

COMMENTARY

U.S. HISTORY | POLITICS

Another verse of an old Texas song?

■ An ambitious lawmaker from the Lone Star State, corporate money, official investigations — this sounds familiar ...

Stop me if you've heard this story:

A politician from Texas gets elected to Congress. He shrewdly uses his fiery personality and hardball political skills to rise rapidly through the ranks, becoming his party's leader in the House.



Gregg Cantrell

Then the story breaks: He has pocketed large sums of corporate money and used his influence to promote those same corporate interests in the halls of government.

Meanwhile, back home in Texas, he is wielding his power, along with generous amounts of that corporate money, to influence the Texas Legislature in ways that greatly further his political ambitions.

Soon he becomes the target of a government investigation in Texas. The national press, smelling blood, finds additional evidence of blatant corruption. Congressional investigations follow. He defiantly proclaims his innocence, weathers the investigations and easily wins reelection.

No, I'm not talking about embattled House Majority Leader Tom DeLay. In fact, I've just described Joseph Weldon Bailey, one-time House minority leader and later U.S. senator.

But Bailey's story, which played out a hundred years ago, offers more than just coincidental parallels to the ongoing DeLay case. In fact, some of DeLay's current difficulties are directly traceable to this long-ago saga of political corruption in Washington and Austin.

DeLay's extravagant overseas junkets have garnered most of the attention in recent weeks, but his greater problem may be the ongoing investigation by Travis County District Attorney Ronnie Earle.

Already Earle has indicted three of DeLay's close associates, charging that they illegally funneled thousands of corporate dollars into the Republican political campaigns that resulted in the GOP takeover of the state Legislature. That takeover, in turn, enabled the now-famous redistricting showdown of

last year that led to the defeat of five incumbent Democratic congressmen.

When writing of Earle's investigation, the press invariably refers to a "century-old state law" that prohibits corporate money from being used in state elections. What the reports fail to explain, given the time and space constraints of the modern media, is the historical background to that century-old law.

Flash back to 1901. Former Gov. James S. Hogg — out of office for six years but still a formidable (at 300 pounds, in more ways than one) leader of the reform wing of the Democratic Party in Texas — issued a challenge to the Legislature.

Hogg called for three constitutional amendments to rein in corporate abuses. One of these called for a ban on "the use of corporate funds in politics." Hogg's amendment got nowhere in the Legislature, largely because it was opposed by allies of U.S. Rep. Joseph Weldon Bailey.

Bailey, first elected to Congress in 1887, had become House minority leader by 1897.

In that year, state Attorney General Martin M. Crane brought a successful suit barring the Waters-Pierce Oil Co. from continuing to do business in Texas. Waters-Pierce, it turned out, was a subsidiary of the Standard Oil monopoly, which already had been barred from doing business in Texas.

Waters-Pierce put Bailey on its payroll, and Bailey then used his influence with state officials to get the oil company's charter to operate in Texas restored.

A public outcry ensued, and Bailey became the target of a state investigation. Maintaining his innocence, he ran for U.S. senator in 1901, and because senators in those days were still elected by the Legislature — which was packed with members beholden to him — Bailey easily won election.

The state's investigation exonerated Bailey, who had neglected to tell the committee that he had received a \$3,300 "loan" from the president of Waters-Pierce.

"Baileysism" became synonymous with corruption in the Lone Star State, thus leading to Hogg's proposed amendment barring corporate money from Texas politics.

But Bailey, undaunted, continued to serve both the people of Texas and his corporate benefactors.

Among other things, he accepted \$149,000 in "legal fees" for helping to get the Houston Oil Co. established in Texas.

In 1906, a new investigation in *Cosmopolitan* magazine (no relation to the cleavage-on-display magazine of today) accused him of still being in the hire of Standard Oil.

This was followed by a new investigation by the Texas attorney general, which revealed the continuing relationship among Waters-Pierce, Standard Oil and Bailey. Amid the public furor over "Baileysism," Bailey again won re-election to the Senate.

But the times, they were a-changin' in Texas.

In 1907, a reformer and avowed Hogg progressive, Thomas M. Campbell, won the governorship. Under his leadership, the 30th Legislature passed House Bill 416, which prohibited corporations "from contributing to a fund for aiding or defeating any candidate" for a public office in Texas. Violations were punishable by a hefty fine and a penitentiary term of two to five years.

