

## OPINION

## THE FUTURE

## The changing face of Texas and Texas A&amp;M

**The Aggies' break with tradition suggests there's a new generation of leaders stepping to the fore in Texas.**

By GREGG CANTRELL  
Special to the Star-Telegram

My alma mater, Texas A&M, really shook things up.

No, I'm not talking about the dismissal of head football coach Dennis Franchione, although for those of us who can't bear another loss in Lubbock, that came as blessed news. I'm talking about the announcement that A&M had chosen Elsa Murano as its new president, replacing Robert Gates.



Murano

The hiring of Murano, a former undersecretary of agriculture who is the dean of A&M's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, made news in part because the Cuban-born scientist will be the university's first female and first Hispanic president.

More on her in a minute.

The Murano hiring made me think about my own class this semester at TCU. In my Texas History course, the semester's last week is devoted to studying demographic trends and trying to glimpse what the future holds. Historians like to take a

theme and run with it. In this class, the theme for the post-World War II period is modernity vs. tradition.

It takes a lot to get the attention of today's college students, but I think I succeeded when I showed them statistical projections of the Texas population for the next three decades. According to the state demographer's office, given current levels of immigration, Hispanics will constitute 59 percent of the state's population by 2040.

If the political and economic status quo holds, the demands on the healthcare, education and criminal justice systems will grow dramatically, while the work force becomes less well-educated and more blue-collar.

A large cohort of aging white baby boomers will expect to be supported in their long retirement years by a tax base of low-skilled, low-income, largely Hispanic workers with lots of children of their own. And this is all before we stop to calculate the costs of maintaining a livable environment, adequate water supplies and a modern transportation infrastructure in a state of 52 million people.

To make my students think about the implications, I asked whether the

state's political system would modernize to meet the challenges of this changing population. To get at this question, we scrutinized the platforms of the state's two political parties.

Because Republicans hold every statewide elected office in Texas and control the Legislature, the GOP platform is of special interest. And although I emphasize to my class that platforms are written by the parties' true believers and don't always reflect the views of all their elected leaders, what we learned from the Republican platform sheds considerable light on the question of modernity vs. tradition.

As we went down the list of Republican platform planks, a clear picture emerged: The Texas Republican Party is on record as opposing bilingual education, government aid for early childhood development programs, universal healthcare, better pay for teachers, stricter environmental regulations and any scent of new taxes to pay for such programs.

Policies it favors include the teaching of creationism in the public schools, the posting of the Ten Commandments on public property, criminalizing flag-burning, arresting and deporting all illegal immigrants, banning all abortion and, for good

## Read it yourself

■ For the state Republican Party platform, go to <http://tinyurl.com/e8guy>  
■ For the state demographer's report, go to <http://txsdc.utsa.edu/pubsrep/pubs/txchal.php>

measure, abolishing the IRS, overturning the Endangered Species Act and withdrawing the United States from the United Nations. The platform goes out of its way to denounce "multiculturalism."

Although I avoid stating my own political opinions in class, a number of my students concluded that the political leaders currently entrusted to lead our state into the future hold policy positions that are not well-calculated to meet the formidable challenges facing us. It's certainly safe to say that in the modernity vs. tradition ledger, the Republicans who govern Texas — and who favor extremely low taxes, severely limited government, and a view (as their platform so eloquently puts it) that "good government is based on the individual" — land on the side of tradition.

For those of us who shudder at the thought of a Texas 30 years from now that has failed to invest in its human capital through education and adequate healthcare, protect its environ-

ment, or foster mutual understanding among its diverse people, this can all seem rather depressing.

Which leads me back to Aggie-land.

I do not know if Elsa Murano will be a good president for A&M. All indications suggest that she will be. (For the record, so was Robert Gates.) I know nothing about her politics, nor do I especially care.

But the appointment of a Hispanic woman to lead the university sends an encouraging signal to those of us who tend to despair about the direction of our state. If A&M, one of the great bastions of conservatism in Texas, can break with 131 years of tradition and entrust its future to someone who is not part of the male, Anglo establishment, it suggests that a new generation of leaders — leaders who are not so tied to the formulaic dogma of the past and who might be able to think creatively about the daunting challenges that we face — might be stepping to the fore.

And maybe, just maybe, those disheartening forecasts of Texas becoming the equivalent of a Third World country will turn out to be premature after all.

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## CAMPAIGN 2008

## How the Iowa caucuses really work

**The public doesn't get the whole story from the Iowa Democratic Party caucuses. It's time for that to change.**

By GILBERT CRANBERG, HERB STRENTZ and GLENN ROBERTS  
Special to The New York Times

DES MOINES, Iowa — This year, a dozen polling organizations have conducted about 70 separate polls about the candidate preferences of Iowa caucus-goers.

