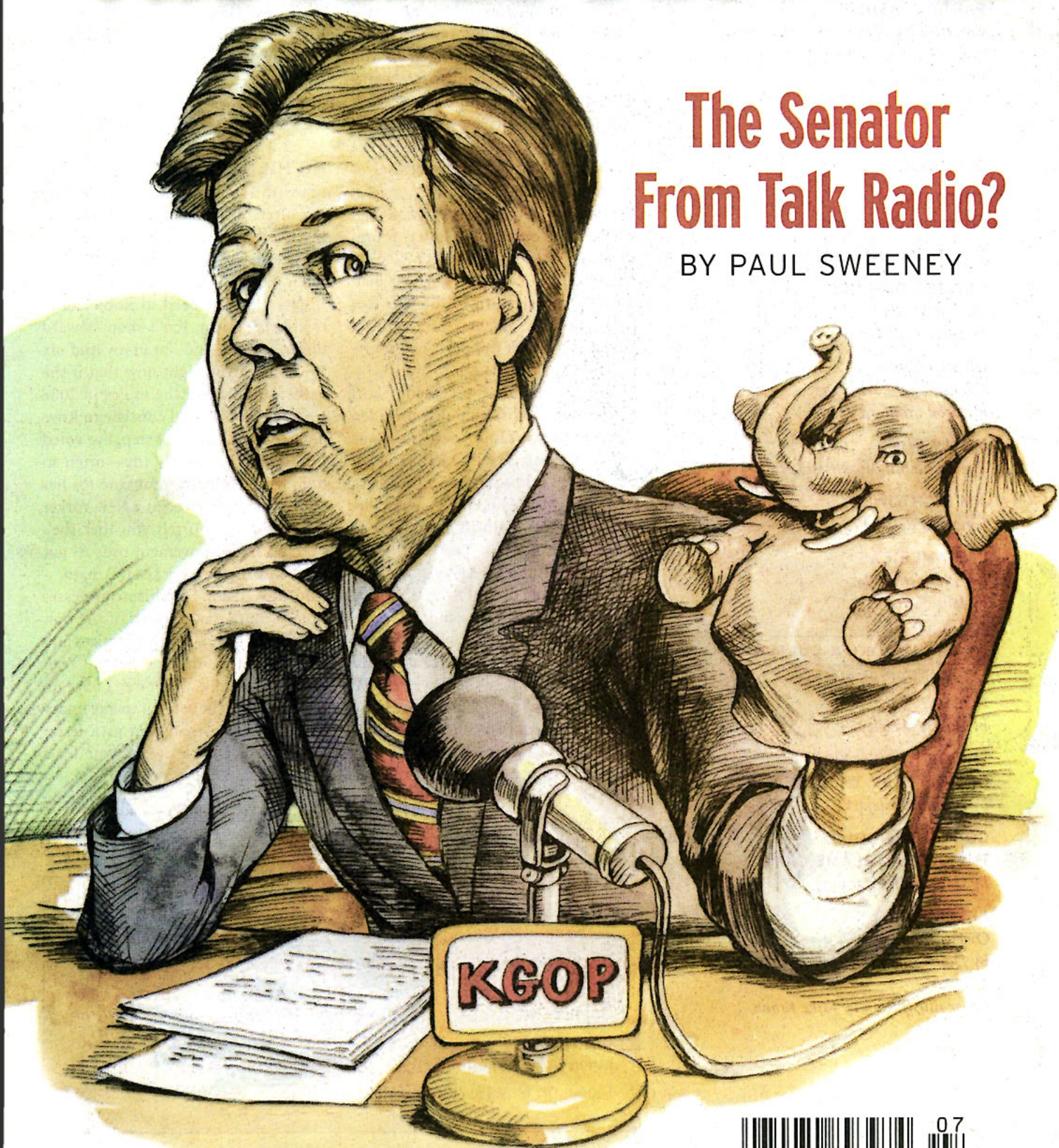


FEBRUARY 24, 2006 | \$2.25 | OPENING THE EYES OF TEXAS FOR FIFTY YEARS

The Texas Observer

The Senator From Talk Radio?

BY PAUL SWEENEY



0 74470 89397 4 07

The Texas Observer

FEATURES

PARTY CRASHER 6
Can the king of Houston's right-wing talk radio bust into the Texas Senate?
 by Paul Sweeney

DEPARTMENTS

DIALOGUE 2

EDITORIAL 3
Crime and Punishment

POLITICAL INTELLIGENCE 4

CAPITOL OFFENSE 11
Mad at Madla
 by Forrest Wilder

OPEN FORUM 12
Accentuate the Negative
 by Jason Stanford

MOLLY IVINS 14
The Accidental Vice President

JIM HIGHTOWER 15
Lobbyists Reject Redistricting

LAS AMERICAS 16
Los Presidenciables
 by John Ross

BOOKS & CULTURE

POETRY 21
by Robert Wrigley

THE RICH, RICH WORLD OF POLITICAL THEATRE 22
by Barbara Belejack

GO FOR THE GOLD: THE GLOBAL BLAME GAME 24
by Gabriela Bocagrande

AFTERWORD 29
Owens Country
 by Don Graham

Cover illustration by Mike Krone

Dialogue

JUDGE NOT

In his piece in the February 10 issue of the *Observer*, "The Worst Judges in Texas," Nate Blakeslee singles out Justice Scott Brister as the most anti-plaintiff, unfair judge on the Texas Supreme Court. What then, do you call a judge who, when Brister wants to find for the plaintiff, disagrees?

Shockingly, Brister (and Chief Justice Wallace Jefferson, and Justice Harriet O'Neill) found themselves outvoted in a 6-3 verdict against the plaintiffs in a class action suit where the Supreme Court found that the defendant (Dallas County Community College District) had illegally charged \$15 million in fees to almost a quarter-of-a-million students. (*Dallas County Community College District v. Bolton.*)

The Court that decided Scott Brister was too pro-plaintiff included Governor Perry's four latest selections for the Court; David Medina, Paul Green, Phil Johnson and Don Willett.

Willett, besides being a strong ally of leading anti-plaintiff group Texans for Lawsuit Reform (and close personal friend of TLR lobbyist and former Perry chief of staff Mike Toomey), is even less of a stealth candidate than Brister—he was an advisor to W. on faith-based initiatives in Texas and in Washington (where he was remarkably unsuccessful). That service to W. comprises most of Willett's time as a lawyer. In fact, since he was appointed to the Court, Willett has made a habit of recusing himself from cases when no one asked him to, including the school finance case, the most

important case the Court has heard since Willett arrived.

Scott Brister may have a bias against plaintiffs. But the worst judge in Texas? He's not even the worst Rick Perry appointee on the Texas Supreme Court.

David Rogers
 Campaign Manager
 Smith For Supreme Court

NO HILLARY

I'm with Molly all the way, regarding her piece on Hillary Clinton and the lily-livered spineless backers of her campaign for the presidency ("Use It Or Lose It," February 10). Three things that you need to know about me: I play poker, I'm a shop-steward union activist, and I'm in my mid-sixties. I'll tell you right now that if she is the candidate of the mules in 2008 we might just as well concede to Rove before we take another step. I've voted for Democrats all my life—often to my regret—but I cannot vote for her. I don't dislike her and as a New Yorker, I'll be the first to tell you that she's been a vast improvement over Al-got-my-hand-in-your-pocket-D'Amato, who Kay Bailey Hutchison professes to love. But I saw enough of the politics that Hillary's family practices and We the People deserve better. Your little essay said it all for me. I have no idea who I might vote for in a primary, but I do know that even as a lesser of two evils choice I won't vote for a Clinton again.

Michael Slater
 Via e-mail
 —continued on page 26

SAVE THE DATES!

An exhibition of music images by *Observer* photographer Jana Birchum will open Sunday, March 5, at Texas French Bread at 1722 South Congress.

Opening reception from 3 to 6 p.m. The photographs will be on exhibit throughout March. The exhibit will then open at Ruta Maya World Headquarters, 3601 South Congress, in Penn Field Plaza, on May 15, running through June 30.

Crime and Punishment

When Jan Reid and I set out to write a book about Tom DeLay in 2003, we assumed we would be writing about a subject whose political philosophy was alien to ours—not about organized crime. But a criminal conspiracy—with our subject at its center—became one of the themes of our book. Incidents of contempt for the law were, as far as reporting goes, low-hanging fruit. Writing about them made us feel as if we were demonstrating our grasp of the obvious.

Congressional Democrats figured out how easy it was in 1998, when they filed a RICO suit against DeLay and his various “criminal enterprises.” After Judge Thomas Penfield Jackson certified the suit, DeLay settled it and shut down some of the fundraising operations described as “criminal.” DeLay’s misconduct wasn’t limited to sketchy fundraising. In that same year, he pulled an intellectual property rights bill off the House floor, to coerce a trade association into firing a former Democratic member of Congress it had hired as executive director. “That meets the legal definition of extortion as I understand it,” said New York Democrat Jerrold Nadler. DeLay was also summoning

lobbyists to his office and telling them they had to contribute more money to Republicans if they wanted access, which meets my definition of extortion, too—even if my deeper understanding of the law is derived from watching “Boston Legal” on Tuesday nights.

Now as the DA in Austin and federal prosecutors in Washington are confirming the obvious claims that we laid out in our book, the House Republican Conference has punished DeLay—by banishing him to an Appropriations subcommittee. The subcommittee’s jurisdiction includes the NASA complex in DeLay’s district; he can use NASA funding to try to leverage up his 28 percent approval rating before he faces Democrat Nick Lampson in November. There’s also a less obvious reason for the appointment. DeLay will temporarily occupy the seat vacated by Randy “Duke” Cunningham, the California Republican who copped a \$2.4 million bribery plea and resigned from Congress. (An appropriate seat for an appropriator like DeLay.) But because DeLay had previously served on Appropriations, he’s now in line to become Subcommittee chair next year when Frank Wolf leaves the post.

The leverage that DeLay will get out of the chairmanship has to do with the funding jurisdiction of

the Subcommittee on Science, the Departments of State, Justice, and Commerce, and Related Agencies. Forget the related agencies. DeLay really needs some stroke at Justice. Right around the time that he received his new committee appointment, the U.S. Family Network received a subpoena requesting information on DeLay and his wife Christine; DeLay’s former deputy chief of staff Tony Rudy and his wife Lisa; and the Network director, the Rev. Ed Buckham and his wife Wendy. Ralph Reed and Grover Norquist were also mentioned in the subpoena—though their wives were not. This all relates to the Jack Abramoff lobbying scandal, which will almost certainly result in the indictment of members of Congress and their staffs. The subpoena in question was issued by the same Department of Justice whose funding DeLay will oversee, if he escapes jail time in Texas.

Funny how these things always seem to work out. —*Lou Dubose*

Former Observer editor Lou Dubose is the co-author of the PublicAffairs political thriller, The Hammer Comes Down: The Nasty, Brutish and Shortened Political Life of Tom DeLay. This is the first in an occasional series of guest editorials.

THE TEXAS OBSERVER | VOLUME 98, NO. 4 | A Journal of Free Voices Since 1954

Founding Editor Ronnie Dugger
Executive Editor Jake Bernstein
Editor Barbara Belejack
Associate Editor Dave Mann
Publisher Charlotte McCann
Associate Publisher Julia Austin
Circulation Manager Lara George
Art Director/Webmaster Matt Omohundro
Poetry Editor Naomi Shihab Nye
Copy Editors Roxanne Bogucka, Laurie Baker
Staff Writers Forrest Wilder, Tim Eaton

Editorial Interns Leah Caldwell, Rachel Mehendale, Sofia Resnick, Kelly Sharp, Elizabeth L. Taylor

Contributing Writers
 Nate Blakeslee, Gabriela Bocagrande, Robert Bryce, Michael Erard, James K. Galbraith, Dagoberto Gilb,

Steven G. Kellman, Lucius Lomax, James McWilliams, Char Miller, Debbie Nathan, Karen Olsson, John Ross, Andrew Wheat

Staff Photographers
 Alan Pogue, Jana Birchum, Steve Satterwhite

Contributing Artists
 Sam Hurt, Kevin Kreneck, Michael Krone, Gary Oliver, Doug Potter

Editorial Advisory Board
 David Anderson, Chandler Davidson, Dave Denison, Sissy Farenthold, John Kenneth Galbraith, Lawrence Goodwyn, Jim Hightower, Kaye Northcott, Susan Reid



Texas Democracy Foundation Board
 Lou Dubose, Molly Ivins, Susan Hays, D'Ann Johnson, Jim Marston, Gilberto Ocañas, Bernard Rapoport, Geoffrey Rips, Sharron Rush, Ronnie Dugger (Emeritus)

In Memoriam
 Bob Eckhardt, 1913-2001,
 Cliff Olafson, 1931-1995
 The Texas Observer (ISSN 0040-4519/

USPS 541300), entire contents copyrighted ©2005, is published biweekly except during January and August when there is a 4 week break between issues (24 issues per year) by the Texas Democracy Foundation, a 501(c)3 non-profit foundation, 307 West 7th Street, Austin, Texas 78701. Telephone (512) 477-0746, Toll-Free (800) 939-6620 E-mail observer@texasobserver.org

World Wide Web DownHome page www.texasobserver.org. Periodicals Postage paid at Austin, TX and at additional mailing offices.

Subscriptions One year \$32, two years \$59, three years \$84. Full-time students \$18 per year; add \$13 per year for foreign subs. Back issues \$3 pre-paid. Airmail, foreign, group, and bulk

rates on request. Microfilm available from University Microfilms Intl., 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106.

Indexes The Texas Observer is indexed in Access: The Supplementary Index to Periodicals; Texas Index and, for the years 1954 through 1981, The Texas Observer Index.

POSTMASTER Send address changes to: The Texas Observer, 307 West 7th Street, Austin, Texas 78701.

Books & the Culture is funded in part by the City of Austin through the Cultural Arts Division and by a grant from the Texas Commission on the Arts.



Primaries, Perry, and Privatizers

BACIO DELLA MORTE? Sometimes a picture is worth a thousand words, but if you're former Congressman Ciro Rodriguez, it can be worth \$52,000 in much-needed campaign contributions.

Rodriguez is trying to regain his seat in Congress from Rep. Henry Cuellar (D-Laredo) in the March 7 Democratic primary. But his campaign seemed to be slumping in January—Cuellar had raised four times more money than Rodriguez. That is, until “the hug”—the tender embrace between President Bush and Cuellar while the president was glad-handing in the U.S. House chamber following his January 31 State of the Union address. A photograph of the hug—in which Bush grabbed Cuellar's face two-handed, à la Michael Corleone's embrace of Fredo in the *Godfather: Part II*—has circulated on the Internet and reinvigorated Rodriguez's campaign. In the week after the hug, Rodriguez's campaign office received \$52,500 in contributions, spokesman Oscar Sanchez said. That represented a quarter of the amount Rodriguez had raised in the campaign so far.

Rodriguez served in Congress from 1997 to 2004. On primary night in 2004, he narrowly led Cuellar in a redrawn district that stretches from San Marcos to Laredo. Cuellar, a former secretary of state, successfully challenged the election in court. After a months-long legal drama and numerous recounts, Cuellar bested Rodriguez by 58 votes.

In his first term, Cuellar has been one of the most conservative Democrats in the House. For evidence of his conservatism, look no further than his voting record. Or just ask the Eagle Forum. The right-wing advocacy group says Cuellar supported its values on 57 percent of his votes in 2005. In contrast, Rodriguez's score with the Eagle Forum in 2003 was 8 percent. The two candidates also stood at opposite ends of the abortion issue, with Cuellar earning a 0 percent rating from NARAL

Pro-Choice America in 2005, according to Project Vote Smart, a nonpartisan D.C. research group. (Rodriguez scored 100 percent in 2003.) But none of those issues elicited as much criticism from the left as Cuellar's pivotal May 2005 vote for the Central American Free Trade Agreement—NAFTA's little cousin. Organized labor was none too pleased. Cuellar distinguished himself as the only CAFTA-supporting Democrat on the Congressional Hispanic Caucus. Not to miss an opportunity, Rodriguez's people said their boss would have stood with the caucus against CAFTA. Cuellar's campaign didn't return calls for comment.

Rodriguez still lags behind Cuellar in fundraising and may not have enough cash to adequately get his message out about Cuellar's conservatism, but it doesn't hurt to have an embrace from the president help make the case for you. “The kiss just gave it another jump start,” Sanchez said of the campaign's fundraising effort. “Well, it was a hug, but we call it a kiss.” He hopes that, in South Texas, it amounts to a kiss of death.

DEM OTHER GUYS Ever since Comptroller Carole Keeton Strayhorn decided in early January to forgo a Republican primary race against Gov. Rick Perry, next month's gubernatorial primary has lost that certain *je ne sais quoi*. Texas political junkies now must hold out until the general election for a red-hot statewide race. But there is another primary for governor out there—on the Democratic side. While the political chattering class has responded with a collective yawn—because the corpse of Sam Houston probably has a better shot at winning the governor's mansion this year than any current Democrat—the two serious candidates, Chris Bell of Houston and Bob Gammage of Llano, are dutifully campaigning. And they're earning some plaudits.

Bell is a former Houston congressman who lost his seat after one term when Rep. Tom DeLay jiggered with his district in the 2003 redistricting fiasco. In 2004, Bell filed an ethics complaint against DeLay that briefly jolted the moribund U.S. House ethics committee into action for the first time in seven years. Bell jumped into the governor's race early; he's been running for more than a year now. An attorney by trade, Bell had hoped to tap into one of the Democratic Party's most reliable pools of money—trial lawyers. But the money hasn't exactly been rolling in. Bell has received only about \$87,000 from trial attorneys since last July, according to campaign finance reports. Trial lawyers are reportedly saving much of their money not for Bell or Gammage, but for Strayhorn, who they believe has the best chance to oust Perry.

