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Dear Client:

Besides the items on the ballot, there were some big losers in Saturday's city elections. And, the most devastating blows were dealt to Austin's militant environmental community.

As we've been telling you for more than a year now, *internal* battles have been waged within Austin's environmental movement. The disagreements divided environmentalists into two camps – the more militant and the more conciliatory. It was a matter of style and approach. The more militant environmentalists – epitomized by **Bill Bunch** and **Kirk Mitchell** – preferred “giving no quarter.” The more conciliatory – epitomized by **Robin Rather** and **Brigid Shea** – worked for solutions, even though in some cases it meant they compromised.

Those internal squabbles moved into the external, very public, arena in the City Council elections. Long-time environmental advocate **Daryl Slusher** was turned against by the more militant faction because of his votes on the City Council that led to compromise-laced solutions (“they eat their own offspring,” was how one wag put it). **Mitchell used some of his family's personal fortune to run against Slusher** – spending more money than any other candidate. But, Slusher beat Mitchell overwhelmingly – two to one (55%-27%).

The biggest defeat of all was dealt to incumbent **Beverly Griffith**, who had parlayed her no-compromise, sometimes lone-voice, City council stances into a possible race for mayor (she stepped aside when **Gus Garcia** emerged as a consensus candidate). In her quest for re-election, **more than 70% of the voters picked someone other than Griffith** (even with the power of incumbency, she got only 29% of the vote). Moderate, city finance expert **Betty Dunkerley** won.

Other losers were those who tried to foist some extreme changes on the way the city government operates. The taxpayer-financed campaigns issue was overwhelmingly defeated, 74%-26%. The item that would have undermined the council-manager form of government by placing a consumer advocate on the electric utility commission lost 70%-30%. And, in an apparent slap at the way our city has been governed recently, voters by a 55%-45% margin kept a two-term limit on the mayor and council.

The turnout was small but the **margins of defeat were large** for those who took a more strident, take-no-prisoners approach to governing this city.

What do the results of this election mean for future elections? What's the future of the environmental movement in city politics? And, how will term limits and campaign donation caps play in the next city election?

The environmental movement, though fractured, is still strong. It's simply a matter of leadership. **Saturday's results should give an impetus to those who have advocated a more conciliatory approach** to protecting the environmental treasures that make Austin one of the more unique cities. If those moderate-approach environmental leaders continue to work with the business community (even **form election alliances**, as was the case on some recent bond issues), then a solid, political force could emerge.

And, frankly, a broad-based alliance of some sort will be necessary to carry the day on most future elections, because the **\$100 campaign donation limit remains in effect** (even though by only the narrowest of margins – less than 600 votes), effectively limiting those who cannot self-finance their own campaigns.

Term limits are something else. Remember **Daryl Slusher** and **Jackie Goodman** bypassed the two-term limit by struggling to get about 20,000 signatures on a petition to seek a third term. It was close. And, the method by which the city verified (?) the signatures was criticized. **Beverly Griffith** used her personal wealth to hire people to get plenty of signatures and, as a result, her totals were not questioned. Nothing changed with this law as a result of Saturday's voting.

But, it's important to keep in mind that, in the next election, term limits will *not* be an issue. Mayor **Gus Garcia** and Councilmembers **Raul Alvarez**, **Danny Thomas** and **Will Wynn** will be wrapping up their *first* term in those positions, should they decide to seek re-election in May, 2003.

Finally, some observations about single-member districts. As you know voters, for the *sixth* time, defeated the concept by 58% to 42%. Under the City Charter, the proposal may not be presented again for consideration for at least two years. But, it probably will return, because the business community, for the first time, is in favor of the concept. As we told you 4/26/02, **the proposal was a "pig in a poke," with the City Council refusing to submit a map along with the plan so voters would know what they were getting**. Maybe after six defeats with no map, the next time voters will be allowed to see the proposed boundaries.

In addition to agreement on the home equity provision of the Bankruptcy Reform Act (see our 5/3/02 issue), congressional conferees have agreed to block creditors from taking household goods such as computers and family heirlooms. The agreement will also allow debtors to hold onto paintings of deceased parents, grandparents or other ancestors. Even though the conferees are making progress, the word we get from Washington is the Act could still get caught up in the crush of other measures when it gets to the floor of the USSenate and the USHouse. Stay tuned.

