



Lone Star Liberty

The Official Monthly Newsletter of the Libertarian Party of Texas
February 2007

TEXAS WORKING TO RETAIN STAFF

The Libertarian Party of Texas is fighting to retain its paid staff through a \$48,000 fund raising appeal. Executive Director Wes Benedict and Assistant Director Arthur DiBianca have gone on half-pay until the results of the appeal are completed Feb 28.

“This is priority 1. There is nothing more critical to our efforts than retaining Wes and Arthur,” says state chair Pat Dixon.

Benedict was hired at the June 2004 convention of the Texas LP following his leadership in a successful ballot access petition drive. “This petition project retained the LP on the ballot at the same time that the Ralph Nader campaign fell short. Wes recruited a record number of candidates in the 2006 elections, deployed over 4,000 yard signs and almost a quarter million door hangers promoting the party. The result was a significant improvement in the election results. Notably, there were 6 major party candidates for the Texas legislature that lost by a smaller margin than the Libertarian votes in those races.

Dixon states that this has caught the attention of state legislators. “I recently received an unsolicited call on my cell phone from the office of the speaker of the Texas house of representatives. We were able to meet with them and discuss a bill we are filing to eliminate some of the egregious ballot access restrictions in Texas. I believe this is unprecedented in the history of the Texas LP and demonstrates our growing influence and effectiveness. When the speaker calls, we know we are making a difference.”

The funding is required to ensure the staff can be retained for the 2008 elections.

Benedict states “I’ve invested over a quarter of a million dollars worth of my time, plus \$23,208 in contributions over the past four years. I can’t carry that much of the burden anymore, unless I know we can succeed in 2008.”

As of 6 February 2007, the party has received \$28,087.00 in donations, 58.5% of the goal.

If you’d like to discuss making a donation of at least \$300 or a recurring monthly pledge of at least \$25, please call Wes Benedict directly at 512-442-4910.

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Volume 17, Issue 2
February 2007

Available monthly online at
www.lptexas.org



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Submissions of party news, meeting minutes, photographs, suggested websites, letters to the editor, etc. are encouraged. Please send to Laura@libertyworks.org or to bcunningham2@verizon.net to submit.

Libertarian activists who are interested in volunteering as reporters, editors, columnists, etc. can join our working group at Lonestarliberty@yahooroups.com.

Federal data shows Capital Metro is a taxpayer's nightmare

From the Austin Libertarian Transportation Committee
Reprinted from Austin Liberator

The Austin Libertarian Transportation Committee (ALTC) has examined recently released 2005 data from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), and found that Capital Metro is becoming an increasingly bad deal for taxpayers.

Data for the year 2005 from the FTA's National Transit Database show that Capital Metro remains one of the most taxpayer-unfriendly bus agencies in America, according to several metrics.

The ALTC compared the 100 transit agencies with the most directly-operated bus service. Capital Metro ranked 99th in fare recovery ratio (i.e., the percentage of expenses paid by passengers). Capital Metro's ratio was 5.2%. "That number is staggeringly low," said ALTC member Arthur DiBianca. "It means that Austin-area taxpayers are forced to subsidize a bigger share of bus service than almost any other city in America."

Capital Metro also ranked 99th in average fare per bus passenger. Capital Metro charged an average of 17.9 cents per passenger. "Riders are practically riding for free," said DiBianca. "Riders need to pay a reasonable share of the cost, and the current level is just not reasonable."

Capital Metro's overall bus operating expenses continued to skyrocket. Capital Metro reported total bus operating expenses of \$97.0 million, up from \$89.2 million in 2004. The 2005 operating expense per passenger mile was \$0.93, up from \$0.79 in 2004. "93 cents per passenger mile is shockingly high," said DiBianca. "By comparison, AAA estimates that a single-passenger SUV costs 59-79 cents per passenger mile, and a single-passenger small sedan costs 38-51 cents per passenger mile. Capital Metro's persistent cost growth is bad news for local taxpayers."

Capital Metro's bus ridership fell. Capital Metro reported 32.4 million bus passenger trips, down from 35.1 million in 2004. Back in 1999, Capital Metro reported 35.7 million bus passenger trips. "Despite skyrocketing spending, absurdly low fares, and population growth, Capital Metro has not

been able to get more people on its buses. It's a failure," said DiBianca.