Still, Bell's campaign has met with some success. He received glowing endorsements from both the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* and the *Dallas Morning News*. Both editorial boards complimented Bell's serious and detailed public education proposals. He wants to bring in more money for education with a widespread tax on business and to end the obsession with high-stakes standardized tests.

Gammage, a former Texas Supreme Court justice and Congressman, came late to the race last fall. His campaign rhetoric has been full of populist gump-tion—“The truth is Perry and Strayhorn play leading roles in the scandalous GOP contributions-for-favors scheme. If we really want to clean up Texas government, we can't fire the CEO of Texas Corruption Inc. just to promote its CFO,” he said in one statement—but contains less policy than Bell's.

The outlook is bleak for whoever wins on March 7. The Democratic nominee will have to scrounge for anti-Perry votes in the general election against Strayhorn and a certain cigar-toting



author-musician. A February statewide poll by the Rasmussen polling outfit found support for the Democratic nominee at just 13 to 18 percent in a general election match-up versus about 40 percent for Perry, 30 percent for Strayhorn, and 9 percent for Kinky.

PERRY FOR PREZ? "People have been speculating about Rick Perry for 20 years," said Kathy Walt, the governor's press secretary. Walt was standing in the back of the Omni Shoreham Hotel ballroom in Washington, D.C., where Perry had just delivered a speech to the Conservative Political Action Conference. A reporter had asked whether the rumors—promoted by everyone from the *Austin-American Statesman* to Grover Norquist—that Perry could be a presidential candidate were true. Even as she offered her non-denial denial, Walt practically levitated with pleasure at the question.

Traditionally, the CPAC conference is the place where GOP presidential candidates go to make their case to conservative Republicans or, as they call themselves, "CRs." Walt noted that Perry was the only governor to speak at the conference. Two other possible candidates for 2008, Sen. George Allen of Virginia and Sen. Bill Frist of Tennessee, also spoke. Both men received better speaking slots than Perry, who addressed an initially empty ballroom at 8:30 a.m. (Rumor has it that Arizona Sen. John McCain's invitation to the conference consisted of an offer to debate someone on an immigration panel; he declined.)

Speculation on a Perry bid for higher office, while preposterous for most people living outside the CR bubble, can only be good for the governor as he seeks reelection. For those who oppose the idea of making Perry the longest-serving governor in Texas his-

tory, such speculation should only raise the stakes. Cornered by reporters after his speech, Perry responded to the question of his future by saying, "I've got an election that I'm working on right now that is the most important election in my life, so what I do after that is light years away." If Perry loses his next election, his chances for future office will all but evaporate.

Perry's speech showed that he can talk CR with the best of them. As is absolutely essential in these settings, he mentioned Ronald Reagan frequently throughout his address. He also spoke to a growing unease among CRs with the Bush administration's positions on immigration and the size of government. "After seeing deficits explode, spending rise to unprecedented levels, entitlement programs take control over more of our federal budget, and our border left neglected and unprotected, it seems as if conservatives won the war at the ballot box, and then let the opposition keep the land," he said to applause.

Perry spent the bulk of his speech talking about illegal immigration and border protection. The growing Latino majority in Texas may not bode well for Perry's political future in the state, but they may yet prove useful for any aspirations he holds for higher office.

CALLING ALL PRIVATIZERS They came armed with a glut of bulleted PowerPoint presentations, ready to cocktail, network, and, of course, preach the fundamentals of "integrated systems" and "strategy articulation mapping." The representatives of the call center industry descended on the Austin Hilton in early February for the Call Center Demo & Conference to bring us—and a few thousand mid-and upper-level managers—the latest in telecommunications technology. It was the fifth straight year that the roving national conference has visited Texas. As usual, there were workshops galore, with such titles as "How to Harness the Power of the Agent" and "Turning Call Center Agents into Loyalty Makers," that gave call center visionaries the opportunity to preach the gospel

—continued on page 20

Party Crasher

Can Houston's king of right-wing talk radio bust into the Texas Senate?

BY PAUL SWEENEY



Dan Patrick

photo by Troy Fields

It's a bright winter morning at the Champions Golf Club in Northwest Houston. A touch of frost flecks the fairways as golfers make their way toward the clubhouse. This hardly looks like a political hot spot. Yet, at a well-appointed function room here, a battle for the soul of the Texas Republican Party is on the breakfast menu.

Some 30 members of the Northwest Houston Executive Club are gathered to hear Dan Patrick, a radio personality-turned-politician who, handicappers say, is the candidate to beat in a four-way race for an open seat in the Texas State Senate. Patrick is up against two members of the Texas Legislature—Reps. Peggy Hamric and Joe Nixon—as well as former Houston city councilman Mark Ellis in the March 7 primary. If no candidate clears 50 percent, a runoff is set for April 11. The winner in this hyper-Republican district in the sprawling Houston suburbs is expected to coast past the Democratic candidate in November.

Tall and lanky with a ready smile, Patrick sports a thatch of

brown hair, parted toward the middle in the style of an Irish bartender. At 55, despite some graying at the temples, he projects a youthful demeanor. A graduate of the University of Maryland Baltimore County, Patrick—whose given name was Dannie S. Goeb—came to Houston from WTTG in Washington, D.C., in the 1970s as a local sportscaster. He went bankrupt as a restaurateur in the mid-1980s. Then he reinvented himself, becoming owner of a radio station, a millionaire, and the host of a Houston drive-time talk show on KSEV-AM (700).

For the past 17 years, Patrick's show has filled the airwaves with a volatile brew of talk-radio populism. He combines a take-no-prisoners stance on pocketbook issues—railing against rising property taxes, public subsidies of sports arenas and ballparks, and what he depicts as out-of-control government spending—with an aggressive, born-again Christian message on social issues such as abortion and gay marriage. In 2003 he formed Citizens Lowering Our Unfair Taxes, or CLOUT. During the legislative session that year,

busloads of CLOUT protesters journeyed to the Capitol in Austin to rally for a cap on property tax appraisals.

At the golf club breakfast, in a practiced and smooth delivery, Patrick inveighs against the "Robin Hood" plan that takes money from property-wealthy school districts and redistributes it to poorer ones. He promises to put an end to politics-as-usual in Austin, attacking the power of lobbyists as well as the clubby atmosphere of the Texas Senate. Taking a stand that sounds uncontroversial here but is jolting to Austin insiders, he calls for elimination of the Senate's two-thirds rule, which requires the consent of 19 of 31 senators before a bill can be considered on the Senate floor. The rule tends to encourage cooperation and collegiality between the GOP and the Democrats; to Patrick it requires the Republican majority to bargain needlessly with the enemy.

But Patrick saves his most hard-edged oratory for illegal immigrants. He blames them for a rising crime rate, overcrowded schools, an overburdened health-care system, and runaway growth in the state budget. "The number one problem we are facing," he tells audiences, "is the silent invasion of the border. We are being overrun. It is imperiling our safety."

"The crime rate is soaring," he says, "and most of it can be tracked to illegal immigration. There are terrorists and drug runners coming into Texas and the sheriffs in 15 border counties are being asked to stop them with only a .45 on their hip and a shotgun in the trunk. They'll tell you it's the federal government's responsibility," he adds, "but the cavalry is not coming. It's up to us to protect our borders."

Illegal immigrants, moreover, are walking pathogens. "They are bringing Third World diseases with them," Patrick asserts, citing "tuberculosis, malaria, polio and leprosy."

Patrick's message goes down well at the golf club with this largely middle-aged, white-collar, mostly male crowd. They include: a car dealer, a commercial real-estate broker, a sales rep for an office-furniture concern, the owner of an auto-repair shop, an insurance agent, a jeweler, and a banker. "I liked what I heard and agreed with Dan's platform," says Bob Steele, a retired ExxonMobil executive.

Several snap up free copies of *The Second Most Important Book You Will Ever Read*, Patrick's inspirational book on reading the Bible, some of which he autographs. (A brief bio of Patrick on the back flap reports that his "number one goal in life is to serve the Lord in everything he does, spreading the Word of God as Jesus commanded.")

As audience members depart, many carry yard signs, bumper stickers, and campaign literature. One Patrick loyalist vouches for his good character. "Dan's the kind of guy," says Steve Drake, an investment counselor in Houston, "that you'd call at three in the morning when you're stuck out on the highway with a flat tire."

Lying mostly outside Houston city limits in the northwest quadrant of Harris County and part of Waller County, Senate District 7 includes the communities of Spring, Katy, Cypress, Tomball, Jersey

Village, and the Memorial Villages. Only about a quarter of the district is within Houston proper. The *Almanac of American Politics* describes this area as "a zone of rapid metropolitan expansion and growth, of commercial office space and upscale residential subdivisions rising on land that once held roadside stands and barbecues and unpainted farmhouses with water pooling on low swampy fields."

Amid tall stands of pine trees, many of the tony neighborhoods here could double for Wisteria Lane of "Desperate Housewives" fame. The district has roughly 700,000 residents and, according to *Capitol Inside*, a political newsletter, there were 409,653 registered voters as of the 2004 election. In recent presidential elections, it has divided 75 percent to 25 percent in favor of the GOP, placing it among the most Republican districts in a Red State.

Patrick has high name recognition among likely voters, the result not just of his radio exposure but of national television appearances on Fox News, MSNBC, and other media outlets. His work on religious and charitable causes helped win the support of the actor Chuck Norris, known for his role as "Walker: Texas Ranger."

In a season with no significant contested statewide races on the Republican ballot, the race for the seat vacated by retiring Sen. Jon Lindsay is emerging as a bellwether election. The winner will help determine the direction of the Texas GOP and, since Republicans rule the roost in the Lone Star State, the trend of state politics and policy. If Patrick wins, moreover, it may position him for higher office.

For his most ardent supporters, Patrick's campaign is something of a crusade, generating excitement and passion. "Let me say from the bottom of my heart," Guy Lewis, a cosmetic dentist, told guests as he played host to a reception for Patrick at his Spring home, "that I admire Dan and he is making this race for all the right reasons. When he goes to Austin, he won't be influenced by the wrong people."

Patrick's earnestness may give him an air of credibility when he's at his best. But on the stump there's also an inflammatory and even paranoid style at work—and not much fact-checking. On the threat of immigrants bringing "Third World diseases" across the border, for example, Patrick's information doesn't check out.

Tim Metz, a physician with a master's degree in public health who serves as the top epidemiologist at the State Health Services Department, says there is not a known case of polio in the Western Hemisphere "and we haven't seen it in decades." Malaria is a tropical disease spread by the anopheline mosquito. It is easily treated and remains "a rare disease in Texas and not a huge problem." Leprosy is known today as Hansen's disease and "we have no more than 50 cases a year that are reported, but it's not on the rise." As for TB, "We'll have 1,500 or so cases in Texas this year, which might be a slight increase, but we've got very effective TB-control programs in every local health department in the state."

Patrick is energizing a new group of primary voters. Many are from evangelical churches or are CLOUT members, or are avid listeners to his radio show. Even some disaffected



Peggy Hamric

photo by Troy Fields

Democrats are responding, Patrick says. Recently, Patrick insurgents have been taking over positions as precinct chairs. So much so that, bolstered by a bevy of new recruits, Patrick claims endorsements from more than 100 Republican precinct chairs in the senatorial district, as well as backing from the State Republican Executive Committee.

At the same time, however, his candidacy is loathed by a significant segment of the party regulars, as well as by powerful business interests. The voters who used to be called "rock-ribbed" Republicans, the party stalwarts who once were the backbone constituency for the late Senator John Tower and former President George H.W. Bush, now find themselves disdained by Patrick as "RINOs," shorthand for "Republicans In Name Only."

The acrimony on both sides is palpable. "He's a radical right-winger," says Kay Shillock, past president of the Greater Houston Council of Republican Women and a longtime party activist. Shillock is self-assured and well dressed; she wears a flowing prismatic scarf about her neck, and an "I'm for Peggy" button. Interviewed after a candidates' forum sponsored by a Republican women's group, Shillock says that she no longer calls herself "conservative;" these days, she prefers the moniker "traditional Republican."

Shillock expresses irritation that during Patrick's appearance at the political forum he made several references to his born-again religious convictions. That, she thinks, could

have been a turn-off for any Jewish voters who might have been present. True Christianity, in her view, does not mean foisting religious beliefs on others or legislating morality. Though she is a self-described Protestant, Shillock has little truck with fundamentalists who inject their religious beliefs into the political process. "I have a problem with that," she says. "I don't think it has a place in the political spectrum."

Her anti-Patrick sentiments are shared by Senator Lindsay, the 70-year-old incumbent and former chief executive of Harris County. "I think he would be terrible in the Senate," Lindsay says of Patrick in a candid telephone interview. "He'd be a difficult person for the lieutenant governor and the leadership to work with. I don't think his agenda would be good for the state of Texas."

The senator holds little regard for Patrick's proposal to make the Senate operate more like the House and enact legislation by a simple majority. "I think the two-thirds rule is something that keeps the Senate stable," he says. "You can't just steamroller people. It makes sure that the minorities are represented." By "minorities," Lindsay explains, he doesn't mean members of ethnic groups but "the rural guys and members of the party out of power."

It also galls Lindsay that Patrick has made illegal immigration a front-and-center issue in the campaign. "This is really not a state issue," Lindsay says, "and you don't hear him explain how he'd fund it. He's misleading folks into thinking it's a black-and-white issue that's easy to fix, but it would be expensive." Although Lindsay would have preferred to stay neutral, he's now backing Hamric. "I'm not a Dan Patrick fan," he says. "He's an extremist. And if Joe gets into the runoff," he adds of Rep. Nixon, "I'll support Joe."

But Hamric has emerged as the senator's favorite. Lindsay worked closely with her on knotty problems involving municipal utility districts and groundwater and surface-water issues back when he was Harris County's chief executive. "And I've worked with her at the Legislature," he adds. "She knows the district well and knows what needs to be done, and she's not a carpetbagger."

Was he branding Patrick a carpetbagger? "There's no telling where Dan Patrick's coming from," Lindsay says.

Rep. Joe Nixon has assumed the role of Patrick's chief antagonist. He regularly lambastes Patrick for continuing his radio show after his October 17 campaign announcement. Patrick signed off the air in late December, just days before the January 2, 2006 filing deadline. Under a rule of the Federal Communications Commission, his opponents would have to be given equal time if he continued broadcasting. (Patrick is reporting in-kind contributions from the radio station valued at \$119,000. He has also lent his campaign more than \$300,000, according to his campaign manager, Court Koenning.)

Nixon has all but accused Patrick of carpetbagging as well, noting at every opportunity that "one candidate in the race" bought a condo in the Senatorial district in September 2005, which narrowly qualified him for residency in the district. "If

you don't want to be my neighbor," Nixon says, "why would I trust you to represent me in Austin?"

Big and burly and occasionally brusque, Nixon tells voters that he's the one who has been laboring in the Republican trenches on issues that Patrick has only talked about. It was he, the 49-year-old Nixon says, who proposed legislation to specify citizenship on Texas driver's licenses and to block "sham marriages" by foreigners. It was he, Nixon says, who introduced a bill to restrict the growth in property-tax appraisals to 3 percent each year—legislation that passed the House only to fail in the Senate. Indeed, Nixon says on the campaign trail that he voted 250 times to cap property taxes. "I'm the guy," he says, "who has been doing the work in the House that everybody else is campaigning on."

It is hard to gauge whether voters are warming to Nixon's argument that his legislative record merits him a Senate seat. He faces hurdles, among them that his House district is only partially located in the Senatorial district, which means that he must introduce himself to a large chunk of primary voters. But as the best-funded candidate in the field, he's got the war chest to do it.

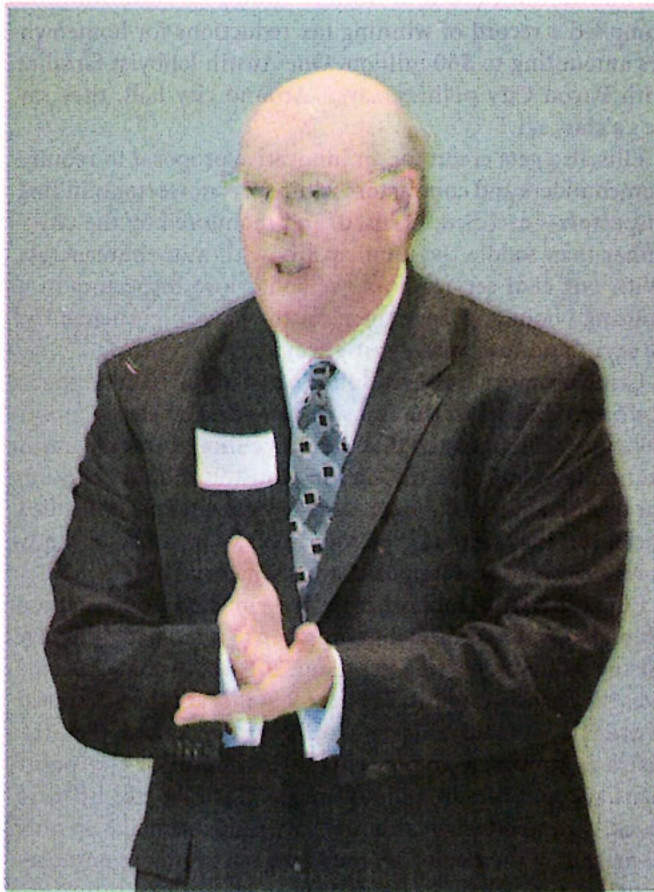
A graduate of Texas A&M in economics and a lawyer, Nixon serves as chairman of the House Civil Practices Committee, where he has built a reputation as a hard-nosed, political tough guy ("There's a new sheriff in town," he famously told trial lawyers) and a leading champion for business interests. He pushed a 2003 law that proponents call "tort reform," which places draconian restrictions on a Texas citizen's ability to seek civil damages and jury awards for personal injuries and other wrongs.