Ninety-eight years later, it is this law that Ronnie Earle has invoked in the prosecution of Tom DeLay's associates. It remains to be seen whether DeLay himself will become a target of the law.

DeLay continues to do as Bailey did, steadfastly maintaining that he had done nothing wrong and asserting that his jealous political enemies were simply out to get him.

History rarely repeats itself exactly, and it's much too early to compose DeLay's political epitaph. But there is a tantalizing postscript to Bailey's tale.

In 1911, facing a formidable reelection challenge and worn down by a decade of corruption charges, Bailey finally resigned his U.S. Senate seat in disgrace. He never held elective office again.

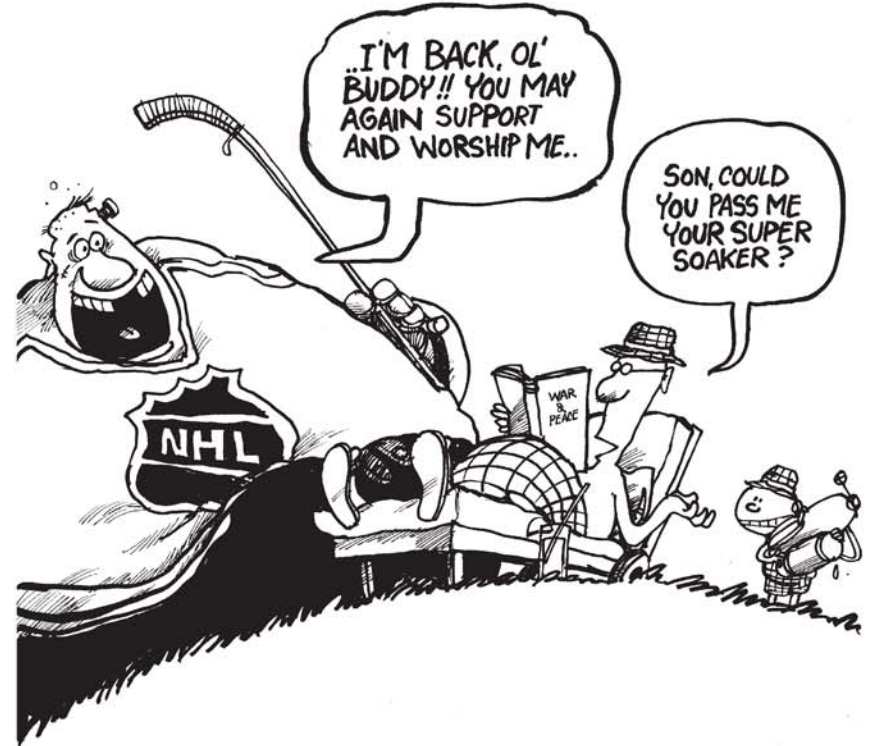
He opened a lucrative law practice in Washington, where he was free to serve his corporate masters without being answerable to the voters of Texas.

Will history repeat itself a century later?

In the crazy world of Texas politics, never say "never."

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Cheers & Jeers

Cheers: To members of VFW Post 5074 in Roanoke who daily greet soldiers passing through Dallas/Fort Worth Airport — especially the retired female Air Force colonel who salutes, hugs, kisses and thanks every one — from one-star to one-stripe soldiers. A job well done. (See May 28 news story and photo essay, "A thankful welcome from those who served.")
E.M. Pranaitis, Watauga

Cheers: To the *Star-Telegram* for its excellent coverage of the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. Not only did we read about the technical aspects and how to listen for the "challenges," but also about the performers, their teachers, host families, members of the Fort Worth Symphony and the audience. All of this helped readers feel as if they had an up-close and personal relationship with the competition. Thank you!
Etta Miller, Fort Worth

Cheers: To Charissa Christopher, owner of Feastivities. She's always ready to help her employees on the job and also with their personal concerns. I want to thank her for her help.
Elvira Estrada, Fort Worth

Cheers: To Midwest Wrecking. The company recently demolished a substandard structure on our property and did a fabulous job after submitting an amazing bid. The demolition operator worked quickly in a very tight space and saved all the trees possible. The dump-truck drivers helped me salvage much of the historic brick for reuse.
Deborah J. Liles, Fort Worth

