

THE

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AUSTIN LETTER

www.AustinLetter.com

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Volume 24, Number 30

October 25, 2002

Dear Client:

It's a good time to be a Republican running for statewide office in Texas. With less than two weeks remaining before the 11/5/02 General Election, practically all GOP candidates are leading their Dem opponents statewide. But, that's not the only reason.

This was the conclusion reached by an *independent* firm that polled Texas voters last week. Blum & Weprin Associates, found GOP Governor **Rick Perry** had a huge lead (50% to 35%, with 14% undecided) over Democrat challenger **Tony Sanchez**. And, GOP USSenate candidate **John Cornyn** also held a hefty margin (47% to 37%, with 14% undecided) over Dem **Ron Kirk**.

Democratic candidate for Lt. Gov. **John Sharp** is running counter to this trend. He holds a razor-thin margin over Republican **David Dewhurst** (42% to 41%, with 16% undecided) – but he's leading, and that's significant when you look at how the other Democratic candidates are faring. Republican **Greg Abbott** leads Democrat **Kirk Watson** (39% to 33%, with a huge 27% undecided).

However, it's more than just the poll numbers that make the pollsters claim it's a good time to be a Republican running for office in Texas. Pollster **Micheline Blum** told *The Dallas Morning News* (the newspaper that commissioned the survey): **“What's happened in Texas is that almost half of all likely voters think of themselves now as Republicans.” This is an extremely important finding.** Texas voters are not just voting now-and-then for popular GOP candidates. They are identifying themselves as Republicans.

Blum says **you can't win statewide anymore with just the Democrats and a chunk of the independent voters.** As we told you in our 10/11/02 issue, Sanchez is spending millions of dollars to get a heavy turnout of Hispanics, and the Democrats were hoping Kirk's name on the ballot would turn out a heavy African American vote. But, this survey suggests little evidence that the Dem ticket has generated sufficient enthusiasm to offset lagging support among whites.

Calling this a real blow for Sanchez, Blum says Sanchez “needs to be taking the overwhelming number of Hispanic votes. Plus he needs the enthusiasm of people getting out in droves to help him do well. And we don't see either one.” It's not good for Kirk either. **“The problem is there isn't a Black-Hispanic coalition.** And, he (Kirk) is not getting anywhere near as much of the Hispanic vote as one might have expected or that he needs to get,” concluded Blum.

If there's a big Hispanic turnout in Texas 11/5/02, it might not be enough to put Tony Sanchez over the top in his expensive campaign for governor, but it could put John Sharp over.

The Blum & Weprin poll results will change between now and Election Day as more voters make up their minds. Predictably, the **races will be closer than the current polling suggests**. And, the pollsters say the race for Lieutenant Governor is so close that either candidate could win.

Micheline Blum said that when you closely analyze the survey results, you find Democrat John Sharp “does well among many more groups than the other Democrats running in any of the other contests.” In fact, even among Republicans, Sharp gets a relatively high one-fifth of the vote. The **Nolan Ryan** TV spot that says “republicans like me support Sharp” must be working. This prompted Blum to say “If Tony Sanchez can pull out more Hispanic votes, **it helps Sharp more than anybody**. If there's a big Hispanic turnout, it might not put Sanchez over the top, but it could put Sharp over.”

If this turns out to be true, then Sharp's assessment four years ago was correct when he lost a close race for Lt. Gov. to Republican **Rick Perry**, even though the GOP's **George W. Bush** was elected governor by a landslide. Sharp set out immediately to get a Hispanic at the top of the ticket, thinking that would increase the turnout to sweep Democrats back into office. As it looks now, it might be the magic that sweeps Sharp into office.

Keep an eye on local Republicans as you watch the returns Election Night. The GOP is mounting a massive campaign in normally Democratic Travis County. If Republicans are successful against long odds, it would be almost a sea change in county politics.

Key races to watch include those for County Judge and County Commissioners. Right now, there are no Republicans on the five-member Travis County Commissioners Court. But, due to vigorous campaigning, **you could wake up the morning after the election with a GOP majority on the Court**. (Even though it's called a “court” and presided over by a “judge,” it is the administrative body – just like a City Council – on the county level.)

The GOP is almost certain to gain one seat — **Gerald Daugherty** is running in a heavily Republican precinct. **Sheri Perry Gallo** has a pretty good chance to pick up a second GOP seat in a precinct that swings between Republican and Democrat. The third seat, which would give the GOP a three-to-two majority on the court, is more problematic because it covers the entire, heavily-Democratic, county. The GOP's **Bob Honts** is campaigning aggressively for County Judge. He has a well-organized neighborhood organization, more signs than anybody else, and is running TV spots with entertainers **Larry Gatlin** and **Gary P. Nunn** endorsing him. It's by far the strongest campaign ever mounted by the GOP for County Judge. Stay tuned.