As the darling of big business, Nixon raised \$477,000 in the last six months of 2005, according to the *Houston Chronicle*. And political observers expect him to raise and spend \$1 million on advertising—billboards, direct mail, and radio and television spots—promoting his image as a person with "integrity, leadership, and results."

But it may be a hard sell. At the same time that he has fenced off the courthouse to people seeking redress for grievances, Nixon has been demanding compensation for wrongs done unto him. In 2003, Nixon got roughly \$13,000 from Farmers Insurance Group in a claim for mold damage to his residence. When an employee of the insurance company charged that the payment was made because of favoritism, she was fired. Whistleblower Isabelle Arnold later was awarded \$260,000 in lost wages by a California jury, according to the *Houston Chronicle*.

Richard Murray, a political scientist and elections expert at the University of Houston, thinks Nixon's reliance on advertising media and his roughhousing with Patrick may contribute to a negative image. "And he's got some heavy baggage from the tort legislation he carried, but then benefiting himself from lawsuits." (Nor does Nixon's baldness help, says Murray. "There are exceptions, but not many bald candidates have fared well since President Eisenhower," Murray says.)

There are, of course, kinder and gentler moments on the



Joe Nixon

photo by Troy Fields

campaign trail when Nixon can come off as "gruff but lovable," in the view of Jon Taylor, a political scientist at the University of St. Thomas. At a recent campaign forum a questioner observed that Texas shamefully ranked 48th in the country in spending on mental health and asked the candidates how they could justify cutting taxes when, as Houston news media report "every other day," people suffering from mental illness regularly commit acts of violence that intervention and treatment could have prevented.

During the most recent legislative session, Nixon noted, he authored a bill to require that insurance companies cover mental health problems at the same reimbursement rates as physical ailments. And he declared that he has been trying to secure earlier treatment for the mentally ill in Houston through greater funding for the Texas Department of Mental Health-Mental Retardation. "There are people—even Republicans—working for that in a compassionate way," he said.

Mark Ellis, at 44, is the youngest candidate in the field. He exudes the collegiate heartiness and good-natured charm of a student body president. Educated at a Jesuit high school and the University of Houston, where he majored in political science, Ellis is a certified financial planner. In his tenure on the city council where he chaired the Fiscal Affairs Committee, he

compiled a record of winning tax reductions for homeowners amounting to \$60 million. One Austin lobbyist familiar with Bayou City politics, says: "Around city hall, they say he's a class act."

Ellis also gets credit for an innovative proposal to require homebuilders and contractors to hire private-sector building inspectors—certified, licensed, and monitored by the city—rather than saddle the municipality with more bureaucrats. "With our civil service laws, we could hire inspectors in a housing boom and have them on the payroll permanently," he says, "and that wasn't cost-effective."

Last November, however, Ellis floated a trial balloon that a scathing editorial in the *Houston Chronicle* labeled a "political stunt." He suggested that the police should enforce immigration laws and that the City of Houston should check on the immigration status of persons receiving taxpayer-funded social services. *Chronicle* editorialists saw it as Ellis's "transparent tactic to win support for his senatorial bid."

Ellis is drawing support from the Houston police, whose union has endorsed him, but his campaign has had difficulty raising money, reporting less than \$200,000 in contributions over the past six months. The fact that most of the Senatorial district is situated outside Houston proper and that the district's suburban voters remain distrustful of city politicians also put him at a disadvantage. But Ellis, for his part, pluckily contends that, although city residents make up only 30 percent of the electorate, they turn out in higher numbers in primary elections.

Even so, he is not given much of a chance by party professionals. His presence in the race, though, could be just the ticket to deprive any candidate of 50 percent, thus forcing a runoff.

Peggy Hamric has laced up a pair of brand-new running shoes, driven her sport utility vehicle nearly an hour north of her House district, and commenced block-walking in the town of Spring. In a pleasant neighborhood of tall trees, neat lawns, and large but not imposing houses, she rings doorbells, passes out campaign literature, and chats with prospective voters.

Accompanied by a campaign volunteer with a computer printout of names and addresses, Hamric is an adroit, experienced campaigner. She senses quickly whether to engage a prospective voter in conversation and, if so, whether talk should be about the gentle Texas winter or politics. Yet few of these households actually merit her attention. Rather than knock on every door, Hamric only calls on domiciles where, according to her campaign's database, a proven primary voter dwells. That means neglecting scores of handsome homes, smiling at a stray citizen on the street, but visiting only the targeted audience. "It's totally retail politics," she says.

Many people are not at home, so Hamric writes "Sorry I missed you" on a leaflet and hangs it on the door. Yard signs for Dan Patrick are abundant and Hamric usually pays them no mind. But if a Patrick-backer is on her list, she gamely strides up the walk—yard sign or not. "If I can't be your first

"THE NUMBER ONE PROBLEM WE ARE FACING," PATRICK TELLS AUDIENCES, "IS THE SILENT INVASION OF THE BORDER. WE ARE BEING OVERRUN. IT IS IMPERILING OUR SAFETY."

choice, I hope you'll make me your second choice," she tells one homeowner, who seems doubtful but polite.

Even among these likely voters, few seem aware of the campaigns or the date of the election; in a number of instances it is news that the incumbent senator is retiring. "We know Jon Lindsay very well because he goes to church with us," a couple standing in their driveway tell Hamric. "Well, he's endorsed me," Hamric says, which impresses them. When they announce their support, Hamric exclaims: "I knew this was a smart household" and enlists them to put up a yard sign.

At 65, Hamric is a 14-year veteran of the Texas House of Representatives and a key cog in a Republican leadership that has dominated the body in the last two sessions. She has made a name for herself as not only an energetic team player but as a person liked on both sides of the aisle. As chairwoman of the House Administration Committee, of course, it behooves a House member to get along with her: she is in charge of assigning office space, furniture, and even parking places.

A graduate of the University of Oklahoma who grew up in Portales, N.M., not far from the Texas border, Hamric has won passage of legislation affecting women's health issues, such as requiring insurance companies to pay for at least 48

—continued on page 18

Mad at Madla

BY FORREST WILDER

At a January 10 fundraiser in Austin, state Sen. Frank Madla (D-San Antonio) described to the assembled business lobbyists and special interest groups what he considered his indispensable philosophy of bipartisan governance. "When I get to the state Capitol, I lock the Democratic Party in the trunk," he said. The senator then turned to Republican Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst, the evening's "special guest," and promised, in his trademark sotto voce tone, to never "change that philosophy."

Comments like that won't help Madla fend off a formidable primary challenge from state Rep. Carlos Uresti (D-San Antonio) in a largely Democratic Senate district, which stretches from south San Antonio across a large swath of West Texas and ends just short of El Paso. Uresti's campaign obtained a videotape of the event and giddily posted a clip of Madla's toss-the-party-in-the-trunk remark on its Web site. Madla points out that the quote was lifted from a longer sentence, "I don't believe that I was elected to represent only one party or the other.... When I go to the Capitol, I lock the Democratic Party in my trunk and just try to do what is right for those in my district and for all Texans."

Still, the video starkly emphasized why Uresti says he wants to unseat the 69-year-old Madla, a 32-year veteran of the Texas Legislature who joined the Senate in 1993. Uresti and other Democrats argue that Madla has betrayed not just his enormous district, but the principles of the Democratic Party as a whole. "In the past four years, [Madla] has been voting more like a Republican than some Republicans," Uresti said. "Tell me one thing he has done for the people in his district in the past four years. A wine bill?" (That's a

reference to Madla's only major piece of successful legislation in the past two sessions, a bill that allowed wine producers to sell directly to the public.) While the race won't increase the number of Democrats in the Senate, replacing Madla could make the minority party more united and powerful in the 2007 legislative session.

The Senate likely will contain 20 Republicans and just 11 Democrats next session. That's a significant number. If all 11 Democrats stick together, they can prevent the most egregious right-wing legislation from passing the chamber. (Under Senate tradition, two-thirds of the senators must support a bill before it can come up for debate.) In the past two sessions, though, Democrats have splintered, and Madla is often the first to bolt. "There's a beaten path on the carpet from Dewhurst's desk to Madla's desk because every time the Republicans need one more vote that's where they go," said Sen. Eliot Shapleigh (D-El Paso). Last May, for instance, the constitutional amendment banning gay marriage passed the Senate because of Madla's change of heart the day before the vote.

On the campaign trail, Uresti has hammered Madla for a 2003 vote in favor of House Bill 2292, which stripped 180,000 low-income kids from the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). A Uresti direct-mail piece sent to 52,000 homes in the mostly poor, Mexican American district reads, "Something is wrong when children aren't smiling" and lists, county-by-county, the number of children in Madla's district dropped from dental coverage offered by CHIP. Madla has responded with a television ad claiming his vote for HB 2292 was just procedural and that he voted against the bill on final passage. (The procedural vote, however, was the important one: Madla's defection

helped rob Democrats of the 11 votes they needed to block the bill.)

Madla also backed the controversial 2003 tort reform package that capped medical malpractice awards at \$250,000. Texans for Lawsuit Reform, the powerful pro-tort reform group, has given Madla's campaign \$180,000 in recent weeks, according to campaign finance records. Meanwhile, wealthy trial lawyers have been funding Uresti's campaign. Until mid-January, Madla was out-fundraising and out-spending Uresti by a large margin. Uresti now says he is "almost matching [Madla] dollar-for-dollar."

What Uresti calls voting Republican, however, Madla terms bipartisan cooperation to benefit his district. "[Uresti] does not understand the Senate process, and he has no real concept of how to be effective in the Senate arena," Madla told the *Observer* in written responses to questions. "Members know that once I give my word, they can take it to the bank. That reputation and the relationships formed over my long tenure in the Texas Senate and the Legislature ... has contributed to my being able to pass the highest percentage of bills in the Senate this past session."

The bitterness of the Madla-Uresti race also has laid bare deep fissures among the West Texas Democratic delegation in both the House and Senate. Shapleigh is campaigning in the district against Madla—an almost unheard-of act in the genteel Senate. Their simmering antipathy boiled over last session based on Madla's sponsorship of a single controversial bill. Senate Bill 547 would have limited voting in the El Paso water district to individuals who own property with water rights. In a bitter showdown on the Senate floor in April 2005, Shapleigh accused Madla of cynically stripping 75,000 people, mostly

—continued on page 20

Accentuate the Negative

BY JASON STANFORD

Want to say something about politics that makes you seem smart? Try this: “Negative attacks suppress voter turnout.” This is one of the most deeply held truisms in American politics. The Big Feet in Washington regard the casual relationship between negative campaigning and low voter turnout as an absolute truth. In his 1996 navel-gazer on the presidential election, longtime political journalist Jack Germond blamed negative attacks—and not the fact that even my dog could tell Bill Clinton was going to win—for the lowest turnout in 72 years. Germond quoted Curtis Gans, the director of the nonpartisan Committee for the Study of the American Electorate, as saying, “The mudslinging disgusted the public to the point where more than half of the eligible voters simply washed their hands of the whole business and stayed home on election day.”

Repeating the mud-keeps-voters-from-voting mantra makes you sound smart on National Public Radio too, as NPR’s Elizabeth Arnold proved during a roundtable discussion about the 2000 South Carolina Republican Presidential Primary. “What observers have historically found is that negative campaigns suppress turnout,” she said.

The easy conclusion from all this negativity about negativity is that people like me—opposition researchers, dirt diggers, muckrakers—are killing democracy. As one influential study (Patrick J. Kenney’s “Do Negative Campaigns Mobilize or Suppress Turnout? Clarifying the Relationship Between Negativity and Participation”) put it, “Our most troubling finding is that negative or attack advertising actually suppresses turnout.... We would even go so far as to say that negative advertisements may pose a serious antidemocratic threat.”

If only we could have positive, issue-based campaigns, the fantasy goes, then more people would vote. If only we could get campaigns to stop throwing mud and stick to the issues, armies of disaffected citizens would come out to vote.

That’s all great, except for one small problem. It’s a load of horse spit and bull corn. Boring campaigns bore voters. Negative campaigns, properly done, engage voters and can actually increase turnout.

That’s not what most political scientists will tell you, however. The political science industry—a bunch of grad students and professors, many of whom have never actually worked on a campaign—says that the causal relationship between negative campaigning and voter turnout is inconclusive, but that the attack ads make voters want to vomit. They say that attack ads create a backlash against the candidate making the charge and make people less likely to vote.

All of that seems to make intuitive sense, but conventional wisdom continues to ignore a small but growing body of work that finds voters are able to distinguish between useful negative attacks and shrill mudslinging. In short, relevant and tasteful negative attacks inform voters and increase turnout, while it’s really the whiny sandbox screaming makes people tune out.

Voters sift through negative attacks to decide what’s in bounds and out of bounds. Study after study, such as the 1999 report by Patrick J. Kenney shows that the more irrelevant and strident the vitriol, the less voters want to vote.

Part of the distinction lies in tone, but that’s a tough distinction to make. The easier measure is the subject of an attack. In 1998, professors Paul Freedman and Dale Lawton at the Sorensen Institute for Political Leadership at the University of Virginia set out to study exactly what

kinds of ads voters find repulsive.

This is where the theory that negative attacks boost turnout starts making sense. The researchers grouped typical attacks into three categories: fair, moderate, and unfair. At least two-thirds of the respondents agreed that the “fair” attacks were, well, fair, and up to two-thirds deemed the unfair ones irrelevant. Everything in the middle was “moderate,” which seems to me the wrong word, but you get the idea.

Here’s which topics respondents told researchers were “unfair” attacks: “behavior of his/her family members” (only 8 percent thought this was a fair line of attack), “personal lives of party leaders” (19 percent deemed fair), past personal troubles (26%), and past extramarital affairs (28 percent). This tells you why the illegal drinking woes of Jenna and Barbara Bush didn’t pose a political problem to their daddy. These scandals have obvious sex appeal but do not engage voters in a constructive way.

The middle group of attacks—the moderate middle of muckraking—starts to ascend into relevance. Only 37 percent think “political actions of party’s leaders” is fair, which tells me why people didn’t grab the torches and pitchforks when George W. Bush installed an Enron lobbyist as head of the Republican National Committee. “Current extramarital affairs” drew 45 percent, and “current personal troubles” got 56 percent. You ever wonder why the fact that Ken Lay’s long-time financial backing of George W. Bush wasn’t a deathblow? Only 63 percent of voters think that an attack on “taking money from individuals with ethical problems” was fair.

That leaves us with attacks that voters in the study called the most fair: “taking money from special interests” (71 percent); “his/her voting record” (71 percent); “his/her business record” (76 percent); and at 81 percent, “talking one

way and voting another." The simple truth is that voters have more sense than pundits in distinguishing between fair and unfair attacks.

Not only do voters make respectable judgments about which attacks are fair, but they pay more attention to the negative attacks than to the positive message. In 1997, Bruce Pinkerton found numerous studies about non-political advertising showing that consumers give more weight to negative information about a choice than they do to positive information.

The reason for this, Pinkerton found, is simply that negative information is easier to remember. Quick question: What was Bill Clinton's greatest policy achievement? While you think about that, tell me why the House impeached him, the name of the woman who performed the act, what room they usually used, and what tobacco product played a role. Suddenly, that budget surplus doesn't seem to come to the fore as easily. Pinkerton says we remember the negative more than the positive because it's more, ahem, "emotionally arousing," and that it is the voter's ability to access the memory of the advertising that drives their voting behavior.

If you're willing to let go of the notion that campaigns use negative attacks to suppress the vote, then the inescapable conclusion is that voters seek out credible negative attacks to make their decisions, are engaged by them, and go to the polls because of them. That's exactly what the two fellows from the University of Virginia found. Their study discovered that voters were more likely to vote when exposed to increasingly fair attacks. Now who's ruining our democracy?

What we really need to know is whether the negative attacks work only to increase voting by the respective base votes. Negative attacks would still be harmful to democracy if they suppressed independent swing voters at the expense of the participation of partisans.

Studies in fact have reached the opposite conclusion. Hard-core partisans are immune to negative communications, while the swing voters, the holy grail of close elections, are the ones most affected by negativity in campaigns. Everyone

agrees that unfair, scurrilous mudslinging turns the swing voters off and makes them skip elections. But relevant and fair attacks, if done correctly, mobilize these folks.

I learned about the link between negative campaigning and higher turnout when Dan Boren hired me to help his campaign for Oklahoma's 2nd Congressional district in 2004.

Voting in the Democratic primaries in Oklahoma's 2nd Congressional district had held pretty steady in the previous two non-presidential years: 1996 (83,665 votes cast) and 2000 (88,750). We're not talking about a giant groundswell of enthusiasm here, just the die-hard Democrats who vote more reliably than they go to church on Sundays. Turnout was stable as long as the candidates kept it generally positive and the attacks very restrained.

The seat had come open again in 2004, and there was a young man with the last name of Boren thinking about getting in the race, and that's like being a Bush in Texas or a Kennedy in Massachusetts. In 2004, Dan Boren was a 30-year-old, first-term state representative who headed up a college foundation, but that last name meant something to Democratic voters who had sent his granddaddy to Congress under FDR and his dad to the Senate and to the governor's mansion after that. So as it turned out, my choice came down to the Boren juggernaut and a Native American former district attorney named Kalyn Free. I chose to work for Boren.

