

# Wednesday's

# Editorials, Columns & Letters

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## Paper 'n Ink...

Politics...then and now...

by Lynn Brisendine

The movie 'Lincoln' is remarkable in so many ways. Sitting in the darkened theater, I found myself watching one of our great presidents fight for his emancipation amendment to the Constitution.

President Lincoln's main task was to fight the Civil War and reunite the North with the South. Recalling our history, this was the war which saw the most American casualties of any conflict we have ever fought. More than 600,000 soldiers, on both sides, fell in battles fought over a wide war front featuring many battles which took days to wind to bloody conclusions, with one side or the other claiming victory.

Driving home, we were listening to an all news channel on the radio when the reporter offered a breathless report concerning the recent petitions making the internet rounds demanding Texas' secession from the Union.

News from an internet source: "As of Wednesday afternoon, North Carolina, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana and Texas -- all states that voted for former Gov. Mitt Romney -- as well as Florida each had accumulated more than 25,000 signatures, the threshold needed to trigger an official response from the Obama administration. Collectively, the secession petitions now have more than 700,000 digital signatures."

Kind of ironic this news of people wanting to quit the union, just as this entertaining movie makes its rounds.

On the giant screen, we watch an amazing portrayal of a man most of us revere for his tenacity to continue the fight and his genius in manipulating the system to gain his ultimate goal to keep this nation whole.

This strategy has seen all of the states working together to make our nation the strongest and greatest ever on this planet.

Now comes these folks who would see that greatness dissolve into a mishmash of small governments going their separate ways in a world waiting to take advantage of any and every weakness.

While Texas could sustain a diminished economy, so many other services now supplied by the federal government would prove to be too much for a single state, even one as diverse and large as Texas. In a few words, it would be a monumental mess. One which leaves in doubt that any of the individual states could muster the wherewithal to survive in a tough world.

I suppose the knowledge that 700,000 people think this idea worthy should surprise, but in fact the notion that we have that many loose wheels walking among us is easily understood. Surely, not even these folks who, it would seem, don't think past the end of their noses, believe the petition they have signed stands a chance of approval.

The internet article continued: "Texas is in the

lead with more than 99,000 (signatures), but Gov. Rick Perry said on Tuesday that he does not support secession." This from a Governor who relishes bashing the feds at every opportunity is, I think, noteworthy.

But Gov. Perry knows all too well how much money comes back to this state to fund various services and infrastructures that cutting this vital lifeline would be... well, like cutting off his nose to spite his face. Pardon the old saying.

I suppose that is enough about secession talk. Still, the movie had other points of interest worthy of comparison in our modern America.

The movie revolved around scenes in the White House and in the House of Representatives where the Emancipation 13th Amendment was argued for months. Perhaps one of the most intriguing parts of the story centered around President Lincoln and his Secretary of State William Henry Seward's use of special agents to secure enough Yeas votes to pass the legislation. They offered bribes of money and political positions.

It was a concentrated lobby of paid advisors and operatives cajoling members of Congress for their vote. And, if the movie is to be believed, the tactic of twisting arms and padding palms worked.

I'm sure this wasn't the first lobby to approach elected representatives of the people. It is a working concept of politics, probably since politics began. The lobby is a powerful, well funded, group who are experts at promoting their message.

A fact that drew this comment in response to the secession report... "If the people really want to fix our government... start a petition that states (We the people of America want an end to the lobbying of our elected officials, and the bribery of hundreds of millions of dollars to their campaigns.) I bet you would get an overwhelming majority of signatures from..."

We the people, an interesting way to begin the request and one that resonates with many of us citizens out in the hinter lands far from the action.

And with this comes the interesting and hopeful actions now taking place to see "our" elected officials break from a lobbyist's pledge.

An oath or, more accurately, a pledge has been made to a lobbyist named Grover Norquist of our elected people to refuse to sign any tax increase. I counted 25 Texas officials on his list. These people were elected to serve us, not some fat cat on K Street.

Quite a stretch from Abraham Lincoln to a rich lobbyist making rules...

If you have the opportunity see 'Lincoln.'



