

As Texas Goes...

By Gail Collins

Open Spaces vs Crowded Places

There is a natural political divide in this country between people who live in crowded places and people who live in empty places.

- If your home turf is crowded, you will need rules to protect you from all sorts of intrusive behavior. Basically, you want a buffer between your family and the rest of the world. That buffer would be government and regulations.
- If you live in an empty place, government looks a lot different. Government is going to tax you and get in your way. It can't help you that much and appears to be telling you what you can do with your property. You are largely on your own and you like it that way.

Empty space people don't acknowledge that their actions could be impacting others, nor do they really care, i.e. dumping pesticides into the water or hunting a species into extinction. Finally, the number of people living in empty spaces is pretty small, but the organization of the U.S. Senate, and to some extent, the Electoral College system, gives them a great deal of power. This was a concern of James Madison, when the Constitution was first drawn up, but he agreed because the difference in population density was only 17 to 1 – it is far, far greater today – and that compromise was necessary to get the smaller and more lightly populated states to join the union.

The current Tea Party strain in the Republican Party is all about the empty-place ethos. And Texas is the natural leader, because it's managed to hold tight to its historic alone-on-the-prairie worldview while growing by leaps and bounds.

Gun laws are a close-to-perfect reflection of the empty-versus-crowded mind-set. If you are on your own, you might feel more secure if you have a weapon to protect yourself, but if you live in a place where police are easy to summon and strangers are constantly bumping up against you, you probably feel safer if only the cops are packing heat. The Texas creed is that the more people carrying concealed weapons the better, regardless the situation. The primary question, however, is what Texas does to the rest of us. The gun thing doesn't stop at the border. California has the most stringent gun laws in the nation, but officials in 2010 tracked 368 weapons used in crimes in California back to gun dealers in Texas. Also, nearly 15,000 guns sold in Texas wound up being used in crimes in Mexico. When it comes to guns, Texas loses its obsession with states' rights – supporting a national 'concealed carry' law that would force states to honor permits granted anywhere in the country. Fortunately for New York, this law has not yet been passed.

The state of Texas is organized so that no one in government will have much power and no one in private business will be under much control. Legislators are paid at the lowest rate for any large state and lobbyists are responsible for writing much of the legislation.

The law of empty places is that neighbors help neighbors, but once the barn is raised or the child rescued, the empty-state presumption is that the family will get back to business and take care of itself. Texas has always shown a stupendous lack of enthusiasm for ongoing social services. It ranks 2nd from the bottom in the percent of low-income people covered by Medicaid, dead last in state spending on mental health, fifth from the bottom in the maximum grant for temporary assistance to a family of three with no income (\$250/mo) and last in the average monthly benefit for poor mothers on the Women, Infants, and Children Program.

Houston (the 4th largest city in the U.S.) has no zoning because – well, zoning smacks of telling people what to do with their property. Of course, none of the anything-goes ethos applies if people have enough money – deed covenants, historic preservation laws, and even 'tiny cities' dot the landscape of Houston where there is money present.

The first key to Texas's outsized influence on the rest of the country: it's the keeper of the empty-places flame. This is in spite of the fact that six of the top twenty most populous cities in the U.S. are in the state of Texas: 4 – Houston, 7 – San Antonio, 9 – Dallas, 13 – Austin, 16 Fort Worth, 19 – El Paso.

The Single Party State

Ever since the Civil War, Texas has been a passionately one-party state. The party may change, but the passionate dedication does not. The Texas voting majority has very consistently gone wherever the African Americans are not.

During its Democratic phase Texas, like other Southern states, acquired its clout by sending savvy politicians to Washington and then keeping them there for decades, building up seniority. When these Democratic politicians switched to being Republicans, they turned out to be far righter of wing than many folks had appreciated. Once they switched sides, Texas Republicans were ready to help turn the rest of the GOP into something more aggressive, more radically conservative, and ready to do battle for the empty-place ethos.

