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Dear Client:

It was a big publicity deal seven years ago when the mayor of Georgetown led the effort to make the Central Texas city's energy supply 100% reliable on renewable sources such as wind and solar. Now, here's the big deal: Georgetown residents paid more than \$1,000 per household in higher electricity charges over the last four years.

“That’s right -- \$1,219 per household in higher electricity costs for the 71,000 residents of Georgetown, all thanks to the decision of its Republican mayor, Dale Ross, to launch a bold plan to shift the city’s municipal utility to 100% renewable power in 2012,” notes Chuck DeVore, a VP with Austin’s conservative think tank, the Texas Public Policy Foundation.

“His decision to bet on renewables resulted in the city budget getting dinged by a total of \$29.8 million in the four years from 2015 to 2018,” said DeVore. **“Georgetown’s electric costs were \$3.5 million over budget in 2015, ballooning to \$6.3 million in 2016, the same year the mayor locked his municipal utility into 20- and 25-year wind and solar energy contracts to make good on his 100% renewable pledge.”**

DeVore said city leaders had to lock in a large excess of wind and solar power to be able to lend credibility to their 100% renewable claim, since wind and solar power can’t be relied on to keep the lights on 24/7/365. **“And, even with that surplus, there are times when Georgetown draws traditional fossil fuel power from the Texas grid, making the city’s ‘100% renewable’ claim nothing more than spurious sloganeering,”** he added.

Georgetown is now trying to renegotiate its costly long-term wind and solar energy contracts. And, effective today, February 1st, Georgetown customers will see an average \$13/month increase in their electricity bills – not due, say city officials, to wind/solar contracts, but because they leaned on forecasts back in 2012 and 2013 that predicted a shortage of power and a significant rise in energy prices.

Long ago, *city-owned* utilities (such as Georgetown’s) were exempted from competition, like you have in other Texas cities, where residents have a choice of electricity providers. Keep an eye on the Texas Legislature. **A proposal is under consideration by lawmakers that would allow such monopolies to be changed, giving customers the ability to shop around.**

They're multiplying around Austin. You've seen them. Dedicated lanes for transportation other-than-cars, speed bumps, round-abouts – all to “calm” traffic in the name of safer streets. But safe for whom? In cities ranging from Waverly, Iowa to Los Angeles, objections are being raised for these “road diets,” because they have a negative effect on emergency vehicles rushing to provide aid. Mike Levy minces no words in his criticism of the “calming” devices.

Levy has been a long-time supporter of fire, EMS and police. He served a stint on the Austin Crime Commission. **He has the ear of the rank-and-file folks in those safety agencies.** In other words, he's **not some naysayer** who sounds off when someone jerks his chain. For instance, he cites specific examples of **Fire Engine 19, Fire Engine 9, Fire Engine 2 and EMS Medic 8 that have been negatively impacted by roadway changes** as they rush to aid Austinites.

He charges Austin **“transportation department planners have adamantly refused to consult with Austin Fire Department officials** regarding their plans for modifying the city's streets, **saying AFD's input would be irrelevant given their commitment to making these changes based on a certain agenda supported by the mayor and council.”**

“Many vehicle lanes throughout the city have been put on a ‘diet,’ narrowing them significantly to **accommodate bike and bus lanes, with these lanes now too narrow to accommodate fire apparatus safely,**” he adds.

“The City knows that road ‘pillows,’ aka speed bumps, are in place primarily to placate neighborhoods that want more traffic enforcement but cannot have it because of too few cops, and their **impact has been to slow down primarily Fire and EMS units,**” Levy pointed out.

He also said an **injured patient on a backboard can suffer significantly increased pain when the EMS unit goes over a speed bump.** And he further pointed out the list of “unnecessarily long response routes for emergency vehicles” holds true throughout Austin.

Levy said **“most important we are talking about human lives. Seconds count if people are trapped in a burning building, or a person has suffered a cardiac arrest.”** His conclusion: **“A disinterested observer might suspect that this is irrelevant to the mayor, the council members, the city manager and the transportation department's management, for whom the value of a life is trumped by a lesser agenda.”**

Looking ahead through the end of April: “During that time frame, all pockets of drought in the state are expected to be removed,” reported the Texas Water Development Board.

