



Texas Legislative Primary Election Update

May 31, 2012

The long-delayed election came, but nobody noticed....

It appears that sometimes the noise can get so loud that you can't hear it any more. After what seemed to be endless political campaigning both on the local and national levels – **only 9% of the eligible voters in Texas bothered to vote** in either the republican or democratic primaries. ***That means that 91% of the voters in Texas stayed home.***

The state redistricting process is always political warfare, but this year the legal challenges by both political parties delayed the traditional March primary elections until May 29th. That meant that the candidates had longer to wait to see what the maps looked like and to consider their options, and the final result was that more candidates decided to run and the campaigns lasted 2 months longer. Considering that the republican presidential nomination process has lasted over a year with endless debates and at least a half-dozen frontrunners no longer in the race..... You'd think that the voting public would have been fired up and ready to vote !!!

Texas has almost 19 million eligible voters. 1.4 million people (7%) voted in the republican primary and only 555,000 people (2%) voted in the democratic primary.

I'm sure the experts will do an analysis of exactly who those voters were; conservatives, tea partiers, environmentalists, party faithful, but from what I could see... it was the angry people. The democrat turnout seemed to be the loyal regulars and the results seemed to support the current officeholders and incumbents. But on the republican side – it was the opposite. It appears that only those who were truly angry showed up. Those who were angry at congress, angry at the economy, angry at all incumbents came to make a statement, and their protest resulted in numerous surprise outcomes. Seven current legislators were ousted from office, and most were just the victim of being the person in-office.

Becoming more like Washington and less like Texas....

For the longest time we were proud to say that we were different than Washington. They were the partisan politicians who couldn't get along, couldn't get anything done because to compromise was allowing the other side to get some credit for accomplishing something. Here in Texas, legislators from both sides worked to resolve issues and bi-partisanship was something that worked. George W. Bush was openly supported by democrat officeholders when he was

Governor, and the current Speaker of the House Joe Straus was elected by a coalition of republicans and democrats. Those days are over and the penalty of ineffective government may have to be paid in the difficult times ahead. Our elected officials are more polarized than ever. Republicans are criticizing other republicans who are willing to work with democrats to find middle ground and the word “compromise” has become a character flaw. “To compromise” used to mean finding negotiated solutions for problems, today it is said that you are “compromising your principals.”

Where did all the elder-statesmen go ?.....

The trend continues. Two years ago the impact of the “Tea Party” voter and the ugly town hall meetings resulted in a substantial turnover in the Texas House of Representatives. There were 36 new members, a 24% turnover. This year the Tea Party voters teamed up with the angry fiscal conservatives and it looks like we could see 42 new legislators after the general elections this fall. ***That would mean that close to 50% of the House of Representatives would have one legislative session or less experience.*** That’s a lot of inexperienced legislators trying to learn the process and a big loss of institutional memory for important issues like school finance and government appropriations. Fully 1/3 of all of the committee chairmanships will be vacant.

Turnover in the Texas Senate will also be significant. There will be 4-6 new Senators next Session, depending on the results of a run-off and the general election, which is unusually high. And if the current Lt. Governor, David Dewhurst wins his race for U.S. Senator, then there will be a new presiding officer selected from among the remaining senators. This kind of turnover will result in new leaders and committee chairmanships which always slow down the pace of progress during the already brief 5 month legislative sessions.

BTW, who really runs the show when there is a void in the leadership and a lack of experience in the legislature? Those crafty lobbyists and association folks will often offer good sounding solutions to problems..... I’m just saying.

So who lost their race for re-election?....

There were a few surprises on election night;

- ★ Rep. Leo Berman (R-Tyler) had served in the legislature for 14 years. He was defeated by a young man who is self-employed and serves in the Navy Reserve.
- ★ Rep. Wayne Christian (R-Center) had served in the legislature for 14 years and lost to a young radio talk show host who is also the Mayor of Marshall, Texas.
- ★ Rep. Rob Eissler (R-The Woodlands) served in the legislature for 10 years and currently serves as the Chairman of the House Public Education Committee. He was defeated by a tea party candidate who owns a pool design company.

- ★ Rep. Tuffy Hamilton (R-Lumberton) served in the legislature for 8 years and served as Chairman of the House Licensing Committee. In the redistricting process he was “paired” with and defeated by freshman legislator Rep. James White (R-Hillister).
- ★ Rep. Marva Beck (R-Centerville) served in the legislature for just 2 years and was defeated by the president of the Lufkin School Board.
- ★ Rep. Barbara Nash (R-Arlington) served in the legislature for 2 years and was defeated by a young attorney.
- ★ Rep. Vicki Truitt (R-Keller) served in the legislature for 14 years and served as Chairwoman of the House Pensions and Investments Committee. She was defeated by a young small businessman who has never held public office.

A Case Study – Why did Rob Eissler Lose?....

To understand what is happening within the Republican Party and in Texas politics in general, we can look at one race for clues. Rob Eissler was the kind of legislator you were really excited to know..... everyone liked him. He was crazy smart and was known for his “Puns and Quips” during debate on the House floor. Rob is a decorated Navy Pilot, Princeton University graduate, a local school board president, president of the local rotary club, honored as “citizen of the year” by the local chamber of commerce, a 20 year youth sports coach, and the radio broadcaster for the high school football team. Rob served as the Chairman of the House Public Education Committee during the school finance crisis and as a result was named one of the “Top 10 Best Legislators” by Texas Monthly magazine. How does a guy like this get beat – by a little known tea party activist?

Well.... I can just envision the day Rob arrived home from the last legislative session in Austin. I can see Rob driving down mainstreet to a big reception planned for him..... On one side of the street were angry constituents who knew he was the chairman of the education committee and blamed him personally for a decision to cut public education funding even though the state was trying to solve a \$27 billion deficit. On the other side of the street was an angrier mob that saw Congress’s out of control spending and blamed Rob for spending too much on programs like education. At the end of the block were a crowd who were mad at him for negotiating with the democrats to solve problems, and then there were those who were just mad at him because he was the incumbent.

Politics and campaigns today are a contact sport. Civility doesn’t matter and neither do the facts. It is true that we get the government we deserve, but someone needs to wake us up before we lose the precious gift we have been given. When only 9% of the people who live in a community bother to exercise their obligation to VOTE, then it is likely that things will turn out like they did.

Brad Shields
brad@bradshields.com