In a one-party state with low voter turnout and high campaign costs, power flows disproportionately to anyone with the money to organize and advertise. The people with that kind of cash in Texas tend to be extremely conservative.

Financial Deregulation – the Texas Angle

Texas began applying the principles of the wide open economic spaces to its state-chartered savings and loan associations. The Reagan administration was trying to find a way to squeeze more profit out of its federally chartered S & Ls and used the Texas model of deregulation as its guideline. By the time the thrifts stopped imploding in the 1990s, 237 Texas S & Ls had failed, twice as many as the next-place state – California. In the end more than half of all the money lost in the nationwide debacle was lost in Texas. It was one of those times when Texas politicians did not complain about massive government spending.

Phil Gramm was the prime player in beating back any regulation of the financial industry when predatory lending began to create an uptick in foreclosures in 2001. He was a major player in writing the Commodity Futures Modernization Act of 2000, which allowed banks to trade, unregulated, in credit default swaps and other financial instruments so exotic that even their CEOs did not understand them. These banks were much larger than they had been in the 1980s – making them too-big-to-fail. Phil Gramm also sponsored the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act which dismantled the Depression-era regulations that kept a wall between commercial and investment banks. Phil and his wife Wendy produced a rule change desired by Enron six days before Bill Clinton took the oath of office. This allowed Enron to avoid any oversight in the business of energy derivative contracts – ultimately resulting first in energy blackouts throughout the state of California and then in the complete collapse of Enron itself.

When Phil Gramm decided not to seek reelection, he took a job as a highly paid investment banker and lobbyist for the Swiss bank UBS and continued to lobby for reduced regulation. In 2008 he became the economic adviser to John McCain's presidential campaign.

No Child Left Behind

The story of how Texas came to set the education agenda of the nation is more emotionally complicated than the one about financial regulation. It is filled with people trying to do the right thing – along with a passel of special interests. Texas – first in size, first in agricultural products, first in production of oil, seventh in wealth, and thirty-ninth in education.

When WWII began, 23% of the young men being drafted or recruited from Texas were too badly educated to qualify for the military – twice the national average. After the war ended, Texas still only required that teachers have a high school education, and rural districts routinely shut down when it was time to plant or harvest the crops.

The “Texas Miracle” began with an education bill in 1993 – two years before George W. Bush became governor – and was the result of the Texas Supreme Court threatening to close down every public school in the state if the legislature didn't find a constitutional way to equalize educational funding. First, the bill gave the schools a lot of money and second, it created an accountability system based on testing. The unintended consequences of the testing requirement were that 1) the students became much better at taking the tests that were administered, not because they were smarter, but because the teachers stressed the tests above all else – their jobs depended upon successful testing results – and 2) the state – and later the federal government – became much more involved in local schools.

By the time of the 2000 election, there was some indication that the testing was not making the students more capable, just more focused on the specific tests, but this was never really admitted, nor investigated by George W. Bush. He claimed to have a recipe for education, since he had presided over “the Texas Miracle” that turned public schools around while he was governor. Schools were being run like a business and testing was the desired measurement of success.

The No Child Left Behind program signed by Bush not only emphasized testing above all else, it also opened the door to converting the public school system to for-profit private schools who measured their performance on their profit and the approved test scores. The No Child Left Behind also let the federal government into the evaluation of state schools – something almost all Texans were horrified by. The law ran into an inherent conflict in the worldview of the Texas political establishment: how do you demand both limited government and accountability.

Today Texas ranks 36th in high school graduation rates, 49th in verbal SAT scores, 47th in literacy, and 46th in average SAT scores.

The Business of Schools

Perhaps the biggest impact of the No Child Left Behind Act will be the advancement of education privatization – similar to what happened to the military during this time. More and more educational tax dollars are going to for-profit companies. They write tests, grade the tests, provide government-subsidized tutoring if your child fails the tests, and they run the GED rescue programs for those students that do drop out. They even run more and more of the public schools themselves. The question is, “Are we getting to the point where the business interests in education are overwhelming the education interests in education?”

