down the stairs, heading back to the airport and a flight to Dallas where the candidate would read his announcement speech for the fourth time that day. It was November 8, the first day of George W. Bush's life as a candidate, and he was a little unsure of himself. The rapid fire questions of the capitol press corps had flustered him. Rove, watching everything, seemed pleased. Bush might have seemed a bit shaky, but he also spoke with authority, called a few of the reporters by their first names, and even made a few jokes.

The face was Bush but the words were Rove. Taxes Bad. Government Bad. Free Enterprise Good. Crime Bad. Criminals Bad. Prisons Good. Build Prisons. The anti-tax, anti-government platform is standard fare of candidates advised by Rove, whose direct-mail expertise, sharp tongue and keen political instincts have made his Austin consulting firm a big-money player in Republican electoral politics. The 43-year-old son of a geologist, it seems, has hit a gold mine of political media money and in doing so might have become one of the most powerful Republicans in Texas.

And on the national scene, he may also have become the heir to the political fortune and power of the late Lee Atwater. While less flamboyant than his longtime

friend, Rove in some ways already has eclipsed the memory of the guitar-playing master of the attack ad. A wizard of the mail shot, Rove raised millions of dollars for former President George Bush and for Texas Senator Phil Gramm. By Rove's own estimates, he has raised between \$10 million and \$20 million for GOP candidates in Texas. Rove has been involved in political races in 31 states, but it is in Texas where a string of victories by his candidates have shifted the balance of electoral politics. He was a chief advisor to Hutchison, the former-UT cheerleader and state treasurer who trounced Democratic non-contender Bob Krueger in a special election for the U.S. Senate last May. Hutchison's win meant Texas would be represented by two Republican Senators for the first time since Reconstruction. Rove also played an important part in the campaign of Barry Williamson, who defeated Lena Guerrero in the 1992 Railroad Commission race, orchestrating the release of Guerrero's college records, which showed the appointed incumbent commissioner had no college degree. (Rove doesn't have a college degree either, but we'll get to that later.) Another key victory occurred in 1990, when Rove oversaw the defeat of Democratic Agriculture Commissioner Jim Hightower by Democrat-turned-Republican Rick Perry.

Democrats praise Rove's skill. "Karl Rove is the Republican party in Texas," says Mark McKinnon, owner of McKinnon Media and former spokesman for Gov. Mark White. Austin Democratic political consultant and former LBJ press secretary George Christian says of Rove, "He's a pro. I don't know another way to describe it. He has good political instincts. He's a modern Republican. He's pragmatic. And he's not anybody's captive on the radical right." Sam Kinch, a veteran reporter on all things political in Texas and editor of *Texas Weekly* newsletter, says of Rove, "He's the best they've got."

Rove's intensity and competitiveness have also won him many enemies. "Rove is a brass knuckles player," says one consultant. "But then you need a brass knuckles player in this business." One Democrat said, "You can't write anything nasty enough about Rove." Some Republicans

are also less than complimentary about Rove. G.G. Garcia, a Harlingen Republican who served in the Nixon Administration, says Rove is good at what he does, but his abrasiveness "turns off a lot of people. He's gotten uppity because of his success running campaigns. George W. Bush is a helluva guy and he deserves better than that."

Looking more like a mid-level accountant than political field marshal, Rove avoids the spotlight. Of medium height, with fleshy jowls and tortoiseshell glasses, he speaks in short, clipped, almost curt sentences. In an interview last November, he gladly provided information on his newest candidate and plenty of shots at Gov. Ann Richards. "She's been absent without leave on virtually every issue that has come down the pike," he said. "She doesn't have strong convictions that she is willing to fight for."

In praise of his candidate, Rove says Bush the Younger will concentrate on government waste. Under Richards, Rove says, "Texas is adding a new employee every 65 minutes. Our bureaucracy is growing faster than any other state. State spending has increased by 47 percent since she took office." (Bush used virtually the identical words when he announced for office three days later.) Ever-eager to talk about the candidate, Rove deigns to discuss himself. The first time I requested an interview, he refused. "I am a very private individual," he replied impatiently. "Not interested. No." With that, he hung up.

Recently, he agreed to an interview. When asked "Are you the most powerful Republican in the state?" he scoffingly replied, "No." Who is? "Phil Gramm, Kay Bailey Hutchison, George W. Bush and about ten gazillion other people." Whoever thinks he is powerful, Rove said, "must have had a few too many drinks."

**F**ramed pictures of Amelia Earhart, Teddy Roosevelt and Gen. George Patton hang in a neat row to the right of Rove's desk. Why Earhart? "Because she broke new ground," he replied. Sitting behind a cluttered desk stacked high with papers, a calendar, Ann Richards' expense reports, and a Rolodex a foot in diameter, Rove said that the growth of the Republican Party in Texas is fueled by three things:

*Robert Bryce is a contributing editor with the Austin Chronicle, where a version of this also appeared.*



ROBERT BRYCE

### Karl Rove

"Conservative white Democrats who are fed up with the liberal Democratic leadership at the state and national level, middle class Hispanics who have become more independent and more conservative, and, the migration to Texas of Republicans from other states."

Direct mail analysts say a 2 percent response rate is good. Three percent is outstanding and anything over 5 percent is a home run. When asked for his response rates, Rove pulled out a sheaf of papers, "Here's one where we got a 24.24 percent response. Here's one where we raised about \$300,000 on a 24.81 response with an average gift of \$57." He continued reading off a list, "10 percent, here's one with 4 percent, here's

one with 18 percent..." According to Rove, the key to success in direct mail is having "the right list, with the right message at the right time. It has to grab attention and it has to be based in fact and need."

As much of Rove's business depends on computer-generated data, he maintains a room full of computer and printing equipment that can pump out thousands of personalized letters a day to the GOP funders. He refused to say how much he has invested in the computers and laser printers but he says they are essential. "We need to be ready, so that when a candidate says 'go ahead' we can have the letters in the mail within two days."

When asked when Gramm will announce

for the presidency, Rove said, "He's already pretty well said that he is going to run." If Gramm wins, will Rove head for the White House? "I have no interest whatsoever in being in Washington, D.C.," he said. "I'm happy right here."

When talking about Lee Atwater, the words come slowly. "He was a terrific tactician. He had a terrific understanding of elections and how they are won and lost." Atwater's death says Rove, was "a terrific loss. He was a great friend and a wonderful companion. You just liked to be around him." But Rove has no desire to be compared to Atwater or to be the sort of high-profile consultant Atwater became before his death in 1991. "Handlers don't deter-

mine the success of a candidate. Their success depends on their message and how they are perceived by voters. I wish you weren't doing this story. This focus on handlers is unwarranted and unwise. It makes handlers think they are more important than they really are."

