

Divided We Stood - Independent Texans!

by Linda Curtis

I think the most important story of the 2006 Texas Gubernatorial race has been missed by the Texas media. 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.

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. To the credit of Texas political analyst, 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!), 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, Page 2 - Divided We Stood - Independent Texans!

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 (San Antonio), 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 Grandma, linking the populist call to stop the Governor's cash-cow of placing tolls on roads already paid for and the massive Trans-Texas 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 are looking for new solutions, including solutions in the democratic process itself. They will drive the movement for increased 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 Page 3 - Divided We Stood - Independent Texans!

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 introduced Brad to one of my closest and longtime political colleagues, Jackie Salit of New York, editor of the ***Neo Independent*** magazine, and a key tactician in the national independent

movement. She's been a major figure in the New York Independence Party. She and IP played a critical role in the election of Michael Bloomberg as Mayor of New York. Throughout the campaign, Jackie served as my unpaid "consultant", helping to shape my and our, at Independent Texans, participation in the campaign.

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. Jackie urged that I go meet with Kinky. I brought several members of Independent Texans with me out to his ranch and I even adopted one of his rescued 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 Page 4 - Divided We Stood - Independent Texans!

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 sought Jackie's advice and 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. 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 massive corruption 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 and some communication between Jackie Salit, Brad and Dean on this subject. But, as we all know, 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.

Page 5 - Divided We Stood - Independent Texans!

Other Notes For Future Reference

There are always mistakes made in campaigns. I only reference these so we can remember them for the future. It's important to note that the Strayhorn campaign did its part to raise the money to be competitive in the Governor's race. There was initially a big investment in the petition drive and bringing on two experienced organizers (myself and Linda Stall, co-founder of CorridorWatch.org) to help organize the efforts made in the summer to get concerned citizens and supporters out to the 56 TxDOT hearings on the TTC-35 Corridor.

On the heels of this effort, Carole began moving ahead in the polls, with expectation that this would continue. However, two problems presented themselves. **First**, her message for "reform", in education and on the Corridor/toll issue, though appreciated, was weak. Rather than a "reform" message, it needed to be a "revolt" message, to reflect what was actually happening on the ground (in the rural areas related to the Corridor, in some urban areas related to the "double tax" freeway tolls, and in many areas on the education issue). **Second**, was that there was no on-the-ground organization ready made to compete with the two parties. There was a constant struggle by the campaign to decide where to put limited funds -- to an air campaign or to the ground operations. Ultimately, the air campaign won out by late August.

The Good News

The good news is that we have momentum to build the on-the-ground organization needed for independent politics to succeed in the coming years. Since Election Day, one of our most stalwart volunteers, David Kinser, of Collin County, has been calling the hundreds of volunteers we met during this campaign. The response has been exceptionally positive, enthusiastic and determined.

Recommendations for the Future

1. **Build a Unified Front to Stop the Corridor/tolls:** bringing together activists from all parties with independents. The centrality of this issue for all Texans cannot be overstated. This \$184 billion plan for the Corridor in Texas, together with the tolling of freeways, carries so many implications we don't have time to go in to here (private property rights, international trade issues, environmental and wildlife destruction, budget issues, the "public, private partnership" trend, security issues, immigration, fundamental democratic process issues and more). Unless it is put to a vote, this issue, with more organizing on our part, will continue to drive the independent movement in Texas. My assumption is that CorridorWatch.org will provide guidance to our lobbying efforts at the state level in the legislative session starting in January, as well as Dr. Pat Choate at the federal level. Pat is already planning on amendments to the highway bill that would

Page 6 - Divided We Stood - Independent Texans!

require: 1) Congressional approval for any federal highway to be tolled, 2) that no federal moneys can be used for toll roads, and 3) that states are prohibited from entering in to highway contracts with non-compete clauses. What should we do in the Texas legislature? Many discussions behind the scenes are taking place right now. Stay tuned.

2. **Build local independent cross-partisan organizations focused on:** uniting Carole and Kinky voters and linking the lobbying to stop the Corridor/tolls with involvement in upcoming local elections (city council, county commission, and in two years, state rep). In parity districts (where Democrats and Republicans are competitive), and/or in districts where Carole, Kinky or both did well, this could be quite lively. For example, my state representative, Democrat Robby Cook, of Bastrop County, barely won reelection with 300 votes. Kinky and Carole's vote combined would have won Bastrop County. Cook has been shaky on the Corridor. I believe that if he knows an independent club is now organizing in his district and can swing the next election by that margin, by supporting his Republican opponent, or by running an independent in a three-way race, he might ask US what WE want! (Note: it is relatively easy for candidates, other than statewide, to get on the ballot as independent -- non-party aligned -- candidates.)

3. **Political Education on Political Reform and Independent Politics:** Our goal at Independent Texans is long-term political restructuring to make the system more competitive. Our motto is, "Those Who Make the Rules, Rule!". The angst and anger about the Corridor/tolls brought in to focus the need in Texas for major political reform (statewide initiative and referendum and others), something that neither party supports. Education on political reform, I believe, is only possible through the establishment of "independent clubs" (loose knit, non-party groups) in communities across the state. It's the activity of these clubs that will create the "market" of interest in how to fix the dysfunctional

democracy ours is becoming. This is where, pardon the pun, "the rubber meets the road". We have to get ordinary people focused on democracy, and what we have to do to overhaul a system that currently gives us such monstrosities as the Corridor/tolls.

Divisive hot button issues like immigration, abortion, gun control, etc. will only serve to attract more partisan oriented people. Independents would be better served by focusing on building new political environments first, so we can learn to talk with and work with others. Disunity is so much easier!

Break Out of County Results

Below are lists of counties where Carole and Kinky did well, as well as a spread sheet of these counties with total numbers. My thanks to Pat Aldridge Jones who helped 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
Page 7 - Divided We Stood - Independent Texans!

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 wherever you are.

Thanks y'all! Texas independents will ride -- soon -- again!

Details on the Counties

Carole Won Five Counties

Cooke, Falls, Goliad, Wharton, Wilson

Carole Came in Second in 104 Counties

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

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

Atascosa, Bandera, Bastrop, Bexar, Bosque, Brewster, Caldwell, Colorado, Cottle, Crosby, Dewitt, Donley, Fayette, Galveston, Gonzales, Grimes, Hall, Hamilton, Haskell (Perrys home county!), Hill, Howard, Jackson, Jeff Davis, Jones, Karnes, Lavaca, Lee, Liberty, Martin, Matagorda, McMullen,

Medina, Milam, Mitchell, Rains, Reagan, Refugio, San Jacinto, Stonewall, Swisher, Throckmorton, Trinity, Walker, Waller, Ward, Winkler, Wood

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

Angelina, Aransas, Brazoria, Brazos, Brooks, Burleson, Burnet, Calhoun, Callahan, Carson, Castro, Chambers, Childress, Clay, Collin, Concho, Crockett, Culberson, Deaf Smith, Delta, Denton, Dickens, Dimmit, Fannin, Fisher, Floyd, Gaines, Grayson, Hale, Hardin, Harrison, Hays, Hood, Hopkins, Houston, Hudspeth, Hunt, Hutchison, Irion, 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