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Dear Client:

For years, one of the many complaints about Austin's traffic congestion is that the traffic signals are not synchronized to keep vehicles moving. Austin mayor Steve Adler says the city has "a state-of-the-art Advanced Traffic Management System to monitor traffic flow." So why hasn't it been used to better synchronize traffic lights? Good question.

Frankly, it comes down to the spending priorities of previous Austin City Councils and city staff. At budget time, record amounts of money were thrown at various city services. But, according to new mayor Adler, **not enough of your tax dollars were allocated to optimize the Advanced Traffic Management System.**

Adler said this week "**we've never had enough trained staff to run it.**" Really? That's it? The money was invested in the System, but not enough was allocated to hire and train personnel to maximize the System's capability? Come on! **What an easy fix to years of driver frustration!** And this was allowed to happen while the City has enjoyed record revenues year after year.

Now what, mayor? "**Now, we're getting that staff.**" And the staff should be able to synchronize and change traffic signals from a central command in real time. Said Adler: "**We will make sure traffic lights are timed to keep things moving.**" Well, it's about time.

Other previously-announced actions are planned to enhance traffic flow. As the mayor said, "**We will try them and keep what works.**" Such as:

Limiting left-hand turns at rush hour ... Scheduling more street repair and construction projects at night ... No scheduling long-term street closures within five blocks of each other ... Permitting fewer lane closures for downtown events ... Accelerating improvements to key intersections.

By the way, that last intersections item includes **IH35/51st Street ... Loop 360 ... the Y at Oak Hill and Four Points** as some of the more than 180 intersections in Austin that have been identified as having issues that need correction. The mayor outlined many more mobility steps he believes should be taken to confront congestion. Meantime, time's a-wastin'. New residents, driving cars, are arriving daily.

The Austin-owned electric utility received a legislative two-by-four knock upside the head this week about the problem we mentioned last week – siphoning some of the money that you pay for electricity and spending it for other city services. No words were minced. And this time the verbal battering came from the State Senate, not the House that is also poised to act.

And it was a *bi-partisan berating* of the policies of the Austin City Council and City Manager **Marc Ott**. Central Texas GOP Senator **Troy Fraser** was joined by Austin Democratic Senator **Kirk Watson** in threatening to take legislative action to rein in the city practices that have raised your electric bills. As mentioned last week, we're talking big bucks – more than \$150 million from your electric bill going for “other” expenditures, just this year alone.

Last week, we suggested you “stay tuned” for looming action by the GOP-dominated legislature. We cited Austin GOP State Representative **Paul Workman**'s bills on this same issue. Well, you didn't have to stay tuned very long. **The Senate jumped into the middle of the battle before the House had time to act.** (Check our April 10, 2015 newsletter for the concerns being raised.)

Let me tell you, this is no ordinary “Austin bashing” that you may have seen in previous legislative sessions. This time, **Fraser, Watson and Workman are powerful players in their own right, and they are customers of Austin Energy** – not some conservative legislators from West Texas who have burrs under their saddles because of the “liberal ways” of Austin.

Yeah, but. What can they do besides raise a little verbal hell? Well, for one thing, **they can effectively remove the monopoly status that Austin Energy enjoys** – open the Austin market so private energy companies can compete for your electricity business. This would be a drastic move. But the Legislature has the power to make that happen.

Also, pressure can be applied to **remove the Austin City Council from its energy policy-making role** and to set up a separate governing board for Austin Energy, much as they have in San Antonio. Watson and others have pressed for this in the past. It is still on the table.

So, what is likely to happen? **The Senate can pass Fraser's bill and send it on to the House where Workman can pick up the bashing and the battle.** Most legislative observers will tell you it is easier to kill a bill than pass one. **But this is a festering issue.** For instance, two years ago, Fraser and Watson raised these same points. Unfortunately the City of Austin has done nothing. So, the intensity level has been raised because the issue continues to be ignored.

Time is on the City of Austin's side. This session of the Legislature is scheduled to adjourn at the end of May, not to return until January 2017. If the city can “Yes, Sir and Yes, Ma'am” it for six weeks, it could possibly skate through this cactus patch. As we said before, stay tuned.

