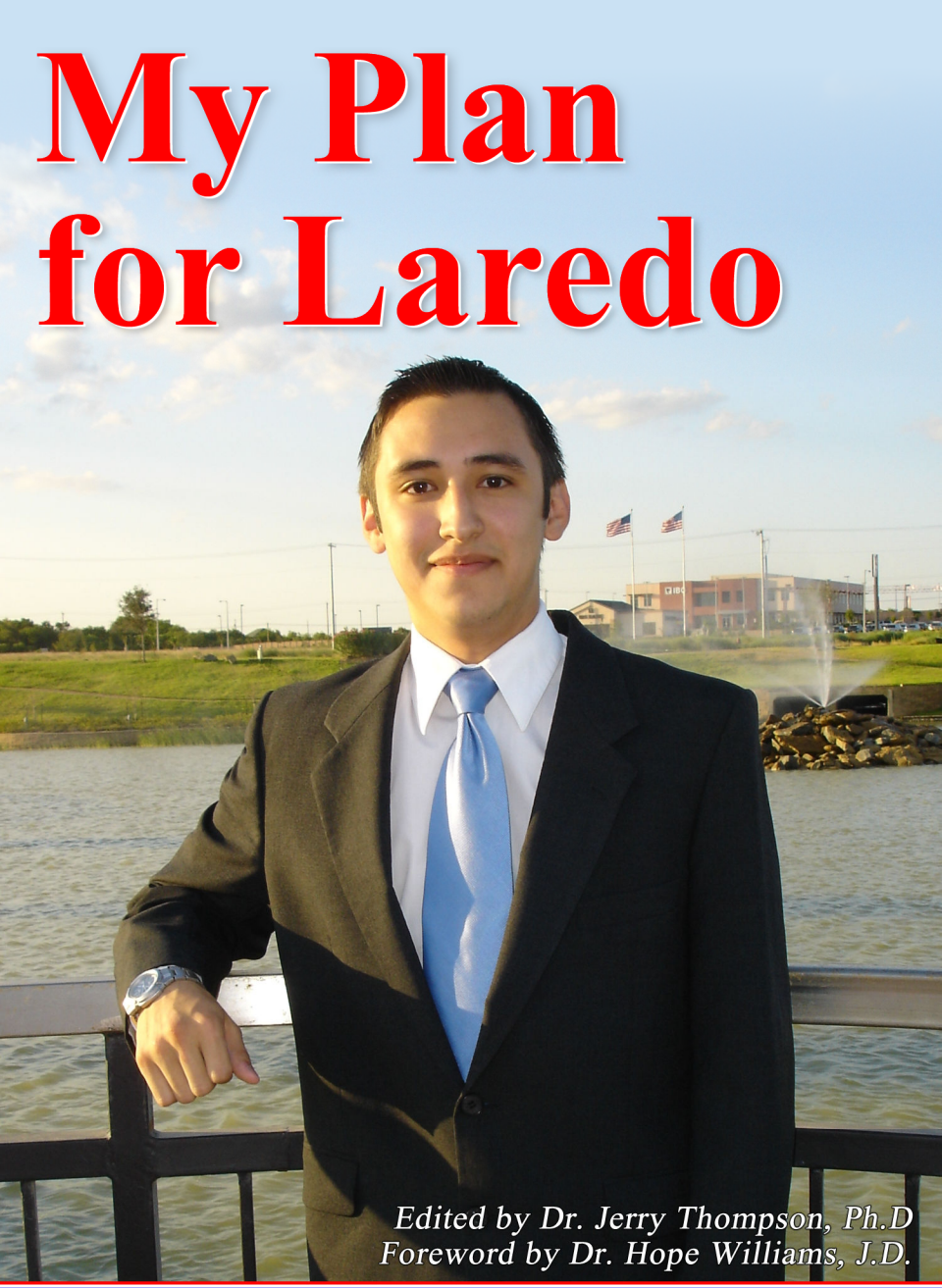
My Plan for Laredo



Edited by Dr. Jerry Thompson, Ph.D
Foreword by Dr. Hope Williams, J.D.

A 21st Century Vision for Laredo

John A. Castro

My Plan for Laredo

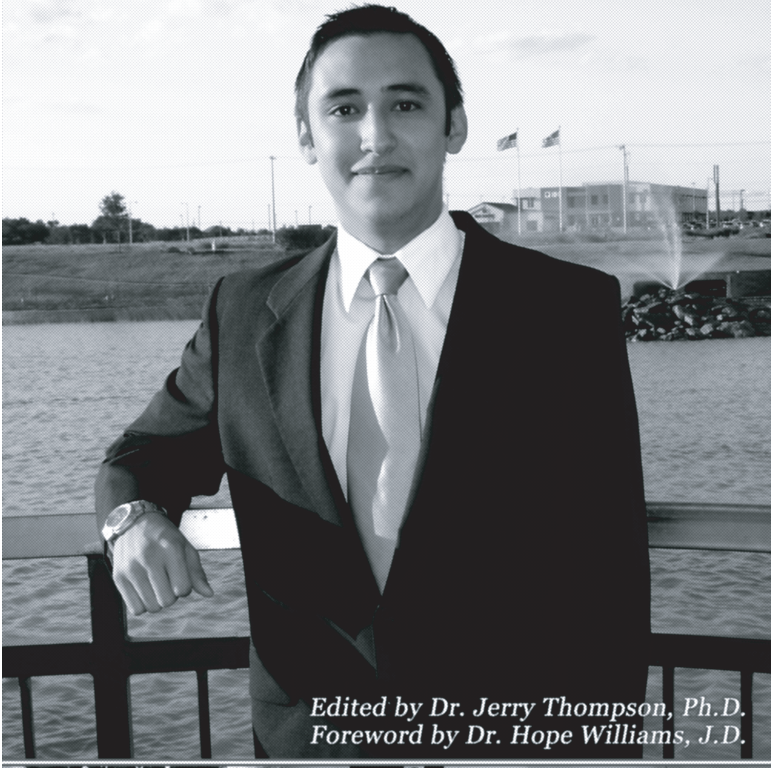
“Without a vision, the people perish.”

