

## The Democrat's Dilemma

An opinion article by Dr. John Coppedge, retired surgeon and Coke County landowner

Not so long ago politics in Texas was simple. Everything was decided in the Democratic Primary. Then along came Dwight Eisenhower. Texans still voted in the Democratic Primary, but began voting for the Republican on the national ticket.

In the 1980's and 1990's things changed. There are 27 statewide elected offices in Texas. Governor, Lt. Governor, Attorney General, Comptroller, Agriculture Commissioner, Land Commissioner, 3 Railroad Commissioners, nine Supreme Court Justices and nine Court of Criminal Appeals Judges. All these offices are now in Republican hands. In fact, the last time a Democrat won a statewide race was 1994---18 years ago! For two decades now, Texans who still vote in the Democratic Primary have effectively given up their right to decide who holds these offices.

During that same time, many of the urban areas of the state switched to electing Republicans to all their local offices. The result of that was that if you lived in an urban or suburban area, the only way you could make your voice heard and your vote count was to vote in the Republican Primary -- for any office, local, regional or statewide.

Much of rural Texas clung to the tradition of local Democratic rule, but is now catching up. Vast swaths of Texas are switching to the Republican Party. Most say they are not leaving the Democratic Party---the Democratic Party left them.

Two examples of this are Harrison County (Marshall) in East Texas and Coke County (Robert Lee and Bronte) in West Texas. Both are represented by Republicans in the Texas House of Representatives, the State Senate and in Congress. Seven of the nine Court of Appeals Justices who oversee their lives are Republican. Both of the State Board of Education Commissioners representing these areas are Republican. In the 2008 General Election, John McCain got over 65% of the vote in Harrison County and 80% of the vote in Coke County.

On the local level, Republicans have already assumed control of the local government in Harrison County and will

soon do so in Coke County. And that is obvious if you examine the Primary Ballots for 2012 for these two counties.

There are 20 offices up for election by the voters of Harrison County in 2012 ranging from President to Constable. The Republicans filed at least one candidate in 19 of them. The sole exception is for Constable in a minority drawn precinct where the incumbent Democrat is running unopposed for re-election. The Democrats filed candidates in only 11 of the 20 races. They failed to file a candidate for five statewide races (Texas Railroad Commissioner-unexpired term, Supreme Court Place 2, Supreme Court Place 4, Judge Court of Criminal Appeals Place 7 and Judge Court of Criminal Appeals Place 8). On the local level, it is noteworthy that there is no Democrat filed for State Representative, District Judge, Harrison County Sheriff and County Commissioner PCT 3.

There are twelve contested races on the Republican Primary ballot in Harrison County, with half of them being local or regional races. There are only three contested races on the Democratic Primary ballot and none of them are local races.

Even the three contested races on the Harrison County Democratic Primary ballot are ones that ultimately will not matter since not even the staunchest Democrat believes that Barack Obama will either lose his Democratic Primary race or win Texas in the fall (although they hope he can win nationwide). The likely winner of the Democratic Primary race for U.S. Senate (either Sadler or Yarbrough) is highly unlikely to defeat the Republican nominee. (either Dewhurst, Cruz, Leppert, Holcomb or James). The SBOE seat will also be solidly in the Republican column for the general election.

In Coke County, voters will vote in 25 races this year. The Republicans filed candidates in 23 of these races while the Democrats filed in only 14. The only two contested races on the Democratic Primary ballot will be for President and U.S. Senator. The Republicans have 12 contested races. It is possible that the only two Democrat winners in November will be the two incumbent Democrat County Commissioners who are running unopposed.

As in Harrison County, what does matter to Coke

County is the outcome of the contested Republican Primary races. Their Tax Assessor, District Attorney, State Senator, Congressman, two Supreme Court Justices and two Court of Criminal Appeals Justices will be determined in the Republican Primary.

And just as Harrison County has gone Republican over the last 4 years, Coke County is doing the same. A Republican won a contested race for County Treasurer in 2010. He was the first Republican ever elected in Coke County. Normally such statements read "the first since Reconstruction" but Coke County was not created until 1889, long after Reconstruction days in Texas.

