



"If Texas is so Big, Why...? A Conversation on Geographic Diversity  
and Civic Life"

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Why are you here at the conference/this room in particular?

- How do we reach out to those who are disconnected to the internet, politics, etc.? How do we reach out equally to everyone in Texas?
- Get informed and involved with civic life in Texas
- Interested in getting involved in Texas
  - Involved in pilot to scale projects-getting them to scale in Texas is hard because of geography
  - Asset building (pilot to scale projects)-Savings, obtaining higher ed, career development, personal assets
  - Improve social wellbeing
- Getting young people involved....grew up in Odessa-politics is very different out there
  - West Austin vs. Downtown Austin
- Progress Texas-has to drive across Texas to get ppl involved (on and off line)
  - Worked for nonprofits and understands that connectivity makes a big difference
  - NPF alumni and always likes to be involved with Strauss programs

- Talking with ppl with different values, different lenses, it's very difficult
- Interested in how civic life works-extra-governmental civics
  - Seeing what ppl are doing in Texas to foster civic life
- Civic life in the social world realm-how to talk about it in a non-off-putting way
- Learn from everyone else-how to connect their community (from the Valley where most people don't have internet and large % of immigrant population)
- Common Cause Texas
  - Need to reach out across the state-need energy from places other than Austin and San Antonio
  - How to get to members/others across the state-not just geographically, but also politically
- Legislative Chair for Austin PTAs
  - How to get information out to parents, get the parents involved
  - 2/3 low income students in Austin, 1/3 non-english first at home
- Diversity in different sides of the spectrum-not enough moderate voices in the political conversation
  - How do we bring more reach diversity of voices
- Public affairs-interested in getting more info about politics
- Lot of what you see on television is a farce-politics is not what you see in media
- Reason Strauss is interesting is because it points out the fact that ppl get involved in government/civics across party lines
  - MSNBC, Fox, charade of politics is different than the actual life of politics
  - Problem is engagement in politics rather than the partisanship of politics

### Issues keeping people from engaging in civics

- Why is the representation of anger in politics happening? Why can't the real life of politics happen in the media?
  - Answer: they push you to make that distinction. They're job is to make agreements across parties into a disagreement. Values assessment that everyone agrees on, it's just that the disenfranchisement affects us on a civic engagement level.

Facilitator: Twitter feed gives him information from “non mainstream” media. Don’t talk the same about politics in Austin as in other parts of the state. Not use the same words, medium, person across the state...how do we deal with geographic diversity. How do we talk about similar topics across the state, with no media that can reach across the entire state.

-Facebook convo (year ago)-“wish we had journalistic view point to help sort out the different claims” Tea Party friend “no, take responsibility and find your own sources”

-Insight this morning: looked to his friend like he needed someone to make his mind up for him, doesn’t give him empathy but definitely insight. Helped him view into her reality that it’s all about individual responsibility. Find what you believe, but don’t look at contrasts with your world view.

Facilitator: Thought he was saying that he might want a different viewpoint.

-Try to stay in the middle, so Facebook comment took him off guard.

Facilitator: reporters on a piece with it looking like it’s talking about one side. Editor will want other side. But if the other side only covers a small portion of the population-then you have given that side a much larger forum. Search for objectivity can actually create false equivalents.

-East Bernard, Texas vs. Austin (talk about civic topics)

-Small communities have so many cross connections (marriage, work). Saw little public disagreement or dialogue.

-Austin-so many voices and topics.

-Looking back-were there just few voices that weren’t being heard?

-Geographic diversity: small town against water bonds because view it as big cities are going to get the water projects. Where you are affects how you view things. Some cities are stronger on charter schools than others.

-Primaries: stifling in small communities the open primary requirements.

-Newspaper/radio are more localized than news media, but now internet is super localized. Impact of particular medium on engagement. Radio tends to be very localized/opinionated.

- Inherent problem in Texas is that thinking organizing needs to be through media. But thinks the best way of reaching out is offline, field organizing.
- Get out of just talking about media. Moved city council races to national ballots, no way candidates that low on the ballot will get air time compared with the higher ticket races.
- Journalism vs. social media
  - Words do matter. Social media (youtube, tumblr) vs. social networking (Twitter, Facebook, interactivity)
  - Movements don't happen from purely online
    - Campaigns don't even want people to share something on Facebook. Rather go out and actually engage "offline"
- San Antonio vs. McAllen
  - SA
    - How do people talk with each other?
  - McAllen
    - Staying up-to-date with technology advancements. But has different population. Lives the "American Dream" but that never includes being a good citizen. It's just work, housing, education. Not a connection with being an American citizen. People would rather be a hardworker-focus on own family, community (relatives) than on larger engagement. Challenging to make them go beyond this focus.
      - How would these people see making changes in politics?
        - Answer: voting is not a big deal. Doesn't make a difference. No following of elections
- See elections as end point....or the point. Election foregone conclusion, vote doesn't count. Rarely did it seem that it was exciting.
- Participation outside of voting is different.
- Drawn geographically diverse districts (how connected can such diverse communities be under one Representative)
  - Reality: Outspent 2:1, \$160,000 spent, strategic financing for those that vote for primary elections
  - Next time special elections, bond elections-cast blank ballot because you'll be automatically included in the campaign process next time.

-Precinct conventions. Smaller, elite who ends up running things-just because they just show up.

-Power increases exponentially.

-San Antonio vibe: engagement, talk

-Thanks to mayor (who's basically a celebrity right now) people are more engaged, but not more informed. Go with what the mayor says (more power than what he should have). People don't know who city manager is who actually has more power than mayor. Mayor is actually a weak mayor. (Austin, Ft. Worth, SA). Strong mayor (Dallas, Houston).

-Nationally well-known, but doesn't actually have much actual power. How much influence does celebrity status have on their actual abilities.

-Not much voter turnout for young adults. Lots of orgs that try to get turnout, but it's not understanding that vote counts.

-How do we reach beyond ourselves and have conversation across Texas. How do we do that:

-Neighborhood level. Both parties have structures to do that, but they don't implement it. Doesn't have to do with politics. Need to have someone you know who's engaged in politics and know how to contact them. Neighborhood connectivity.

-The problem is that we keep circling around back to Austin. We've been talking about the major cities. Not touching on other places. El Paso is always left out. The solution involves talking between cities and everyone actually going out and talking between people. Why are there not enough nonprofits to go around. Canvassing: the criticism that comes up (language). Are we concentrating on middle class? What about all the other people-do working people have the right information that is necessary to know what's going on?

-In El Paso, what plays a central role in people's lives there? Capitalism. Trying to reach middle class (similar to McAllen).

-Asked about El Paso because curious about how to infuse those things that have a central role with civic engagement. Try to tie these things together. Integrate engagement methods into something else.

-Need to have rally point, even when reaching across geographic, demographic areas. Strangers can't raise grass roots. Science of

organizing. Needs to be community level where people trust those they know. Need to do this on a state level.