**S**am Ervin, the drawing North Carolina senator, had just begun hearings on the Watergate break-in when Karl Rove's political life began in earnest. It was 1973, Rove had won the presidency of the College Republicans in a race against Terry Dolan, and Rove's campaign in the Southern United States had been managed by a South Carolina insurance salesman's son who had once played guitar with R&B singer Percy Sledge. His name was Lee Atwater.

Rove's successful campaign for the leadership of the College Republicans coincided with a national resurgence of the Republican Party. And his opponents in the race later became part of the GOP's power structure. Dolan, whom Rove defeated, was considered one of the architects of the modern conservative movement. In 1975, he helped form the National Conservative Political Action Committee, which spent more than \$1.2 million in 1980 to unseat liberal members of the U.S. Senate. Dolan died of AIDS in 1986 at age 36.

In his race against Rove, Dolan had employed Charlie Black, Paul Manafort and Roger Stone. The trio later formed the political consulting firm Black, Manafort and Stone, which played a key role in the successful 1984 campaign of Ronald Reagan. After the 1984 election, Atwater became a full partner in the firm and a fixture at the Reagan White House.

During his tenure as boss of the College Republicans, Rove made contacts that continue to serve him well. From his basement office at GOP headquarters, Rove brushed elbows with the GOP chairman, who at that time was an oilman from Texas named George Herbert Walker Bush. Rove introduced Atwater to Bush in 1973. During the same period, Rove met George W. Bush, and the two became friends. Rove was the first person Bush the Elder hired when he ran began running for the presidency. In 1977, Rove began working for Bush's Houston-based political action committee called the Fund for Limited Government, which later became his presidential campaign organization.

Bush, of course, lost the 1980 race to The Great Communicator. But he accepted the VP nomination from Ronald Reagan and Rove began his consulting business, Karl Rove & Co., in 1981. His first direct mail client was Bill Clements, the man who ended 106 years of frustration for the GOP when he took the governor's office in 1978. In 1982, Rove began working for Gramm,

who was still in the U.S. House of Representatives and still a Democrat. Two years later, Rove helped get Gramm elected to the U.S. Senate—as a Republican. During the 1984 election he did direct mail work for Reagan/Bush. In 1986, Rove got his first big job as a general consultant when he helped Clements win back the Governor's office and Clements began referring to Rove as "my number-one guru." In 1988, Rove worked for Tom Phillips, the first Republican ever elected to the Texas Supreme Court. In 1990, Rove helped Perry win the Ag Commissioner's job. The same year, Rove worked for former Railroad Commissioner Kent Hance (another Democrat turned Republican) in an unsuccessful gubernatorial bid. In 1992, Rove won his biggest contract: the direct mail work for Bush's unsuccessful bid for a second term in the White House.

Contacts with Bush and the national GOP led to contracts across the country, with Senator Kit Bond in Missouri and former Attorney General Richard Thornburgh in Pennsylvania. In 1991, Thornburgh ran and lost a race for the U.S. Senate to Harris Wofford. Because he didn't win, Thornburgh assigned his debt to his campaign committee. But Rove saw it differently, sued and won a \$300,000 judgment against the man who had been the country's most powerful attorney. The lawsuit made Rove a hero among consultants on both sides of the political fence. "It was a milestone for us consultants who have been burned by candidates who don't pay their bills," said one Democratic consultant. Rove, however, plays down the significance of the victory, saying "It is a very narrowly drawn decision that says because of these facts, Thornburgh is liable [for these debts]."

Born on Christmas Day, 1950 in Denver, Karl Christian Rove grew up in Colorado, Utah and Nevada. By age nine, when he backed Richard Nixon instead of John Kennedy, Rove was aligned with the Republican Party. Today, he works in an office on Shoal Creek Boulevard, 10 blocks west of the Capitol, and lives in a house in the hills west of town. He drives a used, 12-year-old, white Mercedes station wagon with a car phone and when his schedule allows, works on getting the college degree that still eludes him.

Rove has been in and out of school since he met Atwater, attending the University of Utah, University of Maryland, George Mason and the University of Texas. He also attended the University of Houston, but he's not sure if he passed the courses he took there. A *Houston Post* profile in the late 1970s said of Rove, "His college career can fairly be described as spotty." The article quoted Rove saying, "It really is bizarre, I've had the most tortured college career of anybody I've ever met in my entire life."

Last fall, Rove attended UT as a senior in the college of liberal arts. His major, not surprisingly, is political science and he expects to spend two more semesters at UT before he gets his degree. Rove's lack of a degree — and his partisan politics — have led to Senate rejection of nominations to two university boards of regents — First, at Texas Women's College and later at East Texas State University. Rove's desire to serve as a regent led to a confrontation with Democrats on the Senate Nominations Committee. While testifying before the committee in 1991, Rove was asked about his relationship with an FBI agent named Greg Rampton, a man who makes Travis County DA Ronnie Earle look like Little Red Riding Hood.

**I**ndignant that Earle, a Democrat, would investigate Hutchison, a Republican, Republicans have accused Earle of being partisan. But as Rove once wrote, "that's pretty small beer." Earle may have had the Public Integrity Unit working for him, but during the late 1980s and early '90s the FBI was investigating Texas Democrats and Rampton was the agency's point man. During a stint in Austin, Rampton investigated high profile Democrats, including General Land Commissioner Garry Mauro, Comptroller Bob Bullock, and of course, Texas Agriculture Commissioner Jim Hightower. Only the Hightower investigation resulted in formal charges. Mike Moeller, Pete McRae and Bill Quicksall were convicted in federal court of conspiracy last October and each man now faces more than two years in federal prison. They are appealing the decision.

Rampton and Rove also crossed paths during the 1986 gubernatorial race, when, shortly before the election, private investigators discovered a bug in Rove's office. Rove was quoted in the *Austin American-Statesman*, saying he was "concerned, worried and angry." He charged that Democrats had planted the listening device behind a framed needlepoint of a GOP elephant while the Dems charged that Rove planted the bug himself. Then-Gov. Mark White offered to take a lie detector test to clear the matter, one of the private investigators who discovered the bug refused a lie detector test, Rampton investigated the matter for the FBI and no charges were brought.

Throughout the late 1980s and early '90s Democrats contended that Rampton was doing dirty work for a Republican administration that wanted nothing less than to get Hightower out of office. Democrats are also quick to note that the U.S. Attorney who oversaw Rampton's investigations was Ron Ederer, who had been nominated by Gramm, and that the Justice Department was headed by Thornburgh, who later hired Rove to work on his Senate campaign.

Rove has consistently denied that he prompted the FBI or Rampton during the Hightower investigation. "Look, the idea that I could call up the director of the FBI, or the head of the Austin office of the FBI and say, 'Investigate these Democrats,' is ludicrous and beyond belief," Rove said. He said he spoke with Rampton three times about the Hightower probe but insists he learned of the investigation "the same way everybody else did: I picked up the *Dallas Morning News* and read about it." But Rove and Perry made much political hay of the FBI investigation, which was assisted by Perry aide Larry Beauchamp, who continues to work for Perry as an assistant commissioner at the Ag Department.