The polls essentially are counts of votes by likely caucus attendees. If a poll is done properly, its measure of opinion about the candidates should be similar to the tabulation of votes on caucus night. But if a poll does manage to precisely forecast the results of the Jan. 3 caucuses, that is probably more coincidence than polling accuracy.

That's because Iowa Democrats shun public disclosure of voter preferences at their caucuses — something not generally reported or understood.

An early order of business in each Democratic precinct caucus in Iowa is a count of the candidate preferences of the attendees. This is basically just what the polls try to measure. But Iowa Democrats keep the data hidden. The one-person, one-vote results from each caucus are snail-mailed to party headquarters and

put in a database, never disclosed to the press or made available for inspection.

Instead, the Democratic Party releases the percentage of "delegate equivalents" won by each candidate.

The percentage broadcast on the networks and reported in the newspapers is the candidate's share of the 2,500 delegates the party apportions across Iowa's 99 counties, based on Democratic voter turnout in each of the 1,784 precincts in the two most recent general elections. So, the turnout for a candidate in a precinct caucus could be huge, yet the candidate's share of the delegate pie could be quite small — if that precinct had low voter turnout in 2004 and 2006.

Under the formulas used to apportion delegates, it is possible that the candidate with the highest percentage of delegate equivalents — that is, the headline "winner" — did not really lead in the "popular vote" at the caucuses.

Further, it is possible that a second or third-tier candidate could garner a surprising 10 percent or 12 percent of the popular vote statewide and get zero delegates. (That's because to be in the running for a delegate a candidate must have support from at least 15 percent of the people at a precinct caucus.) He or she might have done two or three times as

well as expected among Iowa's Democratic voters and get no recognition for it.

Iowa Republicans do not go through this rigamarole. Early in their caucuses they take a straightforward count of how many people support each candidate. The tabulations are reported promptly to the news media. The caucuses then go on to choose delegates to county conventions. Little or no attention is paid to the Republican delegate count, which the press does not even bother to report.

Presidential primaries produce counts of how people actually voted. Iowa's Democratic caucuses do not.

As nongovernmental organizations, political parties are free to adopt whatever rules they favor. The news media need to quit tolerating the practice of denying the public access to facts about how much support each Democratic candidate actually has on caucus night.

Reporters should insist that Iowa's politicians end what amounts to a cover-up of important public information.

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## READER REACTION

## IT'S AN OLD STORY: 'NEW! IMPROVED!'

**Pressure to streamline the newspaper and create some fireworks isn't a recent development.**

In 1941, moviegoers unknowingly got a glimpse of 21st century newspapering.

Barbara Stanwyck and Gary Cooper were starring in *Meet John Doe*, a film that, according to the script on dailyscript.com, opens with a close-up of "a time-worn plaque against the side of a building. It reads: THE BULLETIN 'A free press for a free people.'"

"While we read this, a pair of hands come in holding pneumatic chisel which immediately attacks the sign. As the lettering is being obliterated, DISSOLVE TO: CLOSE-UP: A new plaque on which the lettering has been changed to: THE NEW BULLETIN 'A streamlined newspaper for a streamlined era.'"

Sound familiar? Times haven't changed. Neither has newspapers' competition with shifts in how people live and the information that's valued.

That's why the *Star-Telegram* has been working with and refining a radical new look and format that were introduced last April in response to declining circulation, a need to connect with time-pressed occasional readers and an internal search for efficiencies.

For several months, negative feedback obscured a clear sense of the work's impact. We heard mostly from longtime readers who preferred traditional presentation. They loathed the new approaches, particularly the "super-index" Page 1 that capsuled and headlined news throughout the paper.

A sharper picture came in recently with results from a Belden Associates scientific reader study conducted in September and October.

As Executive Editor Jim Witt reported Sunday in a column, "... the news is overwhelmingly positive: Of readers who had an opinion about whether they preferred the new format or the old, three out of four said the new *Star-Telegram* is doing a better job of meeting their needs and interests: 48 percent said they liked the new format better vs. 15 percent who said it was worse; 37 percent were neutral (they like the new format as well as the old)."

A Page 1 report updated readers on the changes and survey results. Readers were invited to share comments. In the past, an immediate



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flood of reaction followed. Reaction to the new format last spring brought upwards of a thousand calls and e-mails. Changes last year to the Sunday TV Star brought more than 800.

