

Texas Democrats smashed in special Senate election

by Harley Schlanger

The election victory in the race for U.S. senator from Texas by Republican Kay Bailey Hutchison over interim Sen. Bob Krueger by a better-than-two-to-one margin dominated political discussion in Washington during the second week of June. Hutchison ran up the largest victory margin ever by a Republican in a statewide race in Texas, in an overwhelming rejection of Krueger, who had been appointed by Gov. Ann Richards to Lloyd Bentsen's Senate seat. Krueger lost every county in his former congressional district, and received only 40% in south Texas, which usually provides large margins for Democratic candidates.

Although there were minor differences between them, both candidates agreed on the main policy issue, that the budget should be slashed to meet the economic crisis.

Political analysts have called the landslide "stunning," while both parties have drawn the expected political conclusions. The Republicans have declared this a "referendum" on the Clinton administration, with Texas Sen. Phil Gramm proclaiming it to be a "massive rejection" of the President. (A Mason-Dixon poll taken just prior to the June 5 vote showed that 74% of Texans gave Clinton a fair-poor rating.) At her victory party, Hutchison described the results as "a very clear message that the people of this country are tired of business as usual in Washington. They want a change."

Some Democrats rejected that analysis. Governor Richards blamed the defeat on voter "apathy" (fewer than 20% of registered voters turned out) and the timing of the special election. Krueger took some of the blame on himself, saying, "I always said I wasn't a good politician."

However, Texas Democratic Party chairman Bob Slagle echoed the Republican line, attributing the crushing defeat to "a confluence of events," including the "misadventures" of the President. Slagle's post-election analysis contrasts with his private warning to Harris County (Houston) precinct chairmen two weeks before the vote. "This is real serious

business," he told them, referring to polls showing Krueger far behind. "If we lose this election, all our butts will be down the tubes."

In his own jumbled way, Slagle's words to the Harris County Democrats reflected the truth: Voter apathy, a poor candidate, and Clinton's bungling in office were only part of the story. The deeper truth is that Slagle and his cronies have systematically wrecked the Texas Democratic Party since he was elected party chair in the summer of 1980. After 13 years of Slagle's leadership on behalf of the Harrimanite wing of the Democratic Party, Texas will be represented by two Republicans in the U.S. Senate for the first time since 1875.

Texas's Democratic tradition

A former Texas Democratic state officeholder spoke candidly in a background interview of his dismay over the collapse of his party under Slagle's leadership. "We have turned our back on the traditions of the modern Democratic Party in Texas," he lamented. "Krueger tried so hard to appeal to the 'new Democrats' that he confused the old ones, that's why they didn't come out to vote."

The Texas Democratic tradition he was referring to emerged as an important political force in pushing through the infrastructure and jobs package associated with Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. Under the leadership of Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn, Texas Democrats played a leading role in programs ranging from the Depression-era Reconstruction Finance Corp. and Rural Electrification Administration (REA), to ports and water projects. This group of Democrats, which also was key in promoting scientific and technological progress in aerospace (both through NASA and the modernization of U.S. defense capabilities), medicine, and funding for education, included Senators Lyndon Johnson and Ralph Yarborough, and former House Speaker Jim Wright.

These Texans combined a concern for social and econom-

ic justice with a healthy skepticism toward Wall Street. In the U.S. House of Representatives, both Wright Patman and Henry B. Gonzalez, who now chairs the House Banking Committee, served as watchdogs against the abuses of the privately owned and controlled Federal Reserve Bank, demanding that low-interest credit be made available for infrastructure development, and for industrial and agricultural investment. This tradition built Texas and the nation in the postwar era.

And it was this tradition which was targeted by the Harrimanites of Wall Street, who replaced it with their agenda of malthusian zero growth and deindustrialization. Initially, the Harrimanites operated in Texas via the Republican Party, with George Bush and James Baker taking the lead. Bush's father was a partner in the Harriman investment bank, and was a key funder of Adolf Hitler (see *EIR's* book, *George Bush: The Unauthorized Biography*).

Bush in 1964 ran a vicious campaign against incumbent Senator Yarborough, attacking him for his commitment to infrastructure (especially the REA) and civil rights. Though Bush failed to unseat Yarborough in 1964, he teamed up with Democrat Lloyd Bentsen to defeat him in 1970.