- Proverbs 29:18

“Write the vision; make it plain upon tablets… For still the vision awaits its time; it hastens to the end, it will not lie. If it seems slow, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay.”

- Habakkuk 2:2-3

My Plan for Laredo



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A 21st Century Vision for Laredo
by John A. Castro

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★ ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ★

As of today, I know of only two individuals that truly care about helping the people of Laredo; Councilman Juan Ramirez and former County Commissioner Judith Gutierrez. I would like to acknowledge these two individuals and commend them for their courage to stand up for "the little people" and fight for what they know is right. They are the authors of my hope and belief that Laredo has a bright future.

In addition, I would also like to thank Dr. Jerry Thompson for taking the time to edit this book as well as Tricia Cortez and the staff at the *Laredo Morning Times* for staying strong in the pursuit of justice. Equally important, I would also like to acknowledge those that gave me the emotional and spiritual support I needed to overcome the political obstacles I faced in my time as an advocate for change in local politics. My father, Ret. SSG Juan Manuel Castro; my mother, Isabel Christina Castro; my brother and advisor, Ronnie Castro; and above all, my Lord, Jesus Christ. Without this powerful base of support, I would not have lasted a single day in politics.

I thank each and every one of you from the bottom of my heart and promise to stay true to my principle of resisting anger, greed, vengeance, and everything that characterizes the evil nature of humanity. May God continue to bless our pure intentions to help those in need and give us the strength to continue our struggle for democracy.

★ DEDICATION ★

This book is dedicated to my father, Ret. SSG Juan M. Castro, United States Army's 7th Special Forces' Special Operations Command, who always said, "Lead, follow, or get the hell out of my way."

The reason for this dedication is because my father always taught me to stand up to those who were enemies of democracy, such as the former Soviet Union and other Communist dictatorships, which was the original reason for his entrance into the United States Army.

My grandfather, Ret. SGT José Barrientos served in the Korean War, my father dedicated 20 years of service to the United States Army, and I was willing to dedicate my life to military service after the terrorist attacks of September 11th when I was accepted to the United States Military Academy at West Point. Never did my family imagine that heartless, unpatriotic individuals in Laredo would dare to question our family's devotion and loyalty to this great nation for simply questioning our elected officials.

For those that *had the courage* to serve in the military, we know that a soldier's primary duty is to "defend and uphold the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic," whether they be terrorists or criminal politicians. Our duty, as soldiers and Americans is to defend the Constitution. We swear allegiance to that sacred document, not politicians.

My father agrees, as a good American should, and that is why I dedicate this book to him.

★ Forward ★

As the philosopher Alfred North Whitehead said, "The art of progress is to preserve order amid change and to preserve change amid order." In his first book, *My Plan for Laredo*, John A. Castro exhibits his keen awareness of Laredo's unique challenges, in particular exponential growth, location on an international border, and the need to promote sustainable and smart development due to Laredo's distinct climactic and environmental conditions. Instead of despairing at the seemingly overwhelming changes facing Laredo, John gives his readers inspiration, creative solutions and optimism in the ability of local leaders to guide Laredo through the momentous years to come.

John leaves no stone unturned in his plan for Laredo's future. He boldly addresses divergent issues that cannot be ignored if Laredo is to be the flourishing metropolis that its unrelenting growth could allow it to be. John presents innovative ideas to attract and retain industry in Laredo, improve the quality of life for all Laredoans, and ensure that democracy and civic involvement are Laredo's guiding principles through change.

John's words are directed to Laredo's leaders and residents alike, because the awareness and participation of all Laredoans are essential to a promising future. John exhorts his readers to remain ever vigilant of local leaders and to demand ethicality and integrity of those who have been given the great responsibility of guiding

Laredo through the twenty-first century.

My Plan for Laredo is infused with John's unflagging enthusiasm and heartfelt devotion to his hometown. The words of this political prodigy will inspire and guide all readers, young and old, as they ask themselves, "What can I do to help Laredo meet the challenges of the present and future?"

- Attorney Hope Williams
Texas Rio Grande Legal Aid

"Here in America, we are descended in spirit from revolutionaries and rebels - men and women who dared to dissent from accepted opinion."

- Dwight D. Eisenhower

★ A MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHOR ★

The following is a story of a student of philosophy. One day after class, a student asked his professor if they could discuss the philosophy of government. Later that day, the student went to his professor's office for the discussion. The student began the conversation by questioning the ability for an organized democratic government to effectively represent the people at a national level. He talked and talked and talked. Finally, the professor interrupted him and asked if he would like a glass of water. Because of the student's constant talking, he replied "Yes, please." The professor began to pour water into the student's glass, and as it reached the top and began to overflow, the student said, "Sir, the water is overflowing, no more will go in." The professor then stopped, looked at him and said, "Like this glass, you are full of your own opinions and speculations. How can I show you philosophy unless you first empty your cup?" At that moment, the student understood clearly what his professor was trying to make him understand. The student replied, "You want me to empty my mind of past knowledge so that I will be open to new ideas and learning." The professor replied, "Precisely. You have now taken your first step toward the true quest for wisdom. Before you can lead and teach, you must follow and learn."