The Free-Boren race started as a fight for the Democratic primary and became ground zero in the culture wars. She started the hoopla with an ad hitting his votes on gas tax hikes. We answered with a spot attacking her for making an "unfair personal attack" because she wanted to cover up a "history of letting rapists and child molesters go free," which our research showed that she had done as a district attorney. She then put the mother of the rape victim in a television commercial, which rocked us on our heels. We got back on track with a response about how she had given suspended sentences to a lot of sex criminals and how a judge had yelled

at her from the bench for screwing up a death penalty case, accusing her of "incompetence in the first degree." So she tried to change the subject with a commercial accusing Dan of voting to cut funding for in-home health care forcing old people (maybe your granny!) into nursing homes.

And then the race really got nasty.

We put up an ad asking, "Do you want a congressman who supports gun control, abortion on demand, and partial-birth abortion? Kalyn Free does." And on the Sunday before the primary, some Boren field staffers leafleted church parking lots with her position in favor of gay marriage, not that there's anything wrong with that.

Amid all the brouhaha, the race might have been negative, but it wasn't personal. Both sides tried to render the other's flesh into Dog Chow, but we used issues (abortion, guns) and performance in office (gas tax hikes, plea bargains) as weapons. With a week remaining, both candidates had embraced negative attacks with suffocating bear hugs. Voters had to sit through one nasty ad after another just to make it to the local news broadcasts that showed how the candidates tore into each other at debates and forums. If there ever were a case to prove that negative campaigns suppressed voter turnout, this would have to be it.

Amid the salvos over the airwaves, a young man named Ben Joy was working for the Dan Boren campaign as a field grunt accompanying Boren on campaign swings throughout the district. They'd drive around in a beat-up RV to parades, where it was Joy's job to walk a little in front of Boren along a parade route, handing out campaign literature, so that voters might have an inkling of why a young man was smiling and sticking his hand out to be shaken at a parade.

Shaking hands with strangers poses risks for a candidate running a negative television campaign. Little old ladies are liable to whack you with their canes while they shriek about how much they hate negative campaigning. But Joy found that not only was the

—continued on page 19

The Accidental Vice President

Of course the jokes are flying all over Texas—what's the fine for shooting a lawyer?—and so forth. Dick-Cheney-shooting-Harry-Whittington is fraught, as they say, with irony.

It's not as though the ground in Texas is littered with liberal Republicans. I think the vice President winged the only one we've got.

Not that I accuse Harry Whittington of being an actual liberal—only by Texas Republican standards, and that sets the bar about the height of a matchbook. Nevertheless, Whittington is seriously civilized, particularly on the issues of crime, punishment, and prisons.

He served on both the Texas Board of Corrections and on the bonding authority that builds prisons. As he has often said, prisons do not curb crime, they are hothouses for crime: "Prisons are to crime what greenhouses are to plants."

In the day, whenever there was an especially bad case of new-ignoramus-in-the-legislature—a "lock 'em all up and throw away the key" type—the senior members used to send the prison-happy, tuff-on-crime neophyte to see Harry Whittington, a Republican after all, for a little basic education on the cost of prisons.

When Whittington was the chairman of Texas Public Finance Authority, he had a devastating set of numbers on the demand for more, more, more prison beds.

As Whittington was wont to point out, the only thing prisons are good for is segregating violent people from the rest of society, and most of them belong in psychiatric hospitals to begin with. The severity of sentences has no effect on crime.

Texas still keeps the nonviolent, the retarded, senior citizens, etc. locked up for ridiculous periods—all at taxpayer

expense. If we could ever get to where we spend as much per pupil on education as we do per prisoner, this state would take off like a rocket. In 2003, we spent nearly \$15,000 per prisoner, while average per-pupil spending was just over \$8,000.

I am not trying to make a big deal out of a simple hunting accident for partisan purposes—just thought it was a good chance to pay tribute to old Harry, a thoroughly decent man. However, I was offended by the never-our-fault White House spin team.

Cheney adviser Mary Matalin said of her boss, "He was not careless or incautious (and did not) violate of any of the (rules). He didn't do anything he wasn't supposed to do."

Of course he did, Ms. Matalin, he shot Harry Whittington.

Which brings us to one of the many paradoxes of the Bush administration, which claims to be creating "the responsibility society."

It's hard to think of a crowd less that's less likely to take responsibility for anything they have done or not done than this bunch. They sure are good at preaching responsibility to other folks—and then blaming other people for everything that goes wrong on their watch.

Of course the Cheney shooting was an accident.

But is it an accident if your home and your life are destroyed by the flood following a hurricane? Especially if the flood was caused by failed levees, a government responsibility?

Is it an accident if you are born with a clubfoot and your parents are too poor to pay for the operation to fix it? Is there any societal responsibility in such a case?

Is it an accident when your manufacturing job gets shipped overseas and all you can find to replace it is a low-wage job at the big-box store with no health insurance, and your kid breaks his leg,

and you can't pay the bill, so you have to declare bankruptcy under a new law that leaves you broke for good, with no chance of ever getting out of debt? Or was all of that caused by deliberate government policy?

Cheney is much given to lecturing us about taking responsibility. When and where does societal responsibility come in?

Cheney has a curious, shifting history on issues of blame and responsibility. He was vice chair of the congressional committee that spent 11 months investigating the Iran-Contra affair and author of its minority report. As John W. Dean highlights in a recent essay, the 500-page majority report concluded the entire affair "was characterized by pervasive dishonesty and inordinate secrecy."

But Cheney's report said the Reagan administration's repeated breaking of the law were "mistakes ... were just that—mistakes in judgment and nothing more."

Those of you who saw Cheney's interview with Jim Lehrer earlier this month may recall the passage on Darfur that ended with this:

Lehrer: "It's still happening. There are now 2 million people homeless."

Cheney: "Still happening, correct."

Lehrer: "Hundreds of thousands of people have died ... and you're satisfied the U.S. is doing everything it can do?"

Cheney: "I am satisfied we're doing everything we can do."

His head still tilts over more to the right when he lies. ■

Molly Ivins is a nationally syndicated columnist. Her most recent book with Lou Dubose is Bushwhacked: Life in George W. Bush's America (Random House).

Lobbyists Reject Restrictions

Both political parties, squirming under the spreading scandals of supersleaze lobbyist Jack Abramoff, suddenly began posing as reformers, saying it's time to rein in the corporate influence peddlers who haunt our nation's capital. The lobbyists hunkered down like cows in a hailstorm as the leaders of the two parties piously demanded that lobbyist-paid dinners, foreign golf junkets, and other freebies for lawmakers be banned. But as the media spotlight cools, lobbyists are aggressively pushing back against any true reforms. Their tactic is to claim that they are invaluable to the democratic process! John Engler, the former Republican governor of Michigan who heads the National Association of Manufacturers, asserts that his lobbying front for major corporate powers must not be restricted in its efforts "to educate and inform our elected leaders." John insists that the ongoing trips that the NAM finances for Congress critters and their staffers gives them "a very valuable first-hand education" about the legislation that NAM members want—or don't want. Likewise, says the head of the American Society of Association Executives. (Yes, the lobbying group for lobbying groups!) This guy chimes in that no lobbyist-paid junket should be banned, claiming that this would deprive lawmakers of views "outside of Washington." Hello? You're inside Washington! He insists that paying Congress critters to attend corporate conferences is an educational function in support of America's finest democratic ideals. Democracy. Lobbyists. Junkets. In my mind, those words don't go together. When our lawmakers need information on issues shouldn't they get it on their own or from independent sources—not from paid influence peddlers? To push for real reforms, call Common Cause, (202) 833-1200.

POOR TARGETS Just a few weeks ago, Microsoft honcho Bill Gates was named "Man of the Year" by *Time* Magazine, hailed for the humanitarian work he has done through his foundation. Good. But what about the anti-humanitarian work that Gates continues to do through the corporation itself? *Time* didn't mention that Microsoft is a willing accomplice in the denial of human freedoms in China, and perhaps elsewhere. The Internet giant, eager to sell its products in China's burgeoning market of Web users, is ingratiating itself to that country's repressive rulers by cooperating in their repression—literally selling out Microsoft's own customers there! Take the case of Mr. Zhao Jing, a well-known blogger and advocate of democratic freedoms. When the government recently fired the editor of a progressive newspaper, Zhao Jing loudly criticized the repression on his blog, which runs on a Microsoft system. Tyrants have little sense of humor about criticism, and China's rulers wanted this guy silenced. No problem—Microsoft did the dirty work, closing down the dissident's blog.

Gates's corporation also admits that its Internet system in China censors blogs, filtering out words that the government doesn't like, such as "democracy" and "human rights." Well, says the company, naturally we don't agree with them, but if we're to do business in China we have to comply with local laws. That's a hoot! Giants like Microsoft don't comply with our own laws! They either hire squads of lawyers to skirt the law of the land or hire scads of lobbyists to twist the laws to their liking. China's rulers need Internet companies as much or more than the companies need China. Tell Microsoft and Bill to stop their cowardly and avicious complicity in repression—and start standing up for free expression everywhere. Here's their public comment line: (425) 882-8080.

EISNER'S "INVENTIVENESS"

Who says television is a wasteland? If you're sick of getting 500 channels and still finding nothing to watch, get ready for the exciting debut of the Michael Eisner Show! Eisner—the guy who was CEO of Disney Inc. for years—stepped down last year. Now Mike needs something to keep him busy, so he's getting his own hour-long interview show on CNBC. He says he'll feature prominent guests from the worlds of business, politics, entertainment, and such ("people I think are inventive, so to speak").

Eisner definitely knows "inventive." He managed to invent a myriad of ways to pay himself astronomical sums of money at Disney, even when he was ranked as one of America's worst-performing CEOs. In 1998, for example, Eisner took executive excess into the stratosphere when he pocketed more than \$200,000 in pay—not for the year, or for a month, or even a day's worth of work—but for an hour! Last year, even though he only worked nine months, Mike sacked up a cool million dollars in salary, and then added a nice \$9.1 million bonus. Even better, however, is the retirement package he invented for himself. He'll draw \$297,779 in pension every year for the rest of his life. Plus, over the next three years, he's to receive more than \$22 million in "bonus pay"—presumably for agreeing not to show up at the office and make a mess of things. Eisner is the same guy who tried to cut back the health care benefits for some low-paid workers at Disneyland and who used child labor sweatshops in Haiti and China to produce Disney merchandise. Maybe he'll have some of these workers on his show to highlight his "inventiveness." ■

Jim Hightower is a speaker and author. To order his books or schedule him for a speech, visit www.jimhightower.com. To subscribe to his newsletter, the Hightower Lowdown, call toll-free 1-866-271-4900.

Los Presidenciables

BY JOHN ROSS

On July 2, an estimated 70 million Mexicans will be eligible to vote to select a successor to President Vicente Fox. Under Mexican law, Fox cannot run for re-election. The 2006 presidential elections promise to be the most competitive and unusual in recent memory with no party able to achieve more than 40 percent of the vote. Up until the 1980s, the long ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) received 90 percent of the vote. Fox's 2000 win made him the first opposition president in more than 70 years.

Leading the pack is longtime front-runner and former Mexico City mayor Andres Manuel López Obrador (AMLO or "El Peje") with 38 or 39 percent of potential voters according to a con-

sensus of Mexican pollsters (See "La Lotería Más Grande," July 16, 2004). López Obrador enjoyed as much as an 18 point lead early in the campaign but his advantage was whittled down to a mere six by last fall and the latest polls represent a modest rebound over his rivals, Felipe Calderón of Fox's right-wing National Action Party (PAN) and the PRI's Roberto Madrazo who are locked in a technical dead heat at 31 percent to 29 percent.

Although AMLO may show slippage in the months ahead, "it is always good to begin a race eight points out in front," chuckles Ruy Campos, chief pollster for Mitofsky Associates, which is monitoring the candidates for the television giant, Televisa. Campos is optimistic about El Peje's chances to hang on to his lead, noting that nearly half his backing comes from members of other parties or those who have no party. These numbers will grow as voters who oppose the PRI and went with Fox in 2000 come to see López Obrador as the only candidate who can prevent the PRI from re-taking power.

Should Andres Manuel López Obrador and the "Alliance for the Good of All"—which is led by his own left-wing Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) and includes both the tiny Party of Labor (PT) and the even more miniscule Democratic Convergence Party—win the run for the roses this summer, he would become Mexico's first president from the left since Lázaro Cárdenas

(1934-1940). Moreover, his election would be a brusque departure from the nation's last four neo-liberal heads of state. AMLO would also be the latest to join the anti-neo-liberal bandwagon that is sweeping Latin America although he seems closer to Chile's president-elect Michelle Bachelet than to Hugo Chávez and Evo Morales.

Although López Obrador is a vocal critic of neo-liberalism, in recent months he has dedicated much time and energy to persuading Mexico's business class that he is a trustworthy ally. In public utterances, he declares himself a supporter of the free market and commercial globalization—but with a strong state to defend national interests and identity.

The former Mexico City mayor kicked off his campaign in signature style with a not-so-mass meeting in the town of Metlatonac, Guerrero. Of 30,000 residents, 29,000 are deeply impoverished Mixtec, Amuzgo, and Tlapaneco Indians. Infant mortality is reported as being 300 times the national average.

Metlatonac was an exemplary stage for the left candidate to expound upon his campaign slogan: *Primero Los Pobres!* ("The Poor First!") Indeed, these were the buzzwords with which El Peje governed Mexico City, earning him the contempt of his opponents as a "populist" whose giveaways will break the economy. Populist or not, López Obrador, who provided a pension and free medical attention for the capital's senior citizens, is extremely popular with its underclass; Mexico City contains a fifth of the nation's voters.

According to National University social economist Julio Boltvinik, 70 million out of 103 million Mexicans live in and around the poverty line—which is to say that poor Mexicans are the bulk of the electorate. Until 2000, when Fox upset the apple cart, the PRI



Andres Manuel López Obrador

photo by Laura Cano

had a lock on the votes of the poor. In 2006, those votes will be decisive and up for grabs—and the candidates will compete for them until the final ballot is cast.

Inexplicably, AMLO's adversaries chose to open their campaigns in the very megalopolis that he governed so successfully for six years and where the PRD has controlled City Hall for the better part of the decade.

The PAN's Felipe Calderón, a member of Mexico's social and political elite, went slumming for the votes of the great unwashed but drew only a handful of curious onlookers in the downtrodden delegation (borough) of Ixtapalapa, solid Peje territory. Later, as the right-winger (Calderón represents the rightist wing of the right-wing party) began his spiel in a suburban bullring, Televisa filmed hundreds of "PANistas" stampeding out of the arena, presumably because the free eats had been exhausted.

Short, balding, and shrill, Calderón has none of the charisma of the boom-voiced, six-foot-six inch-tall Fox, a former president of Coca Cola who marketed his way into high office. But Fox proved to be a lot like the product he used to sell—full of bubbles and sweet talk—and failed to deliver the "change" he so fervently hawked, a decided handicap for Calderón and the PAN in the upcoming presidential derby.

Another handicap: Calderón is the clear favorite of the U.S. embassy. At a panel discussion late last year that was organized by the American Chamber of Commerce, the PANista, a former energy secretary, drew wild applause when he pledged to privatize PEMEX, the national oil monopoly, while AMLO met with stony stares for his anti-privatization stance. In the light of the current anti-U.S. mania that has gripped Mexico ever since Bush & Company signed on to a border wall, even the sub rosa endorsement of the United States is a disadvantage.

The PRI's Roberto Madrazo, who also launched his campaign in AMLO-landia, had similar problems drumming out a crowd. Party *técnicos* laid out 42,000 chairs for a hugely bal-

lyhooded rally in Ecátepec, just outside the Mexico City line, but only 15,000 showed up. The empty seats came in handy as weapons when a furious brawl broke out between warring PRI factions right below the speaker's podium. Although Madrazo preaches party "unity," the one-time ruling party is seamed with schism and given Madrazo's questionable electoral history (he has often been accused of fraud), keeping the PRI from self-destructing before Election Day is a key concern for party honchos.

To match the PRD's "Alliance For the Good of All," Madrazo has concocted the "Alliance for Mexico"—the PRI plus the Mexican Green Environmental Party (PVEM), an entity that sells itself to the highest bidder every six years (it supported Fox in 2000).

In addition, two newly-invented parties are in the race for the money (juicy subsidies from the non-partisan Federal Electoral Institute (IFE). The PANAL or New Alliance Party, is a PRI split-off that has the backing of the nation's education workers, the largest labor union in Latin America. And a comic opera amalgam, the Alternative Social Democrat Farmers Party features two nominees battling over the party's registration.

But there is also a fourth major candidate—or rather non-candidate—to be reckoned with: Subcomandante Marcos, the quixotic mouthpiece for the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN). Unconstrained by IFE regulations, Marcos took the Zapatistas' anti-electoral "Other Campaign" on the road New Year's Day, barnstorming through the nation's southeast before branching out into the rest of Mexico. By election day, the Subcomandante expects to have spoken with workers, farmers, Indians, and those who share the Zapatistas' vision, in every state in the Mexican union.

The EZLN's strategy is to build an anti-capitalist, non-hierarchical left in Mexico that is not dependent on the political parties or a corrupted electoral system for social change.

