

Divided We Stood - Independent Texans!

by Linda Curtis

I think the most important story of the 2006 Texas Gubernatorial race has been missed by Texas media. That's the story of the movement for political independence struggling to be born. I've been an independent activist for 27 years, and founded Independent Texans in 2001. I've gotten used to our story being "missed" by the media. In a winner take all two-party system, this is lawful. However, there just wasn't anything "lawful" about the Texas Governor's race. If we independents take what has been opened up in this election -- thanks to Carole Keeton Strayhorn and Kinky Friedman-- and build with it, Texas elections will never be the same again.

Suffice to say that the national media has begun to get the story of the mid-term elections. First, the *Wall Street Journal* just came out with a poll showing that 42% of American voters now self-identify as independent voters. Also, independent voters showed up in exit polls, by a 2 to 1 margin, having put Democrats in charge of Congress and the Senate. Sixty-five percent of independents want us out of Iraq, and they voted for the Democrats for Congress (indies "broke" 57% to 39% for the Democrats) to send that message. That story has been all over the national media, although the media doesn't quite get that it was independents who defined the war as the issue and forced the Democrats to recast themselves as an opposition party – at least for this election.

In Texas, Chris Bell may have benefited from the national surge towards Democrats. I haven't seen any exit polls yet to support that, it's just a guess. Texas Democrats focus on down ballot races paid off bringing them 6 Texas House seats, and almost defeated Rep Mike Krusee, with an unknown poorly funded candidate. (Krusee is the Transportation Committee Chair who championed Rick Perry's Trans-Texas Corridor (aka NAFTA highway) and freeway tolling schemes. Bell also benefited from a little two-party two-step, designed to stop Carole Keeton Strayhorn.

Respected political analyst of *Quorum Report*, Harvey Kronberg, did catch that one. Just as Carole was beginning to put distance between her and the two other Perry challengers, Perry started bashing Bell using the "L" word,

making it appear that he was the real threat. This, likely, drove some Democrats back home, as well as some Republicans. Still many -- about 1.3 million! -- stayed out of the box and joined independents in voting for Strayhorn or Kinky, knowing it was unlikely they were going to win. Carole polled 18% of the vote and Kinky 12.6% for a combined total of 30.6% (with Bell at 29.8%).

Bell also moved to position himself as the "real" anti-Corridor/toll candidate, just as national Democrats, who had voted for the war, moved to position themselves as anti-war. But will they deliver? Who knows? As David Brooks of the *NY Times* recently pointed out, two weeks before Election Day, we are entering The Era of What's Next, when traditional liberalism and traditional conservatism are being rendered obsolete. Process will come to the fore, says Brooks, noting: If you look at the political landscape, identification with the Republican Party is falling but identification with the Democratic Party is not rising. Instead, there is a spike in the number of people who do not identify with either.

It's hard to know how much media bias affected the outcome of the Governor's race. Some media outlets chose to continually reference the methodologically flawed online Zogby polls, giving (whether intended or not) Bell and Perry a boost. Again, to the credit of Harvey Kronberg, *Quorum Report* was the only publication that consistently questioned the methodology of the polls and even explained why they were getting different results. Had the larger media outlets followed his lead, this could have given voters encouragement that the race would be decided by them, not the polls nor the media.

KVUE in Austin and the Austin American-Statesman get the prize this year for advocacy journalism. Perhaps I was overly sensitive, but it seemed to me that the media was unusually obsessed with polls and predicting the winner. At what point does that activity become a self-fulfilling prophecy? The original predictions of a record turnout race, fell flat. Wonder how come. That said, numbers don't lie!

Results: Numbers Don't Lie

The combined statewide votes of Carole and Kinky were 4,000 votes more than Chris Bell. This has been underreported and is a seismic shift in Texas voting, with two-partyism suffering a sever jolt. Carole Strayhorn won five counties and came in second in 104 counties. The combined votes of Carole and Kinky won 47 counties (including Bexar County, San Antonio's home), and placed second in an additional 74 counties.

What's more, the Southwest Voter Registration Education Project released some polling (albeit perhaps methodologically flawed) numbers indicating that Hispanic voters gave Chris Bell 39% of their votes, Carole 29% and Kinky 14%. Then they promptly declared that Hispanics are Democrats! This likely "defection" (whatever the precise number, to the extent that polling can ever be precise), from the major parties by Hispanics is a BIG story in the Texas results. I am waiting to hear exit polls in the African-American communities across the state, but we already know that Carole did well in these communities.

The Corridor/Freeway Toll Issue

The Corridor/freeway toll issue -- a massive special interest/corruption scandal, primarily designed by Rick Perry, but brought to us by both parties -- was the issue driving the populist independent revolt in Texas. We, populists of all party persuasions along with, and especially, Mrs. Strayhorn, made it a top issue in the race. A number of the Trans-Texas Corridor affected counties impacted by the TTC-35 and I-69 legs were the highest percentage vote getting areas for Carole Keeton Strayhorn: Dewitt, Colorado, Goliad, Wilson, Wharton, Waller, Cooke, Falls, Gonzales, Hill, Fayette, Bosque, Austin, Milam, and McLennan. She won Falls, Cooke, Wharton, Wilson and Goliad. The problem was that these counties are largely rural and therefore incapable of producing the numbers needed to win statewide.