This is what I ask of you before reading *My Plan for Laredo*.

★ INTRODUCTION ★

An American Scholar once wrote, "A patriot must always be willing to defend his country from its government." This has never been more true for everyone here in Laredo. Patriotism requires us to defend the United States from local officials that are seeking to undermine our democratic processes and justice system by corrupting our government. Although such blatant corruption is often only at the local level, we must stop it before it grows out of control and corrupts the entire United States Government. Let us not forget that even the all-powerful Roman Empire collapsed because of internal problems and corruption in their Senate, the so-called "voice of the people" that slowly began to be more concerned with itself than the people they were suppose to represent. My love for my land that I call the United States of America will not permit me to allow such corruption to destroy the democracy that so many American soldiers have died to defend.

The conflict among the local political factions is nothing when compared with cooperation and progress for all. While the conflict between the city political faction and the county political faction goes on, the people are suffering. We could have already planned and constructed a Fifth International Bridge, which would have been generating millions of dollars to improve the services offered by the city of Laredo to help the people. Instead, the conflict between our local governments has prevented this, and because of that, the

people are suffering from poverty, lack of job opportunities and health care. In the midst of the quarrel between the local governments, our elected officials have forgotten their true purpose for which they were elected; to serve and help the people. Too often, our elected officials forget that their true purpose is to represent, serve, and help the people. Our elected officials become so preoccupied with either warring with rivaling political factions for power or making public service into a money-making career that they forget what their true purpose is suppose to be. When a person is elected to office, it is their duty to serve all the people; not simply those that voted for them. A true leader that is elected to office works with those who politically opposed him or her to compromise on divisive issues and work to unify the people. A true leader respects his opposition and seeks to represent them even after defeating them.

Over the past four years, I have tried endlessly to show the people my intentions, but I was largely unsuccessful. Because I refused to join any of the local political factions that are only interested in self-gain and not helping the people, I was labeled a "radical" and quickly dismissed as an "agitator." Even though I signed -up after the September 11th attacks and served as a cadet in the most prestigious military academy in America, the United States Military Academy at West Point, and was decorated for outstanding military and scholastic performance, people were still easily convinced that I was in some way not loyal to my country. But now you, a reader who I probably have never even met, will be able to see clearly what is truly in my heart.

You will now be able to see clearly the love I have for our land that I proudly call the United States of America. You will now be able to see clearly the wisdom, leadership, and vision that is inherent in my soul. This is my plan for the city of Laredo.

BORDER PATROL
M 8353

Chapter One:

Homeland Security

"I swear to uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic."

- Oath of the United States Armed Forces

IMPROVING LAREDO'S BORDER SECURITY

My plan on increasing local border security will be outlined in the following paragraphs and is partly based on the recommendations of Congressman Jim Turner and the 9/11 Commission Report. While reading my plan for increasing border security, please remember that we are the fastest growing city on the US-Mexico border, and our international bridges are extremely vital to international trade. This makes the city of Laredo a prime target.

I want to make it perfectly clear that I want to see a massive increase in defense and security measures at our four International Bridges that will enable the city of Laredo and the United States to protect itself from enemies of the state that wish to attack our nation. We will accomplish this by asking the federal government to double the number of law enforcement officials at and between our four International Bridges, deploy technology that will enable border officials to monitor the entire US-Mexico border in Laredo twenty-four hours a day, improve the procedures and technology for screening all cargo trucks crossing any of our four International Bridges for illegal substances and any possible weapons of mass destruction, expand detention and removal operations, and require Spanish and other specialized training for inspectors and border officials. All of this and more must be supplied to the city of Laredo by the federal government if we wish to prevent another terrorist attack in the United States.

We must also ask the federal government to make

an assessment of the city of Laredo's vulnerability at our four International Bridges to terrorist attacks and/or penetration by terrorist operatives. For the defense against possible explosive devices and weapons of mass destruction being smuggled into the US from Mexico, I propose an increase in the number of K-9 units to detect both explosives and narcotics.

We must also seek to double the number of Customs and Border Patrol personnel at and between our four International Bridges. In addition, we must make it a requirement that all field agents and inspectors are proficient in the Spanish language and receive anti-fraud and imposter detection training. One reason for this is because the leftist Chavez Administration in Venezuela, which the Bush Administration and Central Intelligence Agency attempted to overthrow in 2003, has recently made a strategic and threatening alliance with the terrorist-sponsoring nation of Iran. This is dangerous to the national security of the United States because terrorist networks operating with the support of the Iranian and Venezuelan government may use Venezuelan passports to illegally enter into the United States. Although there is evidence proving that Iran sponsors certain terrorist networks, there is no evidence that Venezuela has or will support terrorist networks. Nevertheless, we must prepare for the unexpected.

When captured by Border Patrol agents that did not receive anti-fraud training, terrorist operatives claiming to be immigrants from Venezuela will be classified by Customs and Border Protection as OTMs (Other Than Mexicans), temporarily detained, and released pending

court-ordered extradition to their country, which takes several weeks. During this time, these terrorists under the identity of illegal Venezuelan immigrants could easily carry-out shoulder-fired rocket attacks against commercial airliners or other attacks in the United States.