Cheers: To Huffman Irrigation Co. in North Richland Hills for quality repair service with up-front prices. The company fixed a lawn sprinkler job that had been left in ill repair by a company that couldn't solve the problem but charged me for the damage it caused.
Hattie Polimerou, Arlington

Cheers: To Leslie Miller, general manager of the Hampton Inn on Cherry Lane, and Barbara Wilson, executive housekeeper, for donating 16 sheets to Heights-Hills Theater's summer production of *Grease*. Your generosity in making such a large donation made dressing our cast so easy.
James O'Neil, Fort Worth

Cheers: To Shauna Radke, Crystal Baker, Stephanie Suffka, Jamie Roberts, Jami Martin, Ruth Ray and Vicki Clausen. These wonderful ladies have provided many volunteer hours and much love at our school to make this a great year. Our staff and students greatly appreciate all that you've given of yourselves.
School nurse Terri Traylor, David E. Smith Elementary School, Haltom City

Cheers: To the 82 new members of the National Junior Honor Society at our school. Mrs. Roberts and I are so proud of you, and we're looking for a great year filled with wonderful service projects. Have a safe summer!
Danielle Pigneur, McLean Middle School, Fort Worth

Cheers: To the Burleson Park Board for the "Sounds of Summer" — great music and street dancing in downtown Burleson every Friday night in June.
Janelle Coyle, Burleson

Jeers: To a gas station whose price sign read \$1.97 per gallon and whose pump read \$2.02. I was charged \$2.02. Jeers also to the station across the street whose sign and pump read \$1.97 but charged \$2.02.
Ann Chambers, Fort Worth

Cheers: To the Fort Worth school district's Social Studies Instructional Support Team: Marilyn Woodruff, Bob Rominger, Wendy Coleman, Anna Trimble and John Fernandez. As teachers on special assignment, they have mentored, tutored and supported teachers and students, as well as developed and implemented a variety of lessons and activities. Jeers to the school board for disbanding this group of teachers.
Kris McIntosh, Edgecliff Village

Jeers: To the veterinary hospital where I took my older dog because of pus in his eye. I was shown X-rays of an abdominal tumor and stamped into having it removed. I learned later that it wasn't malignant. A simple needle biopsy could have told as much. He died 90 hours after surgery.
Charles R. Saviole, Bedford

Cheers: To the National Center for Community and Justice and all of the 2005 Camp Anytown staff and delegates. The 11th- and 12th-grade delegates were nominees from many Tarrant County high schools. They did an incredible amount of work on breaking down barriers and sharing cultures.
Terri Pearcy, Arlington

Jeers: To the *Star-Telegram* for selling subscriptions in Flower Mound and then failing to cover Flower Mound High School's graduation. If you want residents in our area to buy your paper, you need to cover our school just as you do Tarrant County schools.
Dede Erickson, Flower Mound

Jeers: To NBC and KXAS/Channel 5, which need to retake Geography 101. The Van Cliburn International Piano Competition, according to NBC, was in Dallas. A few months ago, NBC covered steroid use at Colleyville Heritage High School "in Dallas." On May 27, KXAS reported the opening of Bahama Beach "in Dallas." I found out by reading the *Star-Telegram* that it's in Arlington.
Janice Spooner, Bedford

Cheers: To our newspaper carrier for the great service provided to us. The paper is on time, and when it rains or has been raining, our paper is doubled-bagged so it doesn't get wet. I just want to express my appreciation.
Bonnie Fleming, River Oaks

Cheers: To the ladies at Bath & Body Works in North East Mall for their kindness when I went into the store to purchase a gift again because the original one was stolen in the food court. They made me a customer forever! Jeers to whoever stole the gift.
Cathy Sneed, Euless

Cheers: To Texas legislators for their failure to give themselves an increase in their already lucrative retirement pay, which is tied to district judges' lucrative salaries. If it's not enough, don't run again. The job wasn't intended to be a career.
Jack O. Lewis, Haltom City

Cheers: To St. Timothy Cumberland Presbyterian Church for making my graduation day — I was home-schooled — one of the happiest days of my life. Y'all are like family to me, and that day was like the big, happy ending at the end of a great movie. I'll never forget it.
Amy J. Haskell, Bedford