You may have seen the news reports this week that passenger traffic was up at Austin Bergstrom International Airport in September by 23% over the year before. However, this was *not* good news.

Normally such a substantial increase year-over-year increase would be great economic news. This isn't the case this time. And, it's not just because September a year ago included the shutdown of the nation's airports for days as a result of the terrorist attacks 9/11/01. You would expect an increase over those numbers.

The problem is **the increase this September was so small that we actually took a step backward in our recovery.** Earlier this year, airline passenger traffic increased enough that the 2002 numbers moved past the totals of 1999. They hadn't reached the levels of 2000 or the pre-9/11/01 totals. But, they were steadily increasing over what we recorded in 1999.

The new September 2002 numbers show we've **dropped dramatically below even the September 1999 levels of passenger traffic** – a step backward.

The reason we watch these numbers so closely for you is they represent several aspects of economic activity — **business travel to and from Austin** (is business picking up for local enterprises?) and **leisure travel** (do Austinites have enough bucks in their jeans to take optional fun trips, and is business picking up here that depends on the leisure traveler?). We'll check the October numbers for you when they're released in about a month. But right now, it doesn't look good. And it'll take a big upsurge to pass the October 1999 totals.

The old saw “when you die it doesn't matter if you go to heaven or hell, you'll still have to go through D/FW” hasn't changed. But, the way you change planes at the giant D/FW airport is going to be altered, if you fly American Airlines.

Starting next week, 11/1/02, American will switch from its hub-and-spoke concept at key airports such as D/FW, to what it's calling a “**rolling hub.**” What that means is airline schedules will be revised so planes don't stack up in the morning and afternoon – they'll be spread more evenly throughout the day.

The problem is it will be **more difficult to leave early in the morning and return later in the day.** There will also be **more time between flights** in Dallas – cutting down the crowding, the stress and the rush to catch a connecting flight, but probably lengthening your travel day. One of the problems of catching a connecting flight will be eased in another way. All of AA's **big jets will fly out of side-by-side Terminals A and C on the east side**, and only smaller AA Eagle regional jets and turboprops will use the west side Terminal B – starting 2/1/03. Unless you fly AA Eagle, you'll change planes between closer gates at Terminals A and C.

Forget the issues and the charges and countercharges, let's examine some interesting tidbits about GOP Attorney General John Cornyn and former Democratic Dallas Mayor Ron Kirk, that could add a little sparkle to your conversation about their race for the USSenate.

First, Cornyn. He was in his **mid-20s when his hair turned completely white**. His dad spent four months as a German POW after the B-17 he was piloting was shot down in WWII. His favorite band is the Dixie Chicks, his favorite movie is *Jerry Maguire* and his favorite book is *Bonfire of the Vanities* by **Tom Wolfe**. In Japan, he was a high school wrestler (no, not a *sumo* wrestler!) and in college at San Antonio's Trinity University (where he majored in journalism), he played intramural basketball, football and racquetball. After graduation he worked at Steak and Ale and tried to sell houses for a year before going to law school at St. Mary's University.

Kirk was born in East Austin, was sixth grade student council president, played junior high basketball and was student body president at Reagan High School. He got his law degree at UT Austin, where he played on **Charles Alan Wright's** Legal Eagles intramural football team. His mother, **Willie Mae Kirk**, was active in Austin civil rights activities and she was the first black teacher at Austin's Metz Elementary. **Kirk has no middle name**. His favorite movies are *The Thomas Crown Affair* and *Body Heat*. His favorite book is *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*. He worked on the staffs of State Representative **Sarah Weddington** and US Senator **Lloyd Bentsen**.

Musical talent? Cornyn played trombone while growing up, Kirk played cello. **Food?** Cornyn likes anything with blueberries, Kirk's last meal would be fried chicken topped off with pecan pie and Blue Bell ice cream. **Religion?** Cornyn is a member of Austin's University Church of Christ, Kirk belongs to Dallas's St. Luke Community United Methodist Church.

After driving through many of Austin's widespread road construction projects, **Dr. Louis Overholster** is convinced the official flower of Austin is the concrete cloverleaf.

NEAL SPELCE AUSTIN LETTER (ISSN 1071-0612) is published weekly, except last two weeks of the year, for \$150 (plus tax) per year or \$249 (plus tax) for two years. To subscribe, call 512-498-9495. Periodical Postage Paid at Austin, TX 78767 by Austin Letter, Inc., 1407 Wild Cat Hollow, Austin, TX 78746. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to: Neal Spelce Austin Letter, P.O. Box 1905, Austin, TX 78767-1905.

Sincerely



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