

THE

Real Spelce

AUSTIN LETTER

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Dear Client:

The big national winner in the General Election this week is an Austinite who was not on any ballot, and in fact, has never run for public office – Karl Rove.

Rove is the GOP political mastermind who has orchestrated every election victory for **George W. Bush** since he first ran for Texas governor. He hasn't limited his successes to those associated with Bush because, prior to Bush, Rove was guiding Republicans to success in Texas (Gov **Bill Clements**, for example) and all across the nation. The studious-looking political historian moved with Bush to the White House to carefully craft Bush's political moves.

Bush's election victory this week was significant. For only the third time in a century the party in the White House gained seats in the midterm elections, and for the first time in 50 years, the GOP controls the White House, the US House and the US Senate. A single phrase by a political pundit (uttered at 2am after most votes were tallied) summed up the election impact: "**Bush has finally received the national mandate that eluded him when he won the presidency, but failed to get a majority of the popular vote.**" To this we add: "You can thank Karl Rove for that." It was Rove's behind-the-scenes strategy that pulled off this feat.

Rove hasn't had the public persona of past President **Bill Clinton**'s political gurus **James Carville** and former Austinite **Paul Begala**. But, Rove's quiet impact on Bush's political successes has been just as significant – maybe even more important – than the Carville/Begala efforts for Clinton. Rove has been vilified by Democrats for his hardball partisanship, but he has remained laser-focused on his objective: gaining political advantage for his boss in the White House.

That laser focus is now trained on re-electing President Bush in 2004. You can bet Rove started the day after the election poring over the results state-by-state and analyzing the impact generated by Bush's efforts in each of those states on behalf of Republican candidates. **Rove has always had his long-term eye trained on the 2004 Bush re-election**, and this week's results give him more information to finely tune his strategy to that end.

The Democratic opponent for Bush in 2004 will have a tough row to hoe because Rove is already mapping strategy against an **Al Gore** or a **Dick Gephardt**. Many have always underestimated Bush, but **no one should underestimate the political cunning of Rove.**

As far as Texas is concerned, what we pointed out to you 10/25/02 was validated in spades when the election victors were declared – and this does not bode well for Texas Democrats.

Make no mistake about it the GOP sweep of statewide offices this week was a **landslide of almost epic proportions**. With only one exception, the Republicans won every statewide office with double-digit margins. And that one exception, Republican **David Dewhurst's** victory over Democrat **John Sharp's** was close, but still not a nail-biter.

What made this Republican sweep so significant is that, for the most part, the **Democrats fielded qualified, well-funded candidates who ran aggressive campaigns**. The Democrats strategized for four years, got the candidates they wanted at the top of their ticket, put forth an effort unlike any they have mounted in eight years — **and still they were skunked**.

There were a variety of reasons for this GOP shutout, but one basic truth we mentioned 10/25/02 guided this election, and will impact statewide elections in the immediate future: *Almost half of all likely voters in Texas think of themselves as Republicans*. The Republicans demonstrated they **vote mostly as a bloc**, and certainly this week, they **turned out heavily to vote**. Texas is now a solid Republican state. Period.

So, in this environment, **what about the Democrats? What can they do?** Well, other than lick their wounds and give up, there are two – very different and contrasting – theories on how they can crack the Republican hold on the state. One is to **try to improve on the John Sharp model** – field moderate to conservative Dems who aggressively court business and GOP backing, while still stressing some core Democrat social issues. This could undercut the Republican opponent and gain crossover GOP votes.

The other is the polar opposite and riskier. The Democrats should **field charismatic, fire-eating liberal candidates who can energize the faithful and spur them to an almost fanatical effort** – and hope to catch the Republicans asleep at the switch. One staunch Democrat wondered how she could support her party's candidate for governor, **Tony Sanchez**, by pointing out he was a wealthy banker and oilman. She was lukewarm at best about his candidacy. This doesn't inspire a "go the extra mile" approach for the Dems. A dynamic Democrat at the more left end of the spectrum might generate more enthusiasm – and votes.

Even though the GOP picked up a handful of victories in smaller districts, Travis County remains a non-minority island for the Democrats surrounded by a sea of Republicans.