Now that the IH35 reliever, SH130, is well on its way to becoming a reality are we looking at another IH35 – a workhorse in terms of commuter and truck traffic, but about as unlovely a stretch of highway as any in the country? Some visionary leaders hope not.

“The beauty and fragility of the Central Texas landscape – a gift we should preserve for future generations – **cries out for something more pleasant and imaginative than another dull stretch of concrete** six lanes wide, lined with non-descript strip malls, billboards and junkyards,” said **Will Wynn**, chair of the Greater Austin-San Antonio Corridor Council.

What is the Corridor Council’s concept? “We would propose that planners envision and build SH130 as a **scenic parkway system of associated trails, parks and recreational areas**, linking the Guadalupe and Colorado River basins from Seguin to Bastrop and beyond,” suggests Wynn.

In calling for a mixed corridor of trails, rails and roadways, Wynn points out “excellent examples of such road and parkway combinations in urban and suburban settings” already exist, such as the **George Washington Parkway** in Northern Virginia or the **Rock Creek Parkway** in Washington, DC. “Surely,” he says, “Central Texans deserve something at least as good.”

“If a comprehensive planning effort were initiated now – as right-of-way is being acquired – entities such as the Lower Colorado River Authority and the Guadalupe-Blanco River Authority could cooperatively begin developing **trails, pocket parks and recreational areas** adjacent to, inside, and all along the route,” Wynn notes. “Corridors could also be established to **link existing state, city and county parks** nearby using floodplain, endangered species set-asides, or watershed protection zones inappropriate for commercial development.”

There’s more to this vision – such as the development of the proposed **Lake Lockhart, a 35,000-acre recreational lake** that might also supply drinking water to nearby communities. “With the urban cores of Austin-San Antonio projected to double in population by 2020, the area to the east of IH35 could well become a recreational destination for cities, which by then, will be sorely lacking in accessible greenspace,” Wynn commented.

So how do you pay for this? “Due to some remarkable legislative foresight,” Wynn said, the route of SH130 has already been approved as a potential linear Tax Increment Financing District, or TIF. **A TIF facilitates the use of property taxes for specific site investments.** “Those areas along the route that are deemed appropriate for commercial development (and there will, of course, be many) could use the TIF, **in addition to user fees**, to help finance the construction and operation of the parks, recreational areas and trails.”

Wynn said the parkway should be named after a deserving individual and asked for suggestions. Here’s one: **name it for the person who has devoted her entire public life to parks and highway beautification – The Lady Bird Johnson Scenic Parkway.** What a fitting tribute.

The biggest ballroom in Texas will be open for business – in Austin – next weekend. And, Austin Convention & Visitor Bureau officials will be dancing with joy. Why? Because the opening of the ballroom means the convention center expansion is complete.

And that's good economic news. "The opening of the expansion at the Convention Center and 1,000 new downtown hotel rooms under construction give us the ability to **attract larger convention business** that heretofore passed us by," said **Bob Lander**, Pres/CEO of the Austin CVB. "It also allows us to host a wider range and different types of conventions; accommodate several large groups simultaneously; and provides for more efficient move-ins and move-outs of business in the center."

"We've already been successful with several new pieces of (future) business, including the US Hispanic Chamber of Commerce and the Texas Library Association," Lander said. "Neither of these conventions – **Hispanic Chamber with 6,000 attendees and Library Association with 8,000** – would have considered Austin before, as we simply could not accommodate their needs."

Lander said "moving into these larger markets, we're not only touting one of the **most aesthetically appealing and technically advanced convention centers** in the country, but we're also showcasing one of the most desirable cities in the country." Lander also says a dozen major hotel brands are within easy access.

The Convention Center is doubling its size – from 411,000 sq.ft. to 881,400 sq.ft. – at a cost of \$110 million. (The ballroom, at 43,300 sq.ft., will not only seat a lot of folks when used as a banquet hall, but will accommodate a lot of "Texas-Two-Steppin'" when it's used as a dance floor!) **The construction cost will be paid for by visitors to Austin** who will pay a two percentage point increase in the hotel-motel occupancy tax.

When a patient was considering a vasectomy **Dr. Louis Overholster** said "That's a pretty big decision. Have you talked it over with your wife and kids?" The man said "Oh, yeah. We voted, and it carried, 15 to 1!"

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