CONCERNS ABOUT RAIL

Capital Metro's future rail plans are an additional concern for taxpayers. ALTC member Steve Ravet commented, "Capital Metro's continually sinking fiscal performance shows no sign of finding the bottom. We have serious concerns about Capital Metro's ability to add train and streetcar service without accelerating both the erosion of bus service and the taxpayer burden."

CAPITAL METRO TAX BURDEN - THE BIG PICTURE

Capital Metro's 2006 budget anticipated collecting \$129.1 million in local sales tax. In a service area of approximately 738,000 residents, that indicates a tax of \$175 per capita per year.

DiBianca commented, "Although the tax is not entirely collected directly from individuals, we believe that, like all taxes, it additionally burdens taxpayers by putting downward pressure on the local economy."

DiBianca continued, "We find it ironic that an agency so often called on to 'help the poor and needy' acts to make many local residents poorer and needier. After all, not every low-income resident rides the bus—but every low-income resident pays the Capital Metro sales tax."

RECOMMENDATIONS

The ALTC has several recommendations for restructuring Capital Metro to improve its accountability and reduce its burden on taxpayers.

1. Restructure Capital Metro's board (direct elections)

Capital Metro is controlled by a seven-member board of directors, chosen as follows:

- Two council members appointed by the Austin City Council;
- One Commissioner appointed by the Travis County Commissioners Court;
- One mayoral representative appointed by the mayors of the suburban cities of Travis County;

- One representative appointed by a panel made up of the mayors of the suburban cities of Williamson County, the County Judge, and the presiding officer of each municipal utility district located outside Travis County but within Capital Metro's service area;

- Two members at large appointed by the Capital Area Metropolitan Planning Organization (CAMPO).

Although five of these members are “elected officials,” all of them are really appointees of other bodies. No one is elected to serve on the Capital Metro board.

The board has independent authority to set Capital Metro’s sales tax rate. The rate is currently at its maximum level of 1 percent.

Legislation passed in 1995 required Capital Metro to hold an election if it wanted to increase its tax rate. However, shortly before that legislation took effect, Capital Metro raised its tax to the maximum rate of 1 percent, and has not lowered it since then, even though its expenses were generally far below that level. The Capital Metro board chose in part to hoard the excess in anticipation of expanded services, before those services had been approved.

The Capital Metro board is regularly lobbied by vendors, riders’ groups, public transit activists, and members of the StarTran union. However, there has never been a strong voice for taxpayers. This may be largely due to the fact that individual taxpayers have less at stake than members of these other groups, and therefore have less motivation to lobby. However, the fact that Capital Metro’s board members are not directly elected may make taxpayers feel impotent, and that may also dissuade them from taking the time and effort to lobby.

The ALTC recommends that the Texas Legislature adopt legislation to have Capital Metro’s board of directors elected directly by the residents of its service area. We think this is especially appropriate, considering that Capital Metro has independent taxing authority.

2. Fare increases

Except for a brief period when Capital Metro charged no fares for its bus service, Capital Metro’s baseline fare has stayed constant at \$0.50 since 1985. Because of transfers, fare discount programs, and free boarding for several segments of passengers, the average fare is much lower. According to the National Transit Database, the average fare collected by Capital Metro’s directly operated bus service in 2005 was 17.9 cents.

The ALTC finds this average fare is far too low, for the following reasons: a) It leaves far too great a burden on local taxpayers.

b) It encourages joyriding and overuse by frequent riders, which artificially inflates ridership data.

c) Without a strong pricing mechanism to gauge demand, Capital Metro cannot efficiently allocate service. As a result, it tends to “throw bus routes” all over the service area.

The ALTC recommends that Capital Metro increase its fares, and eliminate most discount programs.

3. Improved fare recovery

Capital Metro’s directly-operated bus service has shown a fare recovery ratio of around 5 percent for the last several years. The national average fare recovery ratio has been about 28 percent for several years.

The ALTC recommends that Capital Metro set a policy that it will achieve a fare recovery ratio of 30%. In order to achieve this ratio, Capital Metro would have to raise fares and reduce expenses by eliminating underused service and seeking cost savings. All of those changes would enable Capital Metro to reduce its burden on taxpayers.

ABOUT THE COMMITTEE

The Austin Libertarian Transportation Committee is a group of local Libertarian transportation activists, including Steve Ravet, Vincent May, and Arthur DiBianca.