Because terrorist operatives may use Native American reservations as a possible hiding place, I propose the creation of an Office of Tribal Security to coordinate homeland security issues between the federal government and Native Americans.

Also, I want Congress to improve the efficiency of the US-Visit Act, improve the tools and technology of border officials, create an overseas Department of Homeland Security in the department's Office of International Affairs that will coordinate assignments for all bureaus that fall under the authority of the Department of Homeland Security, and implement a more effective visa security program.

KEEPING OUR NEIGHBORHOODS SAFE

My plan for local police enforcement calls for a boost in technology for the Laredo Police Department. Better than being tough on criminal offenders is to be tough on crime prevention. One problem is that too many police officers are patrolling our streets for traffic violations while nobody is preventing the domestic violence, drug trafficking, and gang violence in our neighborhoods. We need to make sure our police officers are more diligent in patrolling our neighbor-

hoods. Now, some people may say, "Well, if you take officers off the streets and put them in the neighborhoods, who will prevent traffic violations?" This is where the ingenuity of my plan really comes into play.

My next plan is to install *real* cameras on *every single stoplight* in the city of Laredo. These cameras are designed to take a photograph of a vehicle's license plate the moment the vehicle passes a red light. The photograph along with a traffic violation ticket is then mailed to the vehicle owner's home and he or she is ordered in writing to pay the ticket or appear before a judge on a specified date. In addition, these major intersection lights will be equipped with speed detecting cameras that will also take a photograph of a vehicle's license plate the moment the vehicle passes a green light going faster than the lawful speed limit. This will effectively allow the city government to reallocate nearly 40% of police officers to patrol our neighborhoods, which can help decrease the local crime rate by nearly 30%.

My third plan calls for a 300% increase in the number of K-9 units for the Laredo Police Department. Many times, police officers suspect that drivers have illegal substances in their possession, but because of the right to unreasonable searches and seizures guaranteed by the Fourth Amendment to the United States Constitution, they are not lawfully permitted to search the suspect's vehicle or belongings. With K-9 units, the trained K-9 would be able to detect illegal substances without having to search the person's vehicle or belongings. If the K-9 detects something and begins to bark,

this would give the police officer *probable cause* to search the person's vehicle or belongings. This respects and guarantees every person their constitutional rights while still effectively capturing the guilty.

My fourth plan calls for the revival of the Multi-Agency Drug Task Force for the city of Laredo. Under no circumstances will we act as if Laredo does not have a serious problem when it comes to drug trafficking. Already, we have received national news coverage on both CNN and MSNBC for the drug wars that are tearing our sister cities apart. In addition, Congressman Henry Cuellar has vowed that he will stake his political career to do something about ending the drug wars and cracking down on drug trafficking. This and more indicates that Laredo is in dire need to take immediate action. If our officials have failed to take action, it shows the lack of character and courage of our elected officials. And if the upcoming mayoral candidates refuse to discuss their plan to deal with Laredo's drug trafficking problem, it shows that they are either afraid and weak or possibly consider drug traffickers as political supporters. Either way, for the sake of our children's lives, we must elect a candidate with a plan to revive the Multi-Agency Drug Task Force that will work with Laredo's SWAT Team to bring *law and order* back to the streets of Laredo.

My final plan is to increase funding for the development of a more technologically advanced SWAT (Special Weapons and Tactics) Team that will be able to respond to a serious situation in a moment's notice, such as a school shooting or bank robbery in which hostages

are taken and the assailants are armed with automatic weapons that regular police officers are unable to fight against. This is absolutely necessary to prevent another bank robbery like the one at the downtown International Bank of Commerce in 2001. We will do this by giving Laredo's SWAT Team the same tools and equipment as every other city's SWAT Teams, including Police Helicopters to ensure that assailants do not elude capture by the police either on foot or by vehicle. Funding for a more advanced SWAT Team is absolutely vital to the security of our citizens and nation, because one day, our SWAT Team may have to respond to a security threat of greater magnitude at one of our International Bridges.

THE FIFTH INTERNATIONAL BRIDGE

For national security reasons, I support the construction of a Fifth International Bridge. At this point in time, according to state statistics, the number of people crossing the bridges has decreased, but that number is expected to increase at an alarming rate over the course of the next 12 years. Because of this, it will be much easier for terrorist cells to slip through security checkpoints at these high-traffic bridges. If a Fifth International Bridge were constructed, it would greatly decrease traffic at the other bridges and make it easier for US Customs and Border Patrol agents to scrutinize each incoming person and vehicle. This will make it much more difficult for terrorist cells to enter the United States through our checkpoints, thus protecting the United States from another 9/11-like attack.

In addition, the construction of a Fifth International Bridge will create hundreds of temporary construction jobs and dozens of permanent security jobs for Laredoans. The temporary job opportunities will include the workforce needed to construct the bridge as well as the permanent maintenance of the bridge, which will be done by the city government. In addition, security will need to be provided at the new Fifth International Bridge, which means that the US Customs and Border Patrol will need to hire more part-time and full-time agents.

Now, some people may say, "Won't it cost the federal government more money to add technological security capabilities at yet another bridge?" My answer is yes. It will cost the federal government more money to tighten Homeland Security at the new bridge, but my response is, "Isn't a few extra dollars worth preventing another 9/11 attack?" The answer is obviously yes. We must do everything in our power to prevent another 9/11 -like attack. For America's security and defense, a Fifth International Bridge must be constructed.