Texas is crazy about privatizing things and No Child Left Behind is based on a Texas model. Businesses demand an objective result because that is the only way to determine success and improve the bottom line. Education is essentially about kids practicing learning so they can deal with new and different situations in their future – not something that can be objectively measured. When this difference between business and educational goals is married to a belief in small government and concurrent lack of accountability the result is not hard to figure out. Businesses will determine the cheapest way to get the most money and this does not preclude cheating and covering up unfavorable information, with little-to-no concern for what happens to the student once they leave the educational system.

One of George Bush's contributions to American education was to take the struggling voucher movement and turn it into a burgeoning national charter school crusade. Charter schools are another way to get choice, or new ideas, into public education. They generally get most of the standard per-pupil aid, but they are exempted from the regular rules and oversight in favor of a special charter written by the sponsors – often private entrepreneurs. Within a few years, Texas had about 200 charters, and many disasters, some due to ineptitude and some due to corruption. The key has been that there is no way to correct these problems, because of the lack of accountable oversight. This too has been exported to other states.

On average, charters are having about the same success as the public schools they are supposed to be replacing. The best charters do a terrific job, but the jury is still out on whether they do so well because they are not under the thumb of the regular school bureaucracy and the teacher's unions or because they receive extra financial support from enthusiastic donors, have charismatic principals, and dedicated staff – something that also makes for stupendous traditional schools.

One thing that definitely wasn't part of the original Bush sales pitch to the public was that charters would allow public schools to become private profit centers. It turned out that under the law, a for-profit company could get a non-profit group to serve as sponsor for a charter that was almost, or entirely, the creature of the for-profit operator. While some of the sponsors were deeply involved in their schools' operation, others were perfectly happy to sit back and collect a sliver of the taxpayer funding for lending their names. By the 10th anniversary of No Child Left Behind, nearly 400,000 children around the country were being educated in public elementary, middle, and high schools run by for-profit companies. They get a steady stream of funding, but their results weren't all that terrific.

One of the fastest-growing segments of the charter world is cyber-schools. By 2011, there were an estimated 116,000 students going to school full-time in online programs run by for-profits. The profit margins could be huge – just think, no physical plant, no gym teachers or cafeteria workers. Many online teachers had far more students and made less money than their peers who worked in actual classrooms. Remember that each educational dollar that goes to these 'schools' is taken away from other public education institutions. A study by the National Education Policy Center at the University of Colorado found that only about a quarter of for-profit virtual schools met federal standards for academic progress.

The Textbook Wars

“What happens in Texas doesn't stay in Texas when it comes to textbooks”

When it comes to meddling with school textbooks, Texas is once again similar to other states, except for its size – 4.8 million textbook-reading schoolchildren as of 2011 – and the peculiarities of its system of government. The state board of education is selected in elections that are practically devoid of voters, where wealthy donors can chip in unlimited amounts of money to help their favorites win. In 2009, the nation watched in awe as the state board worked on approving a new science curriculum under the leadership of a chair who believed “evolution is hooey.” In 2010, the subject was social studies and teachers were tasked with drawing up course guidelines – working with “experts” added on by the board, one of whom believed that the income tax was contrary to the word of God in the Scriptures. Since the 1960s, the selection of school textbooks in Texas has been a target for the religious right.

The Texas State Board of Education has 15 members from 15 districts whose boundaries don't conform to congressional districts and they run in staggered elections that are frequently held in off years, when the always-low Texas turnout is particularly abysmal. The advantage tends to go to candidates with passionate, if narrow, bands of supporters, particularly if those bands have rich backers. Texas once had a board member who believed that public schools are the tool of the devil.

Texas originally acquired its power over the nation's textbook supply because it paid 100% of the cost of all public school textbooks, as long as the books in question came from a very short list of board-approved options. The books on the Texas

list were likely to be mass-produced by the publisher in anticipation of heavy sales, so other states liked to by them and take advantage of the economies of scale.