Carole and Kinky's combined votes in Bexar County, would have won the urban and suburban county and the second largest city in Texas with over 1.2 million people. I think it's safe to say, this was likely due to two factors. First, was the "double-tax" urban freeway toll issue and the [San Antonio Toll Party's](#) push for Strayhorn. Terri Hall, a fantastic organizer and leader, became a regular feature on some of the big radio talk shows and

was constantly in the news, along with the Carole Strayhorn, aka "One Tough Grandma", linking the populist call to stop the Governor's cash-cow of placing tolls on roads already paid for to the Corridor to Strayhorn's bid. Second, there was the general movement of Hispanic voters towards independent politics - for Carole and Kinky.

The Hispanic community has always had that "independencia" streak, dating back to at least the days of the La Raza Unida Party based in south Texas, in the 1970's. Plus, here's a case where intra-party competition has been helpful to independents. Republican efforts to court Hispanic voters away from the Democrats have helped us gain ground. Once the tendency to vote solidly for one party is challenged, independents can compete for those votes too.

I believe the future for the independent movement in Texas will be in building alliances between rural interests who will continue to fight the Corridor, urban fiscal reformers concerned with taxation issues, including the mammoth and corrupt "toll tax" that is beginning to be implemented, and Texas folks of color, black and Hispanic, who went independent for Carole or Kinky, looking for new solutions, including recognition for independent and split ticketing voter rights.

A Little Inside History of the Attempts to Unify the Independents

I had met Carole Strayhorn (then Rylander) back in 1996, when she came to speak to the Reform Party. She was then a Republican. I met her again in 2005, when she joined the fight initiated by Sal Costello and the [Austin Toll Party](#) against Perry's urban freeway toll scheme. We were thrilled when she announced that she was planning a bid in the Republican primary against Perry.

I had a series of discussions with Brad McClellan, Carole's son and campaign manager, who asked me to come on board the campaign. Brad told me that they were undecided on whether Carole was going to run in the Republican primary and that they were considering Carole running as an independent. In these discussions, I shared with Brad some of my history as part of a national movement of independents, who've been

working for many years, including with the national Reform Party and all its national players. I helped Lenora Fulani make history in 1988 as the first woman and first African-American to get on the ballot for President in all 50 states.

I explained to Brad that we had learned a great deal from the failure of the Reform Party and were now building "fusion" organizations for independents, rather than political parties, in most states. We work with candidates regardless of party affiliation, if we think their candidacy can be used to win recognition for the growing independent voting plurality. We hadn't yet supported a candidate running in a major party primary, but we were open to it.

The fact that Texas has open primaries, where voters do not have to declare or register with a party in order to vote in its primary, made this possible. We realized, though, that mobilizing independent (non-primary, unaffiliated) voters to come in to a party primary would be very difficult. We had many questions about how this might, effectively, be done.

Independent Texans had developed the "Fair Elections for Every Texan" (FEET) political reform package consisting of 3 key reforms for Texas voters: initiative and referendum (I&R) at the state level so voters could petition for a vote of the people on any issue (like the Corridor/tolls), redistricting reform by way of a citizen's redistricting commission, and fair ballot access laws for independent candidates and parties. Carole agreed to support the package early in the campaign, and immediately made I&R an issue.

Kinky Friedman had already jumped in the race as an independent.. I brought several members of Independent Texans with me out to his ranch and I even adopted one of his rescue dogs, Reba McEntire. I broached the subject of what he was going to do about the Strayhorn candidacy, since Carole had already been courting independent voters to help her in the Republican primary. He said he wanted to simply let the two of them -- Perry and Strayhorn -- 'duke it out' and he would 'stay above all that'. However, since Texas statewide election races had for some time, been largely decided in the Republican primary, I urged that he consider an "inside-outside" strategy with Carole -- meaning, supporting some of the

issues I thought she would be raising in the primary, particularly on political reform and the Corridor/tolls, and encouraging voters to help her beat Perry in the primary. If she didn't win the primary, Kinky would be in a better position to "receive" Carole voters in the general election. Kinky said he wanted to think about it. In February, Kinky and I, on behalf of Independent Texans, did a press conference together on political reform and he endorsed the FEET package.

Independent Texans came away from these events clear that we needed to be fully involved in the Strayhorn effort, and we would have Kinky as a potential "back-up" candidate, if Carole didn't win the primary.

However, by December, the Strayhorn camp was reconsidering the strategy and McClellan and I discussed that Carole might file in January to run as an independent. I was very encouraging, but I also worried about having two independents running in the same race. I began working to get the two campaigns together. The discussions that took place between Dean Barkley (Kinky's campaign manager, former manager of Jesse Ventura's campaign and a colleague of mine from the old Reform Party), McClellan and myself were done very respectfully -- unlike the rude and crude move that Bell made later trying to get Kinky to drop out. (Bell, as Kinky quite rightly pointed out, had no credibility with independents to make such a move, and besides, Kinky said in my favorite Kinkyism in the campaign, "I don't negotiate with terrorists"!)