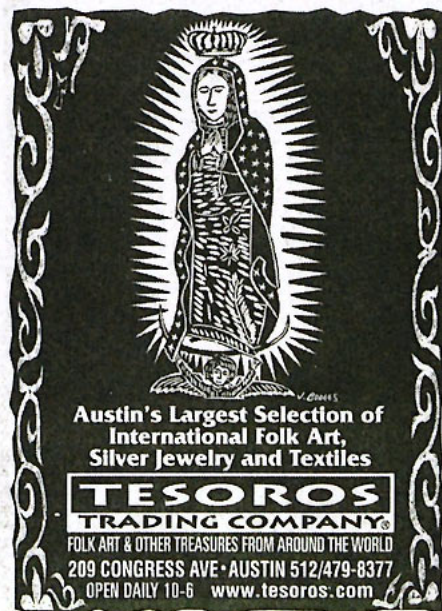
When the presidential campaigns officially kicked off on January 18,

Subcomandante Marcos was in the Yucatán hearing out hurricane victims and disgruntled Mayan artisans barred from selling their wares at the major Mayan ruin of Chichén Itzá. Like AMLO and Madrazo and all the others, the Other Campaign is focused on winning the hearts and minds of Mexico's poor.

Drawing several thousand supporters and/or curiosity-seekers to his camp meetings, Marcos is running neck and neck with AMLO and his rivals when it comes to drawing a crowd. The failure of the candidates—and non-candidates—to turn out the masses could be an early indicator of voter disinterest. A low turnout would validate the EZLN's argument that elections are not a good measure of democracy.

Indeed, as the campaigns move into gear and the hyperbole, hypocrisy and cronyism thicken, and obscene tons of money are spent on cheesy TV hit pieces (the IFE budget for the 2006 election exceeds all of the nation's poverty programs combined), the Other Campaign's message is certain to have much scratch down below in Mexico Profundo ("deep Mexico") where most Mexicans dwell. ■

John Ross's latest work-in-progress, Making Another World Possible—Zapatista Chronicles 2000-2006, will be published by Nationbooks this fall.



Austin's Largest Selection of
International Folk Art,
Silver Jewelry and Textiles

TESOROS
TRADING COMPANY

FOLK ART & OTHER TREASURES FROM AROUND THE WORLD
209 CONGRESS AVE • AUSTIN 512/479-8377
OPEN DAILY 10-6 www.tesoros.com

—Patrick, continued from page 10

hours of hospital care for mastectomy patients. She has also made criminal justice and public safety a concern, authoring a bill that revoked the practice of mandatory releases and instituting a review process.

Her office specializes in constituent services—helping people negotiate their way through government bureaucracies, assisting communities with siting landfills and dumps, or keeping them out. She also has taken a keen interest in promoting transportation and public works. “The suburban area outside Houston would never have happened without the infrastructure,” she says, adding: “A lot of people move to this area for the good schools and the community college system.”

Before her election to the Legislature, Hamric was a homemaker, substitute teacher, and the president of her local women’s Republican club. In 2002, she oversaw the GOP’s get-out-the-vote drive in Greater Houston. “I’m part of the movement that built this

party,” she says.

The party network, as well as a steady stream of endorsements from elected officials, could make her the best-positioned candidate to face Patrick if there is a runoff. In addition, political insiders say that the strength of Republican women’s groups in Houston should never be underestimated.

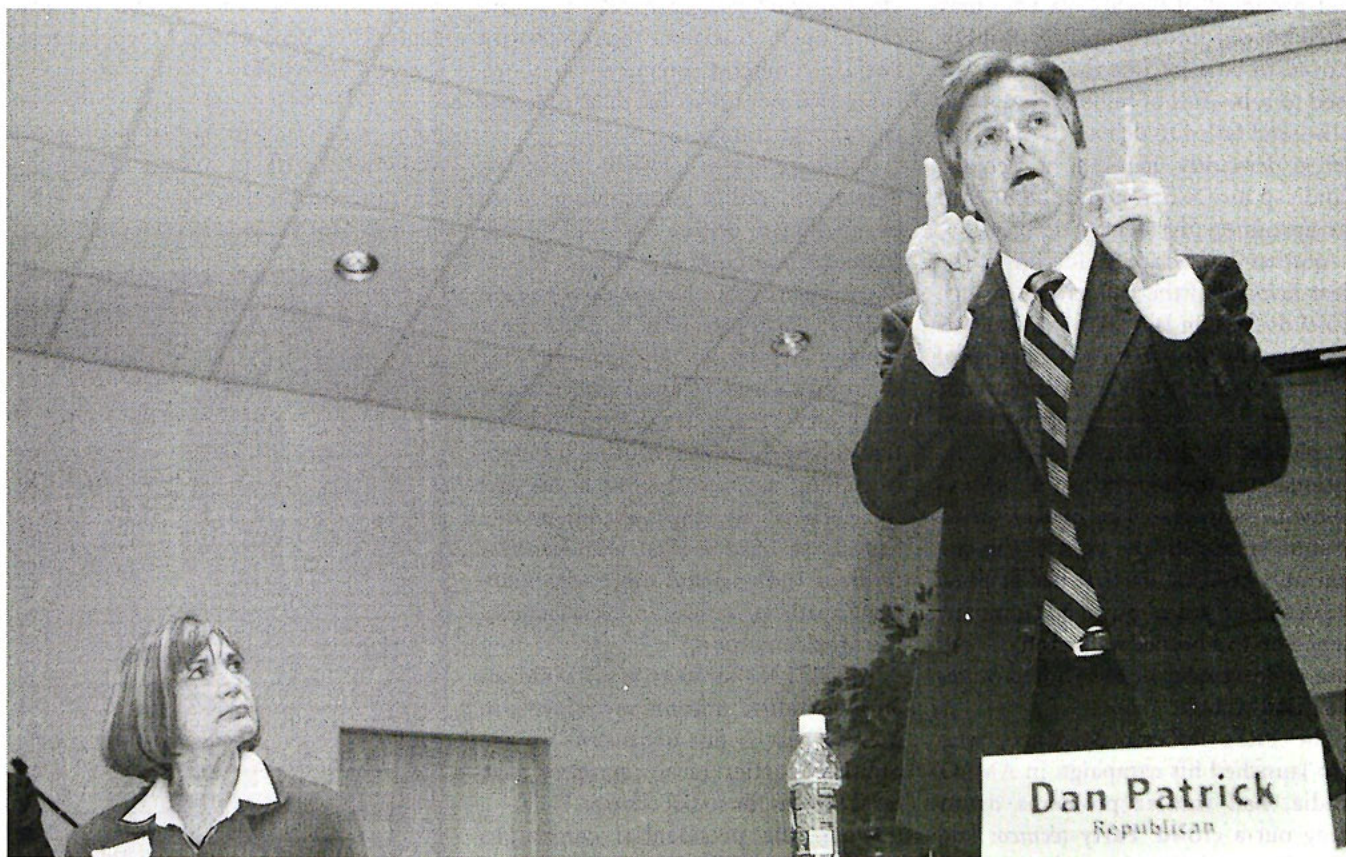
Patrick’s views and “shock jock” edginess—an anti-abortion, former sportscaster who once broadcast his radio show from a doctor’s office while he underwent a vasectomy—are not easily embraced by many women. “About three-quarters of the Republican women’s clubs are going for Hamric,” asserts Shillock, the Republican party activist. Demographic trends, moreover, could provide her with a political tailwind. “Hamric benefits from the fact that about 53 percent of the voters are women,” says political scientist Murray. “There are more women than men in their 70s and younger women are better educated than men and more likely to vote.” Adds a longtime Harris County

Republican leader: “Republican women are very active and they yak—and if they’re talking, it gives a candidate good word-of-mouth.”

If elected, Hamric would be the first Republican woman to represent Houston in the Senate. Should that happen, there will be a welcoming committee. At least a dozen Senators served with her in the House and those relationships, she asserts, will aid her, the district, and Houston. “I’ll be able to work with the Senate as well as with my former colleagues over in the House,” she says.

Only about 40,000 persons are likely to go to the polls in the Senate District 7 primary, says a Republican Party source close to the Harris County Clerk’s office.

Based on the number of Republican voters in the 2004 presidential election, that would be about 13 percent of the district’s pool of registered voters who tend to vote Republican. An even



Peggy Hamric and Dan Patrick

photo by Troy Fields

smaller segment of the electorate is likely to decide the runoff, should one occur. That means that the most activist and intensely committed voters in the district will decide who represents nearly three-quarters of a million people in the state Senate. Using sophisticated marketing strategies, the campaigns are targeting the same narrow group and bombarding them with appeals to vote.

"In a big metropolitan area," says Murray, "the media stays busy and they don't cover the race very well. Hardly anybody knows what state Senate district they live in, so it's become an election among insiders." Among those most likely to cast ballots, Murray says, are older Anglos who are ideologically conservative and connected to the politically active churches, which will prod their congregations to go to the polls. That sounds like a natural constituency for Patrick and his CLOUT group, which in the weeks leading up to the primary were smelling victory.

Patrick says that, if elected to the Senate, he will resume his talk show, broadcasting from the Texas Capitol. Ethical issues aside (there are strict rules barring elected officials' trading on their position as public servants for profit), that could further raise his profile and make him a major figure in the conservative wing of the Republican Party.

It's just one seat in the Senate, but the stakes are high for Republicans. If the field narrows as expected and the race turns into a head-to-head slugfest between the traditional Republican wing of the party and the conservative wing, money will pour into the runoff from all directions.

"Patrick is essentially an entertainer," Murray says. "It's going to be terrific political theater." ■

Paul Sweeney, a freelance writer living in Austin, is a longtime Observer contributor. He has worked at Texas newspapers in Corpus Christi and El Paso and has written for The Boston Globe, The New York Times, and Business Week.

—*Negative, continued from page 13*

information in the ads getting through, but the negative attacks on Kalyn Free motivated voters to seek out Dan Boren's corresponding stands. For example, voters knew from Boren's ads that Free opposed banning so-called late-term abortions. Joy reported that some voters actually referenced the ads in asking him where Boren stood on abortion.

If negative campaign attacks suppress turnout, then wouldn't the voters shy away from the perpetrator instead of seeking him out to engage him on the issues?

Boren ended up winning by a far wider margin than anyone thought possible, 58 percent to 36. The stunning margin of victory got all the attention on election night, but after the numbers got crunched, Boren's field director, Ward Curtain, realized that the turnout was enormous. Remember, only 88,750 had showed up in the 2000 Democratic primary. The Boren campaign's optimistic hope was that 118,000 would vote. The actual turnout in this highly negative race? Try 127,307 Democrats at the polls—surpassing the 2000 race turnout by 43.4 percent.

Deserved or not, Kalyn Free received a shellacking, but the final tally doesn't

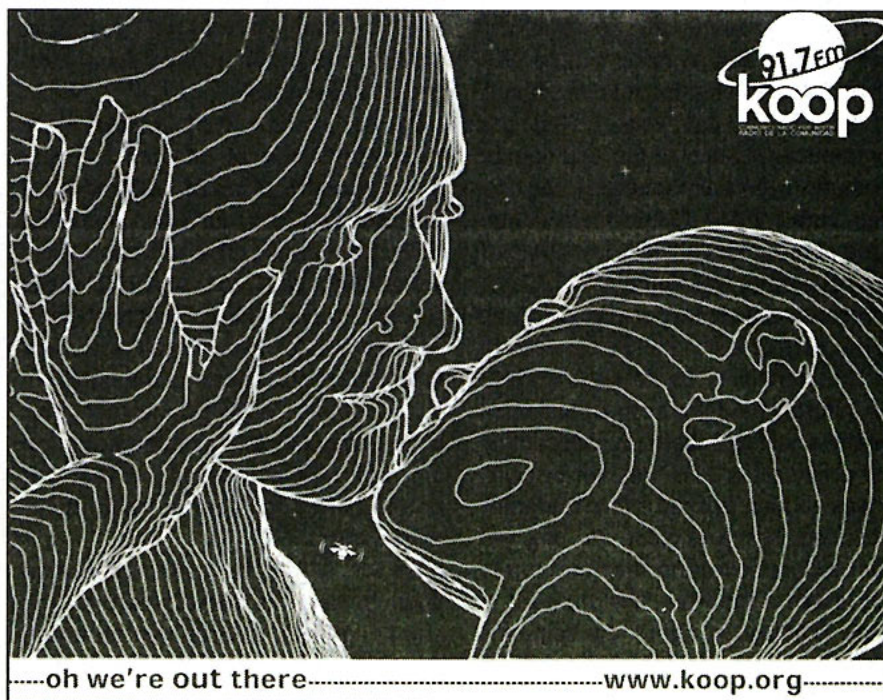
suggest that her candidacy tanked due to her negative commercials either. She received 46,061 votes in her losing bid, exceeding the 39,837 votes Brad Carson got in the 2000 Democratic Primary, and he won.

A few factors went into the surprising turnout. Redistricting after the 2000 census left the 2nd District with more Democrats than before, but the Boren campaign had taken those factors into account and still only put the best case scenario at 118,000 Democrats.

The negative attacks were exactly why Dan Boren trooped home by a big margin. The obvious truth was that the attacks energized and engaged voters by raising the stakes on cultural issues such as guns, reproductive rights, and class differences. The negative attacks engaged two dynamic personalities in a struggle, and voters responded not by expressing disgust but enthusiasm for voting.

Turns out, negative campaigning helps turnout—and democracy—if it's done well. ■

Jason Stanford is the president of Stanford Campaigns, a campaign consulting firm that has helped elect Democrats in 35 states over the past decade. He lives in Austin with his wife and two sons.



—*PIs, continued from page 5*

of efficiency and lay out plans for a more productive, more cost-effective future. The Demo Hall offered attendees a glimpse of this future, which is pretty much like the present, except all call centers will be outsourced to tropical beaches and a robot will be doing your job.

Call centers have recently become almost a dirty word in some circles of Texas politics. In 2003, the Legislature approved a controversial plan to allow call centers to take over the duties of many of the state's health and human services offices. Instead of face-to-face interaction with accountable state employees, Texans applying for social services like Medicaid and food stamps will soon speak over the phone with hirelings of the private consulting firm Accenture. Some lawmakers are expressing doubts about the transfer of services because it is not saving as much money as intended.

No such negativity pierced the corridors and ballrooms of the Austin Hilton. In this modern bazaar, industry cheerleaders from companies with names like Talisma and Genticity displayed their finest products such as natural-voice technology, call-recording software, and economically underdeveloped countries. (Did you know that Guatemala is home to several luxury golf courses and a massive untapped labor force willing to answer phones for next-to-nothing wages?) But the conference was not all fun and games: delegates eventually sobered up to cast their vote for the funniest call center trade publication cartoon. The competition, as always, was fierce.

Because call centers are typically one of the first of a company's services to be sent offshore, it's no surprise that the industry has long been a focal point for the ongoing debate on outsourcing and privatization. This market insecurity was enough to keep some conferees grounded in the present. As one rep from a data-collecting firm uncomfortably asked a reporter, "We're based in Texas. That's good, right?" For someone in this business, it's not only good, it's an anomaly.

TCEQ SNUBS EL PASO On February 8, environmental activists and politicians from Texas, Mexico, and the Mexican state of Chihuahua, came to Austin with hopes of permanently shutting down ASARCO's El Paso copper smelter (See "Clean Up or Cover Up?", October 8, 2004). The Arizona-based mining company's air quality permit was up for renewal by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. After a two-week hearing in El Paso last year, state administrative law judges found that the company failed to meet the requirements for renewal, citing a poor compliance record and failure to show that the smelter would not further foul the air over El Paso, Ciudad Juárez, and southwestern New Mexico if operations resumed.

Although the commissioners didn't give ASARCO the go-ahead just yet, to the dismay of Sen. Eliot Shapleigh (D-El Paso) and some 150 activists and politicians, they also didn't deny the renewal permit. Instead they will allow the company to fix deficiencies in its application. The company will now undergo new air modeling and an on-site investigation.

After the decision was announced, several of the disappointed activists booed the commissioners and expressed concerns that if the plant fires up again, it will spew out lead, arsenic and other poisons that make their children sick.

To be precise, that means more than 7,000 tons of pollutants a year, including 6,673 tons of sulfur dioxide and 7.6 tons of lead, says Shapleigh. After the hearing, the senator walked stone-faced past the ASARCO execs, refusing a handshake. Shapleigh later said he would arm himself with new information and continue the fight.

Meanwhile, ASARCO lawyer Eric Groten praised the Commission's ruling, but also acknowledged that the permit battle had been a frustratingly long process.

As for TCEQ, the Commission managed to save its perfect record: The state's official environmental watchdogs have never denied an air quality renewal permit. ■

—*Capitol, continued from page 11*

minorities, of their voting rights and of carrying water for longtime campaign contributors. Asked about the bill, Madla responded, "[My] constituents believed, and I supported, that, as landowners of the property impacted by the legislation, they should be the ones to vote on it."

The bill passed the Senate and later died in the House. Yet the issue has opened a rift in the Democratic Party in West Texas. On one side are Shapleigh, Uresti, and Rep. Norma Chavez (D-El Paso), who blocked the water district bill in the House. On the other side sit Madla, Rep. Chente Quintanilla (D-El Paso), a backer of the water bill, and Martha "Marty" Reyes, who's challenging Chavez in the primary. (She happens to be the wife of Jesus "Chuy" Reyes, the general manager of the water district.) Not to be outdone, Quintanilla himself is facing primary opposition due in part to his support of the water district bill.

This split is manifested in the two side's financial backing. A review of campaign finance reports shows that El Paso area agricultural interests, including several individuals that sit on the water district board, have been major funders of Madla, Reyes (44 percent of her total campaign funds), and Quintanilla (34 percent), while donating little or nothing to their opponents.