SOURCES

Capital Metro’s 2006 budget may be found here: <http://www.capmetro.org/docs/Budget.pdf>

The National Transit Database (NTD) web site is here: <http://www.ntdprogram.com> Current and past NTD profiles for Capital Metro:

www.ntdprogram.com/ntdprogram/pubs/profiles/2005/agency-profiles/6048.pdf
www.ntdprogram.com/ntdprogram/pubs/profiles/2004/agency_profiles/6048.pdf
www.ntdprogram.com/ntdprogram/pubs/profiles/2003/agency_profiles/6048.pdf
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www.ntdprogram.com/ntdprogram/pubs/profiles/1997/agency_profiles/6048.pdf

Information on AAA automobile cost estimates:

www.pacebus.com/sub/vanpool/cost_of_driving.asp

What is a libertarian?

Reprinted from Austin Liberator

Here’s local libertarian Daniel M. St. Andre’s opinion:

Libertarians believe that every person is the absolute owner of his or her own life as long as he respects the liberty of others. Government should engage in the minimum amount of initiatory force (such as levying taxes to provide some public goods such as defense, law, and roads, as well as some minimal regulation), because we believe it helps to ensure maximum individual freedom. We also believe that a free market can adequately provide these functions in most cases when government gets out of the way. Libertarians generally do not oppose force used in response to initiatory aggressions such as direct attack, physical violence, fraud or trespassing subject to the respect for liberty mentioned above.

If you would like to write a brief description of what you think a libertarian is for possible publication in this space, write cattledriver2002@yahoo.com for *Austin Liberator* or bcunningham2@verizon.net for *Lone Star Liberty*.

Bexar County LP Calls for Volunteers for Outreach

The Bexar County LP is calling for volunteers to help with recruiting tables, as they are in dire need of new members and especially Libertarian activists to help us “spread the word”! There are people already committed to running recruiting tables; but they need some more help with these efforts.

If you are interesting in helping, contact Carl, thecrusadingpagan@yahoo.com

LPT Finances

Dear Texas Libertarian,

I'll be honest with you. Sometimes the LP of Texas has spent money with little or nothing to show for it.

The last few years have been different. The end of David DeLamar's term and the beginning of Pat Dixon's term saw donations from you and me turned into a successful petition drive.

Then came the hiring of Wes Benedict, which meant our money was turned into full-time activity taking care of tasks which simply would not have gotten done had we continued to rely on unpaid labor.

Then last year saw our donations turned into literally hundreds of thousands of door-hangers and thousands of yard signs, *and* – most impressive of all, the *distribution* of 225,000 of those door hangers (written so that the remaining ones can still be distributed), and the placement of 4,000 of the yard signs (also worded to allow future use of those remaining).

Now, however, the LPT faces a financial crisis. We're low enough on funds that we may not be able to retain Wes Benedict, who's already sacrificed tens of thousands of dollars in potential income (not even counting what he's donated!) in order to work for us. In fact, he was not paid his full compensation last month.

Nor do we have enough funds to continue building the LPT in support of our goal of winning more local, non-partisan races.

And the 2008 elections are drawing ever closer.

We simply must retain Wes and his assistants, and build our treasury back up to where we can have an impact on Texas politics this year and next.

Many of your Texas Libertarian colleagues have already contributed. Please join them, either by mailing a contribution to the address below or going to the website to donate on-line. Thanks!

For Liberty,
Jeff Daiell
<http://www.tx.lp.org/>
LP of Texas
P.O. Box 41059
Austin, Texas 78704-0018

Epic Competition - Harris vs Travis County - In The Struggle of Good vs Better ...

To: Residents of Harris County, Texas
From: Guy McLendon,
guy@mclendon.net, Chair Harris County LP

My fellow Libertarians,

Texas Executive Director Wes Benedict & Chair Pat Dixon gave us a challenge, and I for one intend to meet this head on . The prize is that Texas will retain the best state executive director team in the USA . if we meet the challenge.

For new donations, here's my offer: from my personal account, I will provide matching funds to match the next \$600 that is donated by residents of Harris County. When you send checks to Texas LP, please write the words HARRIS COUNTY in the "for" section of your check. Please let me know you'll donate & how much, and I'll keep a log of pledges. Status of matching fund usage will be posted on HCLP Yahoo Group. Once all \$600 of matching funds are accounted for . I'll send in a check for \$600 .

Further, addressing my fellow county chairs throughout Texas, I challenge you to initiate a similar matching fund program for the respective activists in your county. Consider the gauntlet has been thrown down .