The day Carole filed as an independent, she gave Kinky a courtesy call. That was the last day to file for any race. That night, Kinky called me, clearly upset and sounding somewhat caught off guard. He asked me if he could file for another race or what I thought he should do. I was taken aback. It appeared that his campaign manager (Barkley) had not adequately informed Kinky of his options in time for him to switch seats. I told Kinky that it was too late to switch, and I honestly thought he should consider dropping out and joining me in leading the Strayhorn effort. He could become, de facto, the leader of the independent movement in Texas, and could help us all make history electing the first independent Governor since Sam Houston (1859). It would galvanize the independent movement to take Perry out. I underscored how important this was to stop the scandal brought to us by Perry, that Democrats rolled over for -- the Trans-Texas

Corridor and freeway toll schemes. What's more, we would -- finally -- bust through the two-party stranglehold on the Texas election process. I posed, what was more important? Running for Governor or running the two-parties out of their monopoly. He wanted to think about it.

After this, there were a number of discussions between the two campaigns, but no unification took place. I am not interested in blaming Kinky or blaming Carole for the lack of unity. Ultimately, if you want to lay "blame", perhaps it's more a direct result of the fact that the independent movement -- on the ground -- doesn't yet have enough strength to make unification happen.

Below are lists of counties where Carole and Kinky did well, as well as a spread sheet of these counties with total numbers. Thanks for Pat Aldridge Jones' help in pulling this information together. I would urge that those reading this report begin looking in to what election races will be happening in your area next year. I will be very happy to help you think through where there will be opportunities for the independent movement in your community. And, I would love to come meet with you in your community.

Thanks y'all!

Details on the Counties

Carole Won Five Counties

Cooke, Falls, Goliad, Wharton, Wilson

Carole Came in Second in 104 Counties

Anderson	Edwards	Kendall	Real
Andrews	Ellis	Kennedy	San Saba
Archer	Erath	karr	Scurry
Armstrong	Fayette	Kimble	Shackelford
Bailey	Foard	King	Sherman
Bandera	Franklin	Lampassas	Somervell
Baylor	Freestone	Lavaca	Stephens
Bell	Frio	Leon	Sterling
Blanco	Garza	Lipscommb	Stonewall
Borden	Gillespie	Live Oak	Taylor
Bosque	Glasscock	Llano	Throckmorton
Briscoe	Gonzales	Loving	Upton
Brown	Gray	Martin	Van Zandt
Cherokee	Gregg	Mason	Waller
Cochran	Guadalupe	McCulloch	Ward
Coke	Hamilton	McMullen	Washington
Coleman	Hansford	Medina	Wheeler
Collingsworth	Hardeman	Midland	Wichita
Comal	Hartley	Mitchell	Wilbarger
Comanche	Hemphill	Montague	Winkler
Coryell	Henderson	Montgomery	Wise
Crane	Hockley	Moore	Yoakum
Dallam	Howard	Ochitree	Young
Deaf Smith	Jack	Oldham	
Eastland	Jackson	Parmer	
Ector	Johnson	Rains	
	Jones	Randall	

Carole & Kinky, Together, Won 47 Counties, including Bexar County!

Atascosa	Fayette	Jones	Refugio
Bandera	Galveston	Karnes	San Jacinto
Bastrop	Gaonzaloes	Lavaca	Stonewall
Bexar	Grimes	Lee	Swisher
Bosque	Hall	Liberty	Throckmorton
Brewster	Hamilton	Martin	Trinity
Caldwell	Haskell	Matagorda	Walker
Colorado	(Perrys home	McMullen	Waller
Cottle	county)	Medina	Ward
Crosby	Hill	Milam	Winkler
Dewitt	Howard	Mitchell	Wood
Donley	Jackson	Rains	
	Jeff Davis	Reagan	

Carole & Kinky, Together, Would Have Come in Second in 74 Counties!

Angelina	Burleson	Chambers
Aransas	Burnet	Childress
Brazoria	Calhoun	Clay
Brazos	Callahan	Collin
Brooks	Carson	Concho
	Castro	Crockett

Culberson
Deaf Smith
Delta
Denton
Dickens
Dimmit
Fannin
Fisher
Floyd
Gaines
Grayson
Hale
Hardin
Harrison
Hays
Hood
Hopkins
Houston
Hudspeth
Hunt

Hutchison
Irrion
Kaufman
Kent
Knox
LaSalle
Lamb
Limestone
Lubbock
Lynn
Madison
McLennan
Motley
Nacogdoches
Navarro
Nueces
Palo Pinto
Panola
Parker
Pecos

Polk
Potter
Presidio
Roberts
Sabine
Schiecher
Shelby
Smith
Sutton
Terry
Tom Green
Travis
Upshur
Uvalde
Victoria
Williamson
Zavala