Democrats point out that Rampton subpoenaed Ag Department documents on the day that Hightower was expected to announce his bid for re-election. Then, six weeks before the election, Rampton went to the Secretary of State's office and obtained Hightower's 1988, 1989, and 1990 campaign finance records.

Rove's contact with Rampton on the Hightower investigation led former Senator Bob Glasgow, a Stephenville Democrat, to grill Rove before the Texas Senate Nominations Committee in March of 1991. Rove, who was nominated by Clements to the board of regents of East Texas State, was asked by Glasgow if he had been "involved in the Hightower investigation at the request of special agent Rampton." Three times, Rove said no. Rove was not confirmed for the board of regents and his enemies continue to believe that he was connected to the investigation.

In any case, Rove appeared to know quite a bit about the probe. In June 1990, he told a group of Washington, D.C., reporters that Agriculture Department officials would be indicted. The indictments were not handed down until January 1991. Rove also admits talking to Rampton while the investigation was ongoing. In the summer of 1990, according to Rove, Rampton called to inquire if the Perry campaign intended to issue a press release on the Hightower investigation. When asked why the FBI would call him, Rove said "I don't think it's unusual for him to call up and say don't do it [issue a press release]. He was pissed. He did not want to see us noodling around in his investigation." When asked about investigations, the FBI usually will neither confirm nor deny that an investigation is underway. Juanita Benavides of the San Antonio office of the FBI said the agency has a policy "to wait until after the trial to comment on investigations."

Byron Sage, supervisor in charge of the FBI's Austin-Waco office, maintained that there was nothing unusual in Rampton's conduct. "The FBI doesn't conduct investigations based on politics; they do criminal investigations based on probable cause and

on criminal complaints. We don't target individuals based on political affiliations. I supervised Rampton for a number of years after my arrival here. I found him to be extremely professional and unbiased in his approach. ... When you have sensitive investigations, you assign the best-caliber agents and the ones with the most experience. That was Rampton."

Rampton, a 22-year veteran of the FBI, also wrote an unusual op-ed case published last June in the *San Antonio Express-News*. The article rebutted a column by Molly Ivins that had been critical of Rampton's testimony in the trial of Randy Weaver, the Idaho separatist who was charged (and later acquitted) with killing a U.S. Marshal. Rampton wrote that Ivins' column was "without factual basis and is a disservice not just to me and the FBI, but to her readers as well."

The Idaho incident, in which Weaver's wife was killed by FBI snipers, has led to a high-profile Justice Department investigation of the FBI's actions. The inquiry, conducted by the Justice Department's Office of Professional Responsibility, was reported by the *New York Times* last November and is looking into possible wrongdoing by the FBI. Justice Department spokesmen would not comment on whether Rampton's actions were being scrutinized. Rampton no longer works in the FBI's Austin office. He is currently stationed in Lewiston, Idaho.

**T**ogether, Ann Richards and George W. Bush will spend close to \$30 million to win election to an office that pays \$99,121.92 per year. For political consultants, a \$30 million race means lots of work and lots of profit. Observers estimate that Washington-based media man Bob Squier, who will do Richards' TV work, will make about \$1 million. For the GOP, you only have to look at the contribution and expense reports issued by Bush's campaign to get an idea of Rove's importance to the race. According to documents filed with the Texas Ethics Commission, half of the money Bush has spent has gone to Karl Rove & Co. By the end of January, Bush had raised just over \$2 million. He had spent \$613,929.51. The amount paid to Rove for direct mail, consulting and computer equipment was \$340,579.

Rove says the figures are misleading because he pays for all of the printing, postage and design work in a direct mail campaign. Pulling out Richards' expense reports, he says that Richards has spent more than \$400,000 on direct mail, but because Gold Communications, the company doing Richards' direct mail, subcontracts much of the work, the numbers look lower. "We can save a candidate money because we do a lot of the work in-house," he said.

Regardless of how you figure expenses, Rove is obviously a critical player in Bush's

race. For the four full months that Rove has been working for Bush, he has billed the candidate an average of \$85,144 a month. Rove's first bill to Bush came on September 27 of last year, for \$13,553.65 for direct mail. The most recent expense listed was \$24,016.91 for list rental paid to Praxis List Co., which is owned by Rove.

Direct mail has always been Rove's bread and butter. Shaking cash out of voters' pockets is his specialty. The lists he keeps and the letters he writes to GOP contributors have driven much of the GOP's expansion in Texas. So how does he feel about campaign finance reform? "If we limit the amount of money people can take ... then we will rely on people who can jump into a race and pump a lot of money into the race from their own pockets. The majority of people in the U.S. Senate are multimillionaires." Rove believes serious reform is needed, but as long as the system is controlled by incumbents, serious reform will only come after a major scandal. "Money corrupts politics when you tilt the game to the advantage of the people who are in power." He favors limiting PAC contributions because they are "a defense mechanism focused on preserving the status quo" and he wants contribution limits tied to inflation.

If money alone meant success in politics, Claytie Williams would be governor, and Texas would be the laughingstock of the other 49 states. Rove says winning takes money, it also requires "fundamental core beliefs that you can share with people in a way that people say, 'I think this person is better qualified.'" He says for Bush to win, he will have to "share his vision of where he wants to take the state, demonstrate that he has sensible common sense ideas to move the state forward and the leadership to do it."

Again, Rove sounds like Bush and Bush sounds like Rove. Maybe it's just political-speak. But you can be sure that when candidate Bush talks about crime, Rove has schooled his candidate to make sure the message is clear. That's what Rove has to do to stay in business: Get his message to the people. He dismisses the idea that consultants create an image for a candidate. "That assumes you can fool everybody," he says, "that the masses are asses. People are pretty damn smart. What you've got to do is present your case in the best light possible, with credibility and integrity."

Like him or not, Rove has made his mark on Texas politics. He denies having power, he calls himself the "cheapest person you've ever met," and he tries to stay out of the limelight. But if his clients win this November, Hutchison goes back to Washington and Bush heads for 1010 Colorado Street, the Republican stampede in Texas will be near complete and Rove won't be anonymous any longer. □

# JIM HIGHTOWER

## OSHA in Hiding

Did you know that the fastest animal on two feet is the ostrich? Except, of course, when it has its head stuck in the sand. Well, those who run OSHA — the Occupational Health & Safety Administration — may be the slowest critters on two feet, and they've raised "Sticking Your Head in the Sand" to an Olympic-level sport.

Remember that fire a couple of years ago at the Imperial Foods chicken processing plant in North Carolina? Twenty-five workers died because Imperial was imperiously violating about every safety standard on the books — including keeping the plant's emergency doors locked. In the plant's 11-year existence, it had never been inspected by OSHA.