If Democratic moves are indicators, the battle for Texas Congressional seats in the 2020 election will be more aggressive than what we've just witnessed in the 2018 contests. And, those tussles are starting right now. Not only that, three of the targeted Congressional seats are here in Central Texas. Democrats are energized. Here is how this is shaking out.

First of all, after the 2018 elections that saw two Texas Congressional seats flip from Republican to Democrat, **Republicans still represent 23 of the state's 36 Congressional districts.** This is, by any measure, a hefty majority. But, Democratic leaders in Congress have huddled in Washington and they are **mobilizing to try to defeat six Texas Republicans.** If successful, it would give the Democrats a 19-17 majority of the Texas delegation. This would be a seismic shift in Texas political clout.

At the top of the list of GOP targets is Austin Congressman Michael McCaul. He is one of the most powerful Texans. He just stepped down as Chair of the Homeland Security Committee and is now the ranking member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. McCaul has announced he is running for re-election. And, Democrat **Mike Siegel** has officially announced he will oppose McCaul.

There are other area GOP Congressmen in the Democrats' crosshairs as well. Former Judge **John Carter** of Round Rock, who won a close race last time, is on the list. And Central Texas freshman Congressman **Chip Roy**, a **Ted Cruz** protégé, also made the Dem hit list. Other Texas GOPers who are targeted: **Pete Olsen, Will Hurd** and **Kenny Marchant.**

The Democrats' concentrated effort to defeat these GOP Congressmen is public knowledge. It's not just lip service ("yeah, okay, we oughta defeat these guys"). **The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC) thinks these races can be won. It points out all six republicans won by just five points, or less,** in diverse suburban districts.

A DCCC endorsement means "money, marbles and chalk" (to use an old Texas political term) will be thrown behind the challenger's efforts. **Money? You bet. But organizational resources, research, strategic assistance, etc. will also be available to those running against the GOP incumbents.** In a tight race, the DCCC support could be a tie-breaker.

However, all this does not take into account what the Republican Congressional Campaign Committee (RNCC) might do to protect the GOP Reps. No announcements have been made, **but you can bet the RNCC will give substantial support.**

Two other *wild cards* for the 2020 Congressional campaigns: 1) turnout will depend upon the presidential nominee of each party, and 2) if Democrat media darling **Beto O'Rourke's** flirtation with a presidential run flames out, some are predicting he will run against Senior Senator John **Cornyn.** Don't discount the impact of the two top races on the ballot.

A deadly polar vortex slammed the upper Midwest and Northeast this week, driving wind chill temperatures to negative-30 and even negative-40. This not only disrupted everyday life, but it became downright miserable and dangerous for many millions living in those areas. So, one city, striving to become more tech savvy like Austin, is capitalizing on this northern misery to entice talented workers to their area. Yep, sunny San Diego is running ads in cities like Chicago and New York about the great weather in Southern California.

As you well know, Californians are leaving the state in droves due to the state's policies. The weather is generally good in the Golden State, but after a while, temperate temperatures won't pay the taxes or make homes more affordable. However, **if you're 27 to 37 years old, trained in science and technology, living in the bitterly-cold parts of the US and making good money, moving to a better climate may be appealing.**

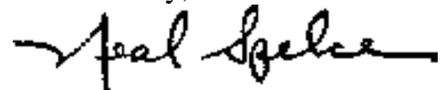
Enter the brainchild of the San Diego Economic Development Corporation. The EDC developed an ad campaign titled "**Just Say No to Winter.**" According to the *San Diego Union Tribune*, the effort is branding the city as a **promised land for tech and science talent**. The ads are targeting millennials in winter climates.

One ad is a nearly 2-minute video **juxtaposing San Diego's beautiful sunsets and beaches with harsh clips of winter weather and traffic jams in other cities**. Mixed in are clips of San Diego's biggest employers, including **Qualcomm, Illumina, Intuit and Viasat**.

You have to give San Diego credit for stressing its climatological assets to enhance its economy, with a clever ad campaign. **But San Diego is still a part of California**. And those it entices to move there showing beautiful scenes may, after making the move, could soon come face to face with the state's realities. **And they could become future residents of Austin – if current trends continue.**

As the wintertime football season winds down, **Dr. Louis Overholster** is convinced sharks are as tough as those fans who take their shirts off during games – but sharks are more intelligent!

Sincerely,



Editor/Publisher