The incumbent Tax Assessor, elected as a Democrat, has filed as a Republican and has drawn a Republican Primary opponent but not a Democrat opponent. A Constable up for re-election has also switched parties and filed as a Republican. He also has no Democrat opponent. The Sheriff historically voted in the Democrat primary but was elected four years ago running as an independent. He is running for re-election as a Republican, and the Democrats have no one in this race. Several other local officials are eyeing a switch to the Republican Party soon.

Coke County does not

have its own District Attorney and votes for the 51st Judicial District Attorney whose district also includes Tom Green County (San Angelo) and a few other small counties. The incumbent Republican D.A. is retiring and there is a three-way battle in the Republican Primary for this seat. The Democrats failed to file a candidate. The District Judge of the 51st Judicial Region is a Republican running for re-election, and is unopposed in either the Primary or General elections.

Incumbent Republican State Representative Drew Darby has also drawn no opposition. Incumbent Republican State Senator Robert Duncan and Incumbent Republican Congressman Mike Conaway have both drawn Republican Primary opponents, but neither of them have a Democratic opponent in the fall.

Coke County is one of 24 counties that make up the 3rd Court of Appeals District, and there is a contested Republican Primary battle for one of the four seats on this court up this cycle. There are no contested Democrat Primary races for this court. In the General Election all four 3rd Court of Appeals incumbents (one Democrat and three Republicans) are being challenged. Despite the district containing Democrat leaning Travis County, the Republicans are considered to be the

favorites. In the 2010 election, the Republican candidate for another seat on this court garnered over 57% of the vote and over 75% of the vote in Coke County.

In the open seat race for State Board of Education District 15, there is a contested Republican Primary between Anette Carlisle and Marty Rowley. The winner is assuredly going to defeat the sole Democratic candidate who has filed, Steven Schafersman in the fall. This 77 County district is one of the most Republican areas of Texas, and John McCain got over 74% of the vote there in 2008.

A sober look at this shows why it makes no sense for Harrison County or Coke County voters to vote in the Democratic Primary. The same thing applies in most of Texas. Conservative Democrats who stubbornly insist on voting in the Democrat Primary because their granddaddy did miss having a voice in who represents them from the courthouse to the statehouse and everywhere in between. And they are squandering a chance to make Texas better.

Paradoxically, some core urban areas in Texas are returning to Democratic control at the local level but are being outvoted by the adjacent suburban areas for regional and statewide offices. However, this shift does not affect rural Texas.

*You Are Invited To A*

## Coke County Conservative Convocation

Honorary Host Texas Agriculture Commissioner Todd Staples  
(who will be making a special announcement)

**Thursday, April 12th, 2012 3:30 -5:00 PM**  
**Rec. Hall, County Park, Robert Lee, Coke County, Texas**

*The public is invited to attend this event to meet and greet numerous local, regional and statewide elected officials and candidates for office. Get to know them, have your picture taken with them and ask them questions before deciding who to cast your vote for.*

**Admittance is free.**

**There will be refreshments served.**

**Other Dignitaries, Elected Officials and Candidates in attendance:**  
(partial list at time of printing-names in bold type will appear on this year's ballot)

State Representative **Drew Darby**  
Coke County Judge Roy Blair  
Coke County Commissioners Wendell Lee and Bobby Blaylock  
Coke County Sheriff **Wayne McCutchen**  
Coke County Treasurer Hal Spain  
Coke County Tax Assessor **Josie Dean**  
Texas Supreme Court Justices **Don Willett and David Medina**  
Texas Court of Criminal Appeals Presiding Judge **Sharon Keller**  
Texas Court of Criminal Appeals Judges **Elsa Alcalá, Barbara Hervey** and Mike Keasler  
State Board of Education Candidate **Anette Carlisle**  
3rd Court of Appeals Justices **David Puryear**, Melissa Goodwin, **Jeff Rose, Bob Pemberton**  
3rd Court of Appeals Candidate **Scott Field**  
51st District Attorney candidates **Allison Palmer, Nathan Butler & Andrew Graves**  
Coke County Tax Assessor candidate **Kathi Cox**  
Congressman **Mike Conaway** and State Senator **Robert Duncan** will be represented.

*Numerous other local and regional officials are expected to attend.*

**FOR MORE INFORMATION: (325) 282-2425**

Pol. Ad paid by David Kitten, Chairman Coke County Republican Party, 653 Sweet Road, Blackwell, TX 75906