By then, Texan Bob Strauss, a close friend and business partner of Baker, had become the leading Harrimanite political operator in the Democratic Party. He assumed a leadership role in the national party, developing a very close relationship with Democratic doyenne and salon keeper Pamela Churchill Harriman, the wife of Averell Harriman. The Harrimanites made major gains in the Texas Democratic Party in 1972 and 1976, based primarily on their commitment to a radical social agenda and anti-science environmentalism.

Slagle versus LaRouche

Slagle, who boasts that he learned politics on Sam Rayburn's knee, was elected chairman by the Harrimanite coalition in 1980. Since that time, he has stifled policy debate within the party. A prime example of this was his collaboration with Governor Richards to keep former Attorney General Jim Mattox out of the June 5 Senate race. Mattox is known as a tough political fighter and represents, in many ways, the traditional Texas Democrats. As a congressman in the early 1980s, he was one of the few with the courage to challenge Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker in House hearings. Volcker's high interest rate policies devastated farms and industry in Texas and throughout the nation. While the Harrimanite Democrats in Texas's congressional delegation were voting for the hoaxster Phil Gramm's phony Gramm-Rudman bill, Mattox denounced it as a fraud.

Slagle and Richards conducted strong-arm tactics against Mattox to keep him out of the race. He was denied routine access to party offices and lists. They put out the word to party contributors to freeze him out. On March 10, Mattox announced he would not run for Senate, clearing the path for Krueger to run as the anointed Democrat.

The precedent for the tactics employed by Slagle against Mattox was the 13-year campaign by Slagle to defeat the influence of Lyndon LaRouche among Texas Democrats. As the Harrimanites increased their power over Texas Democrats, the LaRouche wing of the party increasingly became the center of resistance.

This began with the dramatic address by LaRouche to the 1980 state convention in San Antonio, during which he demanded that the party stand behind the traditional policy for parity pricing for farmers. It was continued by the leadership of LaRouche's allies in Texas against banking deregulation, which LaRouche prophetically warned would wipe out the S&Ls, and in the fight against the Gramm-Rudman bill. In 1984, LaRouche again catalyzed Democrats in Texas against the Reagan-Bush-Gramm "free market" insanity when he issued his call for a parity price for oil through a trigger price tariff on imported oil, to guarantee a floor price of \$26 per barrel for domestic oil.

In each of these fights, Slagle and his allies joined with the Republicans, denouncing LaRouche. In spite of the lies and slander against Democratic candidates allied with LaRouche, some of them won local races in 1984, with several candidates for county chairmen receiving over 30%.

As the LaRouche candidates movement gained momentum, Slagle allied with the Anti-Defamation League. In 1986, Slagle, acting with the ADL, used threats to force LaRouche Democrat Donald Varella to drop out of the race for Bexar County (San Antonio) chairman. Varella, who received 39% of the vote to lead in the first round, withdrew from the runoff because of harassment against him and his family. It was Slagle's policy to exclude LaRouche Democrats from official party functions whenever possible. This soon meant that all debate within the party was silenced, and the only voice allowed was that of the Harrimanites.

In 1988, LaRouche Democrat Claude Jones won the race for Harris County Democratic chairman, receiving more than 53,000 votes in beating the incumbent, attorney Larry Veselka. Slagle, in an act of dictatorial power observers described as reminiscent of Josef Stalin's tactics, first stripped Jones of his powers as party chair, then acted illegally to remove him from office. Slagle was warned at the time that such disregard for the voters, who had elected Jones, would eventually catch up with the Democratic Party. If a vote can be taken away by the arbitrary act of the state chairman, why bother to vote?

In 1990, Dallas County Democratic leaders attempted to keep African-American LaRouche activist Greg Witherspoon off the ballot in the county chair race, arguing that he is not a "true" Democrat. The tax-exempt ADL aided Slagle by planting slanders against Witherspoon in the local press. Despite their efforts, Witherspoon's candidacy was reinstated by a three-judge panel, and he received more than 36% of the vote.

There are rumors circulating that Slagle will either resign or be forced out in the wake of the Krueger debacle.