



The exceptionalism backlash

President Barack Obama learned from Bill Clinton's mistakes in 1993-94. He ran, relative to Clinton, a buttoned-up transition. He sought to avoid Clinton's tactical miscues on health care.

And he steered clear of cultural land mines.

The backlash against Democrats in 1994 was famously attributed to "gays, guns and God." Obama has mostly avoided stoking opposi-

tion around that hot-button triad, but faces a backlash almost indistinguishable in feel and intensity. Why?

Big government became a cultural issue. The level of spending,

the bailouts and the intervention in the economy contemplated in health-care reform and cap-and-trade created the fear that something elemental was changing in the country -- quickly, irrevocably, without notice.

Obama has run up against the country's cultural conservatism as surely as Clinton did. But Obama is encountering its fiscal expression, the sense that America has always been defined by a more stringently limited government than other advanced countries. It's an "American exceptionalism" backlash.

The roots of our exceptionalism extend all the way back to our mother country, England, which was less centralized, hierarchical and feudal than the rest of Europe. Taking England's incipient liberalism and stretching it to its logical conclusion, we became the most liberal polity ever known to man.

We arrived in this century still a country apart. Prior to its recent run-up, total government spending remained about 36 percent of GDP in the U.S. In Europe, the figure was higher -- 44 percent in Britain, 53 percent in France and 56 percent in Sweden, and they spend less on defense than we do.

The left has long been scandalized by our cussed differentness. Progressive intellectuals last century looked to alternative foreign models like Bismarck's Germany. You can hear the same plaint in contemporary liberalism: Why can't we be more like them -- like the French, like the Swedes, like any people with a larger, busier government overwringing the private sector and civil society?

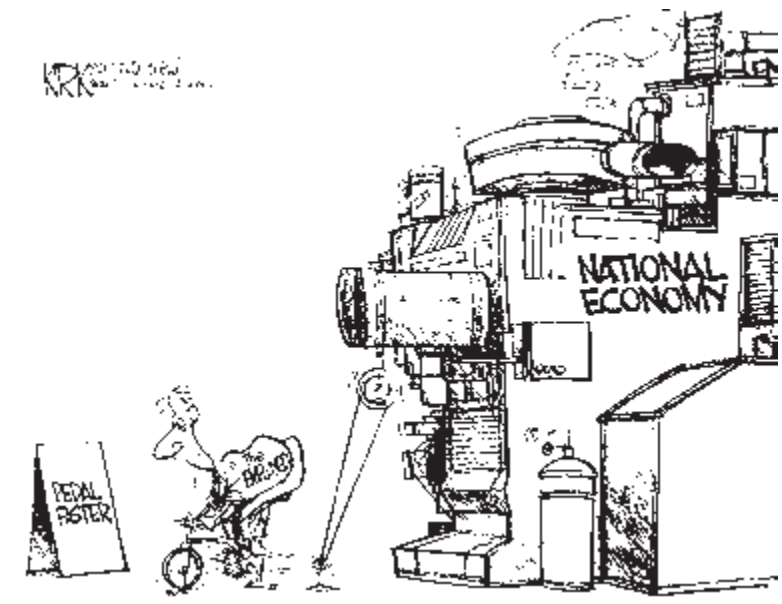
Obama is answering the call. Spending is sneaking up to European levels -- an estimated 44 percent of GDP this year -- even before the baby boomers retire. He seeks to give us European-style health-care, energy and labor policies.

Abroad, Obama has often displayed a dismaying defensiveness about his country. He appears to have an allergy both to U.S. power and to the word "democracy." In John Bolton's pungent phrase, he's a "post-American president."

All of this has created a roiling reaction. The ground troops of this revolt aren't the Christian right activists of 1994. Instead, they are tea-partiers driven by the growth of government. Their catchphrase of "taking back the country" isn't an appeal to power so much as a clarion call to preserve the foundations of the country's distinctiveness. The debt, for them, isn't just about fiscal probity, but our way of life.

Of course, the American tradition has ample room for government expansion or the welfare state wouldn't already be so large, and Obama is weighed down as well by the weak economy. But his rush to social democracy has touched a raw cultural nerve. He's avoided "God, guns and gays," and hit on something more profound.

Editorial Page



Primary results: Perry to face White in November election

AUSTIN — Gov. Rick Perry fought off two strong challengers in the March 2 Republican Party primary, positioning himself for an unprecedented third term as governor of Texas.

By drawing more than 50 percent of the vote, Perry avoided an April runoff with his closest challenger, U.S. Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, who received 30.3 percent.

Newcomer Debra Medina of Wharton followed with 18.6 percent.

Combined voter turnout for the primaries was the highest since 1992, according to the Secretary of State's office, with an estimated 2.1 million ballots cast.

In the Democratic primary, Houston Mayor Bill White took 76 percent of the vote to Houston businessman Farouk Shami's nearly 13 percent, so it will be Perry versus White in the November general election.

Perry, already the longest-serving governor in Texas history, advanced from lieutenant governor to governor when George W. Bush left for the White House in

January 2001.

He was reelected in 2002 and 2006 and now looks forward to a record third full term, but White stands in his way.

Incumbent Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst, running unopposed in the GOP primary, will face Democrat Linda Chavez-Thompson in November.

Chavez-Thompson, a long-time labor activist, got 53 percent of the vote to former Travis County District Attorney Ronnie Earle's 34 percent.

Coming in third was Austin delicatessen owner Marc Katz with 12 percent.

Other key matchups in statewide races will include:

•Incumbent Republican Attorney General Greg Abbott versus Dallas Democrat Barbara Ann Radnofsky, a Houston attorney who challenged Hutchison for her U.S. Senate seat in 2006.

