

THE

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AUSTIN LETTER

www.AustinLetter.com

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Dear Client:

With less than four weeks to go, the campaigns are in a full court press until Election Day, 11/7/00. And we've got the very best, most accurate, way for you to trace the progress – each weekday. Best of all, it's devoid of any spin by the opposing camps.

Each weekday, at 8 a.m. Austin time, from now until Election Day, the previous night's polling results will be posted on our web site. These are not just *any* polling results, these are from the most highly-regarded, non-partisan, poll available. In fact, it has been the most accurate of all major national polls. In 1992 and 1996, its final predictions were off by only one percentage point. It's the **Voter.com Battleground 2000 Daily Poll**.

The bi-partisan survey is conducted jointly by Republican pollster **Ed Goetas** of The Tarrance Group and Democrat **Celinda Lake** of Lake Snell Perry & Associates. And, it's funded by an extremely diverse group of organizations to keep out any bias: AFL-CIO, American Conservative Union, Americans for Tax Reform, Business-Industry Political Action Committee, Christian Coalition, Democratic Leadership Council, EMILY's List, People for the American Way, Sierra Club and US Chamber of Commerce.

The Voter.com Battleground 2000 Daily Poll may produce results different from those of other national tracking polls, but in our estimation, the Battleground poll produces more accurate results. First of all, the **pollsters don't call Friday or Saturday nights**. Weekend calls may give Democratic candidates an artificial boost, because a disproportionate number of GOP voters are married couples with children who tend to be away from home more often on the weekend.

Also, since many Registered Voters (the only ones polled) tend to overstate how likely they are to vote, the Battleground poll gives **more emphasis to the areas with high voter turnout** in previous presidential elections.

The poll itself is what's known as a tracking poll. It represents a sampling of 1,000 likely voters and has a margin of error of plus or minus 3.1%. Each morning's tally is based on 250 completed surveys from the previous night and 750 from the three nights leading up to the last night.

This is your best way to stay on top of what's happening. Just go to the Links section on our website, www.AustinLetter.com and click on Voter.com, under "Political Information Sources." Even if you're not a web subscriber, you can still check it out on our website.

Being able to legally drive around with an open beer in your vehicle may have had something to do with the fact Austin received a much lower allocation of highway funding than it was seeking. Not that the state highway folks who allocate the federal/state dollars don't want you to sip a cool one in your pick-up. They got caught up between state and federal laws.

You see, the Texas Legislature has time and again **refused to ban open containers of alcohol in your vehicle.** There have been plenty of bills introduced to ban open beer or whiskey bottles, but strong lobbying efforts to the contrary have prevailed.

That's in spite of the fact a 1998 federal law says a state must ban open containers of alcohol. Of course, the Feds can't force the states to enact laws the state is unwilling to pass. State's rights, you know. But the Feds *can* assess a penalty if certain criteria are not met. And that's where the "gotcha" comes in.

If any state fails to have an open container law in effect, the Feds **will divert funds from highway construction to traffic safety efforts.** In Texas's case, that amounts to about \$96 million over the next couple of years. So, the state had \$96 million fewer dollars to divvy up among the various cities and regions.

Texas will still get its fair share of highway dollars. But the \$96 million portion that is the "penalty" for not banning open alcohol containers must be **used only for road safety projects,** such as widening intersections and not for new roadways.

The arguments for and against light rail in Austin can be found succinctly summarized in one location so you can quietly make up your mind without being distracted by claims and counterclaims loudly funneled your way by the campaigners. Go to an ambitious local web site whose purpose is to provide voter services and civic information — www.GetHeard.org.

On the website's Home Page, you can click on the pro/con arguments drafted by those who support each position. The argument for light rail is summarized under the heading "**Is Light Rail Right For Austin?**" The argument against light rail can be found under the title "**Austin's Mobility Challenge.**" At the end of each of the summaries, there is a brief rebuttal.

Pretty good. There is a small caveat, though. The Advisory Board for GetHeard is made up almost totally of people who have come out publicly in favor of light rail. However, after reviewing what has been posted on the fledgling site so far, there **appears to be no bias** in the carefully crafted positions.

