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Dear Client:

It's a long way off – January 2019, to be precise – but it's not too early to predict the next regular session of the Texas Legislature in Austin will be unlike any in recent memory. You can blame (credit?) a force of nature – Hurricane Harvey. “Nearly everything that would have been on the state's plate between now and the next scheduled legislative session in 2019 has been marked by the disaster,” noted a longtime legislative chronicler.

That's a pretty strong claim from *Texas Tribune* columnist **Ross Ramsey**. He backed it up with this quote from Texas House Speaker **Joe Straus**: “Harvey has changed everything.” The issues of the next session, Straus said, “are going to be overtaken by Mother Nature.” Ramsey added details of what is likely to happen.

“School finance is dependent on property taxes. More to the point, it's dependent on taxes on properties that are now worth a lot less than they were four weeks ago,” he noted.

“A 2017 legislative debate over insurance – spurred by wind and water claims after previous storms – is now in high relief as insured property owners make their Harvey claims and dicker with insurance adjusters and lawyers,” Ramsey pointed out.

“Prisoners have been moved around. Social services have been stretched. Lawmakers who were talking about limiting state spending a few months ago are now scheming about how to tap the state's \$10.3 billion savings account, known popularly as the Rainy Day Fund,” he further reported.

“The physical damage from the storm is relatively easy to spot, assess and catalog,” he observed. *“But it's becoming more evident that the storm also seeped into every corner of government policy and politics. State leaders who were preoccupied with social and cultural standards and ideas about the role of government a month ago are now bound to more tangible things: roads, prisons, schools and other buildings, hospitals and shelters.”*

About the Rainy Day Fund that legislators have been reluctant to touch in previous sessions, the official who oversees the Fund, State Comptroller **Glenn Hegar**, was asked if the Fund should be use for storm costs: **“Absolutely, what else would you use it for?”**

What does Austin have in common with New York City, Dallas, Los Angeles, Seattle, Denver, Chicago, Atlanta, Washington DC and Miami? First hint: Austin is on the same Top Ten list with these mega metros. Second hint: the list is current, just released this week. Third and final hint: it is based on actual numbers, not percentages. Give up? These ten cities have approved the most multifamily (apartments) units over the past year.

This Top Ten ranking, in the sequence listed above, places **Austin #7 in the nation** in what is expected to be a 20-year-high in new US apartment construction. *Bisnow* reports that roughly **399,000 units were approved nationwide during the 12 months ending July 31**, according to RealPage. And in most of the nation's largest cities, the approval of multifamily units is still increasing, *Bisnow* reports.

Austin's inclusion on this list is all the more impressive because RealPage counted the exact number of permits, regardless of the size of the city. Sure, **mega-population New York City topped the list with 30,351 permitted units. Dallas** was #2 at 18,987 units and **Los Angeles** was #3 with 15,365 units.

The number of permitted units in #7 Austin is 10,565 – ahead of #8 **Atlanta** (9,828) ... #9 **Washington DC** (9,563) and #10 **Miami** (8,689). FYI, Dallas was still #2 on this list even though “it experienced a sharp drop from the prior year” when Big-D was called “the most aggressive building market in the country.”

Austin's total represented a +5.7% year-over-year change. *Bisnow's* report singled out Austin's *The Independent* saying it will be, at 658-feet-tall, “**not only the tallest residential building in Austin once it is completed, but the tallest west of the Mississippi River.**”

It was reported this week that San Antonio “is getting overhang from Austin's tech boom and is starting to attract new types of companies.” The same report mentioned the Alamo City is also beginning to mimic Austin's work-and-play lifestyle in certain portions of the city. And, it claimed Austin's pricey office towers have helped lease-up San Antonio's downtown.

It's interesting that San Antonio, long one of the most distinctive cities in the US, is **getting caught up in the Austin vibe** at the same time it is benefitting by being a more affordable option to Austin's more costly housing/office situation.

Several changes were cited in **downtown San Antonio**, like redevelopment projects around the **HemisFair's** area, and even the venerable **Pearl Brewery** “a place that can compete with anyplace in the nation, as far as appeal and lifestyle.”