Some Democrats view the intra-party scrap—especially the Madla race—as a way to solidify the power of the minority party in a Republican-dominated state. "The only power that the Democratic Party has left in the Senate is those 11 [Democratic] votes," Uresti said. "That's all we have left to be able to tell the Republicans, 'Hold on a second, yes you outnumber us, but if we're going to move this bill forward, you need to give us something for our people.'" ■

WRITE DIALOGUE

307. W 7th Street
Austin, TX 78701

editors@texasobserver.org

THE MOST PATRIOTIC MAN IN TEXAS

Maury Maverick Jr. (1921-2003)

It's the all wrong, rigid liquidity of the mountain maple tree's
new spring foliage that draws me down the slope to see it.
Surely it's dying: every leaf encysted with galls—swollen,
massive, tumorous, and seemingly still growing.

The branches dangle: up close, they're an ache;
from a distance, a half-molten tree, a chyme
of greenery and acid air, an awful thing the wind can't move.
I should fetch the saw and take it down—

just so, the world seemed back at the house:
more news of the recent war, the usual foolishness of fools
with power. I remember thinking: *Maverick, we need you now.*
Cantankerous, left-wing, legendary Texas lawyer, he helped me—

boy soldier, CO—leave the army if not the war behind.
The day I headed home, he said, "Goddamit, don't ever let me
catch you being a conservative." He did not smile saying this.
It was October, 1971. I didn't think there was much hope

for the nation, nor did I really care, which he must have sensed.
Maverick shook his great head. In San Antonio, the Alamo
reliably drew a sort of faithful son. "Not everybody
who's brave has to die for this," he said, and I nodded,

though I knew I was not brave, knew what courage I'd mustered
would have come in part from him. I owe him, and now he's dead,
and it's only through the tributes of others that I know he was childless—
which I think is half true—and how very much he loved the trees.

Therefore, because afterward I never laid eyes on the man in his life;
because after my last day in Texas I never thanked him again
and I am ashamed for that; because I also love the trees,
and, finally, because he believed in some mysterious way beyond

the national madness, I will say that I too believe, though mostly
in people like him. And in trees, yes, trees. And speaking of trees;
I would say that, as Maverick would have known, there have
been galls like these before, on many trees, and someone

at the very next opportune fall took out all the dead wood
they could, believing the roots at least were sound and deep,
as they are, no doubt, even in Texas, where a tree like this one
might well come back the very next spring, without, let's say, delay.

ROBERT WRIGLEY teaches at the University of Idaho. His most recent book is *Lives of the Animals* (Penguin).
—Naomi Shihab Nye

The Rich, Rich World of Political Theater

“**W**hen a government substitutes propaganda for governing, the Potemkin village is all,” New York Times columnist Frank Rich wrote last December. “Since we don’t get honest information from this White House we must instead, as the Soviets once did, decode our rulers’ fictions to discern what’s really happening. What we’re seeing now is the wheels coming off: As the administration’s stagecraft becomes more baroque, its credibility tanks further both at home and abroad. The propaganda techniques may be echt Goebbels, but they increasingly come off as pure Ali G.”

The column was vintage Rich, with its piercing critique of White House political theater and its pop culture reference to Ali G, the British comic whose real name is Sacha Baron Cohen.

Born in Washington, D.C. in 1949, Rich graduated from Harvard in 1971. By the end of that year he had published his first big story: a 10,000-word profile of Daniel Ellsberg that appeared in *Esquire*. After several years in Richmond, Virginia, where Rich and a group of friends founded a paper that combined muckraking with cultural and service journalism, he moved to New York. As he explains in his autobiography, *Ghost Light* (Random House, 2000), from an early age he was fascinated by the theater, which became a home away from home after his parents divorced. In 1980 at the age of 31 he was appointed chief drama critic at the *Times*, a position he would hold for 14 years before turning his attention to politics and the strange intersection of politics and pop culture, fact and fiction, that is so much a part of contemporary American life. As it happens, all those years as chief drama critic, all the preoccupation with stagecraft and what’s really going on in the wings, may be the perfect apprenticeship these days for a political columnist.

“It’s as if the country is living in a permanent state of suspension of disbelief,” Rich wrote on January 22. His column, “Truthiness 101: From Frey to Alito,” examined the Alito confirmation hearings, paired with the flap over fake memoirist James Frey. At the end of the column, Rich announced that he was going on book leave for several months, “writing nonfiction about our post-9/11 fictions.”

During a recent trip to Austin, he met with the *Observer*. The following is an excerpt of that conversation:

Texas Observer: For so many years your readers knew you primarily as a drama critic. But your first big break was a political story, a profile of Daniel Ellsberg that you wrote for *Esquire* right after college. How did that story come about?

Frank Rich: In 1970 I was the editorial chairman of the *Harvard Crimson*. Early that fall a guy who I had never heard of by the name of Dan Ellsberg started hanging around the *Crimson*. He was a fellow at MIT, an alumnus of the *Crimson* from the early 1950s. He was this obsessive guy with all these stories to tell about the Vietnam War and a lot of name dropping, in particular about McNamara and Kissinger. He wanted to speak to us about the war at our editorial board meetings. At that time there was a rule that non-staff people were not allowed to speak at the meetings. But he was so insistent, sort of charismatic and interesting—although we didn’t quite know what to make of him—and obviously brilliant. So he became a sort of unofficial hanger-on. We socialized with him and his wife.

That spring I was graduating and—I’ll never forget this—I was going to Class Day, a day-before-graduation event, where Jimmy Breslin was speaking. I got the *Sunday Times* and there was this lead story, which was the Pentagon Papers. Immediately I started recognizing

ing that these stories overlapped the stories that Ellsberg had told us. Then I head off to Class Day and stop at the Harvard Square News Stand and see Dan buying about seven copies of the *Sunday Times*. He gave me this look and said something like, “I’m going to be disappearing for awhile.” And I said, “Well, can I get in touch with you?”

To make a long story short, I spent the entire summer doing this piece, a lot of which involved furtive conversations with Ellsberg, who was on the lam and would call me from phone booths. At the end of the summer I finished a 10,000-word profile, edited it in New York and then went to Europe. While I was in London, some FBI agents came to the door and asked me to come to the American Embassy. I remember them taking me down corridor after corridor after corridor. It really was like out of a bad movie. I ended up in a room that was completely decorated with J. Edgar Hoover memorabilia and mounted guns on the wall and they asked questions like, “Did Daniel Ellsberg live in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in 1970?”

I never heard from Ellsberg again until about a year-and-a-half ago. I got a call at the *Times* from someone, “This is Dan Ellsberg.” As if we were talking yesterday. And he says, “You know, in the fifth paragraph where you said I compared myself to Rosa Parks, I didn’t.”

TO: It seems fitting that Ellsberg would resurface at this time. Before the Iraq war began he was active, trying to get people who worked in Intelligence to speak out.

FR: I think we’re seeing something like that now—Lawrence Wilkerson is a classic example, Powell’s former top aide, who has really been ferocious. Keep in mind, [Wilkerson served] at a much higher level than someone like Ellsberg. Ellsberg was really low on the totem pole. I think we’re seeing a number of people—Richard Haass

[former director of policy planning in the state department under Powell], has been talking about the war for quite some time now. Certainly as you read books like Larry Diamond's book [*Squandered Victory: The American Occupation and the Bungled Effort to Bring Democracy to Iraq*], George Packer's book [*The Assassins' Gate: America in Iraq*], there are quite a number of people who are talking. And, of course, Joe Wilson, who in a way may be the closest figure—close in his role in the sort of unraveling of the Iraq war and in his public personality—to Ellsberg.

TO: *In Ghost Life you lay out your early fascination with theater, which later would affect the way that you write about politics—the theater of politics. Where does your own politics come from?*

FR: Here's the thing: I grew up in Washington. My father was a shoe storeowner, a native Washingtonian. Politics would enter that part of my family's life only if Bess Truman came in and bought a pair of shoes. My stepfather, as you know, was a major character in *Ghost Light*. Even several years after it's been published, I'm still wrestling with him as an influence on me. He was a very difficult character, abusive to his family; on the other hand, he was this brilliant guy, very tough. He represented airlines that were not the big airlines. This is a world that no longer exists because it's all been deregulated, but he represented Air India and Air France and British Airways, which were always fighting route cases, fighting hugely powerful airlines like Pan Am and TWA. What I realize now is a lot of it was what we call lobbying. A lot of it was about jollying up senators. He had worked as a secretary to Henry Wallace in the late '40s and he worked in the Commerce Department. He really knew quite well people like Johnson, Humphrey, Scoop Jackson [the late Senator Henry Jackson of Washington], but he was very much against the status quo, so in that way he no way resembles lobbyists today. He thought the big companies were out to screw the little companies he represented. He was an

authoritarian personality, but he hated authority. One of his very good friends was Bill Douglas, the Supreme Court Justice. He was also very friendly with two columnists. I'm convinced that he fed them items: One of them was Drew Pearson, the other was Leonard Lyons. Drew Pearson was about Washington political gossip and Leonard Lyons was about celebrity gossip. My stepfather always had this interest in theater, and one of his clients was New York theater producers' trade association.

The other thing that had a huge effect on me was the lack of home rule in Washington. To this day, my father, who is turning 85 in April, is involved in DC Vote, an advocacy group—this clearly doomed effort to get home rule. I was always a theater fanatic; the theater and politics fused in my mind because if you are interested in the theater you always know that what you're

seeing on stage is a bunch of scenery and actors playing roles in what is essentially fiction. But as you learn more about it, you know there are stagehands, there are things going on in the wings. I think that informed my view of Washington.

On one hand, you're presented with this official view of Washington as this cradle of democracy and this fantastic egalitarian place where all the principles in the constitution and the bill of rights are being upheld. On the other hand, I could see every day, these incredible inequities—the way black people were treated, the way the city was run. That discrepancy in the theater between onstage and off to this day has affected my view of politics: I'm always curious about what's happening in the wings.

TO: *It's interesting hearing you talk about your stepfather's cynicism, how that affected your perception. But once*

—continued on page 27

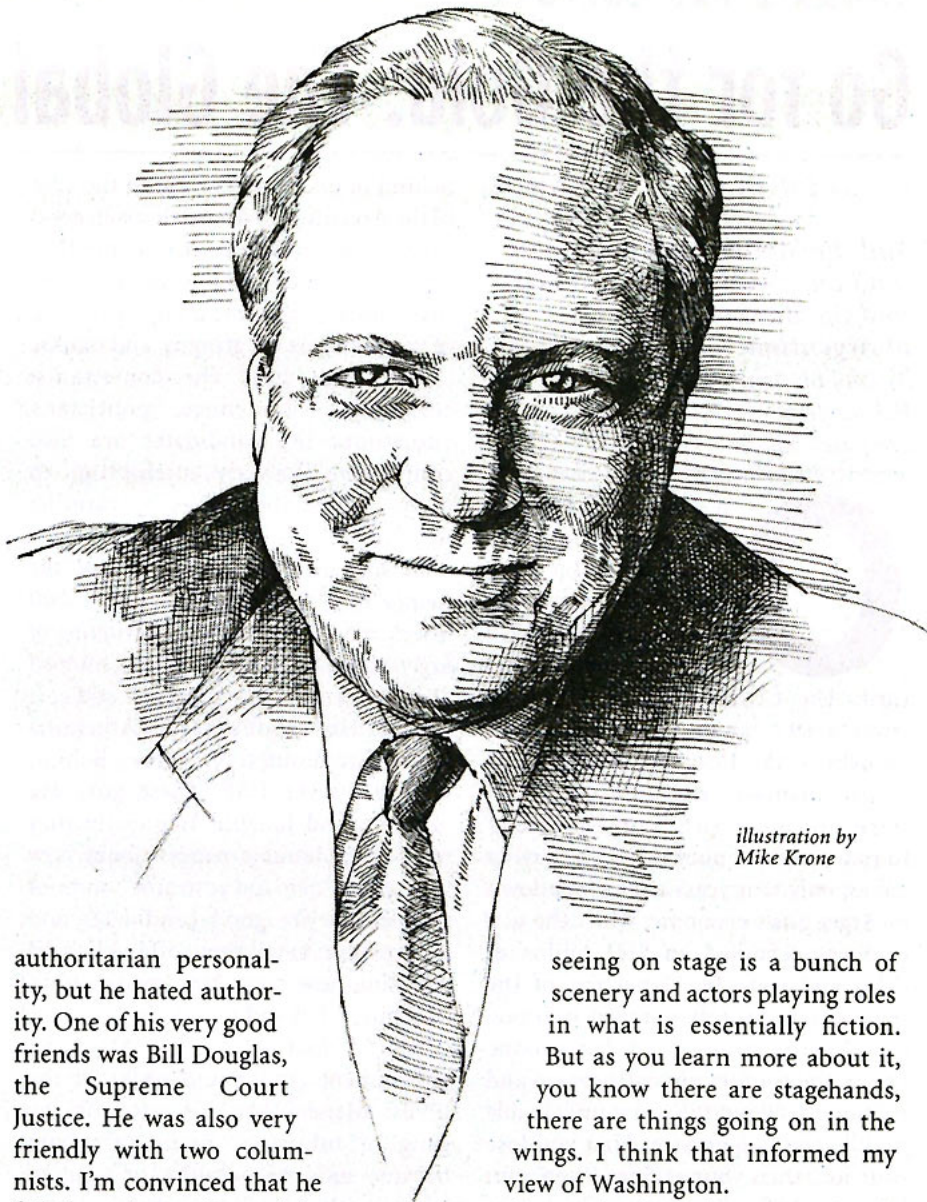


illustration by
Mike Krone

Go for the Gold: The Global Blame Game

BY GABRIELA BOCAGRANDE

And the Money Kept Rolling in (and out): Wall Street, the IMF, and the Bankrupting of Argentina

By Paul Blustein

PublicAffairs

278 pages, \$27.50

On January 3 of this year, the long sorry saga of Argentina and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) took an astonishing turn. The Government of Argentina wrote a \$9.8 billion check, paying off its debt to the IMF, the deep-pockets global financial institution controlled by rich people in rich countries to lend to rich people in poor ones. The payout comes only four years after a meltdown of Argentina's economy, when the government defaulted on \$141 billion of debt, and roughly 30 percent of the population abruptly plunged into poverty. That year, as capital fled, production in the country virtually ceased and millions lived out the worst imaginable middle class nightmare: First you lose your job, then your savings, then your house ... before it's over you're bartering your wedding ring on the street. This really happened.

When a disaster of the proportions of the Argentine collapse occurs, economists, politicians and bankers are, whether they like it or not, obliged to play what post-Enron, post-Katrina Republicans refer to derisively as "The Blame Game." This game is an amusing pastime through which a few unlucky individuals take the fall for the massive corruption of the structure itself and then we revert to doing whatever it was we were doing before this unhappy event occurred.

This game can get complicated, though. For example, you must first stash a few blameworthy candidates

behind doors #1, #2, or #3. In the case of the Argentine financial disaster, good candidates for these roles were the IMF, former President Carlos Menem and his cronies (who stole a huge pantload of money), certain gringos, and banks.

Then you have the contestants: columnists, academics, politicians. Sometimes the candidates are also contestants, cleverly attempting to escape blame themselves by blaming each other.

In his aptly titled book *And the Money Kept Rolling in (and out): Wall Street, the IMF, and the Bankrupting of Argentina*, Paul Blustein proves himself an able Blame Game producer and contestant. His candidates for Argentina blame are limited to three: Behind door #1 is the IMF. These guys are arrogant and hateful; frequently they write impenetrable papers about how to impose "demand restraint" on poor people. They're good candidates and it's great fun to tell them off publicly by exposing how they were 'mistaken' in the things they did.

Behind door #2 are the Argentine government crooks and hacks of the 1990s: Menem and his wisecracking gang of ministers, many of whom became suddenly wealthy, or went to jail, or both. Also a good choice.

And finally—always a favorite—the Wall Streeters lurk behind door #3. They're excessively rich and cynical, usually they are gringos, and they believe themselves entitled to absolutely everything.

Gee it's hard to pick. Through much of Blustein's book, we go back and forth.

Sometimes it's the IMF: "Argentina was badly served by the global institutions on which it had come to depend. Nations experiencing reversals of the sort Argentina was experiencing in 2000-2001 should be able to count on the international community for well-designed support to break their falls..."

But then again, the government must

have been at fault: "Like a person prone to heart attacks who must maintain a much healthier lifestyle than the average individual to reduce the risk of a fatal seizure, Argentina needed to be ultradisciplined about fiscal matters." Which it was not.

And don't forget, "the global financial markets were even more grievously at fault."

In this version of *The Blame Game*, Blustein employs a skillful strategy. If you look carefully at the IMF staff and managers, and the government politicians and bureaucrats, and the Wall Street investors and analysts, you will notice that our three possible choices are, in fact, *the same people*. How about that? Of course, they're not exactly the same *individual* people. They're the same kind of people, and that's what matters.

The IMF works most closely with the Central Banks and governments in the respective countries, and Central Banks work closely with financial markets. Central Banks also hold public dollars as reserves to back government policies, and Central Bankers are their country's representatives at the IMF. The staff and management at the IMF are often former Central Bankers. The Executive Directors at the IMF, who approve loans, are Central Bankers. Sometimes managers and Executive Directors at the IMF return to their national Central Banks. Many of these people go to U.S. universities for at least one degree—the University of Chicago, Harvard, and MIT—where they meet each other and learn the same dogma.

This is a fact. For example, the IMF staff member with responsibility for overseeing Argentina and Brazil in 2001 was Teresa Ter-Minassian: Harvard graduate, staff member Central Bank of Italy. On her staff, Jorge Campodónico, former Finance Minister of Peru indicted *in absentia* for corruption and wanted in Lima.