As a market, the state was so big and influential that national publishers tended to gear their books toward whatever Texas wanted. Given the high cost of developing a single book, the risk of messing with Texas was high. California, which has the most public school students, focuses its system of textbook approval only on books for the lower grades, thus giving Texas great power over publishers producing books for the higher grades.

Students all around the country will be feeling the effect of Texas on their textbooks for years, if not generations. That's because the school board's most important contribution has not been to make textbooks inaccurate, but to make them unreadable. The typical textbook is composed of a general narrative sprinkled liberally with "boxes" or sidebars highlighting trends, individuals, social issues, or historical events. As the textbook wars mounted, those boxes multiplied like gerbils, because it is the ideal place to stash the guy who broke the motorcycle speed record or mini-biographies of prominent women and minorities. In an era of computerized publishing, changing the boxes is easy. The problem comes when the publisher has to change the narrative, something endless committees of experts may have labored over at the cost of millions of dollars. All the bickering and pressuring over years has caused publishers to shy away from using the kind of clear, lively language that could raise someone's hackles. The result is unreadable mush. Texas has been particularly good at making things mushy.

The legacy is that current textbooks have lost their compelling narrative. Texas certainly didn't single-highhandedly mess up American textbooks, but its size, its purchasing heft, and the pickiness of the school board's endless demands certainly made it the trend leader. While Texas has never managed to get evolution out of American science textbooks, it's been far more successful in helping to make evolution – and history, along with everything else – seem really, really boring.

Speedy the Sperm and Friends

"If you teach kids about sex, kids will start having sex."

One of the interesting things about the empty-place ethos is that the theory about leaving people alone to do whatever they want does not apply *at all* when it comes to sex.

If we lived in a world where parents and teachers always got their first choice when it came to teenagers' sexual behavior, Texas would be so in the vanguard. In 2009, the Texas Freedom Network, a liberal nonprofit – yes there are some of those in Texas – funded a study to find out what was going on in Texas sex education classes. They got documents from more than 96% of the school districts and concluded that "abstinence-only programs have a stranglehold on sexuality education in Texas public schools." More than 94% gave that instruction exclusively, while a small percentage completely ignored the rule that said they had to have *something*.

Most districts got their materials – and sometimes their speakers – from private vendors marketing programs. If non-abstinence methods of preventing pregnancy came up in the class material at all, it was almost invariably in terms of condom failure rates. One program, "Why kNOw?" has the poor teacher construct an 18-ft-long model known as "Speedy the Sperm" to demonstrate condoms' alleged failure to guard against STDs.

Almost 30% of Texas school districts simply relied on one of the four state-approved health textbooks, whose publishers generally opted for self-censorship and obfuscation. Three of them never mentioned the word "condom," while the fourth mentioned it exactly once. Besides incoherence, the study was able to document a factual error in 41% of the school districts in the state.

The state of Texas has the third-highest rate of teenage births in the country, and the second-highest rate of repeat births to teenage girls. In 1992 California's teen birth rate was about the same as Texas – 74 births/1000 women between 15-19, while Texas had 79 births/1000 women. California committed to do something about it in its education system and by 2008, when Texas's fertility rate was 63 births/1000, California's was 39.5 births/1000 and continuing to drop.

The consequences of a large number of teenage births are that the mother is more likely to drop out of school, live in poverty, and remain a single parent. The children themselves are more likely to experience abuse or neglect, end up on foster care, and, if they are male, to end up in prison. Still, if you didn't know better, you'd think there was a concerted effort in Texas to increase the number of children being born to teenage parents. The state is also one of the most restrictive in the country when it comes to teen access to birth control, and it is one of only four states that don't cover contraception under the federal Children's Health Insurance Program. In 2011, the legislature also cut two-thirds of the funding for family planning. It was impossible to get rid of the last bit, since it comes from a federal program specifically for family planning, but there has been discussion that the state might not renew the grant.