GetHeard was founded as an outgrowth of last year's 360.Alpha Summit. It is non-profit and plans to implement various services to assist Travis County citizens in government and civic participation – such as its recent **online voter registration service** for the 11/7/00 election.

The troubled Texas Lottery may have taken an uptick just in the nick of time. Over the past couple of years, the Texas Lottery has been bombarded with bad publicity, lawsuits and dwindling revenues. Now, after reversing an earlier decision, it could be on the way back – just as the Texas Legislature rides into town in January.

There are still some **powerful legislators who would do away with the Lottery** in a New York minute. Remember, the Legislature recently took action resulting in less money for jackpots and reducing advertising expenditures. So, those who back the Lottery need all the ammo they can get when the Legislature meets every two years.

What helped the Texas Lottery more than anything was to make it **more difficult to win the multi-million dollar Lotto**. Lottery officials knew all along if they did that, it would result in larger jackpots because fewer winners mean the jackpot keeps rolling over and getting bigger. And bigger Lotto jackpots attract more players. More players mean more revenue for Texas.

But, the officials caved-in to criticism the first time they proposed the idea and abandoned it. They finally got the guts to go ahead and do what experience said would work. It appears **revenues will increase** because more people are laying down more bucks to win bigger jackpots – even if their chances of winning are smaller (nobody asks “what are the odds?” they ask “how big’s the jackpot?”).

Don’t know if you’ve noticed, but since Day-One no ads, literature or publicity from the Texas Lottery refers to gambling. The word “play” is used instead of “gamble”. It’s **“play the lottery,”** not **“gamble on the lottery.”** Ah, the power of words.

The Austin area – and much of Texas, for that matter – suffered through a summer of drought due to little rain, a lot of sun and trees. Yes, trees. Red berry juniper trees, which most folks around here call **cedar**, suck enormous amounts of water out of the ground. Take a look at the hills surrounding Austin and on out west to the Hill Country. They’re covered with cedar.

The extremely-efficient, water-hungry tree crowds out all vegetation around the trees – especially the grasses that used to be so prevalent. One other tree has just as voracious an appetite for water as the juniper. It’s the **mesquite**, which is found more in South and West Texas than here in Central Texas. Both are more shrub-like than tree-like.

In fact, the two together are so bad for the state’s water tables that major programs are underway in West Texas to clear the land of the trees to **increase river flows** and return grasses. It’s not that bad in the Austin area where only the cedar is thriving. But, when you see cedars being cleared from the land, don’t complain about the loss of some shrub-like trees. It could be **helping your water supply** (and cutting down on wintertime allergens as well!).

While UTAustin has 2,000 more students than it wants to have, there are certain types of students it wants a lot more of. You've probably heard about UTAustin's aggressive efforts to recruit more minority students. This has been an ongoing objective of the University's administration, well chronicled for many years.

What has not been as widely publicized, is UTAustin's quest for the best and the brightest. And, it has been **more successful at that task than any other public university in the nation.** One of the ways you measure higher education institutions is by the quality of the students they are able to attract. And, one of the best ways to identify the brightest high school students is to seek out those who qualify as National Merit Scholars.

None of the great public universities – such as The University of California/Berkeley, The University of Michigan and The University of Illinois – matched the number of freshmen National Merit Scholars enrolled by UTAustin in 1999. In fact, **only the renowned private institution, Harvard University, ranked above UTAustin.**

Harvard tallied 394, **UTAustin 244**, Cal/Berkeley 235, Stanford 229, Rice 183, TexasA&M 181, Florida 176, Yale 170, Chicago 139 and Oklahoma 136 in make the Top Ten Honor Roll National Merit Scholars rankings in 1999, according to *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

UTAustin, which has done well by this measure in recent years, owes a bit of the credit to **Robert Dedman, Sr.** of Dallas. Back in 1986, Dedman and his wife, Nancy, pledged \$10 million to support UTAustin's National Merit Scholars and for scholarships in the College of Liberal Arts. The founder/Chair of ClubCorp International, the world's largest operator of private clubs, resorts and country clubs, Dedman earned three degrees from UTAustin back in the late forties.

Speaking of students, **Dr. Louis Overholster** said his teachers always hated to call on him in medical school: "It reminded them of all the work they had ahead of them!"

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Sincerely



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