

Texas politics

This one not all DeLay's fault

Texas faces a large loss of clout in Congress, due to congressional redistricting in 2003. But think twice before heaping all the blame on former House Majority Leader Tom DeLay.



Dave McNEELY

Yes, DeLay's insistence kept redistricting alive even after the Democrats managed to block it for months. But DeLay didn't act alone. The fact Texas now will have not a single committee chairman in the U.S. House is due to almost 100 other Texas officials who did DeLay's bidding.

The first step was the Legislative Redistricting Board favoring Republicans in drawing new districts for the Texas House of Representatives. The five-member special board drew the lines in July of 2001, after Republicans in the Texas Senate refused to consider the House-passed redistricting bill.

The redistricting board's members in 2001 were Attorney General John Cornyn (since elected to the United States Senate); Comptroller Carole Keeton Strayhorn; Land Commissioner David Dewhurst (since elected lieutenant governor, and thus presiding officer of the Texas Senate); acting Lt. Gov. Bill Ratliff; and House Speaker Pete Laney, the lone Democrat of the five.

Cornyn, Strayhorn and Dewhurst outvoted Ratliff and Laney, putting in place Texas House districts for the 2002 elections designed to punish senior Democrats.

That redistricting, engineered by Republican Tom Craddick of Midland, swapped out nine of Laney's 12 counties for nine other counties. More than a dozen longtimers decided to retire.

Laney didn't, and was re-elected in the Republican-leaning district in 2002. But the stage was set for a Republican to take over when Laney retired.

So the 2001 Legislative Redistricting Board vote, that brought the 2002 elections in redrawn districts, resulted in Republicans going from a 72-78 deficit to Democrats in the Texas House to an 88-62 GOP advantage in 2003.

Then came part two: congressional redistricting in the middle of the decade, for the first time without a court order. DeLay negotiated between the Texas House and Senate to reach a redistricting compromise.

Democrats in the House managed to block the redistricting in the 140-day regular legislative session — by leaving. Fifty-one — enough to break the two-thirds quorum required to do business in the 150-member House — fled to Oklahoma until it was too late in the session for it to pass.

Gov. Rick Perry called a special session to continue the effort. The first session got nowhere, as Lt. Gov. Dewhurst honored the Texas Senate tradition of requiring a two-thirds vote to bring a bill to the Senate floor for consideration.

So the governor called another one. That time, 11 Democratic senators — enough to break a quorum of the 31-member Senate — fled to New Mexico.

After 45 days, Sen. John Whitmire of Houston got cold feet and brought the stalemate to an end. Gov. Perry called a third special session, and the congressional redistricting bill was passed.

The 2004 elections with the new map resulted in Democrats suffering a net loss of six Texas seats, and dozens of years of seniority. Three of those Democrats in 2007 would have chaired committees: Martin Frost of Dallas, the agenda-setting Rules Committee; Charles Stenholm of Abilene the Agriculture Committee; and Jim Turner of Crockett the Homeland Security Committee. Frost and Stenholm lost re-election races, and Turner retired.

(During redistricting in earlier decades, Democrats certainly aided themselves. But they also drew districts that let senior Republicans keep their seats, and their seniority, rather than set them up for defeat.

So unless House Speaker-to-be Nancy Pelosi passes over more senior members to pick Silvestre Reyes of El Paso to chair the Intelligence Committee, because of the actions of Gov. Perry, Lt. Gov. Dewhurst, Comptroller Strayhorn, Sen. Cornyn, 76 Texas House members and 17 senators, the Democrats will run the U.S. House without any chairmen from Texas.

Tom DeLay made it happen, but he had plenty of help. Reach McNeely at dmcneely@austin.rr.com or (512) 323-0248.



Spinoff

Festival a hit in more ways than one

What a great day! The first ever Old Town Festival was *fun!*

The parade was Port Aransas through and through: A rag-tag affair in which we all just "mooshed" together, meandering through Old Town and landing at the Tarpon Inn courtyard.

The route was anything but traditional — which is in the best of old Port Aransas tradition. The surprise was that there were spectators all along the way!

Those who heard the tales told by long-time residents stationed in various businesses throughout the day gained an insight into what makes Port Aransas more than just another vacation spot. They might have learned that Port Aransas isn't just another destination committed to finding new ways to separate tourists from their money.

Instead, we are a community committed to one another that embraces our tourists in such a way that they are drawn to become perma-



Mary HENKEL JUDSON

nent or semi-permanent residents (we do that to people).