Then there's the Deputy Managing

Director of the IMF, Agustín Carstens. Ph.D. and M.A. from the University of Chicago, former Deputy Secretary of Finance in Mexico, IMF Executive Director, former official at the Central Bank of Mexico.

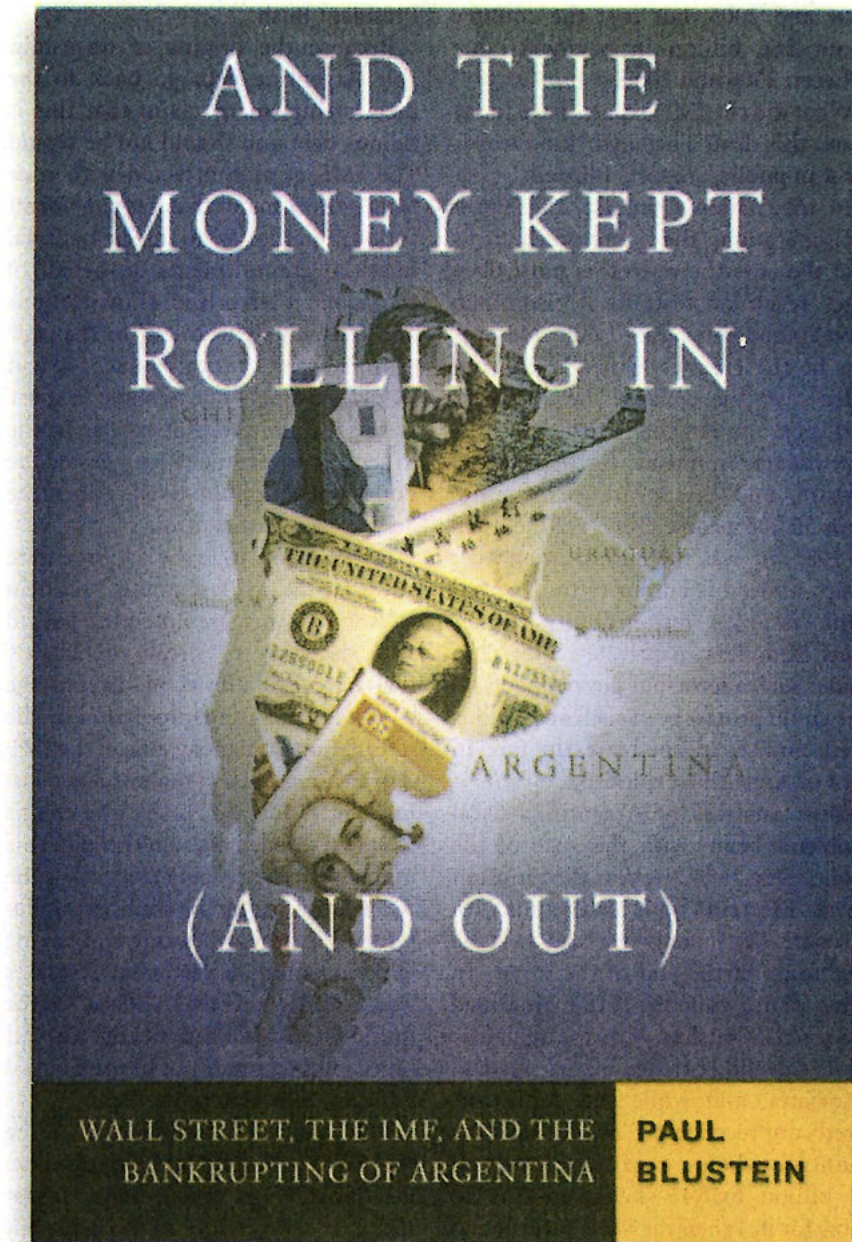
During the Argentine collapse, the presiding Finance Minister in Buenos Aires was Domingo Cavallo, a Harvard graduate. Cavallo, after being released from a three-month jail stint in 2002 for presumed complicity in the illegal sale of weapons to Croatia and Ecuador, returned to Harvard to teach in 2003. There, presumably, he is now cranking out the next generation of financial geniuses.

Presenting the IMF, the Argentine government and Wall Street as three different participants in the collapse, as Blustein does, gives the false impression that there were fundamentally differing views involved—that choices were to be made and that those who made them made the wrong ones. Structural reform in this system is therefore unnecessary. Those involved should simply be more thoughtful.

If this is so, what exactly were the choices available to “decision-makers” as the financial house of cards that was the Argentine economy drew closer to collapse? Choice #1 apparently, was to “pull the plug.” The IMF could have refused to lend the government any more money and let the chips fall where they may. And choice #2 was to keep bailing until the collapse happened anyway. Not much of a selection.

Blustein describes a number of other possible strategies, such as a transaction tax on international financial transfers to stem capital flight, or jurisdiction of local courts over the funds of international investors to cool the enthusiasm of speculators eager to cash in on the Argentine bubble. But these kinds of solutions were never seriously considered by any of the possibly blameworthy candidates, despite the fact that they might, at least, have cushioned the blow.

These choices were not adopted because, in the end, there weren't different views, and the private advisers, as well as the Argentine politicians



and businessmen counseling the Executive Directors at the Fund were making enormous amounts of money by deepening the crisis before they addressed it.

A case in point: David Mulford. Mulford had been U.S. Treasury Undersecretary for International Affairs during the administration of the first President Bush, a position that deals closely with IMF policies. Later he joined Credit Suisse First Boston (CSFB), the firm that cashed in on the privatization of Argentina's oil company in 1993 (a long and interesting story in itself) and became a major underwriter

of Argentina's bonds. While working at Treasury, Mulford had become great pals with Domingo Cavallo. He and Cavallo worked out one last deal as Argentina sank under the weight of its loans in 2001: the megaswap. Under this arrangement, bondholders who were due for a short-term payout on their holdings agreed to wait longer to cash in their bonds, if paid higher interest rates. The deal was a bonanza for CSFB and the other firms that arranged it—they earned \$90 million in fees—but it was a bust for Argentina. The swap saved the government about \$12 billion in payments due between

2001 and 2005, but cost the country about \$66 billion in payments due between 2006 and 2030.

What did the IMF experts have to say about this deal? They had "kind words for it in public," reports Blustein.

In international finance, the bigger the operation, the more likely it is that the laws the rest of us must obey, can't reach or restrain it. Domingo Cavallo had this figured out. No only was he the Finance Minister who presided over the collapse, he also held this post under the Argentina military *junta*, responsible for the murder, torture, and disappearance of more than 30,000 people from 1976 to 1983. In 1982, he was the author of another swap; under his authority the Central Bank assumed responsibility for billions of dollars in private sector debt. Under such a ferocious government, no one could protest even such an obvious theft, and so, in one blow, the foreign debt of Argentina exploded.

Most analyses of Argentina's fiscal problems begin with the state of the economy in 1984, the year the junta left power. Blustein's book also begins with this date. But in many ways, 1984 is the beginning of the end of the story. In seven years, while the IMF maintained a cozy relationship with the dictators, while Cavallo enriched his friends and associates, and while the public suffered unprecedented repression, the country's debt increased tenfold—from \$4 billion to \$45—with nothing to show for it. When the *junta* returned to the barracks, the Treasury was empty, the debt already unmanageable, and the economy of Argentina was mortally wounded. It would bleed for 17 more years before it died. And when it died, the only responsible party who lost his job was the unfortunately named IMF staffer, Claudio Loser. The people and the system responsible, the managers of the IMF, the David Mulfords, Domingo Cavallos, Teresa Ter-Minassian and her ilk, were not the ones left out on the street bartering their personal effects in exchange for food and clothing. Quite the contrary. Cavallo went to teach at Harvard, and Mulford was appointed U.S. Ambassador to India in 2004 by

President Bush.

Because the origins of unsustainable Argentine debt go back to the dictatorship, many claim that this is odious debt and should not be repaid. The IMF et al contracted with a *de facto* government that lacked constitutional authority to make national financial commitments on behalf of the public it terrorized. If institutions and individuals who lent to that government can't be repaid, that's too bad. Oddly, no one—not a single "expert" at the IMF, on Wall Street, or in the Argentine government—suggested the non-payment option as the Argentine debt grew out of control.

Which brings us to the last Argentine payout to the IMF last month. President Néstor Kirchner presented the payout as a decision to "break the chains" that have held the economy hostage to hostile foreign manipulation by the international financial elite at the IMF. Oh, please. A trail of memos dated last July shows that, in reality, the chains simply tightened a notch through this maneuver. The memos reveal that the early payout using the country's dollar reserves instead of waiting and paying with incoming government revenues was actually the IMF's idea. So the President transferred nearly \$10 billion in public funds out of the Central Bank of Argentina to the IMF.

The potential consequences of doing this are alarming; chief among them is a possible halt to foreign investment, as the stability of the currency erodes. Later, The Blame Game will begin: Who was responsible for this latest "mistake"? Someone will write a book to determine whether it was the Argentine government or the IMF staff that made the wrong decision and emptied the Central Bank. But something more consequential should really be done.

But once again, just as the country's economy began to recover, public dollars went rolling out. Something really ought to be done. ■

Gabriela Bocagrande, who lives in Washington D.C., reports on multilateral malfeasance for the Observer.

—*Dialogue, continued from page 2*

I'm not going to vote for Hillary Clinton either. I'm a liberal Democrat and whole-heartedly agree with you that our Democratic "leaders" need to get up off their butts and lead! What a bunch of wimps they've become. But I do like our brave new senator from Colorado, Ken Salazar. He speaks his mind.

Thanks Molly, for always speaking yours.

*Kizzen Laki
Crestone, CO*

THIN REED

Why don't we see Andrew Wheat's "Thin Reed" (January 27) in every major newspaper? It is very well researched—something rare for the print media nowadays as well as for the talking heads for that matter.

Thanks for printing it. And thank God for the Internet that allows people like me way up here in Fortuna, California to read it.

*June Nessler
Fortuna, CA*

I was unaware until I read "Thin Reed" that its author, Andrew Wheat, had made "repeated requests for comment" by me on Ralph Reed's contact with members of the State Board of Education in the fall of 2002. Mr. Reed did call me that September on behalf of Channel One. My then-colleague, Judy Strickland (R-Plainview), had filed a resolution asking Texas public schools not to broadcast Channel One into their classrooms.

Reed's sole request, to which I was sympathetic, was that Channel One should be allowed an opportunity to defend itself. A majority of the Board agreed to hold over the resolution till our next meeting in November, at which time both sides got to speak at length.

I can't recall what we eventually passed, but the statement could only have been hortatory, as the Board has no control over what public schools show in the classrooms.

*Chase Untermeyer
U.S. Ambassador to Qatar*

—Rich, continued from page 23

you get to that cynical stage—where a lot of people are now—what do you do with that?

FR: All I can do is write about it. I'm not a politician. I'm not a political activist. I'm lucky I found a career—this kind of strange, peripatetic career—where I've been able to fuse all my interests and write about it. What's been brilliant about this administration is their ability to create a false reality. It's not just about using fake numbers. It's about creating absolute scenarios. Hiring people to carry them out. Somebody like [Michael] Deaver in the Reagan administration—an actual Hollywood administration—looks tame by comparison.

I really feel strongly that Katrina was the final moment when things sort of fell apart. A lot of the country just really turned the page about Iraq. Just tuned it out. Because what, one in 11 people knows someone who's fighting there. In that way, it's not like Vietnam. It's like, "Agghh! Bad news. I'll change the channel." When this hurricane happened, you had actual Americans crying in anguish on national television. People talk now about a bounce in the polls. It may bounce up to 41, 43 percent, depending on which poll you read as he enters the lame duck part of his presidency. [But] I think Humpty Dumpty can't be put back together again.

TO: Maybe not, but that whole culture of unreality is so entrenched—

FR: That's a part of American culture that predates the ascendancy of George Bush. There's a media structure that's been created and it really took hold, in my view, in the mid-1990s. CNN became a big hit finally, after being a big joke, with the first Gulf War. You add to that mix competing cable networks of all sorts and the beginning of the explosion of the Internet as a mass medium. We've created this culture now, this sort of 24/7 culture I've written about a lot, where anything can be turned into a national soap opera and can be manipulated, particularly by people in power. We look back now at the Lewinsky scandal and it

WHAT'S BEEN BRILLIANT ABOUT THIS ADMINISTRATION IS THEIR ABILITY TO CREATE A FALSE REALITY. IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT USING FAKE NUMBERS. IT'S ABOUT CREATING ABSOLUTE SCENARIOS.

seems like whatever anyone thinks of Clinton, what the hell was that all about? How did that ever become a national soap opera? But we have the media in place to do it. What's brilliant about the Bush people is that they've figured out how to manipulate it. There was a time when television, the way most Americans get their news, was considered a public service entity. It was like this public service fig leaf for people like Paley at CBS to the federal government: We'll do "The Beverly Hillbillies," we'll do the game shows, because we're giving you the evening news and "CBS Reports" and we don't expect to make a profit. Now CBS as a whole is a small part of Viacom and CBS News is a tiny part of CBS, so that's all gone by the wayside. It's been replaced by news that is literally run by entertainment companies and is completely ratings-conscious. It's not simply that FOX is right wing; that really isn't the big point. The big point of all of them is that they're going to give the audience what it wants and what gets the highest rating. So it will always be an abducted young woman, shark attacks, or Monica Lewinsky or O.J. Simpson.

TO: You really think the networks always give the American people what they want?

FR: Do I think that is there an audience for something higher? Of course there is. But it's a niche audience. The audience of *The New York Times*, is what? A million people during the week. The printed word has to face the technological challenge and the economic challenge of the Internet. Leaving that aside for a second, print has much more freedom than television. The notion that on prime time people are going to watch ABC news, or a CBS news, or a FOX news hour about the future of Hamas is preposterous. It can't compete; never could compete. It's not like Edward R. Murrow had high ratings either. He had high ratings—as the movie *Good Night, and Good Luck* indicated—from when he interviewed Liberace. Not from talking about migrant workers or Joe McCarthy. The networks didn't care. Maybe there was also a little altruism, although I think that movie captures very well that it was hardly altruistic.

Don Hewitt, who created "60 Minutes" makes the very good point that his show, which is one of the best things to ever happen to TV news, also creates its destruction. People forget that for eight, ten seasons "60 Minutes" had terrible ratings. By today's standards it would have been cancelled in two or three weeks. But it was still the tail end of the public service period [of television his-

tory]. So CBS just kept it on and didn't give a shit. Suddenly it became a big hit and set a new standard. My God, you can do this and make money too! In some ways that was the beginning of the end. Hewitt himself has said many times, "We created the monster." Today if ABC, or CBS, or NBC wanted to start a new foreign policy "60 Minutes" or an investigative "60 Minutes"—even if [it] was allowed to get on the air on primetime on a big-three network—it would be cancelled as quickly as "The Book of Daniel," the television series, because no one is going to stick around and wait a decade for the ratings to kick in. Wall Street won't stand for it.

What gives me some encouragement is the generation coming up, maybe because I see this in my own two sons—one of them is 25 and one is 21—and their friends. They have been sold so much crap, so much more than we were. They're so suspicious of everything and may yet think of a way to reinvent [news coverage]. They are a huge market. And I can't imagine that they won't have some impact when their moment comes.

We're in a very odd situation right

now; it's almost as it was when talkies came into the movie industry. People went into a panic in the late 20s. You have traditional mainstream media terrified by the technological developments, intimidated by the government and the rise of the very vocal critics of the blogosphere. It can't last indefinitely. There comes a point, for instance, when people are going to want news about what's really going on in Iraq. They're going to want news about what's really going on with the next Enron. They're going to want to know what is really going on with global warming. There is a market for that. It may not be in primetime, but people will want it. Someone will supply it, someone will figure out how to make money doing it and how to distribute it.

TO: I want to close with a question about your new book. How are you going about putting that together?

FR: I am trying to construct a narrative, to stand back, look at what's happened since the summer of 2001 and try to tell the story. What it was like to live in this culture, to be somewhat innocent—not naïve—after this horrific attack and

this feeling that everything had changed. That we had left the frivolous 1990s of Monica Lewinsky and the stock market bubble and Enron phoniness behind us and we had all this new realism. Try to tell the story bit by bit from my point of view of how nothing changed—just some very slick people created a false reality that essentially sent a country into a war that had virtually nothing to do with the attack on America.

Although this is a book implicitly very critical of Bush, I don't want to write just about Bush or to argue about all his policies or any of all that. I feel what I have to bring to it is a cultural critique: watching the show. And then watching it implode in the past year, both in Iraq and in America. ■



Ruta Maya
International Headquarters

Come Visit us for LUNCH! In addition to our organic coffee, pizzas, empanadas, pastries and pies, we now prepare made to order sandwiches, salads, and even black bean gazpacho.

3601 S. Congress off E. Alpine
Penn Field - under the water tower
(512) 707-9637 www.rutamaya.net
check our site for monthly calendar



The Texas Observer

would like to remind you that:

DISSENT IS EDUCATIONAL.

PLEASE SUPPORT PUBLIC LIBRARIES

and the *Observer* by donating a tax-deductible *Observer* subscription to the Texas public library of your choice.

Visit our website www.texasobserver.org, or call us at (512) 477-0746 or toll-free at (800) 939-6620 for a complete list of Texas public libraries and to order a subscription.