•Incumbent State Comptroller Susan Combs ran unopposed in the GOP primary and no one ran for the office of comptroller in the Democratic primary.

•Incumbent Land Commission-

er Jerry Patterson, a Republican, will face Democrat Hector Uribe, a former state representative and senator from Zapata County.

•Incumbent Agriculture Commissioner Todd Staples, a Republican, will face Democrat Hank Gilbert.

Gilbert shifted from his gubernatorial campaign to run as agriculture commissioner last fall when Bill White announced for governor.

In the Democratic primary, Gilbert, an East Texas rancher, outdrew Hill Country humorist Richard S. "Kinky" Friedman, founder of Utopia Animal Rescue Ranch near Kerrville.

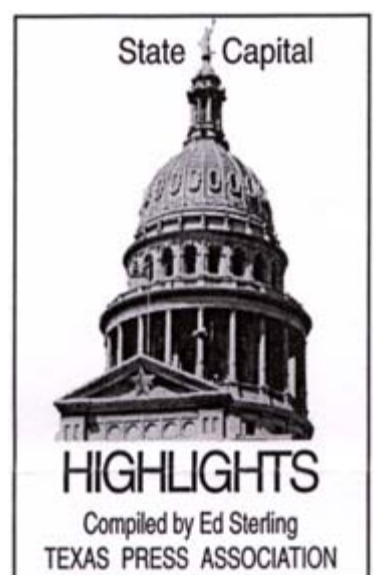
•Incumbent Texas Railroad Commissioner Victor G. Carrillo lost to Midland accountant David Porter in the Republican primary. Porter will face Democrat Jeff Weems in November.

Six incumbent state representatives lost to challengers.

For a complete listing of primary results, go to www.sos.state.tx.us.

Posthumous pardon

Gov. Perry on March 1 granted



a posthumous pardon to Timothy Brian Cole, a Texan who died in state prison in 1999 while serving a 25-year sentence for a 1985 aggravated sexual assault he did not commit.

Perry said he pardoned Cole after receiving a unanimous recommendation to do so from the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles.

More than a year earlier, a court ruled Cole was innocent after proof was confirmed through DNA testing.

Cole, who turned down an offer of parole in exchange for admitting guilt, maintained his innocence throughout his time in prison.

In 1995, five years before Cole's death, another suspect confessed to the crime. Cole died in prison of an asthma attack on Dec. 2, 1999, having served nearly 15 years of the wrongful sentence.

Independence Day site debuts

A Web site created by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department and Brenham-based Blinn College, www.txindependence.org, debuted on March 2, Texas Independence Day.

The site spotlights the convention held at Washington-on-the-Brazos in 1836 when 59 elected delegates met, signed the Texas Declaration of Independence from Mexico and created a new nation, The Republic of Texas.

Stay away from border

The Texas Department of Public Safety on March 4 urged spring break travelers to avoid border cities in Mexico.

DPS Director Steve McCraw said there is an increase in drug cartel-related violence in those cities, adding that parents should not allow their children to visit there because their safety cannot be guaranteed.

Unemployment figure repeats

On March 3, the Texas Workforce Commission reported the state's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 8.2 percent in January, the same as in December 2009.

The other side of the ballot ...

By Poncho Hernandez Jr.

I've read quite a few books, have read newspaper articles, and yes, have even watched televised programs on bad politicians -- you know, the ones that allegedly steal and get rich while their employees do all the work.

I've also read books, have read newspaper articles, and yes, have watched televised programs on the good deeds politicians perform -- yes, the ones who sacrifice their time to support our community while we stand around watching.

I've listened closely as their opponents spread rumors and have speculated if the dimmest, slightest idea of what it takes to insure good government is in their heads. I respect politicians whether they win or lose because they stand up to the abuse that's flung at them.

I'm also intrigued by the apparent lack of respect from Internet bloggers who abuse our politicians' reputation while hiding under the veil of anonymity.

I've written tons of editorials in my life, some good, some bad, and I've always posted my name on top. So when I was asked to comment on recent statements posted on the Internet my response was straightforward.

"Who wrote it?" I asked.

"Well, I'm not sure," I was told.

The response was predictable.

While I have little reverence for persons who make unfounded accusations in anonymity, I share even less respect for persons who

spread fiction without the slightest regard to the damage they invite.

My conclusion: There's little difference between politicians and the people who vote "for" or "against" them.

Of course, there are some bad politicians, but I'm proud to say that none of the candidates that appeared in the March ballot had anything to hide. If nothing else, they deserve our respect.

A second conclusion is that individuals who vote (early and on Election Day) share an equal responsibility along with the candidates they support. Politicians should be judged on their ability to perform a specific task, on their merits, and not on the rumors that float about them.

On the other hand, we should admit that our vote isn't always cast for the best candidate. There's always an underlying reason and there's always a dialogue to prove it.

Woman: "You voted for him? He didn't even go to college. Don't you know his opponent has a degree, an MBA."

Second woman: "Yes I voted

for him. I voted for him because he's my sister-in-law's brother-in-law. So I voted for him."

Woman: "So if your sister-in-law's uncle's second cousin ran you'd vote for him too?"

Second woman: "Yes, because he's my sister-in-law's uncle's second cousin. And he doesn't have an MBA either."

So I guess the politicians aren't the only ones with a vested interest on Election Day. When it comes to playing politics, it seems we're all involved.

Still, there's the question of Tuesday's election night's results.

While the election unveiled some major surprises, the good news is that the ideas laid forth by our founding fathers remain intact. Our Constitution remains well preserved and the will of the masses will always be the victor.

So, the next time you consider bashing your neighborhood politician think about your contribution to the political state of affairs. It seems the politicians aren't the only ones playing politics. That's the other side of the ballot!



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