

HARVEY KRONBERG'S QUORUM REPORT

TEXAS POLITICS REPORTING SINCE 1981

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HK: Will the upcoming session be driven once again by fear of the next Republican primary?

Democratic implosion in November consigns the Texas general election back to the trash heap; perhaps a session truncated by the pandemic is a good thing after all

Of course **Ted Cruz** would be one of the Senators objecting to certifying the electoral college. Like his counterpart **Josh Hawley** of Missouri, Cruz has a world class legal education, clerked for a *Supreme Court Justice* (Rehnquist), and was a brilliant litigator when serving as Texas solicitor general. Like Hawley, he knows full well this is show business, not preserving and defending the Constitution. Some of the same arguments promoted by Cruz and his allies to challenge the results would also disqualify Texas' votes for Trump since Governor **Greg Abbott** changed election rules without the consent of the *Legislature*.

This political theater is a freebie since it has little chance of success but does put Cruz on the short list announcing his candidacy for President in 2024. Perhaps more to the point, it is also symptomatic of what may be coming in the next Legislative session

So enough of the obvious.

It got me to thinking. With the exception of the presidency, the Democrats turned in a humiliating performance in the national election but particularly in Texas where the Legislature is set to convene essentially unchanged despite estimates of Democratic spending somewhere between \$40 million and

\$60 million.

Yes, politics is volatile but the pathetic Democratic performance in a redistricting cycle all but guarantees they are sidelined as a serious legislative force for at least half of the next decade. And forget statewides. Who would give money to Texas Democrats now?

One Democratic graybeard noted that Chairman **Gilbert Hinojosa**'s "deep dive" rehab panel does not have one forensic accountant to figure out where all that money went, and suspicions run deep – among some – of a big skim.

Meanwhile, those House Republicans that were on the receiving end of the tidal wave of Democratic money are waiting with bated breath for the next ethics report to find out the funding sources. When asked what the basic legislative agenda will be besides the budget and redistricting, I only half-jokingly respond "revenge."

The darkest outcome of the Democratic implosion is maybe less obvious but certainly more dramatic.

Democrats firmly established that Texas remains a Republican state and have found no rhetorical or mechanical way to undermine the GOP. And after the next redistricting, that will be institutionalized for at least half a decade. Hell, even the presumed Latino deliverance of Democratic future triumphs went out the window in the last election.

Despite misadventures last session, the surprise success of Democrats winning *Texas House* seats in 2018 and nearly knocking off Cruz and Lt. Gov. **Dan Patrick** had Republicans worrying about the general election for the first time in two decades. Prior to that, since 1998, the only election that mattered had been the Republican primary which, like the Democratic primary often penalizes any hint of moderation. But with the general election a serious concern, Republicans in 2019 arguably turned in their best performance of actual meaningful governance in years. They reframed their party after the disastrous and tragically silly bathroom session of 2017.

Now it appears the November election is back off the table as a serious concern and the primary once again dominates. Primary voters on both sides of the aisle are typically the least rational and most

inflamed of voters. The Republican platform contains hundreds of policy nostrums.

And in case anyone doubts, the new Republican Party Chair **Allen West** will have regular press releases, press conferences, and rallies criticizing GOP officeholders. He has already sued the Governor and called presumptive Speaker **Dade Phelan** a traitor for getting along with known Democrats.

So once again, Texas' 28 million folks will be governed by 1.3 million primary voters. To put it another way: 675,000 Republicans control the conversation in Austin.

As postmortems go, we anticipate little of real worth in Chairman Hinojosa's deep dive.

Suffice it to say, the biggest casualty of 2020 is the 2022 general election and that cannot be good. Neither side puts its best foot forward when the general election is irrelevant. Perhaps the presumed pandemic-truncated session is a good thing after all.

By Harvey Kronberg

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