Cheers: To Dr. Craig Saunders and his staff and the nurses and caregivers at Hurst Southwest Surgical Hospital for the outstanding care provided to me after my May 20 surgery.
Rosemarie Aliles, Watauga

Cheers: To the Texas Christian University baseball program for a thrilling season, and to the announcers and staff of KTCU/88.7 FM for their excellent coverage. Looking forward to next year.
Bob and Mary Hagar, Fort Worth

Cheers: To Randy Freeman and Jenny at Medwell Home Medical Supplies on Vickery Boulevard in Fort Worth for providing the equipment, explanations and friendship to me and my family during such challenging times. Your knowledge about the proper equipment needed during my family's illness helped make all of us more comfortable.
Pam Collier, Weatherford

Cheers: To all who worked so hard at the Relay for Life in Saginaw. The luminarias were awesome, as was the great music. A salute to all who brought this together and the survivors who attended — an inspiration for all.
Pat Banks, Fort Worth

Cheers: To Ernie's Plumbing Service for a quick, efficient job in repairing my broken water heater. The heater failed after business hours and saturated my carpet. But the workers came immediately to put things right. I received a discount on what already was a reasonable rate. Thanks, Ernie, for giving me peace of mind if anything again goes wrong with my plumbing system.
Dorothy Irvin, Arlington

Cheers: To Morgan's Lawn Care. After my father received a diagnosis of cancer and was unable to work, he had to cancel his lawn service. But the great people at Morgan's told him that they would continue his service free of charge until he got well. Thanks, Morgan's, for great customer appreciation.
Roger Thieleman, Fort Worth

Cheers: To the wonderful young man who bought our lunch at Furr's Cafeteria on Airport Freeway. He said it was for Father's Day. God bless you.
Allen and Billie Martin, Hurst

Cheers: To a stranger who paid for our lunch on Memorial Day at Don Pablo's. My daughter and I appreciated your kindness. Thanks so much.
Teresa Horn, Fort Worth

Cheers: To chefs Jon Bonnell, Lanny Lancarte and Brian Olenjack for their delicious cuisine and endless energy at the Refuse to Lose Ranch Roundup. Because of these selfless gentlemen (and an amazing group of dedicated volunteers), Cook Children's Medical Center is closer to our goal of raising \$4.5 million to help kids with epilepsy, brain tumors and neurological diseases through the purchase of intra-operative MRI guided imagery and data-management technology.
Julie Hatch, Cook Children's Health Foundation, Fort Worth

Cheers: To the mechanics of Dealers Alternative. My car needed service; because I'm a cancer patient being treated in Dallas, they promptly and courteously worked me into their busy schedule. A free loaner car was provided, and my auto was serviced promptly at a most reasonable fee.
Richard Hinojosa, Dallas

Cheers: To Dr. Nathan Emerson and nurses Steve, Julie and Ron at John Peter Smith Hospital for their compassionate and professional care of my husband.
Jane C. Lewis, Fort Worth

Jeers: To the city of Fort Worth for putting no-parking signs under Interstate 20 at Westcreek Drive, where people would park their cars during storms. But police and others continue to park just down Interstate 20 at Granbury Road. Something's wrong with this picture.
Gary Harrell, Fort Worth

Cheers: To our *Star-Telegram* delivery person, James D. Minor Mohammed, for putting our paper on our porch every day for more than a year. He is kind and extremely caring. We and our neighbors believe that James deserves a nice little raise and/or promotion for going beyond expectations.
Becky Dunbar, Fort Worth

Cheers: To the Fort Worth Animal Control Center for helping us take care of unwanted animals. From the staff at the center on Martin Street to those answering the phones to the officers who visit houses, all are professional and friendly. The city should be proud of them all.
G.P. Smith, Fort Worth

HOW TO SEND A CHEER OR JEER

Limit your Cheers or Jeers to about 50 words. Full name (signature and printed), address and daytime phone number are required. There are some restrictions on subjects. Items may be edited. Call 390-7753 with questions. MAIL: Box 1870, Fort Worth, TX 76101 E-MAIL: letters@star-telegram.com FAX: (817) 390-7688