At the same time, a San Antonio Chamber official **cautioned against becoming too much like Austin**. And he pointed to affordability as an example. Change is always interesting.

If you are interested in rising local political leadership on the Republican side, keep your eye on first-term Austin State Senator Dr. Dawn Buckingham. The staunch conservative just wrapped up her first regular and special legislative sessions. And, the State GOP hierarchy has taken notice of her with a special appointment.

Buckingham is an eye doctor, living in Lakeway with offices in Austin. She ran a highly-contested campaign for **Senate District #24 that runs from the western edge of Austin and Travis County, through several counties out to West Texas.** The seat was formerly held by **Troy Fraser** who did not seek re-election. Democrat **Kirk Watson** represents most of Austin.

After only nine months in office, the state Republican leadership has given her a major statewide responsibility: **Republican Party of Texas' Victory Chair for 2018.** In addition to her State Senate duties, Buckingham will lead fund-raising to **fuel voter registration drives and to trigger greater GOP voter turnout.**

In this role, she will campaign across the state, appearing alongside Gov. **Greg Abbott** and Lt.Gov. **Dan Patrick.** In so doing, she will work with major **GOP heavyweight donors, as well as local GOP elected officials.** If she is successful, this will give her strong **statewide credentials and credibility within the party.**

These party fund-raising chores have been political stepping-stones for Republicans and Democrats alike, many of whom move up the political ladder. Keep your eye on the eye doc.

When you gotta go, you gotta go. But what if you are out-and-about in the downtown area and the sign on the door reads “no public restrooms?” What do you do? In other cities, there are free public restrooms in downtowns. Well, Austin is gonna experiment with this concept. And the first temporary location is in the vicinity of IH35 and 6th Street.

Many downtown businesses have complained about **the stench of urine on the sidewalks,** such as at the Post Office, where it's not unusual to see homeless types asleep or passed-out near the doorway. Others have noticed **signs of human excrement** in certain areas of downtown.

It's been more than a year since the study of a free public restroom downtown was authorized by the Austin City Council. **The study identified five test downtown locations. A portable unit will be set up for one month.** After 30 days, the facility will be moved to another test site.

It's not just for the homeless. Downtown visitors, runners, bikers and the late-night crowds are also targeted. At the end of the testing, **the pilot project could result in a recommendation for a permanent, free downtown restroom facility or facilities.**

Austin’s airport is highly rated nationally, and record numbers of travelers are experiencing the airport’s functions each month. But what about *other* airports Austin passengers use when they fly through Austin-Bergstrom International Airport (ABIA)? After all, each traveler is going *to* other airports, or flying into ABIA *from* different airports. Which other airports rank highest in passenger satisfaction?

Each year, **J.D. Power** conducts a North American Airport Satisfaction Study. The 2017 study was just released. It looked at items like security, baggage check, food, beverage, and retail options. It separates airports by “Medium,” “Large” and “Mega” categories. **ABIA is in the “Large” category and is ranked by J.D. Power as 6th in the nation in overall passenger satisfaction.** To help you with your travels, here are the airports that rank at the top.

In Austin’s “Large” category, the top three – in passenger satisfaction are #1 **John Wayne Airport in Orange County, California** ... #2 **Tampa International** ... and #3 **Dallas Love Field**.

In Power’s “Medium” category, the top three, in order, are **Sacramento International Airport** ... **Indianapolis International Airport** ... and **Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport**.

Okay. Now, for the “Mega” category. The tops in the nation for passenger satisfaction is **Orlando International Airport**. It is followed in the #2 position by **Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport** and in the #3 spot by **McCarron International Airport** in Las Vegas.

The other item we wanted to mention about ABIA is the tremendous increase in passengers using the soon-to-be expanded facility. **The recently-released totals for August 2017 increased by more than 100,000 passengers over August 2016 to reach 1,205,341.** The increase *year-to-date* is up an impressive 11% -- surpassing the 9 million passenger mark

Dr. Louis Overholster: “Some things are better left unsaid. Which I realize after I say them.”

Sincerely,



Editor/Publisher