On a more political note, I am in favor of the city being given the permit to construct the Fifth International Bridge because of their experience, which the county government currently lacks.

THE USE OF PRIVATE PRISON SYSTEMS

The private prison industry has grown 1000% in the last decade and the number of people in US prisons has more than doubled since 1985 with 70% of prison

inmates being people of color. Unfortunately, this new industry is unknown to most Americans, and those that are aware of its existence know little about it, which is a serious problem.

Private prison corporations are paid by the government to house federal inmates. They claim they can do it more efficiently and at less cost than public facilities, yet unlike public facilities, their main goal is to rake in huge profits for their executives and shareholders. In addition, these private prison corporations have well-paid lobbyists in Austin and Washington DC to push for laws that help their bottom line, increasing inmates through tough-on-crime legislation and keeping inmates for longer periods of time through "mandatory minimum sentencing" laws. These private prison corporations usually create Victims' Rights Political Action Committees that contribute millions of dollars in campaign contributions to politicians every year to disguise their intent to corrupt our system and generate profits. For example, State Senator Judith Zaffarini, whose husband, attorney Carlos Zaffarini, represents Wackenhut Corrections Corporation (a private prison corporation), is known as a "tough-on-crime" Democrat for passing numerous tough-on-crime bills in the Texas Senate. Little did the public understand that by passing those "tough-on-crime" bills, Senator Judith Zaffarini was increasing the number of inmates and their sentencing to many private prisons throughout the state, and thereby increasing the profit margin and stock index of the corporation that her husband, Carlos Zaffarini, represents and holds a large amount of stock in. With private

prisons, it's all about money.

Another interesting fact is that private prison corporations don't like to risk their own money to build prisons, so they often ask the local government for tax breaks, free infrastructure and construction costs, and more. Additionally, local government are often able to cover construction costs by issuing millions of dollars in municipal bonds, essentially putting the county and its taxpayers in debt. In the event that a county helps to construct a private prison that later fails, the county and its residents have the burden of paying-off the bonds, not the private prison. If the funds do not come from the prison itself, the county may have to increase taxes or find another way to pay-off the bonds. Large prisons can also drain other needed resources such as water and electricity from city and county supplies.

In addition, private prisons tend to be less stable than public prisons. One study found that private prisons have 49-65% more violence than public prisons. Another study found that private prison guards have a 36% higher turn-over rate than public prison guards. Private prison corporations are notorious for big scandals and big mistakes. In Youngstown, Ohio, a Corrections Corporation of America prison was forced to close due to mismanagement and poor training that led to a violent outbreak.

The American prison system is suppose to focus on the rehabilitation of our prison inmates and make them productive American citizens. These people are in prison because they violated the laws that govern our civilized society, and they must be taught to obey the

law before they are released back into our society.

All throughout history, there have only been two goals of jails and prison: to rehabilitate inmates into productive citizens or to make profits from prison labor. Unfortunately, many local government in America have chosen to ignore the need to rehabilitate inmates and instead focus on making profits from prison labor. For example, one privately-owned prison system signed a contract with Ford Motor company to use their prisoners as cheap labor to make auto parts for the assembly of their vehicles. Prison inmates were paid only 25¢ an hour for their labor when other Americans receive up to $14 an hour. Not only that, but these are very good paying jobs that because of greed and the quest for profits, have been given to prison inmates to exploit their cheap labor. This is not what America and our Prison System is suppose to be about.

While I understand the need to incarcerate illegal immigrants that may be potential terrorist operatives until they can extradited back to their country, I do not believe that a private prison should be given the task of handling these individuals. Even when a prison is under military control that requires discipline and adherence to the law from its guards, problems can occur just as we witnessed in Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison. Therefore, I believe it should be left to the federal government to construct an new immigrant detention center or federal prison in Laredo. With international laws and regulations outlining the treatment of foreign nationals while in the custody of the United States, I believe government employees would be far more capable of running a

prison system than private prison guards with little or no experience or understanding of laws and regulations.

My first plan to deal with private prisons calls on the Laredo City Council to pass a resolution declaring that it will not enter into negotiations and/or create contracts with private prison corporations, and publicly resist all attempts by private prison corporations to establish a private prison within a 100-mile radius of the city of Laredo. More specifically, I call on the Laredo City Council to condemn the attempt by the Webb County Commissioners' Court to allow the construction of the privately-owned Laredo Super-Jail that will house as many as 2,800 federal inmates. This privately-owned prison will not focus on rehabilitating inmates, but rather, it will focus on generating millions of dollars in profits for their stockholders. While I recognize the need for a large federal detention center in Laredo on the grounds of national security due to the Venezuelan issue addressed at the beginning of this chapter, I believe that privately-owned prisons are a threat to our society. Because privately-owned prisons will obviously be more concerned with generating profits to increase their stock index instead of rehabilitating inmates in preparation for release back into society, it is clear that inmates released from a private prison will not have been rehabilitated and will most likely commit more crimes.

My second plan calls for the Webb County Commissioners' Court to create a Citizens Jail Oversight Committee that will oversee the standards and quality of the Webb County Jail to ensure that all cells are always properly ventilated and that the jail follows all the

guidelines set by the State of Texas. This oversight committee will also be in charge of receiving complaints from family members of inmates about internal conditions to ensure that the county never has to face a possible lawsuit by the State of Texas and the Texas Attorney General over the poor quality of the County Jail System.

In closing on this issue, I believe that all prisons that house federal inmates should be owned and operated by the federal government, and if ever we are forced to privatize a federal prison, we should at least be allowed to maintain control over the rehabilitation of the inmates to ensure that once release back into society, the former-inmate will respect and obey the laws that govern our civilized society.