Big public outcry! National news! Congressional hearings! Demands for change! Two years later, a watchdog group — the Government Accountability Project — checked up on conditions in six North Carolina chicken plants and found that the promise of change was all foam, no beer.

Not only are many fire exits still blocked, but employees are severing fingers and suffering other injuries because companies are requiring workers to process up to 91 chickens a minute. Chlorine bleach is causing eye and breathing disabilities, ill and injured workers are forced to stay on the line or be fired and ... well, you don't want to hear about the maggots.

Where's OSHA? Head in the sand. It inspects only if it gets a "formal" complaint. Now, these are about as rare as July snowballs since the complaint process is both mysterious and perilous — those who do complain seem especially prone to getting fired.

Fear not, though, Al Gore is riding to the rescue — not of the workers, but of the companies.

As part of his "reinventing government" scam, he's proposed letting poultry processors inspect *themselves* for workplace violations. Great idea! Let's also eliminate cops and just ask the criminals to turn themselves in.

Instead of letting these foxes guard the chickens, let's put some teeth back in our worker safety laws. Call the Government Accountability Project to learn how you can

*Jim Hightower, a former Observer editor and Texas agriculture commissioner, does daily radio commentary and in May will begin a weekend talk show on the ABC radio network.*

help: 202-408-0034.

**T**he tomato is actually a fruit, but tariff collectors in New York declared it a vegetable in the 1890s. It seems they had no tax on fruits, but they had one on vegetables so — Presto Change-o! — the tomato's a veggie!

Government works its miracles in mysterious ways, doesn't it? Take the FDA — Food and Drug Administration. They're supposed to keep our food supply from being contaminated, but they're currently about as effective as a jello doormat.

For example, truck after truck of pesticide-laden produce from Latin America is waved right through FDA's border stations. DDT, heptachlor and dozens of other illegal, cancer-causing toxics have been found on loads of everything from asparagus to zucchini, bound for our grocery shelves. Yet the FDA checks only 1 percent of the shipments.

But while it can't seem to stop tainted produce from coming in, FDA has gone the extra mile to let Monsanto and other agribusiness giants willingly contaminate the one food that families most want to keep pure: our milk.

FDA is acting more like industry's lapdog than our watchdog, giving Monsanto the green light to inject dairy herds with a gene-altered drug called bovine somatotropin, also known as bovine growth hormone. This synthetic additive not only hooks Old Bossy on the drug, but she passes it through to our kids with every glass of milk they quaff.

"Perfectly safe," FDA tells us. Never mind that BGH causes infections in cows, requiring high doses of antibiotics that'll also show up in your babies' milk; and never mind that BGH has never been tested on humans. And never mind that the feds also once told us that DDT and Thalidomide would be "perfectly safe" for us.

You don't have to be Louis Pasteur to smell something sour in this deal. FDA is forcing our children to be Monsanto's guinea pigs. I don't care what these humbugologists say — I simply don't want this stuff in my family's milk. If you agree, call The Pure Food Campaign, which is fighting for our right-to-know what's in our milk: 800-253-0681.

**T**he old curmudgeon H.L. Mencken wrote: "There are some politicians who, if their constituents were cannibals, would promise them missionaries for dinner."

Now, if you think even politicians wouldn't go that far, check today's "hottest button" in public opinion polls: fear of crime. Sure enough, here comes everybody from guber-

natorial candidates to gooberheads running for library trustee on a platform of electrocuting anyone with more than two books overdue.

Every politician with a pollster is trying to "climb on crime," including William J. Clinton of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. Here he is in his State of the Union diatribe: "Three strikes and you're out."

Hey, get tough Bill!

Problem is, police chiefs, prosecutors and even his own Justice Department say it's good political theater, but little more than flimflam when it actually comes to stopping crime.

Three strikes? Well, they have to be *federal* strikes, which most crimes you and I worry about are not.

And "out" means life in prison, so it's really three strikes and you're "in." Since most crimes are committed by people in their teens and 20s, this means 50 to 60 years in jail time at roughly \$20,000 a year each. Go figure. Clinton is figuring roughly 20 billion bucks of your and my money for his political jab at the problem.

Yes, there are a few good things in Bill's grab bag of a crime bill, but overwhelmingly it's packed with more prison building, more mandatory sentencing, more federal prosecutors, more of the same old, high-dollar, dead-end, hot-air wheel-spinning that caused Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan and George Bush to lose their "Wars on Crime."

Bill Clinton keeps talking about being "new" and "bold," but you can't throw a wide loop with a short rope, and his proposals are way too short for his rhetoric.

"Bold" isn't building still more prisons — it's building possibilities: youth-service programs, jobs creation, intensive drug treatment, inner-city boys clubs. This is a crime approach based not on our country's fears, but on our hopes. And it would work.

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## Man of the People

This is a horse-race column, so those of you don't like inside political skinny can go read something elevating on Bosnia.

The betting line on the morning after the primary election is that Jim Mattox is toast. He needed 45 percent and a 10-point lead; he got neither, in part because Mike Andrews drew so well in Houston — 17 points when some were speculating that he wouldn't get into double digits, and most of that's an anybody-but-Mattox vote.

No one is willing to count out a campaigner like Mattox, but great gobs of money, some of it rumored to have been held out to this point at the request of Gov. Ann Richards, is about to descend on Richard Fisher's head, while Mattox has none.

Look at this Senate runoff. Here's Richard Fisher proudly declaring that he's "not a politician" — he's a "small businessman." What he is, is an investment banker who makes a living making money for people who are already rich, period. You have to have a minimum of \$2 million to sign up with his firm.

Fisher may not have held public office before, but believe me, he has the "politician" drill down perfectly: He can not-answer a question as well or better than people who've been in politics for 30 years. He can talk longer and say less than that old character of John Henry Faulk's who used to go on about motherhood.

Fisher is like a parody of what's wrong with politics — he's Bob Roberts, he's Bob Forehead — he doesn't stand for anything, he doesn't believe in anything, he just goes around saying buzzwords like "job creation" and "the future." There's no there there with Fisher.

Jim Mattox is the best-qualified candidate in the Senate race by experience, by record, by 20 years of standing up and fighting for what's right. He's made some good enemies over the years, and he's also made some enemies he didn't need to by fighting like a junkyard dog. Maybe that makes him unelectable, but we are taught to put principles above personalities, and I believe we should. I am so tired of these slippery candidates whose stands are based on the latest polls, who will tell people anything they want to hear except the truth.

Mattox sure ain't perfect, but boy, is he ever a real person. I've seen him take on the insurance industry, manufacturers of shoddy products, corporate polluters, greedy bankers and the Dallas Establishment. Talk about

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

someone who has never forgotten where he came from: Mattox's mama was a waitress who died from a heart attack she had while carrying a tray of pizzas at Campisi's on Mockingbird Lane in Dallas. Mattox is a working folks' Democrat, and in case you haven't noticed, working folks in this country are in dire need of someone who will stand up and fight for them.