All this is an introduction to how this situation begins to impact the rest of the nation. Texas has the second-highest birth rate in the country after Utah, and nearly 60% of the women giving birth in Texas are low-income enough to qualify for Medicaid. Medicaid is a federal program and more than half of the \$1 billion federal monies allocated to Texas is paid by federal taxpay-

ers. This is in addition to the fact that many of these poor and poorly educated children will migrate to other states and become burdens on their social and education systems.

Cool to Global Warming

Texas has a long history of hostility to environmental regulation, as befits its status as a place where everybody feels as if they're in the wide open spaces. The great tradition of Texas has been not to protect, but to extract. "Texans had spent most of five generations trying to wring a living out of the land, and they associated environmentalism with flower children and other nonsense." historian James Haley

The period after the 1994 elections was the first bellow of the louder, more aggressive, and far more conservative new Republicanism. The Texas Republicans were bent on reducing all regulation of the energy industry (Dick Armey, Tom DeLay, Joe Barton).

As governor, George W. Bush's refrain when it came to the environment was "Let Texans run Texas." His appointments were to take members of private industry and allow them to oversee regulation of the industries they came from. He was for voluntary compliance with regulations and the state stopped making surprise inspections of the plants it did regulate, during his term in office. As president, George W. Bush made Dick Cheney his energy czar and implemented the same policies he had championed as Texas governor.

The Texas attitude on global warming: "It's the arrogance of man to think that man can change the climate of the world. Only nature can change the climate." - *Tom DeLay*

Texas produces the most greenhouse gases in the nation, what with one thing (energy production) and another (energy use). During the George W. Bush presidency, the EPA announced that it had no authority to regulate carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions in order to halt climate change. It took a Supreme Court ruling in 2007 to force the EPA to announce regulatory plans. Texas was the only state that refused to join in the program and, instead, led a consortium of states in suing the EPA. Texas is the 12th largest emitter of carbon dioxide in the world and no one should be able to reasonably argue that reducing carbon dioxide emissions in Texas wouldn't have a positive effect locally.

By the end of 2011, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality edited out all mention of climate change and sea-level rise from its 200-page scientific study and every scientist involved in the project demanded his or her name be removed from the report.

The Texas Miracle, Part II

Over the last decade Texas has replaced New York as the nation's second largest economy – California being the largest. Rick Perry: "As the state of California continues to support legislation that causes undue burden and taxation on companies doing business in the Los Angeles area, I invite you to consider your future in America's new land of opportunity, the state of Texas."

The keys to Texas business attraction:

- No income tax
- More business-friendly incentive like the Enterprise Fund
- A business friendly regulatory climate
- Handcuffing trial lawyers

Tax-wise, the thing businesses love most about Texas is that it has no income tax, therefore they rely heavily on sale tax – as regressive a levy as you can invent, short of tax on children. It averages out at more than 8% once the local governments get their extra taste. So it turns out, Texas is a low-tax state only for people with lots of income. The bottom 20% of residents pay more than 12% of their income in state and local taxes, while the top 20% pay about 3.3%. Rule One: To join the Texas job-growth derby, begin by making sure poor people pay a disproportionate share of the freight.

On the business side, Texas had long made its money off a complicated levy known as the franchise tax, which fell heavily on some firms while leaving many others untouched. Meanwhile, the localities and school districts got their funds mainly from the property tax, which was also relatively high on average in Texas, and hard on large-space enterprises like manufacturing. Rule Two: Low-ball the taxes you are actually imposing. In 2006 the legislature replaced the franchise tax with a margin tax on businesses and the state wound up collecting \$12.5 billion a year less than they had budgeted for.