## Thinking in Type:

By Brian Brisendine

Another heated debate kicked up in our backseat on the ride home from the grandparents' house after Thanksgiving.

The family was discussing Christmas plans and the hectic schedules and traveling involved.

My youngest wasted no time in expressing her concern over whether or not Santa would be able to find us if we should spend Christmas Eve somewhere other than under our own roof.

This led to promises that Santa would find us no matter our location and then came the predictable questions of how does he actually make it to all those houses in just one night.

I went for the simple answer: "It's magic."

But as soon as we arrived home, I launched an exhausting research effort on the World Wide Web in search of a better answer.

It turns out there are more Santa sites on Google than a guy could ever look at, but I found one that looks to be based on pure science.

So put on your white lab coat and your most serious expression and read along with me in a dour voice.

There are two billion children in the world.

But since Santa doesn't appear to handle Muslim, Hindu, Jewish and Buddhist children, that reduces his workload to 15 percent of the total -- roughly 380 million kiddos.

At an average census rate of 3.5 children per household, that's almost 92 million homes.

The research presumes there is at least one good child in each.

Santa has 31 hours to work with, thanks to the different time zones and the rotation of the earth, assuming he travels east to west.

Being the math whiz that I am, I quickly deduced that this works out to 822.6 visits per second.

For each household with good children, Santa has

1/1000th of a second to park, hop out of the sleigh, slide down the chimney, fill the stockings, distribute the remaining presents under the tree, eat the cookies and milk, shimmy back up the chimney, get back into the sleigh and move on to the next house.

Quite a feat by anyone's standards -- especially a portly fellow of maturity such as Santa.

This means that Santa's sleigh is moving at 650 miles per second, 3,000 times the speed of sound.

So much for the reindeer hearing their names being called out. It would be more like "On Dancer, On WHOOOOOAAAAA!!"

For purposes of comparison, the fastest man-made vehicle ever produced -- the Ulysses space probe -- moves at a poky 27.4 miles per second. A conventional, earth-bound reindeer can run 35 miles per hour, tops.

The payload of the sleigh adds another interesting element. Assuming that each child gets nothing more than a medium-sized Lego set weighing two pounds, the sleigh is carrying 321,300 tons -- not counting Santa, who is invariably described as overweight.

On land, conventional reindeer can pull no more than 1,000 pounds. Even granting that flying reindeer could pull ten times the normal amount, we cannot do the job with eight, or even nine of the behoved beasts of burden.

We need 71,420 reindeer. That's a lot more names for Old St. Nick to remember. The added animals increase the pay-

load to 353,430 tons.

That much weight traveling at 650 miles per second creates enormous air resistance. This will heat the reindeer up much in the same fashion as a spacecraft reentering the earth's atmosphere.

The lead pair of reindeer will absorb 14.3 quintillion joules of energy per second, each. I don't know what that means, but it sounds ominous.

In short, they will burst into flame almost instantaneously, exposing the reindeer behind them, and create deafening sonic booms in their wake. The entire reindeer team would be vaporized in 4.26 thousandths of a second.

As grim as that thought is, I think the scientist who compiled this data must have been having a bad day (or he got socks last year like I did).

Santa, meanwhile, would be subjected to centrifugal forces 17,500.06 times greater than gravity. A 250-pound Santa (which seems slim by all estimates) would be pinned to the back of his sleigh by 4,315,015 pounds of force.

In conclusion -- if Santa ever did deliver presents on Christmas Eve, he's in bad shape now.

The scientific fellow who figured all this out must have more than average time on his hands. Either that, or he doesn't have wide-eyed kids counting down the calendar days until Santa's visit.

Even in the face of such impressive scientific data, I prefer my first answer: "It's magic."

## State Capital Highlights

Compiled by Ed Sterling, Texas Press Association



### Board proposes budget for next biennium...

AUSTIN — To pass a budget bill is the Texas Legislature's main job, but it is the 10-member Legislative Budget Board's job to propose how much money the state may spend.