RELATIONS WITH OUR NEIGHBOR TO THE SOUTH

First of all, I understand the importance of maintaining good relations with Mexico due to the importance of international trade, but Mexico has abused Laredo for far too long. They do nothing to combat the ever-increasing drug trade. They do nothing to ensure their citizens are liable for automobile accidents in the United States. They do nothing to show respect to our citizens in their country. And they do nothing to prevent the illegal immigration of their citizens into the United States. Worst of all, Laredo does nothing.

The reason Mexico allows and, in fact, promotes illegal immigration into the United States is to give their people false hope and prevent the growing number of

citizens who are discontent from forming a revolutionary army like the one that formed in Chiapas, Mexico; the Zapatista National Liberation Army. Because only citizens who are discontent form or join revolutionary movements, it is best to give those potential revolutionaries a false hope of opportunity by promoting the idea of illegal entry into the United States, which is a clever tactic to maintain political stability in their country; however, it is not a tactic admired by most Americans who now fear the possibility of a terrorist operative posing as an illegal immigrant infiltrating our borders.

I understand that we are connected in spirit to our brothers and sisters across the border, but something must be done to make Mexico respect our laws just as we respect theirs.

First, I propose that we lobby our US Congressmen and Senators to make Mexican citizens or their government liable when involved in an automobile accident in the United States. If a Mexican citizen were to crash into an American citizen's vehicle today, they are not liable for a single penny and would be allowed to go back to Mexico without any kind of prosecution or reimbursement for damages. On the other hand, it is well-known that if the same situation occurred in Mexico, the American citizen would be incarcerated without question. This is unfair and must be changed to protect American citizens who already pay a lot of money for car insurance. I also propose the creation of a local database that will log traffic violations by Mexican citizens; those that become repeat offenders will face three days in jail and have their vehicle impounded. This

new local law must be strictly enforced and not changed until the Mexican government alters their laws to be more US-friendly.

Second, there must be some type of punishment for Mexican citizens that pollute our shopping centers with wrappers and boxes. The Wal-Mart Corporation had to actually build a second Wal-Mart on Loop 20 because Mexican citizens were flooding the old shopping center and polluting it to a point that angered most environmentalists. This polluting of our shopping centers by a few Mexican citizens has only served to support stereotypes against Mexicans. This must be changed immediately. Therefore, I propose that the Laredo City Council demand that the Wal-Mart Corporation and others hire employees to clean their parking lots at all times or face fines for negligence and environmental pollution.

Third, I believe that the Mexican government should be held liable to pay for the fines of their citizens that violate our traffic laws, because this would force the Mexican government to make their citizens respect our laws, just as we respect theirs when crossing into Mexico. This is not discriminative, it is realistic and fair. We, the American people, deserve the same respect that we give to Mexico when entering into their country. As most Laredoans are aware, violating even a minor law in Mexico will result in immediate incarceration.

On the topic of International Trade, I believe that we, the United States, already have good trade relations with Mexico that neither side would risk harming. Mexico enjoys threatening the United States every time we demand action on their part or seek to make stricter

regulations to defend the American people and our environment, but realistically, Mexico cannot afford to cease trade with the United States. If Mexico were to ruin the trade relations it currently has with the United States, they would sink into debt and their economy would quickly collapse and require a bail-out much larger than the one they received under the Clinton Administration. Their survival depends upon trade with the United States. But that doesn't mean that we should abuse the dependency they have upon us, it simply means that we need to make sure they respect our laws and the obligation we have to defend our citizens and environment.

Chapter Two:

Domestic Issues

"The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams."

- Eleanor Roosevelt

TAKING ON POVERTY

The *Holy Bible's* Book of Acts 20:35 says, "I have always pointed out to you that it is by such hard work that you must help the weak. You need to recall the words of the Lord Jesus himself, who said, 'There is more happiness in giving than receiving.'"

My first plan calls for a more government-involved War on Poverty with minimal use of social welfare programs. We can do this by first increasing the minimum wage in Laredo to $6.75 an hour. For decades, the city of Laredo has been known as the minimum wage capital of Texas, because of the low wages paid to workers in our city. My plan calls for an end to this negative image. My plan calls on the Laredo City Council to increase the federal minimum wage in the city of Laredo to $6.75 an hour, which is authorized under the Texas Constitution for a city with *home-rule* status. Now, some people may say, "Won't that make it harder for small businesses to succeed?" My answer is no because my economic plan calls for a two-year tax abatement of 35% for starting small businesses. This tax abatement effectively eliminates the increased cost to maintain a small workforce for the small business and covers some of the cost of utilities.

In addition, increasing the minimum wage will make the working men and women of Laredo less dependent on the government and more responsible for themselves. When an employee feels more independent and works with more pride and dignity, he or she will work harder and faster than usual; thus increasing

worker productivity. Because of the decreasing need for welfare assistance, we can lobby the state and federal governments to cut funding for social welfare programs and increase funding for economic aid to replace the funding we previously received for welfare programs, thus creating more of an increase in economic expansion and job growth.

My second plan calls on the Laredo City Council to create a Homeless Rehabilitation Center in Laredo. This homeless shelter will resemble an ordinary motel; however, it is much more complicated. The shelter will be run by one of Laredo's many 501(c)3 non-profit organizations and be wholly maintained by volunteer staff. The purpose of this Homeless Rehabilitation Center will be to locate homeless individuals in the city of Laredo, offer them a place to stay, give them job training skills, find them decent jobs, get them to be financially responsible, find them another place to stay, and release them from the Homeless Rehabilitation Center as productive, working citizens. This will effectively transform our homeless population into employed and fully independent citizens with their own place to live.