Meanwhile, a star was born in Texas politics — to wit, Robin Rorapaugh, who managed Fisher's campaign. Her proud political parents in the world of campaign consulting were aglow on March 9

"I was the first to recognize her ability," claims George Shipley. "She's the best grassroots organizer I ever saw."

"She the best goddamn field organizer I ever ran across," says Jerry Hall.

"She's somethin' — one of the secret treasures of the party," says James Carville.

And a round of applause to Rorapaugh, who, like most victims of instant stardom, has been around for years. She ran Raul Gonzalez's first campaign and Dan Morales' last campaign and did Texas for Bill Clinton, bringing him within 3 points in George Bush's home state with no money. She messed around in Washington and then helped bring Jim Florio back to within a point in Now Jersey.

She comes from a small town in Indiana — like something out of *Hoosiers*, Hall says — and came to Texas as a labor skate, picking up her skills as an organizer for CWA. Then Shipley, Dr. Dirt, found her in '85, and the rest is, as they say, history.

Fisher is, according to Shipley himself, just what the Democrats need on their ticket: a Republican. "We've got women, we've got Gonzalez and Morales. Hey, this has always been a big-tent party; this is just what we need — someone to bring us social credentials — a country-club Democrat," he said.

Great — when the richies are tipping the help at the country club, they can say, "You know, I'm really with you people — I voted for Richard Fisher."

The one thing that Fisher brought to his campaign is the most fluent Spanish that anyone in South Texas has ever heard from an Anglo pol — although if the ability to speak Spanish were sufficient, Bob Krueger would be a senator today.

I have to admit that Ann Richards told me in December that this race was going to be won by someone who wasn't even in it yet, and I didn't believe her. But if Richards is so smart, how come her primary opponent, No-Name Espinosa, got 200,000 votes without spending any money? What was that vote?

Craig Washington is gone, amid a general feeling that it's a shame but that he deserved to lose; Gene Green is back; and Charlie Wilson gets to run against Donna Peterson in East Texas yet again.

The most interesting court race, Place 1 on the Supremes, landed in a runoff between Raul Gonzalez and Rene Haas that should be worth watching. Gonzalez says it's "the bitterest, most cynical campaign ever" and "sets a new low for judicial politics." Whiner. Merely a spirited contest, sports fans, with lots of unlovely undertones: a Mexican-American vs. a woman; a pro-lifer vs. a law-'n'-order macho female. Whoopee.

The best strategic move of the primary may have been an anti-Fisher ad that Andrews put up about two weeks out — your basic attack ad. No one noticed the Andrews tag in the first frame, they got to the end, there's no "Paid for by ..." and apparently most of the people who saw it assumed it was a Mattox ad. And that's pretty much the story of how Mattox killed himself over the years — people see an attack ad and think of Mattox.

Meanwhile, ol' Texas Tough's first runoff move was to promptly challenge Fisher to a debate — in the ballroom of the Dallas Country Club.

And here's the single most amazing piece of news out of the plebiscite: Doyle Willis of Fort Worth, who entered the Texas House of Representatives while the pyramids were still being built, is in a runoff. □

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# Cannes on the Colorado

BY STEVEN G. KELLMAN

**T**HE EYES OF TEXAS are bleary. While the Longhorns were leaving the Southwest Conference, the South by Southwest Film and Media Conference was arriving in Austin, opening on March 11 with two world premieres — Eagle Pennell's *Doc's Full Service* and Alex Georges' *Cultivating Charlie*. By the time the conference concludes on March 19 it will have included more than 110 separate screenings of 40 different programs.

Among the festival's offerings are 35 feature films and videos, eight of them regional premieres. A retrospective series, titled *A Celebration of Texas Independents*, exhibits earlier work by: Andy Anderson (*Positive I.D.*), Hector Galan (*Vaquero: The Forgotten Cowboy, The Hunt for Pancho Villa*), Ken Harrison (*On Valentine's Day, Jackalope, Gimble's Swing*), Richard Linklater (*You Can't Learn to Plow by Reading Books, Slacker*), Michael Nesmith (*Repo Man, Tapeheads, Dr. Duck's Extra-Special Secret Sauce, Elephant Parts*), Pennell (*Last Night at the Alamo, The Whole Shootin' Match*), Bud Shrake (*Kid Blue, Songwriter*), and William Witliff (*Barbarosa, Red-Headed Stranger*). New works are competing for festival honors in the categories of narrative feature, documentary feature, narrative short, documentary short, and music video. Your reporter was drafted for jury duty.

"I am but mad north-north-west," says Hamlet to Guildenstern. "When the wind is southerly I know a hawk from a handsaw." In Texas, deranged hawks wield chainsaws, but the organizers of the South by Southwest Film and Media Conference are not so disoriented by sunny days in unlit screening rooms that they selected Bethany Yarrow's *Mama Awethu!* — a documentary about life in the South African townships — and *Aelita, Queen of Mars* — a lost Russian sci-fi silent — out of defective geography. South by Southwest denotes the festival's locus more than its focus; though partial to Texas, the offerings in Austin also encompass neighborhoods where the Alamo is a very distant memory.

What they do have in common is inde-

pendence from studio conventions and connections. That usually means a budget so modest that its blush is indistinguishable from red ink. While Hollywood productions now average about \$25 million, Pennell, who made *Last Night at the Alamo* in 1983 for \$35,000, did not spend a great deal more for *Doc's Full Service*, which he financed through a matching grant from the NEA. The \$1.6 million spent on *Cultivating Charlie* would not cover the catering fees on a Schwarzenegger venture. "I have no idea whether it has commercial potential," Georges, a 30-year-old Houstonian, admits about his feature debut, which he finished editing barely a month ago. "We just want people to see it." Audiences at the South by Southwest Film Festival have the opportunity to see works they might not otherwise ever encounter. Many of the filmmakers come to these screenings with exalted hopes but without distribution deals. As the annual WorldFest reduces its operations in Houston and relocates its headquarters to Charleston, South Carolina, the new Austin event offers Texans a rare alternative to shopping-mall movies.

"My films are about Texas, and they're about small guys trying to fight big guys," proclaimed Pennell a few hours before the first public screening of *Doc's Full Service*. Born in Andrews and educated at UT-Austin, he now lives in Houston. A local legend, he remains a small independent in a business dominated by big guys and gals based in California and New York. Pennell reveals that his next project will be set in a Bay City bait shack beside the controversial nuclear power plant that he abhors. Undeterred by trademark control, he intends to call the film *South Texas Nuclear Project*. "I have no fear of their goddamn attorneys."