Much has been written about the important role Texas may play in the selection of the Republican nominee for president. After all, Ted Cruz, Jeb Bush, Rick Perry and Rand Paul can all make some claim to Texas ties. And an earlier-than-normal GOP Texas primary next spring will make the state's Electoral College votes highly-prized. Overlooked, however, is a potential Texas role for the Democratic Party.

First of all here is the fall-back caveat all political commentators use as a crutch: **a lot can happen between now and decision-making time.** But here's something to file away as you watch what's happening as the political maneuvering revs up.

San Antonio's Julian Castro is a young, shining star in the Democratic Party. For the last eight months, he has served President Obama as his Cabinet **Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)**. Prior to that he was mayor of San Antonio. (His twin, Joaquin, is a member of the USCongress.)

If **Hillary Clinton**, almost 70, is her party's nominee for president, **the 40-year-old Julian Castro would likely be on her short list as her Vice President running mate.** He provides a good balance of age, geography, experience, etc. He is charismatic with a winning personality, and by many accounts, is viewed as one of the Dem's rising stars on the national scene.

Castro's political profile may rise in the coming months, as this is HUD's 50th anniversary.

Could an economic rift be developing between San Antonio and Austin? A new San Antonio economic study suggests UTAustin's Dell Medical School could negatively impact the Alamo City's top industry. But, there is also the possibility the study will spur a San Antonio economic offensive.

San Antonio is rightly proud of its nearly \$25 billion health care and biosciences industry, centered around the South Texas Medical Center. A new San Antonio Medical Foundation study warns that **new medical schools in Austin and the Rio Grande Valley will trigger new opportunities in Austin and the Valley at the Alamo City's expense.**

A quick summary: the report says those two new medical schools will **pull patients and dollars away from San Antonio.** Additionally, it predicts the two new schools will **compete for medical faculty and top-tier research talent.**

The Alamo City foundation is not slapping the study on a shelf to gather dust. It has committed up to **\$1 million to, among other things, leverage San Antonio's health care and bioscience assets.** The foundation's concern will bear watching over the next few years as the Austin and Valley medical schools are up and running.

UTAustin-ex Jordan Spieth powered his way this week to one of the pinnacles of the golfing world, winning the Masters championship in overwhelming fashion. Now that momentum is propelling him toward becoming America's newest sports hero. His All-American Boy image will bring him fame and untold riches. And, by many accounts, he is deserving of both.

His \$1.8 million prize for winning the Masters will likely quickly grow to as much as \$10 million a year in endorsements. Sponsors are lining up to bid for the opportunity to link to his personality. Already, **Under Armour – that has a major presence in Austin – has outfitted him head-to-toe (eat your heart out, Nike!).** Other sponsors already on board include **AT&T** and **Rolex**. Look for him to appear in major ad campaigns for years to come.

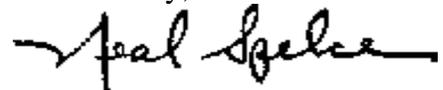
Don't know if you noticed, but the UTAustin **Tower was bathed in burnt orange from top to bottom Sunday night just hours after Spieth's impressive win** -- an honor accorded for special accomplishments. And the last UTAustin alum to win the Master's, Austin's **Ben Crenshaw**, hustled to the campus to pose for a picture honoring Spieth, flashing the Hook 'Em Horns hand sign.

Interestingly, Los Angeles sports writer **Bill Plaschke** wrote: "On the same weekend Ben Crenshaw retired, **the sport has a new Texas two-putter who is equally gentle, but quietly tough.**" It's not just being a golf champion that will spur Spieth's success, it's who Spieth is. Listen to what Spieth's agent says: "**The nice thing is, it's real, it's genuine. Nothing that he does is not honest and genuine. He's a marketer's dream.**"

He has already put some of his growing wealth to work. He paid \$2.275 million for a home in Dallas's Preston Hollow neighborhood, near such notables as **George and Laura Bush, Mark Cuban, Ross Perot, T. Boone Pickens and Roger Staubach.**

Dr. Louis Overholster gave up golf several years ago when he walked off the 18th green and said to his caddie, "Kid, you've got to be the worst caddie in the world." The caddie responded, "Sir, that would be too much of a coincidence!"

Sincerely,



Editor/Publisher