At a Nov. 15 public hearing, the Board offered up a 2014-2015 two-year state budget capped at \$78 billion per year, observing the constitutional spending limit. Comptroller Susan Combs has another couple of months to share her revenue forecast with the budget-writing House Appropriations Committee and the Senate Finance Committee.

The 83rd Texas Legislature is scheduled to convene on Jan. 8. Among a multitude of budget considerations are: (1) a state population projected to be greater than 27 million people; (2) the business climate; (3) public health; (4) public education; (5) public safety, law enforcement and prisons; (6) roads, highways and bridges; (7) local governmental institutions, and more.

Members of the Legislative Budget Board, to whom much is entrusted, are joint chairs Lt. Gov. Dewhurst and House Speaker Joe Straus, House Appropriations Committee Chair Jim Pitts, R-Waxahachie, Senate Finance Committee Chair Tommy Williams, R-The Woodlands, House Ways and Means Committee Chair Harvey Hilderbran, R-Kerrville; and five appointees: Sens. Robert Duncan, R-Lubbock, Juan "Chuy" Hinojosa, D-McAllen, and Judith Zaffirini, D-Laredo; and Reps. Dan Branch, R-Dallas, and Sylvester Turner, D-Houston.

Remember, however: the Legislature relies on the office of the state comptroller to do the critical job of forecasting the amount of revenue that will be

available to pay for it all. Comptroller Combs and crew are busy looking at tax collections, non-tax revenue, unspent funds from the current budget and the option to transfer in billions of dollars from the Economic Stabilization Fund, known widely as the Rainy Day Fund.

Five months ago, the governor and the Legislative Budget Board directed state agencies to find 5 percent in savings for fiscal 2014 and another 5 percent in savings for fiscal 2015.

### Sequestration panel named

House Speaker Straus on Nov. 12 named an interim panel to recommend ways Texas can prepare for what now is commonly referred to as the "fiscal cliff" -- a mix of federal tax increases and spending reductions poised to take effect at the end of the year unless Congress takes actions to avoid the cliff.

The panel, titled Interim Committee on Texas Response to Federal Sequestration, will report its findings to the speaker by Jan. 7, the day before the 2013 Texas Legislature convenes.

House members named to the panel include Rep. Linda Harper Brown, R-Irving, chair; Republican Reps. Cindy Burkett, Mesquite; Brandon Creighton, Conroe; Dan Flynn, Canton; Jodie Laubenberg, Rockwall; and Charles Perry, Lubbock; and Democratic Reps. Dawna Dukes, Austin; Craig Eiland, Galveston; Naomi Gonzalez, El Paso; and Eddie Lucio III, San Benito.

### Secretary of state resigns

Texas Secretary of State Esperanza "Hope" Andrade on Nov. 20 resigned from office, effective Nov. 23.

After more than four years as the state's chief elections officer, Andrade leaves office as Texas's fourth-longest serving secretary of state. The San Antonio na-

tive previously served as chair of the Texas Transportation Commission, the agency that oversees the Texas Department of Transportation.

### NTSB investigates accident

National Transportation Safety Board sent a team to Midland to investigate an accident in which a Union Pacific freight train struck a flatbed semi-trailer at a grade crossing on Nov. 15. At the time of the accident, the trailer was being used as a parade float in an event to honor veterans. Four deaths and 16 injuries were reported in the accident.

F1: impact totals to come On Nov. 16-18, the new Circuit of the Americas Grand Prix track near Austin hosted its first Formula 1 racing event.

State and local agencies, merchants and people who live in the Austin area will be contributing information that will be used to calculate the economic impact of the event. When that calculation will be released is unknown. What is known is the number of gate receipts for the three-day event, as reported by Circuit of the Americas: total attendance, 265,499.

### Secession petitions circulate

Following the election of President Barack Obama to a second term, a group has been gathering signatures in favor of Texas seceding from the United States. Soon after, a reactive petition was being circulated, attracting signatures of Texans who prefer that the state remain part of the union.

Gov. Perry, who in 2009 made a public statement suggesting that Texas might be better off on its own, distanced himself from the notion driving the pro-secession petition. Email