"This place ain't much," says Frank "Doc" Kovar (Kevin Wiggins), "but it's all we got." The place is a dilapidated gas station in fictional Barton, somewhere between Houston and Austin, that promises "service you won't find in the big city or on a bypass." *Doc's Full Service* covers three summer days in the lives of several characters in a tiny Texas town ordinarily bypassed by movie cameras. They include: Clifford R. "Peewee" Linedecker III (James Belcher), a tippling dreamer still dependent on his overbearing

mother's opinions and his dead daddy's money; Ann, who runs the station's barbecue stand and is described by Peewee as "so cool she could eat soup with a fork"; Doc's ditzzy, earthy wife Belma; Cecil, a fastidious but incompetent mechanic; and Vernon, a slick and solvent salesman of used automobiles. Belma runs off with Vernon to the Cayman Islands, while Doc almost runs off with Ann to Dallas.

Pennell is the foremost practitioner of Lone Star neoclassicism, restricting the time, place, and action of his stories for aesthetic intensity at least as much as out of financial restraint. *Last Night at the Alamo* confines itself to the final hours of a Houston bar scheduled for demolition, and *Doc's Full Service* could likewise succeed as a concentrated stage play, with nothing but language to offend Aristotle. Peewee, who, against all rational evidence, convinces himself that he will soon direct a production of Hamlet, is a flamboyant figure out of Tennessee Williams, a character whose fond fantasies far exceed accomplishment or possibility. Unlike Doc, who learns to accept the narrow perimeters of his existence, other locals who wander in and out of the sluggish station also long to be elsewhere and other.

It would be easy — and erroneous — to fault this work for being "uncinematic," for not availing itself of the filmmaker's privilege to cut through space and time. But *My Dinner With Andre* managed to make absorbing cinema out of the prandial conversation between two people in a restaurant, and splendid celluloid records of performances by Spalding Gray and Eric Bogosian make cavils over inadequate exploitation of the medium seem pedantic. No, what weakens Pennell's appealing new film is not its theatricality but the fact that it is sometimes theatrical without being dramatic. The pacing sometimes seems abrupt and the exposition intrusive. Particularly toward the end, when Doc and Ann revel in painful self-revelation, the script, by Kim Henkel, who also wrote the screenplay for *Last Night at the Alamo*, substitutes discourse for disclosure. The characters talk about what they should be showing, obliquely. "I like to deflate windbags," Pennell told the *Observer*, but he lets the air collect in Barton.

"Doc, you belong here," Ann explains to

Steven Kellman teaches comparative literature at the University of Texas at San Antonio.

her lover and, superfluously, to the viewer. "If you left here you would die." In contrast to Doc, who thrives in lifeless Barton, Ann recognizes that she must return from whence she came: "If I stayed here, I would become as desperate and frivolous as Belma." To find the universe in a grain of provincial silt or to look for it by wandering far and wide: It is a choice central to a celebration of films that dare to be independent and local. And it is one that haunts another new offering brought to Austin after triumph at the recent Sundance Festival — *blessing*, a remarkably accomplished and understated feature debut.

"From up here, it's all green," says Jack (Guy Griffis), to explain his fondness for climbing to the top of the silo at his dairy farm. The problem is that when you get back down and close, the wintry Wisconsin landscape is bleak and its residents are ornery. "Everything is sick," Jack insists, "everything." No wonder that his oldest son, Tommy, ran off to sea, and his teenage daughter Randi (played adeptly by Griffis' actual daughter Melora) is itching to do the same. His other child, 10-year-old Clovis (Clovis Siemon), is content to stay at home on the grange, but he is mentally impaired. Wife Arlene (Carlin Glynn) uses sweepstakes entries to shield her from despair. *Blessing*, in whose signature scene a priest consecrates the local crops and livestock, is a gloss on William Carlos Williams' axiom that: "The pure products of America go crazy."

Producer/director/editor/writer Paul Zehrer, who left his native Minnesota to live in New York City, neither glamorizes nor demonizes the American heartland. Farmer Jack digs a pit in front of his house merely to irk a wife made frantic by fantasizing her husband's sexual attentions to a neighbor. Daughter Randi stays out with a handsome stranger until long after the cows have come home, and she awakens too late to help her parents milk them. A chilly study in how a rural family implodes, *blessing* conveys mute hysteria without exploiting cinematic histrionics.

In the winter in Wisconsin, it is hard to cultivate your garden. But the lesson of *Candide* is to make what you can of your own barren plot, lest you make yourself miserable with longing for Eden. *Cultivating Charlie* takes the plot of Voltaire's book and adapts it to the contemporary world. The eponymous Charlie (Jake Weber) is the vegetarian son of Ed Thundertrunk (David Huddleston), founder of the flourishing Burger World chain. "I've got 1,000 restaurants that all sell hamburgers, and some day you're gonna run 'em," Ed promises the boy. Rejecting his bloody birthright and desolated by the fickleness of his beloved Candice (Elizabeth Lande), who abandons him for a TV contract, Charlie wanders the roads of America in quest of truth.

In one of his earliest episodes, Charlie encounters a berserk mailman (James Belcher,

also Peewee in *Doc's Full Service*) who massacres customers and staff at a Burger World. Later, he meets Dr. Tim (played by the genuine Timothy Leary), a computer genius intent on "trying to unify mathematics with nirvana." Amid the violence, viciousness, and vapidness of this world, Charlie places his trust in Dr. Richard Glosser (Richard Libertini), a mellow mentor who dismisses every catastrophe with the reassurance that: "It's OK." His nihilistic counterpart, Martin (Vincent Schiavelli), proclaims: "I don't give a shit about anything. God made the world to drive us crazy." Glosser drives his Pontiac convertible so nonchalantly he does not bother to hold the steering wheel, and Martin, a lapsed Jesuit, delights in torching a museum housing a Gutenberg Bible. Both compete for control of Charlie's soul.

Matt Greenberg's clever script calls attention to its literary origins by dividing the segments into titled chapters. Georges' movie calls attention to itself when Mexican *federales* attack his own cameraman filming Charlie's arrival in Baja California and when Georges himself appears as a TV director during Charlie's visit to Hollywood. *Cultivating Charlie* does not eclipse the Leonard Bernstein-Richard Wilbur-Lillian Hellman musical as a modern translation of *Candide*. It is at the same time too preeningly ingenious in its transpositions and too unfaithful to the spirit of the original. Unlike a hamburger stand, literary classics cannot be franchised easily. Though it worries many of Voltaire's meditations on free will, chance and evil, the film lacks the master's frenetic pacing and naughty charm. This is not the best of all possible productions, though as Glosser might aver, it's OK.