Owens Country

This past year, 2005, marked the centennial of Texas author William A. Owens (1905-1990), and in his home country, north-east Texas, they remembered. On November 9-11, at a conference hosted jointly by Texas A&M University-Commerce and Paris Junior College, family, friends, scholars, and the general public came together to celebrate the life and work of the man from Pin Hook. This is a part of Texas I know well, having grown up on a cotton farm in Collin County, two counties southwest of where Owens lived and therefore considerably closer to that magnet of cosmopolitanism for country youth in those days. Dallas. Owens' early life, like mine, was one of cotton farming culture, on blackland prairie, where the crops were best, or on sandy land, where they were not.

On my way to Commerce, I saw with surprise that the Audie L. Murphy Cotton Museum, formerly located on the square, had moved to a location south of town, the better to entice visitors—children who have grown up without cotton fields forever or their grandparents on a nostalgia trip. Greenville, it will be recalled, was once known round the world because of the famous sign over Lee Street that circulated globally in the form of a picture postcard: Welcome to Greenville/The Blackest Land/The Whitest People.

I first met Bill Owens in the late 1970s, when he came to the University of Texas to offer a summer course in the English Department. I was teaching that session as well, but we didn't meet until a friend of his, Tom Hatfield, Director of the Extension Program then (as now), arranged for a get-together in his office. I wasn't sure why I was invited, but I was eager to meet Owens. Bill was very friendly and energetic, and the first thing he did was to query me about what he felt was the shabby treat-

ment he had received in the English Department. The Chairman had not welcomed him, he said; in fact nobody had. He wanted to know why. I told him, Shoot, that's the way the English Department treats everybody. I told him if Jesus H. Christ his own self got a teaching job there, they'd treat him the same way. I said, Bill, no need to take it personally. Years later, I could have muttered the swaggering mantra of the present: We're Texas.

I don't remember now what the luncheon was about; Hatfield and Owens had some plan in mind for a book, but I didn't see how I fit into it. Still, I very much enjoyed talking to Bill Owens, and in the years to come I saw him from time to time. Once was at North Texas when they held a symposium on his work. This was in 1981. They published a little collection of the talks from that day. My subject was Owens' remarkable autobiographical project, beginning with *This Stubborn Soil* followed by *A Season of Weathering*. My remarks were in the nature of a preliminary assessment, as later there would be two more volumes added to the list.

From time to time Owens would blow into town, and I use the word *blow* deliberately. He was always in motion and he came in like a spring shower—freshening and invigorating—and what I remember most is that he'd call and say you want to have lunch, and I'd say yes, and directly there'd be another call, moving the time because there was going to be somebody else at lunch, and finally it would be all set and there would be three or four people for lunch. Owens didn't want to waste lunch on one person; he had about five irons in the fire every time I saw him and he wanted that lunch to be productive.

I saw him again in 1983 when he came to a big conference on Texas writing that was held at the University of Texas. He delivered a talk titled

"Regionalism and Universality," providing an overview of his career. His main point was the need to leave one's region in order to apprehend a larger world. He described the limitations of his early views in a manner familiar to most people who grew up in rural Texas: "All that time I was an unreconstructed southerner, as well as a Texas chauvinist of the J. Frank Dobie persuasion, with no waverings at all until I traveled in the world north of the Red River and encountered other ways of thinking." And from that conference, I find, in my copy of *Tell Me a Story, Sing Me a Song* (the third volume of his autobiographical project) this inscription: "To Don Graham With deep admiration and appreciation for a wholly satisfactory symposium on Texas traditions, and all there are to come in the future. William A. Owens."

I don't remember the last time I saw Bill Owens. By the time he came to publish *Eye-Deep in Hell* in 1989, the fourth volume of his autobiographical memoir, I was publishing, that same year, my own book about WWII, a biography of another kid, Audie Murphy, who grew up in a cotton field as Owens had—poor and hungry for a wider world. I did not read Owens' book at that time—in fact I just read it for the first time a couple of months ago—and I have no idea whether Owens read my biography or not. Probably not. He was beginning to fail, and he died the next year.

The future that Owens alluded to in that inscription back in 1983 is now here, 23 years later. By this time you'd think that Owens' place in Texas letters would be secure. After all, there aren't many books in the same league with *This Stubborn Soil*. John Graves, for example, has called it "one of the best books ever written about our part of the world." Yet Owens belongs to the part of Texas that keeps being forgot-

ten or erased—East Texas. The most recent evidence of this tendency is the special section on Texas literature published in the *Dallas Morning News* (“Beyond the Texas Myth,” October 30, 2005). So far as I can tell, the people behind it were all associated with the Texas Book Festival in Austin, or as author Bill Clinton insisted on calling it during his speech at the event, the Texas Book Fair, and some of those folks can’t tell the difference between a Texas author and an armadillo.

Among the entries in the *Dallas Morning News* special was a list of the seven most important Texas authors. The list included some obvious choices: Katherine Anne Porter, Larry McMurtry, John Graves, and Cormac McCarthy—but also included Stephen Harrigan, Edwin (Bud) Shrake, and Terry Southern. You will notice that the magnificent seven does not include anybody east of I-35. No William A. Owens, no William Humphrey, no William Goyen, no George Sessions Perry. Instead a place is made for Terry Southern, author of the camp porno send-up, *Candy*; the screenplay for *Dr. Strangelove*, which contains only one Texas-based character; and a collection of undistinguished short stories set in Texas (*Red-Dirt Marijuana*), and one undistinguished short novel set in Texas (*Texas Summer*). Terry Southern is not a major Texas writer. William A. Owens is. Just for the record, my list would consist of Katherine Anne Porter, Larry McMurtry, John Graves, Cormac McCarthy, J. Frank Dobie, Américo Paredes, and William A. Owens.

There was also a literary map of the state, but it too ignored all the important East Texas authors, containing no mention of Owens, Humphrey, Goyen, or Perry. The only writer east of the great I-35 divide singled out for praise was Edward Swift of Splendora whose novel *Splendora* relates the adventures of a man returning to his small-town East Texas roots dressed as a woman.

Rereading Owens has been a salutary experience, as I knew it would be—especially *This Stubborn Soil*, my favorite among Owens’ writing and a book very close to the marrow of my own

experience. But increasingly that world is now so remote as to seem hopelessly unfamiliar, foreign, and unfathomable to many Texans, including my students. A year ago I had a strange experience when I realized that not one member of my Life and Literature of the Southwest class, the one invented and made famous by J. Frank Dobie, had a clue as to what I was talking about when I was talking about cotton farming. I was in fact going over a passage from Dobie himself (*Some Part of Myself*) where he relates a story about the time Ab Blocker, an old-time trail driver, planted, tended, and picked a crop of cotton. Writes Dobie: “While he was chopping cotton he saw Kansas-bound herds of longhorns stringing by on the unfenced prairies.” Dobie ends the anecdote by describing the traumatic year that he himself put in in a cotton patch: “All ranch work was congenial to me as I grew up, even doctoring wormy calves by day and skinning dead ones by lantern light, but the year we boys tried raising a bale of cotton remains a dark blot.”

When I finished reading, I realized that my students didn’t know what the phrase chopping cotton meant. They were bright students, but nothing in their experience led to an understanding of that phrase. I could tell from their blank eyes. So I asked them what they thought chopping cotton meant. They allowed as how it meant cutting the cotton. After I picked myself up off the floor, we went on.

I forgot about this incident until the same thing happened this past fall. The exact same thing. At a certain point in your teaching career, everything happens again and again.

So when I saw those same blank looks, I decided to try to give them some idea of what chopping and picking cotton might be like. As it happened, one of my students was going to Rockdale to visit sites featured in George Sessions Perry’s *Hold Autumn in Your Hand*, and I asked her to bring back a cotton boll if she could find one. Well, she did bring back a nice full boll with fluffy cotton in it and I passed the cotton artifact around and tried

to describe how long a cotton sack was and how long it took to fill one up, etc. I did the whole cotton thing. And I might as well have been talking about the Bronze Age. The only thing that seemed to make any impression on them was when I asked them why that old stadium in Dallas where the UT—OU game is played is called the Cotton Bowl. Why not the Oil Bowl or the Cattle Bowl? Because, I shouted, once upon a time Cotton was King! Then the bell rang and everybody got out their cell phones.

The cotton side of the Texas experience is fading, fading. Dobie, Bedichek, and Webb each had something to do with that, incidentally. Here is Webb on farming (he means cotton farming): “I never appreciated the nobility of farming. All I ever got out of it was sore fingers.” And here is Bedichek: “So I quit right in the middle of a row, chopping cotton.” Bedichek walked out of that cotton field and moved to Austin to attend the University. I have written elsewhere of my own cotton field conversion. It was much the same as Bedichek’s, except that I went to work caddying for a country club, a job that seemed more like play than work, and one that pretty much spoiled me forever.

The fact is, Dobie and Webb didn’t have a lick of interest in what happened east of I-35. All they cared about was cows, aridity, sagebrush, barbed wire, coyotes, windmills, longhorns, a great long list of western critters and icons. Their imagination, which always stayed west of the Pecos and rarely strayed east of I-35, was scarcely indistinguishable from that of Zane Grey.

Finally, one more note on the slippage of cotton culture from the consciousness of Texans. Mary Karr, who is often an unconscious source of amusement, writes in *The Liars’ Club* of her grandmother who moved out to West Texas and bought a “cotton ranch.” A cotton ranch? What the hell is that? The distinction between farm and ranch is being lost. A percentage of my students routinely speak of the farm in *Horseman, Pass By*. The term farm now seems to cover ranch, the

way novel seems to mean any book. I cannot begin to explain why these things are so.

Owens wrote about life on a farm, just to get that out of the way. There might be a milk cow on a farm, and there usually was, but not a herd of cattle. Farm=cotton; Ranch=cattle.

What Owens set out to do in *This Stubborn Soil* was to create a time and place already disappearing in 1966, when the book was published. (He had actually finished the book in 1947, but his agent told him to wait until he was "bigger," i.e., better known as a writer, before telling his own story. Would that many confessional memoirists of our own time had followed this admonition.) The time is pre-World War I America and on into the 1930s. The place is, well, let Owens' opening paragraph, which is worthy of Dickens, speak for itself:

If one was born in Paris or London or New York, or even in Dallas, to name a place closer to home, he has, when writing about himself, only to mention the city and the reader pictures place, buildings, people and he can go ahead to particulars about himself and his family. But since I was born in Pin Hook, Texas, a place whose character has not been made known to the world generally, I must begin by writing all I know or ever heard about it.

For those interested in visiting Pin Hook today, it is about a half-hour's drive north of Paris and just five miles from the Red River. All that remains of Pin Hook—there was never much there—is a graveyard.

Owens subtitled his best book *A Frontier Boyhood*, a significant designation in light of the fact that Frederick Jackson Turner, in 1893, declared the frontier over (based on the census of 1890). But Owens, looking back on his childhood, knew it wasn't over in northeast Texas where he lived, not by a long shot. And this was not the frontier we normally think of; it was not a romantic site of open range or unexplored, unsettled territory. Owens' frontier was that of small tenancy cot-

ton farms, an agrarian zone of hard times mixed with sporadic religious fervor and, in Owens' case, a dogged determination to acquire an education against all odds. Before he started school, weather and dirt defined a boy's existence. Owens is very good on dirt: "My toys were the dirt, and a stick to dig the dirt. No one could live closer to the earth than I did. I dug the sand, I rolled in it, I covered myself with it. Before my first year had passed I had eaten the peck of dirt everyone, Pin Hook people said, is entitled to. I had learned the feel, the smell, the taste of earth."

The phrase "this stubborn soil" is so striking that Bert Almon, in a very fine study of Texas memoirs, adapted the title thus: *This Stubborn Self: Texas Autobiographies* (2002). There was hardly any self more stubborn than that of Owens; he had to be stubborn just to survive in that country, pursuing, as he did, decade after decade, the goal of achieving an education.

The first edition (1966) ends by calling it a "fictionalized autobiography." Today I suppose that would make it creative nonfiction. But not a confessional or recovery narrative. Owens wasn't interested in psychology in the modern sense, or at least not in this book. In that vanished world nobody had time to be dysfunctional; they were too busy trying to make a living, to survive.

As we move forward or is it backward into the future, Owens' book will become all the more important, and eventually, the way things are going, its language and content will become as remote as Chaucer. Future editions will need careful annotation because nobody will know what the simplest words or phrases mean. Except perhaps in Northeast Texas, where people are not as likely to forget what it once meant to chop cotton. ■

Don Graham is the editor of Lone Star Literature: From the Red River to the Rio Grande A Texas Anthology, which was recently released in paperback. He teaches creative writing and literature at UT-Austin.

Observer readers are

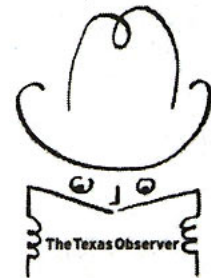
SMART PROGRESSIVE INVOLVED INFLUENTIAL GOOD LOOKING

So are Observer advertisers!



Get noticed by *Texas Observer* folks all over the state and nation.

Let them know about your bookstore, service, restaurant, non-profit organization, event, political candidate, shoe store, coffee house, boutique, salon, yoga studio, law practice, etc.



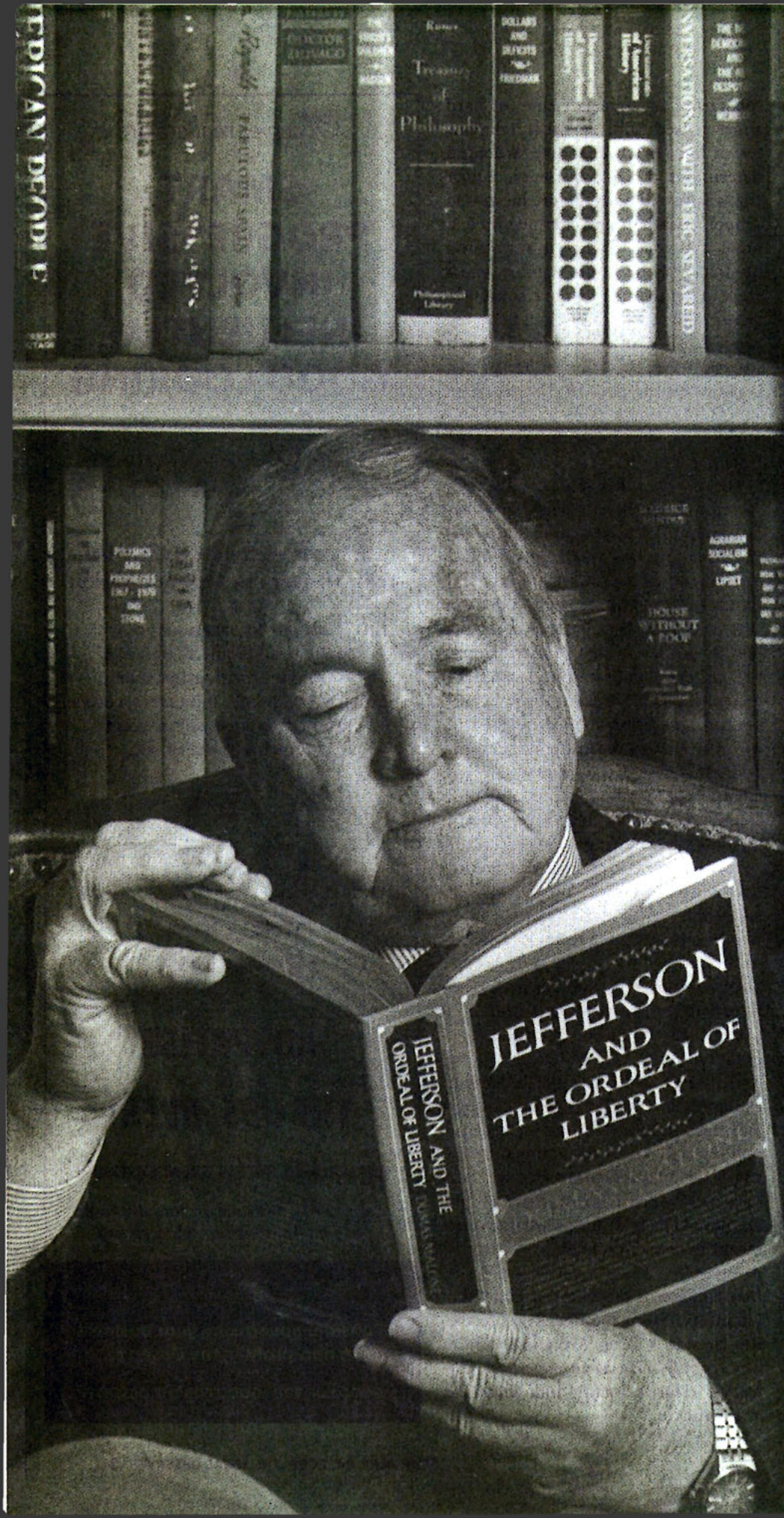
ADVERTISE IN THE OBSERVER!

REASONABLE RATES • GREAT EXPOSURE

Call 512-477-0746 and ask for Julia Austin
or e-mail austin@texasobserver.org

Hey, Observer readers!
Consider advertising your business
or non-profit in the *Observer*.

GOOD FOR YOU • GOOD FOR THE OBSERVER



The Texas Observer

Put your John Henry
on our subscriber list.

Sign up for 24 issues of The Texas Observer for just \$32. You will find stories and information you can't find anywhere else and you will be supporting a nonprofit warrior of a publication that stands up for people and speaks the truth about Texas.

Subscribe online at www.texasobserver.org or call us at 800-930-6620 (512-477-0746).

Do it now — things are happening all over Texas that you need to know about.

The Texas Observer
Opening the Eyes of Texas for 50 Years.

www.texasobserver.org

The Texas Observer
307 West 7th Street
Austin TX 78701
512.477.0746

photo of John Henry Falk by Alan Pogue