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Dear Client:

The SOS Alliance's failure to block the City of Austin's agreement with SOS's arch-nemesis Gary Bradley may signal a sea change in local politics as they relate to Austin's renowned environmental activism.

As you may know by now, at its 3/23/00 meeting the Austin City Council voted unanimously to approve the settlement with Bradley, allowing him to develop more than 3,000 acres of environmentally sensitive land in southwest Austin and Hays County. The agreement brings down the curtain on years of acrimonious infighting, which spilled over into the Texas Legislature and made Austin the target of numerous initiatives to overturn or pre-empt its authority to regulate development in the Barton Springs watershed.

The Council's vote marked a personal triumph for former SOS Alliance Chair **Robin Rather** (who resigned this week), whose willingness to negotiate with Bradley precipitated a well-publicized split with SOS hardliners such as **Kirk Mitchell** and **Bill Bunch**.

The question now is whether Rather's departure will allow the puritans to reestablish philosophical dominance over the pragmatists, perhaps **throwing SOS back into the adversarial mode** that has historically characterized relations between the group and the development community.

Moreover, it is highly unlikely that the Council would have signed off on the Bradley deal if Rather and other moderates within the organization had not given their public assent. In other words, SOS's official opposition may have had the effect of keeping the foot soldiers happy, while Rather gave Council members a free pass to vote with Bradley and Circle C without fear of political retaliation. With Rather out of the picture (at least officially), **SOS could quickly turn up the heat on the Council to stop any future dealing.**

How the Council reacts could determine the future of SOS's virtual political domination of Austin city politics. With his historic settlement in hand, **Bradley may finally have achieved through compromise what he couldn't through open warfare:** the end of a cohesive and philosophically monolithic political organization willing to go to any lengths to shut him down. Of course, SOS will remain one of the principal players in the orchestra, but it may no longer call the tune.

Ann Kitchen's resounding victory in the 3/14/00 Democratic Primary for Texas House District 48 came as something of a surprise to many inside politicos, but it probably shouldn't have.

In racking up nearly 75% of the vote, Kitchen was able to mobilize her SOS Alliance base through targeted direct mail, intensive block walking, and a dense network of local environmental and Democratic Party activists. **Mandy Dealey**, while philosophically in sync with District 48 Democrats, simply couldn't match Kitchen's organizational advantage -- despite a six-figure budget for direct mail and television advertising.

However, it's unlikely the "Kitchen Cabinet" will be overconfident going into the November election. While Kitchen's opponent won't be known until the 4/11/00 runoff between **Jill Warren** and **Scott Loras**, District 48 Republicans have to be pleased with GOP turnout in a district the Democrats have held for the last ten years. While the two Democrats spent at least \$200,000 between them to turn out 7,900 votes, the six Republicans spent somewhat less to produce 7,775.

The relatively equal turnout in the primaries suggests two things. First, the **district is razor close**. Even under **ideal** conditions for the Democrats, Kitchen will have to scrap for every vote to win.

Second, the conditions are **not ideal**. Republican voters, in Austin and across Texas, are likely to turn out in record numbers to vote for their Governor in the presidential race. For every Republican who voted in the District 48 primary, another stayed home because Governor Bush had already locked up the nomination. Many of those homebodies will show up at the polls in November.

Moreover, Warren and Loras are mainstream candidates attuned to Austin issues: growth, transportation, education, and the environment — no wing nuts here. Kitchen will have to reach well beyond her SOS base to counter heavier than usual GOP turnout. Without a lot of burning issues to drive Democratic loyalists to the polls, that could be difficult. In short, **this race will be a barometer of both SOS power and growing Republican strength in Travis County.**

Road-weary Austinites are getting ready to face the largest intersection construction project to date – the long overdue Ben White Blvd/IH35 intersection.

The first big disruption will actually be ½ mile north of the intersection. In order to widen IH35, contractors will demolish the Woodward Street overpass spanning IH35. A new, wider bridge will then be built to allow for more lanes underneath on IH35. As roadwork goes, this demolition/rebuilding part of the project shouldn't take very long. The **new overpass should be re-opened by Fall**. Then, phase two of \$88 million project kicks in.

The line-ups for this spring's Austin City Council and Austin School Board elections look a little like the player rosters at Round Rock Express baseball games. There may be some up-and-coming talent on the field, but nobody appears ready for the big leagues.

Former Mayor **Bruce Todd's** bitter re-election campaign a few years ago seems a distant memory this spring. If it has done nothing else, Mayor **Kirk Watson's** peace plan has kept him pristine for a possible statewide election bid in 2002.

Things are a little more muddled in Places 2 and 5, where the retirements of Council members **Gus Garcia** and **Bill Spelman** have left two seats up for grabs.

In Place 2, the battle lines are already being drawn between attorney **Rafael Quintanilla** and SOS activist **Raul Alvarez**. Quintanilla, who has a long and distinguished history of community involvement, is likely to garner broad support from business and civic groups. Alvarez will likely have the backing of the SOS organization — the magic bullet in recent council elections.

In Place 5, the choice of the downtown business establishment is **Will Wynn**, a downtown developer, arts supporter, and environmental enthusiast. But Wynn bridges the traditional gap between business and environmental interests; he is both Chair Emeritus of the Downtown Business Alliance and a major benefactor of the Nature Conservancy. With the support of former SOS Alliance Chair **Robin Rather** and others within the organization, Wynn will run a unity campaign against a field of opponents with little organizational support.

Although three seats on the AISD board are open, **no prominent Austin business leaders offered themselves for service** — continuing the current dearth of core business experience in the AISD leadership.

In the wake of the Austin 360.00 Summit, at which “New Economy” leaders talked about the necessity of improving Austin’s public schools, it is revealing that not a single high tech executive (or any major Austin business executive, for that matter) volunteered for perhaps the most important job of all.

It’s one thing to talk about “connecting” every child to the New Economy. It’s quite another to take the reins of a school system that is crying out for the organizational and business smarts to accomplish it.

The Austin Bergstrom International Airport numbers continue to be amazing. For the first two months of 2000, passenger activity is up a whopping 14.8%.

Hunting and fishing are declining precipitously in Texas, according to the Texas Forest Products Review, a publication of the Texas Forest Industries Council (TFIC). And that could have far-reaching implications for landowners, state and local governments, and conservation and environmental groups.

Since peaking in 1983, sales of Texas hunting and fishing licenses have slumped 22% and 13%, respectively. The decline has had a **significant impact on revenues** for the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, which operates and maintains Texas' sprawling park system.

In view of this, one might think environmentalists would be jumping for joy. But before they take that victory lap, as the TFIC points out, they should consider the impact of the decline on the maintenance of and public access to open spaces.

Revenues from hunting and fishing leases are a significant source of income for farmers and ranchers and, in many cases, are the difference between keeping the farm and losing it. As that income dries up, more **farmers and ranchers could be forced to sell their land for development**. Once developed, the land is lost forever as wildlife habitat.

In the face of shrinking revenues from hunting and fishing, government agencies will be forced to tap other groups to make up the loss. Those groups are likely to include bird watchers, canoeists, hikers, campers, and other users. Also, declining revenues could halt park expansion and restrict public access to parkland due to lack of maintenance and operation funds.

This issue is the last of our publishing year. Next week, we'll begin a New Year. And, our 22nd year of publishing will mark the beginning of a new era for us, as we add a new dimension – a web site where subscribers can get this same information sooner.

As the April income tax deadline approaches, **Dr. Louis Overholster** said he never understood why it's called the income tax. As he puts it: "It's more like a Roto-Rooter for savings!"

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Sincerely



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