I omit mention of the nonfiction entries at this year's festival. With the exception of Hector Galan's *Los Mineros*, a riveting account, narrated by Luis Valdez, of the 50-year struggle by Mexican-American copper workers in eastern Arizona to organize against discrimination, exploitation, deportation and violence, I have not yet seen them. Other documentaries include Tara Veneruso's *Janis Joplin Slept Here*, an examination of the Austin music scene, Brian Huberman's *John Wayne's The Alamo*, *The Documentary*, Barry Alexander Brown's *The Who's Tommy: The Amazing Journey*, Rachel Liebling's *High Lonesome*, which is subtitled *The Story of Bluegrass Music*, and Allie Light's *Dialogues with Madwomen*, a study of seven women afflicted with psychoses.

Much of the delirium of attending a film festival comes from the prospect of encountering unheralded releases, unfamiliar works that do not come trailing clouds of criticism. Siskel and Ebert have not yet commented on most of the entries in the South by Southwest Film and Media Conference Film Festival. At press time, early in the proceedings, neither will I. □

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**Continued from pg. 24**

for personal and political reasons, resulted in reimbursements but no indictments. Bledsoe quit his job as assistant attorney general after Republicans complained that he did NAACP and Democratic Party work on state time and the investigation by Travis County District Attorney Ronnie Earle's Public Integrity Unit found Bledsoe, who also was Travis County Democratic Chair, had made several questionable phone calls, for which he reimbursed the state \$25. Enoch, a Republican, was accused of using his staff for campaign-related activities and to help him write his master's thesis when he was on the 5th Court of Appeals in Dallas. He reimbursed the state \$568. Earle said that, unlike Kay Hutchison's celebrated

**Continued from pg. 7**

the Democratic runoff to replace progressive Representative Garfield Thompson.

In District 143, the seat given up by progressive Representative Mario Gallegos, Carol Alvarado will face Gerard Torres, who has TSTA support, in the Democratic runoff.

In District 148, the seat given up by progressive Representative Yvonne Navarro Flores, Jessica Farrar faces Brian Quintero in the Democratic primary.

Races to watch this fall include District 43, where freshman Representative Pedro G. Nieto of Uvalde converted from moderate Democrat to Republican and now faces Tracy O. King, a Uvalde hearing aid specialist; District 61, where Representative Ric Williamson of Weatherford switched to the GOP and beat a Republican primary challenger but now faces a challenge from Roberto R. Hopkins of Decatur, who believes the district is still Democratic; and first-term Representative Bernard Erickson of Cleburne, who became a Democrat after he found himself voting with the Democrats on rural issues and will face the Johnson County Republican Chair in November. In District 52, backlash against the fundamentalist Christians who have taken over the Round Rock school district and the Williamson County Commissioners Court may help Democrat Llorente Navarrette, a Georgetown school trustee, mount a challenge against Republican Representative Mike Krusee of Austin. In District 105, the seat given up by progressive Representative Al Granoff of Dallas, Democrat Dale B. Tillery, who has the support of organized labor, faces Republican Mike Anderson. In Dallas District 107, the seat given up by David Cain, Democrat Harryette Ehrhardt will face Republican Lee Sanders. In District 134, the Houston seat given up by Sue Schechter, Democrat Bruce Reeves, who got the liberal Harris County Democrats' support, faces Republican Kyle Janek.

*Early voting for the April 12 runoff election runs April 4-8.*  
—J.C.

case, Bledsoe and Enoch cooperated with the investigations. Earle said the GOP had engaged in an "ethics lynching" of Bledsoe; state Republican Chairman Fred Meyer told the *Austin American-Statesman* that now that Bledsoe has been cleared, Attorney General Dan Morales should offer him his job back.

✓ **BAPTIST RIFT.** Fundamentalists tightened their control over Southern Baptist institutions on March 9 as the president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth was fired by trustees a day after the board had given him a glowing appraisal. Immediately after the vote to remove Russell H. Dilday after nearly 16 years as president, the locks were changed on his president's office, the Dallas-based *Baptist Standard* reported.

Dilday had charted a middle course as fundamentalists have consolidated their hold on the national Southern Baptist Convention over the past 15 years, but he was seen by some fundamentalists as too open to moderate Southern Baptists, according to Daniel Cattau of the *Dallas Morning News*. The *Baptist Standard* editorialized that the firing could widen the gap between more moderate Texas Baptists and the more fundamental conservative Southern Baptist Convention.

✓ **SHIITE REPUBLICANS.** The low turnout for party primary elections and the lower turnout for precinct conventions may have finally given the religious right control over the Republican Party. Tim Fleck's *Houston Insider* newsletter reports that

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Christian, anti-abortion groups packed Houston-area precinct conventions, elected delegates to the senatorial district conventions and passed a plethora of resolutions, urging the quarantine of AIDS patients, outlawing abortion and affirmation that civil government is subordinate to "God's law." Conservatives — and this is a relative term — shouted down Republican National Committeewoman Penny Butler when she tried to convince her precinct convention that Republicans were not extreme. Elsewhere, when a moderate offered a resolution condemning violence at abortion clinics, conservative standard-bearer Jim Kennedy, who led moderate Betsy Lake into a runoff for county chair, reportedly suggested that doctors performing abortions be treated the same way in which they have treated "unborn babies."

✓ **CRITICAL MASS.** Sarah Weddington is an unlikely guest at a symposium studying the link between nuclear power and breast cancer, but there she was, seated in a back row for both days of an Austin conference sponsored in February by Women's Action on the Environment. What made Weddington's presence unlikely is her current employment as a lobbyist for Maine Yankee Atomic Power, whose nuclear plant, when decommissioned, will probably be disposed of in Hudspeth County. Weddington

protested when a photographer tried to take her picture. "I'm just a private citizen here," said Weddington, who is more widely known for her Supreme Court victory in the *Roe v. Wade* abortion-rights case than her nuclear industry lobbying. "How much are you paid each year to represent the nuclear industry — a million dollars?" asked an environmental lawyer who caught up with Weddington in the lobby of the LBJ School auditorium. Weddington suggested that the lawyer "go look it up." According to records at the Texas Ethics Commission, in 1993, Weddington earned between \$10,000 and \$24,999 from Maine Yankee. She also reported earnings from \$10,000 to \$24,999 for lobbying on behalf of State Farm Insurance.

✓ **ON THE WATERFRONT.** Laurel Entertainment of New York has bought a film-rights option to the story of Diane Wilson, who for the past five years has waged a fight against Formosa Plastic's pollution of Upper Lavaca Bay, now closed to oystering by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. Wilson, a fourth-generation shrimper, has requested a meeting with Gov. Richards and conducted three hunger strikes in protest of the Formosa plant and, with Calhoun County Resource Watch, has filed suit in state and federal courts. She is backed by Greenpeace, Communities Concerned About Corporations, and a local

coalition of Vietnamese and Anglo shrimpers. According to a story that appeared in the *Victoria Advocate*, Formosa Plastics is also expanding inland, at another facility near Edna where the company is seeking to have land designated as a reinvestment zone to be used "for additional downstream manufacturing facilities." EPA Secretary Carol Browner reportedly has agreed to meet with Wilson to discuss Formosa's expansion. Formosa has already received state-agency permits required to dispose waste water in the bay.