My third and least compassionate plan calls on the Laredo City Council to pass strict anti-vagrancy laws to clean-up our streets. Unfortunately, the homeless in Laredo will have only two available choices: enter into the Homeless Rehabilitation Center or be incarcerated. This will effectively force the homeless to get to work and keep the public safe from other homeless individuals that are not mentally stable. While critics argue that

it is inhumane to incarcerate mentally unstable individuals, I feel that the public that pays taxes for police protection should not be fearful to walk our public streets because of the presence of this mentally unstable vagrants. If they cannot find, rent, or buy a home nor reform themselves, their new home and permanent rehabilitation center will be the minimum security section of the Webb County Jail until a family member, friend, or non-profit organization is willing to take personal responsibility for that person.

CREATING JOBS FOR LAREDOANS

In early 2004, Forbes Magazine named Laredo as one of the Top 25 Areas in the United States for big businesses and corporations to locate. Now all we have to do is offer more tax incentives to help bring them down here to our city. My long-term goal is to increase the minimum wage in Laredo to $6.75, which we can do according to Texas State Law, but first we have to reduce the number of unemployed people in Laredo, which is what has led to low-wage paying jobs. Because employers can easily replace 'noisy' employees that demand living wages with one of the 11,000 people seeking employment in our city, workers have been grossly underpaid as compared to other cities in Texas. My first plan is to lobby the city to construct several Toyota Supplier Plants that will make parts like air bags, aluminum brakes, anti lock brakes, bumpers, engine bearings, radiators, wiper systems, and many more auto parts that will be sent to San Antonio to be used in the

assembly of Toyota Tundra full-size trucks, which is the main focus of their assembly plant. This will produce over 2,000 jobs which will significantly reduce the number of unemployed people in Laredo, which will give workers more of a voice in their workplace because there will no longer be a large pool of unemployed people to easily replace them. Next, once we have brought the unemployment rate down to at least seven or eight percent, workers will have more of a voice and will be able to begin efforts to unionize their workplace. Third, we will ensure that industry does not violate labor laws or threaten to shut down their factory in response to unionization efforts by urging the city to appoint the City Attorney to oversee all actions and judge their legality. Fourth, the local government must do all it can to ensure that workers in the Toyota Supplier Plants are adequately represented by a labor union, most likely the United Auto Workers of America, and paid a living wage of $8.25 and hour with decent health benefits.

With 2,000 newly employed citizens in Laredo, the local economy will spur and increase economic consumption. With this increase, more businesses will want to establish themselves in Laredo to ride our increasing economic wave. Within six to eight years, the city will generate more revenue through taxes without increasing the current tax rate, which will enable the city to fund more job training programs for incoming businesses as an incentive. In addition, with a rapidly decreasing poverty and unemployment rate, we can once again lobby the state and federal governments to cut funding for social welfare programs and increase funding for

economic aid.

MAKING HOUSING AFFORDABLE

With the increasing need to make Laredo a more desirable place to live and the knowledge that there are families that have been living here for decades, the need for local affordable housing is a complicated issue. But of course, there is a solution.

The city's current plan is to increase the property values of areas they want to "improve" in an effort to drive-out the less fortunate and make way for those wishing to relocate in Laredo. Although this has proven to be an effective tactic in other cities and counties throughout America, it is a very unethical and immoral practice. My plan is much more complicated but entails necessary moral and ethical principles. Please read carefully.

My plan calls on the Laredo City Council to offer more tax incentives for construction and development companies in Laredo. We must develop a plan to increase the rate of Laredo' growth in a stable manner. The company that builds the most homes in Laredo will receive a 35% tax abatement; the company that build the second most amount of homes will receive a 20% tax abatement; and the company that builds the third most amount of homes will receive a 10% tax abatement. While this may sound like some kind of "construction contest," please allow me to fully explain. The small companies may become infuriated because they will know that there is no way they can compete with the

major developers like Leyendecker and Killam Construction, but this is where it gets complicated.

When determining which company built the most homes, the definition of "most amount of homes" is the ratio that is reached when you divide the total number of homes built by the net worth of the company according to their 2005 Income Taxes. This creates a "fair playing field" for the small companies to compete with the larger companies. Now, some people might say, "Well, won't the companies build homes at an extremely fast rate without focusing on building quality homes." The answer is no. This is another complicated issue. Any legitimate complaint that is filed both with the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the City Secretary's Office that points-out at least three legitimate problems with their home will not be considered a "built home" and will not be added to the total number of homes built.

Another question people may ask is, "Well, won't the companies hire a bunch of Mexican immigrants to build the homes in a faster time frame." The answer is no. Every American citizen that is employed full-time by the company will be considered a "built home" and that number will be added to the total number of built homes. This is an incentive for the companies to hire Laredoans and not immigrants, thus creating more jobs for our citizens.

Within a year of this plan being enacted, enough homes will be built so that the Laredo City Council will not have to increase the current property values because new "higher appraised" property will have been devel-

oped. With this plan in effect for a 10-year period, Laredo will nearly double in size and become the Economic Powerhouse of the State of Texas.