That hasn't happened this time. Through the noon hour Monday, I'd heard from only 39 readers: 24 didn't like the new format; nine approved of it, and six said the format didn't matter, but they wanted certain changes in content. Some samples:

■ "I am glad everyone likes the new format, but I just have to offer my opinion. I can't stand it."

■ "I want to compliment you on your new format."

■ "The new format reminds me of my *Weekly Reader* when I was in elementary school 45 years ago."

■ "I am satisfied with the new format ... although I had no complaints about the previous format."

■ "Bring back Ed Brice."

■ "You didn't survey me! I hate the new format. ... I really dislike how you have dumbed-down the paper."

■ "The new format was never a point of concern to me. Like anything else that is new, use it for a while and it just falls into the daily routine."

■ "I guess you can make any statistic to appear in your favor, which I am sure whoever brainstormed this mess wanted."

■ "When you made the last format changes in the *Star-Telegram*, I made no comment because I thought that no one was listening anyway. After your article today, perhaps I was wrong."

Reaction ebbs and flows, but not the spirit of competition.

Early in *Meet John Doe*, new managing editor Henry Connell (played by James Gleason) calls in young reporter Ann Mitchell (Barbara Stanwyck) to fire her because her column's "lavender and old lace! We're after circulation. What we need is fireworks."

Tough world back then. Just like today.

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## ARLINGTON | SCHOOLS SUPERINTENDENT

## MONTENEGRO'S THE RIGHT MAN FOR THE JOB

**Today, the district needs a leader who understands Latinos — and is finally getting it.**

Joy swept the ranks of Arlington's LULAC members on the Arlington school board's selection of Hector Montenegro as the next district superintendent. Several watched proudly as Montenegro signed his \$270,000 contract at the memorable Nov. 29 school board meeting. (Full disclosure: I'm president of Arlington LULAC Council 4353.)

Former national LULAC President Hector Flores, who was present, told me that Montenegro was *buena gente* (a good person) and related well to the community. Flores had worked with him when



Montenegro

Montenegro served as deputy superintendent for the Dallas school district. Arlington LULAC members hope that, after years of negotiations with the Arlington school district, Montenegro is the educational leader whom we've been expecting to look after all our children's academic interests.

Mac Bernd certainly did a fine job as superintendent. But the demographic changes



RICHARD GONZALES

that have shifted the district's student population from largely Anglo to majority-minority call for an educational leader with ample experience in motivating minority students to excel.

This was an event foretold 15 years ago.

On June 16, 1992, the ACCORD Task Force (I was a member of the Acknowledging Community Cultural or Racial Diversity Task Force) presented the Arlington school board with its findings from a yearlong review of 23 perceptions of the district. This document should be required reading for Montenegro within his first 100 days on the job.

At a time when the district's student enrollment was 73.8 percent Anglo and 26.2 percent minority, Latino and black community activists and parents felt that the district discriminated against minority students and failed to hire enough minority teachers and administrators. The district responded wisely by forming

the ethnically mixed task force to investigate the concerns.

Administrators at times must have wondered what they had wrought as heated discussions erupted. The education of children elicits passion and discord among well-intentioned adults.

The report predicted then that the district's student makeup would change rapidly going into the 21st century. The task force concluded: "Citizens must recognize that we live in a multicultural and very diverse community. The time is long overdue to unite in a spirit of cooperation and openness to solve our community problems."

If the cooperation and openness was long overdue in 1992, it's certainly Mad March Hare late in 2007. It's comforting to know that Montenegro was a math major. He'll understand the minority community's frustration with the numbers showing the lack of minority educators and the 30-point TAKS achievement gap between Anglos and Latinos and blacks.

In 1991, Anglos comprised 94 percent of teachers compared with 3.1 percent black and 1.9 percent Latino teachers. Today, Anglos comprise 82 percent compared with 9 percent black and 7.5 percent Latino teachers. The student profile is 35 percent Latino, 24

percent black and 33 percent Anglo, based on district data.

So what, some may ask. A teacher is a teacher.

An Arlington ESL instructor recently asked several Latino male professionals to speak to elementary school children in a predominantly minority school. She explained that the students must see and hear from Latino male role models to envision future success.

Latino youths learn from Latino engineers, architects, physicians, attorneys and writers in their classroom that the road to their future lies in the book in front of them. Students can see their future selves in living color.

And so it is with Montenegro. He brings a firm handshake, broad smile, quick wit, buoyant spirit and management acumen. He also embodies a Latino heritage and speaks Spanish, assets that Latino youths, parents and community can find inspiring.

Montenegro told me to invite him to any of the LULAC *pachangas* (fun-filled gatherings). He's reputed to be an avid ballet folkloric dancer.

We gladly welcome him so that he can show our children the dance steps to academic excellence.

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