✓ **PRICE OF OPENNESS.** Legislators who are trying to make public records a revenue source for state government may have given government bureaucrats a new way to hide their misdeeds: exorbitant fees for "public" documents. The General Services Commission on March 29 will act upon a proposal to levy extra charges for requests of more than five pages of public documents or those which required more than 15 minutes to locate. And the House State Affairs Committee is considering further revisions of the Open Records Act to "clarify its meaning and utility in light of the number of information files now maintained on computers." This may be an opportunity to improve access to information, but there also will be interests in keeping "public" records shunted far off the information superhighway. □

## CLASSIFIEDS

### ORGANIZATIONS

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LESBIAN/GAY DEMOCRATS of Texas — Our Voice in the Party. Membership \$15, P.O. Box 190933, Dallas, 75219.

SICK OF KILLING? Join the Amnesty International Campaign Against the Death Penalty. Call: Austin (512) 469-0966, Houston (713) 529-2118, Dallas (214) 739-5151, San Antonio (512) 622-3618, El Paso (915) 592-3925.

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## POLITICAL INTELLIGENCE

### ✓ MORE PREVENTION THAN CURE.

Even right-wing politicians are starting to read the public demand for health-care reforms. Senators Phil Gramm and Kay Hutchison took the Republican line that there was no health-care crisis in the first place and Gramm was quoted in the Capitol Hill newspaper, *Roll Call*, on the President's plan: "We have to blow up this train, the trestle it's on and kill everybody in it," but after reading the polls, the GOP figured out it had better sign onto a reform package, albeit with the least reforms and the most profits for insurance corporations. Meanwhile, Texans with roles writing health-care reform bills in the House include Mike Andrews, D-Houston, a member of the health subcommittee of Ways and Means and a co-sponsor with Tennessee's Jim Cooper of the "bipartisan" insurance industry protection bill; John Bryant, D-Dallas; Ralph Hall, D-Rockwall, and single-payer advocate Craig Washington, D-Houston, members of the Energy and Commerce Committee, which will consider one version of reforms; Gene Green, D-Houston, a member of the Education and Labor Committee, which will consider employer mandates; Jake Pickle, D-Austin, a senior member of the Ways and Means Committee who will help negotiate the bill in that panel; and Martin Frost, D-Dallas, a ranking member of the Rules Committee, which will take the proposals from the standing committees and assemble the package for the House debate.

Insurance companies and other health care industry lobbyists have committed hundreds of millions of dollars to slowing down the pace of reforms. To counter the big money and to keep the reforms alive, members of the public should contact their representatives and demand a) universal coverage; b) comprehensive benefits; c) employer mandates; d) cost containment; and e) preservation of a single-payer option for states. Call the U.S. Capitol at 202-224-3121 and ask for the U.S. Representative or Senator of your choice or write them at the U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515 or the U.S. Senate, Washington, D.C. 20510.

✓ **PARTY CRASHERS.** Crashing a press conference touting Jim Mattox's support among State Democratic Party Executive Committee (SDEC) members, Richard Fisher's campaign managed to get one sup-

porter into the audience. When a radio reporter asked the 20 SDEC members standing with Mattox about Fisher's credentials as a Democrat, Cynthia Morton, a Dallas African-American SDEC member supporting Fisher, yelled from the back of the room. Morton seemed to have little more to say except that she supported Fisher. Mattox seized the moment, however, proposing once again that he and Fisher debate in the ballroom of the Dallas Country Club where Fisher is a member — a club that includes no African-American, Hispanic or Jewish members. Fisher campaign manager Robin Rorapough stood in the back of the conference room that Mattox had booked—and watched.

✓ **NEW DEMOCRATS.** A spokesperson for the Jim Mattox Senate campaign complained of phone calls and letters written to Dallas-area Republicans urging them to cross over and vote for Richard Fisher in the March 8 Democratic primary. Included in a press packet distributed by the Mattox campaign were transcribed telephone pitches and a photocopy of a letter from Ruth Sharp Altshuler, the sister of the late Dallas Republican Congressman Jim Collins. Before making the case for Fisher, Altshuler writes that the candidate is married to her niece, Nancy. "We are fortunate in Texas to be one of the few states that does not have political party registration" Altshuler wrote. Mattox attributed the Republican get-out-the-vote campaign in the Democratic primary to the high number of Democratic primary votes won by Richards' opponent, Gary Espinosa, whose 213,726 votes represented 23 percent of those voting in the Democratic primary. "We welcome new members of the party," Mattox said, "but not one-time crossover votes who are voting against the Governor." San Antonio Congressman Henry B. Gonzalez is expected to travel with Mattox in South Texas, a traditional Mattox stronghold where Fisher's personal appearances and bilingual media campaign carried the region for him on March 8.

✓ **POLITICS AND ENVIRONMENT.** Nearly one-third of the employees surveyed at the Natural Resource Conservation Commission said the agency put business and industry concerns before environmental concerns while 79 percent of surveyed employ-

ees thought the agency had politically motivated priorities. Ralph K.M. Haurwitz of the *Austin American-Statesman* reported that 69 percent of the agency's 2,536 employees filled out the questionnaire; more than one-half regarded the commission as a national leader in environmental protection and a majority said their top reason for working at the agency was to protect the environment.

### ✓ HALFWAY CONSERVATIVES.

Texas' two senators, who like to talk about the need to cut deficits, voted to reduce the deficit only about half the time last year, according to the Concord Coalition, which was organized by former senators Paul Tsongas and Warren Rudman. Looking at 20 key Senate votes last year, the scorecard rated Sen. Phil Gramm as voting to cut the deficit 50 percent of the time and Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison 48 percent, as reported in the *Houston Post*. The two Texans voted for spending cuts but not new taxes, Rudman noted.

✓ **STATE'S RIGHTS.** With federal courts backing off from minority voting rights, state courts may start taking up the slack under the Texas Equal Rights Amendment. Four minorities were elected to the Del Valle school board March 8 in the first election under a new single-member plan that resulted from a voting rights case filed in state court in 1989. Although the district is approximately 45-percent minority, only three minorities had been elected to the school board under the at-large system between 1960 and 1994, and they were elected on the majority-Anglo slate. Rev. Maurice Walker, an African American, filed suit in Travis County district court with the help of the Texas Civil Rights Project and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund. Judge Joe Dibrell of Austin declared Del Valle's at-large system unconstitutional and his ruling was upheld by the 3rd Court of Appeals; the single-member plan resulted. Walker is one of the newly elected trustees. At-large election plans are still common in Texas cities and school districts.

✓ **ETHICS BILLS.** Investigations of Texas NAACP President Gary Bledsoe and Supreme Court Justice Craig Enoch, both of whom had been accused of misusing state resources

**Continued on page 22**