TCLPActive] results from KLBJ Talkfest

From: Arthur DiBianca,
adibianca@austintx.net

Yesterday [27 January], several volunteers, including me, Wes Benedict, Pat Dixon, Rock Howard, Matt Finkel, Gricha Raether, Nancy Neale, Yvonne Schick, Mike Burris, and Michael Badnarik, gave the World's Smallest Political Quiz to people attending KLBJ's Talkfest at the convention center.

By my count, 185 people took the quiz, and 137 scored in the libertarian section (or borderline). That's 74%. KLBJ obviously attracts libertarian-leaning people.

We got contact information for about 70 people, and several joined the LP.

Events

6 February 2006 Monthly TCLP business meeting. 6:45 - 8:30 p.m. Old Quarry Branch Library, 7051 Village Center Drive, Austin. 6:45 - 8:30 p.m. Social hour at 8:30 p.m. at the nearby El Arroyo restaurant, 7032 Wood Hollow Drive. Visitors welcome at both events.

20 February 2007 Bexar County LP General Meeting, 7:00 PM China Bay Chinese buffet, 1007 NW Loop 410, San Antonio, TX 78213, (210)524-9333

20 March 2007 Bexar County LP Business Meeting, 7:00 PM China Bay Chinese buffet, 1007 NW Loop 410, San Antonio, TX 78213, (210)524-9333

17 April 2007 Bexar County LP General Meeting, 7:00 PM China Bay Chinese buffet, 1007 NW Loop 410, San Antonio, TX 78213, (210)524-9333

21 April 2007 SLEC meeting, Houston area, Location to be announced.

15 May 2007 Bexar County LP General Meeting, 7:00 PM, China Bay Chinese buffet, 1007 NW Loop 410, San Antonio, TX 78213, (210)524-9333

19 June 2007 Bexar County LP Business Meeting, 7:00 PM, China Bay Chinese buffet, 1007 NW Loop 410, San Antonio, TX 78213, (210)524-9333

17 July 2007 Bexar County LP General Meeting, 7:00 PM, China Bay Chinese buffet, 1007 NW Loop 410, San Antonio, TX 78213, (210)524-933

21 August 2007 Bexar County LP General Meeting, 7:00 PM, China Bay Chinese buffet, 1007 NW Loop 410, San Antonio, TX 78213, (210)524-933

18 September 2007 Bexar County LP Business Meeting, 7:00 PM, China Bay Chinese buffet, 1007 NW Loop 410, San Antonio, TX 78213, (210)524-933

16 October 2007 Bexar County LP General Meeting, 7:00 PM, China Bay Chinese buffet, 1007 NW Loop 410, San Antonio, TX 78213, (210)524-933

20 November 2007 Bexar County LP General Meeting, 7:00 PM, China Bay Chinese buffet, 1007 NW Loop 410, San Antonio, TX 78213, (210)524-933

18 December 2007 Bexar County LP Business Meeting, 7:00 PM, China Bay Chinese buffet, 1007 NW Loop 410, San Antonio, TX 78213, (210)524-933

LPT Donation Form LSL

(Note: You can also donate online at LPTexas.org. Click "Donate".)

- You can count on me to help! I will join the Monthly Pledge Group to fund our ongoing efforts for liberty. I am enclosing my best monthly pledge of:

[] \$250 [] \$100 [] \$50
[] \$25 [] \$10 [] Other \$_____

- Enclosed is a one-time donation:

[] \$1,000 [] \$500 [] \$250 [] \$100
[] \$50 [] \$25 [] Other \$_____

____Visa ____MC ____AmEx ____Disc Card Number: _____

Name as it appears on card: _____

Expiration Date: _____ Signature: _____

Please make checks payable to "Libertarian Party of Texas."

State law requires us to report the occupation of any individual who contributes more than \$50 in a reporting period. Political contributions are not tax deductible.

Occupation: _____

Please help us stay in touch:

Name:

Title _____ First _____ Middle _____

Last _____ Suffix _____ Nickname _____

Address:

Street _____ Add2/Apt _____ City _____

State _____ Zip _____ County _____

Phone:

Home _____ Home 2 _____

Work _____ Cell _____

E-mail (print clearly): _____

For additional information, please contact our Executive Director, Wes Benedict, at (512) 442-4910, 8:00 am - 10:00 pm, 7 days a week (Director@LPTexas.org).

You can **fax** your credit card donation to 512-233-0613.

Or mail to:

Libertarian Party of Texas

PO Box 41059

Austin, TX 78704

Thank you!