At the same time, those tourist dollars keep local businesses open — or not — and merchants reported that traffic on Saturday was heavy in many cases, and involved first-timers as well as regulars.

The street dance in front of Shorty's drew a crowd of spectators, dancers and music lovers, and the performance at Third Coast Theater, which was a benefit for PAPHA, was a sell-out.

Thanksgiving weekend is a time when families gather, whether they're full-time residents or part-timers who may carve the turkey in San Antonio or Austin on Thursday and head for

Port Aransas on Friday. That makes it a busy weekend and a perfect opportunity to hold a festival.

The event serves two purposes: one, to bring attention to the Port Aransas Preservation and Historical Association (PAPHA) and its current project to save the Sears/Mercer house, and two, to draw residents and visitors to shop Port Aransas.

It seems the festival served both purposes well.

Port Aransas is not, and never will be, the place it was 20 or 30 or 50 years ago; but an appreciation of, and the preservation of, our past is crucial to how we evolve into the Port Aransas of our future. Old Town Festival is a marvelous way to remind and preserve the heart of our community.

We're not just a tourist town. We're Port Aransas, and we don't want to ever forget it. Cheers to Old Town Festival 2006, and here's to Old Town Festival 2007!

Sage observations

Multi-lingual Port Aransans

Go to Port Aransas this time of the year, and if you hear somebody using words like "howdy," "What's up?" "Are y'all havin' any fun?" "How's your mom and daddy?" And you think is that the voice of a purebred Texan here in Port Aransas. Yep that's one of them things, li'l buddy.

Now listen and hear the voice of another person saying words like, "Good morning, it's a lovely day, isn't it. Nice, warm and sunny." "What is your opinion of the defeat of Penn State over Harvard?"

Yep, Port Aransas is a town of two languages this time of the year when the winter visitors mingle with the down-home Texans who call Port Aransas their home.

I love to sit and eat my pancakes in a Port

Aransas café and listen to the sound of the various voices. Like, "Hey, purty lady, would ya grab me another cup of this here coffee stuff?" Or, "Waitress, I'd like another cup of your wonderful coffee, please."

Or, "Hey dearlin', whatcha donna do when the cow comes in? I ain't gonna eat these scrambled eggs and used up pigs till you milk that cow and give me a dab of that white stuff." Or, "Uh, waitress, I'd like a glass of your sweet milk, please."



Cactus PRYOR

Then come supper time and you'll hear, "I'd like a slice of your delicious halibut with three recently obtained saltwater shrimp dressed in your marvelous sauce, and a glass of your native red wine."

Or, "Hey little lady, I'm hungry enough to eat a live stingray. Put whatever got caught today on the stove, slap some lemon and some Wooster sauce stuff on top of it, and brang me some French fries that didn't come from France last week. And somethin' colder and higher than a 3-2."

All this is a more than a slight exaggeration, but in winter there is a magical melding of those from up there with those who come from here. Thank you for comin' down and lifting us up through the winter time.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Remembering Shirley

On Nov. 3, a very good friend and mentor passed away. Shirley Whiteside always thought of me as one of her own, and I was listed as a daughter in her obituary. However, I was not truly related to her and Hershel. That did not stop us from enjoying a close relationship.

Shirley was a wonderful listener and probably the best kind. She never gave advice other than her famous words, "Just let it go, Brucette. You can't change anything or anyone, so just let it go." It was as I got older that I learned the wisdom of those words. Shirley would remind me how lucky I was to have a good and caring husband and kids. I have tried to fashion my home life on what I experienced in hers. I think it worked. I have a close-knit family that likes being together.

I realize Shirley was one of many "island mothers" for me. Not only was I lucky enough to learn from my own mother and Shirley, but I believe many Port Aransas women helped shape me into the woman I am today. Eula Mae Dreyer, Florine Ousley, Edna Mae Littleton, Peggy Nelson, Virginia Fisher, Betty Curry, Nellie Studeman, Arlene Mayer Hughes, Barbara Behrens. And there were others that I just can't remember right now. But the island women never let anyone "slip through the cracks," and I was lucky to have been raised

there. Even though my parents divorced when I was young, I never missed out or even felt left out because of all the wonderful women in my life. I was blessed, and I've been grateful every day of my life. I have learned lessons from all my "mothers". Each one has made an impact on my view of family, friends and life.