The Enterprise Fund, the Emerging Technology Fund, and a special fund for movie-making are used to bribe – um, *incentivize* – businesses to relocate in Texas. In recent years they have been the largest programs of their kind in the country. Putting aside the desirability of having one state bribe businesses to relocate to another state within the country, these funds are paid for out of state taxes. If one state bribes a business in another state, then the other state bribes the business to remain, exactly how does that help the taxpayers in either state? How many new jobs are created nationwide? It doesn't even work

well in Texas because businesses promise to add new jobs in Texas, then produce far fewer than promised – but they keep the incentive used to bring them there.

Lack of regulation might be another key for companies currently residing in much more heavily regulated California. The first companies considering this move would be those under threat of heavy fines due to environmental violations. Now Texas gets these companies, with all their loose environmental standards, and the people in Texas get to pay for the fouled water and polluted air created. When Texas officials brag about their hatred of business-unfriendly restrictions, they don't generally point to lax enforcement of laws against water or air pollution – even though Texas has the most polluted toxic discharges into waterways in the country.

Lastly, the most important thing to happen to Texas is tort reform. Companies have expanded into Texas because they were largely driven by steps the state has taken to cap non-economic damages in medical malpractice suits and to make it harder to bring product liability and class-action cases.

It is so difficult to collect that the number of lawyers willing to work for people who can only pay a percentage of their final court settlement has substantially been reduced. Now you can't find a lawyer and, if you could, you could collect only pennies on the dollar for your injuries or damages.

The caps on malpractice awards were supposed to draw more doctors to Texas, and it has. They just aren't settling in the areas where they are most needed – in the empty spaces. Medicaid reimbursement rates are so low that doctors are discouraged from going anywhere there are a lot of poor people – especially if they are spread far apart. Also, overall health care spending has risen more in Texas than the national average. Medical practitioners and their suppliers organized everything to maximize financial returns – like the sub-prime lenders. Once again, concerning Medicaid, we should recall that these are our federal dollars being spent to line Texas doctors and suppliers pockets.

If you don't have money then don't get hurt in Texas. Only one state in the union doesn't require large employers to take part in a state-regulated workers' compensation system, which provides people with medical benefits and support if they're injured on the job. Texas – which has the lowest workers' compensation coverage in the country – about a third of the businesses have left the system and gone off on their own. There are two kinds of businesses who opt out: 1) small employers who operate on the margins – unfortunately that's a lot of the most dangerous occupations, like construction – and 2) Fortune 500 companies. Texas law now limits lawyer's compensation in these cases so much that there are now only about 30 lawyers state-wide that have significant worker's compensation practices. With most Texas workers not being unionized, the chances of anyone getting a lawyer are small, particularly for low-paid workers with an unsensational injury.

Big employers often set up their own privatized systems and those plans are not under state regulation. They often provide limited benefits and have narrow windows of opportunity to qualify – like reporting your request for benefits before the end of the shift you were working on.

Other reasons for job growth in Texas that should be considered by states wishing to follow the Texas model:

Have oil: the Texas economy tends to follow the price of oil.

Avoid being in the Snowbelt: People in the U.S. are migrating to the Sunbelt.

Abolish sex education: This keeps the population young and young people like to spend more money than do old people.

Share a border with Mexico: The total impact of Mexico on the Texas economy is impossible to account, given that billions of involves the illegal drug trade, but the legal trade between violence-torn Juarez and El Paso is more than \$70 billion. Of course that doesn't count the sale of guns to Mexican drug lords.

Hitch a free ride: Texas is hitching a free ride on the back of other states and if we were all like Texas, the entire system would simply collapse – i.e. low spending on higher education (Texas has two tier-one public universities while California has 10 and New York has 8), but importing graduates from other states,

In Texas, public employment makes up about 17.8% of the workforce, compared to 16.9% in the country as a whole. The Texas public sector created over 47% of the net new jobs since the beginning of 2007. Some of these jobs – like military bases – are the responsibility of the federal government. Texas was built by government assistance of one kind or another – rural electrification and Eisenhower-era roads – and the state simply could not compete in the modern world if these federal programs hadn't modernized a state that wasn't suited for life in the current economic world.