By virtue of solid victories for Democratic incumbents in the State Senate and County Judge's races against aggressive GOP challenges, Travis County remains Democrat Territory. Not surprising. But it has implications for Austin's Mayoral/City Council elections next spring.

When, oh when, will the US183 freeway conversion be completed so you can zip from the far northwest all the way to Austin-Bergstrom Airport (ABIA) without any traffic stoppages?

We've long been told "in a few years." The Texas department of Transportation (TxDOT) is now getting a little more specific. **In December, contracts will go out to extend the freeway past the US290 interchange toward ABIA.** The project will start by moving city utilities and then progress to new frontage roads. After that, work will start on the main lanes of US183.

So, when will all this be finished? **TxDOT says the construction, which should start by early March, will last about four years** – barring any complications and extreme weather delays.

As you know when you drive in that north Austin area, work is still continuing to turn US183 into a long freeway. **The bridge decking is virtually completed over Bolm Rd.** Crews are now working on the road base and new lanes leading to the overpass. Project manager **Lanny Hall** expects to **move traffic to the new Bolm Rd overpass before Spring 2003**, though that timetable depends on the weather.

The October rains slowed some work, but Hall doesn't think those rains will result in any significant delay. When completed, the overpass will have **two traffic lanes in each direction, with room to expand to six lanes** and a possible High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lane in the future.

As for the rest of the mammoth (and, seemingly, never-ending) US183 construction project, **construction on the main lanes between Hunters Chase and RM620 has increased.** As a result, you will soon see TxDOT crews reaching some notable milestones. TxDOT's **Mike Miller** says all retaining walls, especially at overpasses, should be in place by Thanksgiving. This will allow crews to fill in the above-grade void and prepare for road surfacing.

By December, Miller believes the remaining support beams will be hoisted into place at **Anderson Mill Rd.** Workers would then begin constructing the bridge decking. Miller also hopes to have the final drill shafts completed at RM620 for the overpass and ramps at the north end of the project at about the same time.

Rain is the one thing that could spoil the timetable. Miller says the **October rains have delayed some work**, but should not put a major crimp in the project's overall construction schedule. Last year, unusually wet weather in November and December idled workers for weeks at a time, but crews made up most of the delays during dry conditions in the spring.

Rainy weather is one thing engineers considered in designing the US183 freeway expansion. **Twelve filtration and detention ponds** are part of the system to control and clean rain run-off. Miller says excavation is underway for one of the ponds along (aptly named) Pond Springs Rd. At least one of the other catch basins was built under the southbound frontage road expansion.

One of the most elegant areas of Austin is the close-in Old Enfield area where stately mansions sit in the midst of vast, lavishly landscaped lawns. So why are wells being drilled there by these West Austin wealthy homeowners?

To save money. Some of the homeowners are **upset by the huge water bills** they pay each month to keep their well-manicured lawns in pristine condition. So they are drilling water wells to provide water for their yards.

One longtime homeowner told us his **water bills this summer were, hang on, \$1,980 per month – just for the water used in his yard.** (He has the outside water on a separate meter so he can track those costs.) Upset by the City of Austin’s high “conservation” rates during the summer, this landowner noticed his neighbor drilling a well and decided to do the same.

Now he is pumping water from below his property and using it on his lawn and flower beds. **His cost for the well water is zero, zip, nada.** He doesn’t have to pay the City of Austin one red cent for the water that is under his property, since Texas law gives him the right to that water. So the City has lost this revenue.

This homeowner calculates the **cost for his well will be totally paid for in six months** and from then on, he gets all the water his 3-acres of land can drink – for nothing.

Having withdrawal pangs since there are no more political TV commercials to watch? Didn’t think so. You have reason for being shell-shocked by the ad bombardment. *The Wall Street Journal* reported **more political ads were sold in Austin than in any other city in the US.** The *Journal* calculated 24,876 ads were sold in the Austin market – and you probably feel like you saw every single one of those ads!

Dr. Louis Overholster shuns dull, boring meetings by quoting Ronald Reagan: “I have left orders to be awakened at any time in case of a national emergency — even if I’m in a Cabinet meeting!”

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Sincerely



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