I will miss Shirley so very much, but I know she's right here with me. I hear her laugh, I see her smile and I feel her love. What more could an "island daughter" ask? Brucette Kifer Beitz
 Austin

Need to recycle

We need to recycle. When we throw away paper products, we waste resources, and it's not fair to the tree that we kill. Every ton of paper recycled saves 17 trees, two barrels of oil, 7000 gallons of water, 60 pounds of air pollution particles and enough energy to heat and cool a home for six months.

When you recycle you do a good deed. Recycling is important to me because it makes the world a better place to live in. If you think about it, all our landfills will fill up someday, so they'll have to start tearing down houses and forests to build more landfills. In the future we might not be able to have forests, which will make a home for some of your favorite animals

and plants.

My suggestion is to have a city recycle day. There will be a contest for recycled art projects and different activities, and there will be recycling boxes for free.

I hope the city council will consider my idea.

Lizzie Abbott
 Port Aransas

Retiring the colors

In the Nov. 9 issue of the *South Jetty*, I read an article that concerns me greatly. As the proud parent of two Eagle Scouts from Troop 97, Longhorn Council in Fort Worth, I feel the need to help other Scouters, both young and old, understand the proper U.S. Flag retirement procedures.

Page 7A of the Nov. 9 issue had a story and picture about Boy Scout Troop 29 doing a U.S. Flag retirement ceremony. I could not believe my eyes when I saw a U.S. Flag completely intact being dumped into the fire by two Scouts while one flag is lying on the ground partially incinerated. In the background is another Scout holding a flag in a wad.

While the intent is clearly noble and appropriate to retire the U.S. Flag when required by age or condition, it is very apparent that

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A Texas voice

Advice on how to stay alive (?)

You just can't be too specific when spelling out safety guidelines for the office ... or can you?

Following are some high, or low, points among 42 safety trips — excuse me, safety tips — from the U.S. Department of Labor's OSHA Office of Training and Education:



Steve MARTINDALE

Fans in office should be placed where they cannot fall on anybody and they should be secured in place. (Just how effective is a fan sitting above your head, any way?)

Electric key switches should be avoided because people try to key the lock with hairpins and paper clips. (Sounds like candidates for the Darwin Award.)

Extension cords should not rest on steam pipes or other metallic surfaces. (It's not like metal conducts electricity ... does it?)

Outlets should ... be placed where they will not be accidentally kicked or used as a foot rest. (Why do they stick out of the wall if they're not to be used as foot rests?)

No smoking should be allowed in mailing, shipping or receiving rooms, or where large quantities of loose paper and other combustibles or flammable liquids are stored. (No smoking around gasoline ... got it.)

Many cut fingers have resulted when people try to move fans by grasping the guard, or tried to catch falling fans. (There seems to be a trend here toward outlawing fans in the office.)

Collisions at doors can be prevented if people do not stand directly in front of the door but out of the path of its swing when they go to open it. (There goes that old "watch me walk through this door" party trick.)

Commonly, falls on stairs occur when the person is talking, laughing and turning to friends while going downstairs. Be alert while using stairways. (The only thing I want to hear coming from the stairwell is, "Look out, some fun-loving dude is rolling down the steps.")

Broken glass should be swept up immediately. (No more leaving it lying around until the weekend.)

Don't do that!

Leaning back in the chair and placing the feet on the desk should not be allowed. (The feet of the chair?)

Never store pencils in a glass on the desk with points upward. (Sounds like an idea from those who would profit from increased sales due to a sharp increase in broken pencil leads.)

Razor blades, thumb tacks and other sharp objects should not be thrown loosely into drawers. (You might consider keeping them in your pants pocket.)

Do not throw matches or cigarettes into waste baskets. (Then, just how do we burn our waste?)

Then there are these questions from an office safety and health checklist:

Are carpets well secured to the floor and free of worn or frayed seams? (Those free-floating carpets are such a nuisance.)

Do you know where emergency exits are and how to reach them? (Are those the "out" doors?)

Are file cabinets arranged so that drawers do not open into aisles? (Better yet, they only open when nobody's around — poltergeists, we think.)

Is furniture free from sharp edges, points and splinters? (We found that round drawers in round desks do not slide out into the aisles.)

Are all office tools (pens, scissors, staplers, etc.) kept in their proper places? (Yes, all the razor blades, thumb tacks and other sharp objects are thrown loosely into drawers.)

Are photocopying machines placed in well-ventilated rooms away from workers' desks? (They're at the other end of the building. We call it our company exercise program.)

Steve Martindale is a self-syndicated columnist. Write him at penmanmail-steve@yahoo.com.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR DEADLINE: MONDAY, 10 A.M.

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