Texas ranks first in creating jobs at or below the minimum wage, although in 2011 it managed a tie with Mississippi. Nearly 10% of hourly workers are paid at or below the minimum wage. Of all the jobs Texas added in 2010, 37% fell in this category – which is also the group that pays 12% of their income in state and local taxes. California, Florida, and Illinois combined did not have as many people as Texas earning minimum wage or less in 2010.

Texas is the poster child for economic inequality. Is this the state we want to emulate?

The Other Side of the Coin

“Welcome to Texas. You won't Pay Much and You'll Get What You Pay For”

Some Texans, particularly the wealthy, pay low taxes. But virtually no one gets much support from the state. Even if they're poor – or need services.

“Everything's bigger in Texas, including our poverty and hunger”

When we think about what a low-service state fails to do, we tend to focus on social services. But there are a lot of other things that we instinctively expect to be taken care of, and Texas doesn't – Necessarily – In all cases.

Weather is no small matter in Texas, which actually has some of the worst in the country. Yet Texas spends virtually nothing trying to keep track of weather and climate data. You do not think of Oklahoma as a big spender when it comes to state services, but it manages to cough up enough cash to try to figure out where the next disasters are going to strike, and warn its citizens about what might happen and how to prepare for it.

The low-service state story is mainly about things that happen to the poor and helpless. Let's start with mental illness. Unless you are suffering from schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or severe depression, you will not get treatment in Texas if you are poor unless you are threatening to harm yourself or others. State law stipulates that these are the only disorders the state is to treat. The state is 50th in per capita mental health spending and, when this is the situation, what is happening looks a lot like rationing. Texans with mental illness are estimated to be eight times more likely to end up in jail than in a mental hospital – 48th among all states (thank you Arizona and Nevada). Effectively, the jails in Texas are serving as the mental hospitals, however, they don't have any doctors to treat mental disorders.

One of the reasons so few Texans have health insurance is the much-touted business-friendly culture that shies away from the idea that employers have any responsibility to their workers beyond the occasional paycheck. Another is that the state is 2nd from the bottom in its spending on Medicaid – if a working mother with two children makes \$5000/yr she doesn't qualify for Medicaid. Four states have lower cutoffs for Medicaid – Arkansas, Alabama, Louisiana, and Missouri. All four of these states combined account for half the uninsured wandering around Texas.

What do uninsured do when they get sick? If they live in an urban area they can go to the county hospital, which is obligated to see everybody, but reserves the right to charge anyone who doesn't qualify for free treatment. In rural areas the nearest hospital can be hours away. Waiting time in an emergency room can sometimes be measured in days, not hours.

So many people don't go to hospitals that some teaching hospitals send residents to southern Texas to study disease, because the diseases can only be found in that part of the country – leprosy, dengue fever. What this means for the rest of us is we have untreated carriers of communicable diseases, along with many, many people with untreated chronic conditions. All of them have every right to move to other states and present themselves to the local emergency room or state-funded clinic for treatment.

You would think the fairest thing would be for the country to come up with a plan that makes sure everyone has health insurance – then the people who have the capacity to pay for this coverage will have to do so and those who don't will still get help. What do Texans call this? – rationing.

We've Seen the Future and It's Texas

San Antonio, the 7th largest city in the U.S., is a majority Hispanic and moving toward two-thirds. Texas is already a majority minority state and will soon become a majority Hispanic state. These facts have driven the state to have the toughest voter identification laws in the country. The problem for Hispanics is that registered Hispanic voters are even less likely to vote than are registered Anglo, and voter turnout is not exactly a strength in Texas.

There's nowhere that points to the future more than Houston, the 4th largest city in the U.S., where the exurbs keep growing, but the new arrivals from the city are different from the generations that preceded them in one way: they're Asian, Hispanic, and black. “We've run out of white folks to flee.” - *Richard Murray, director of the Survey Research Institute at the University of Houston*