DROPPING THE DEBT AT HOME

My "Drop the Debt" plan calls on the Laredo City Council to pass a resolution for a one-time opportunity aimed at city tax debt elimination for every citizen in Laredo. As of May 2005, a total of $6,112,737 is owed in delinquent property taxes in Laredo. The details of my plan to drop the debt is to decree a four-month period in which people who are in debt to the city only have to pay 25% of the taxes they owe to have their record cleared. And the percentage of the debt paid during this period will be deducted from the original debt if they are unable to pay the full amount during the 4-month grace period. If this was done, we could expect a 75% increase in the number of people who fully pay their delinquent tax debt to the city. This would effectively bring-in an estimated $2.1 million in revenue, help our citizens get out of debt, and make funding available for other projects.

An English poet once said, "To err is human, to forgive is divine." This plan is not designed to make people rely on the government to solve their problems; it is designed to allow the people of Laredo to learn from their past mistakes and begin the new year with a fresh start. Not only does it show that our local government is compassionate toward those struggling in debt, but it also brings in more revenue for the city to rejuvenate the

local economy and create job training programs.

HEALTHCARE FOR INDIGENTS

My plan calls on the Webb County Commissioners' Court to increase their funding for the Indigent Healthcare Program, and support Commissioner Judith Gutierrez and Sister Rosemary Welsh's struggle to keep the Indigent Healthcare Program alive.

My second plan calls on the Webb County Commissioners' Court to seek corporate grants from private entities like the Rockefeller Foundation to assist with the funding of the Indigent Healthcare Program. If the Webb County Commissioners' Court were to put full effort and support into this endeavor, the county could help raise as much as $2.5 million to fund the Indigent Healthcare Program.

My third and final plan calls on the Laredo City Council to donate 5% of all revenues from the future 5th International Bridge to the county's Indigent Healthcare Program. This will begin a new era of cooperative intergovernmental relations and work toward the consolidation of both governments' similar departments and services.

INCREASING THE MINIMUM WAGE

As stated earlier, the city of Laredo has been known for decades as the minimum wage capital of Texas because of the low wages paid to workers in our city. My plan calls upon the Laredo City Council to increase

the local minimum wage to $6.75 an hour, which is actually a very conservative proposal. With time adjustment, our current minimum wage of $5.15 is at its lowest point in history. According to the Brennan Center of NYU Law School, the 1968 minimum wage of $1.60 would be, with inflation added, $8.70 today! This demonstrates how bad things have become.

Because of this, we have seen an increase in crime, the number of people of prison, and drug trafficking in our neighborhoods. According to many sociologists, these problems are a direct result of poverty, an unfair economic system, and the lowest minimum wage in modern time.

My plan to increase the minimum wage in Laredo is absolutely necessary to ensure that our citizens do not have to resort to illegal means of financially supporting themselves and their families. In addition, I call upon the Laredo City Council to offset the increased labor cost for businesses by offering larger and longer tax abatements for all current and starting small business in the city of Laredo.

LINKING REFORM, TAXES, AND EDUCATION

Before a war can be won, a series of battles must be won. With this in mind, pay close attention to my plan to save public education in the state of Texas.

The idea of campaign finance reform stems from the knowledge that our system has become too reliant on the wealthy and corporations to fund political campaigns, thus eroding the voice of the people in our

"people-centered" democratic government. Campaign Finance Reform was originally meant to completely eliminate corporate influence in national elections, but met fierce resistance from Congress. The reason for this is that the wealthy and corporations already had too much influence in Congress and would not allow our elected officials to support a bill that would guarantee an end to their own influence. Politicians were afraid that if they supported and voted for Campaign Finance Reform, their corporate campaign contributors, who they rely on for hundreds of thousands of dollars in campaign contributions, would cut all funding and ensure that the politician was removed from office.

Most Americans might think that the issue of campaign finance reform is just a politician's problem, but it is something that every America should know and care about. As the influence of corporations in our government grows, the more insignificant the voice of the people becomes. We are slowly shifting our system from a "people-centered" government to a "corporation-centered" government, which threatens the democracy that our nation was funded upon. We are unknowingly allowing our democracy to transform into an oligarchy.

The only question left is: what do we do about it? First, we must unite progressive organizations to form a political action committee to lobby for and contribute to public officials that support Campaign Finance Reform. Through this well-funded political action committee, we can guarantee our elected officials that if their support for campaign finance reform results in a loss in campaign contributions, we will make up for that loss by

using our political action committee to contribute to their political campaign. This will "break the chains of reliance" that our elected officials currently have with the wealthy and corporations, thus allowing them to vote their conscience and support campaign finance reform. Second, we must ensure that the wording in the Campaign Finance Reform bill completely eliminates corporations and most political action committees from contributing to political campaign. Third, once we pass a real Campaign Finance Reform bill, our elected officials will realize that an alternative means on financing is necessary to run their political campaigns. The reason for this is because our political culture is becoming extremely commercialized, which means that candidates are "selling themselves" to the public when campaigning for office. This commercialization of modern politics is making it more and more expensive to run for office. When campaign finance reform is passed and corporations are barred from making political contributions, our elected officials will come to the inevitable conclusion that the only remedy is to institute public financing of elections.

Once the idea of public financing of elections becomes an actual political possibility, we must seek to have political campaigns completely financed throughout a candidate's entire campaign. While this may once again seem like an issue only concerning politicians, it is an issue that every American should know and understand. If public financing of elections was instituted, an extremely small percentage of our taxes would go toward the funding of every candidate's political

campaigns to ensure that they are only loyal to one contributor; the American people. This and the almost complete elimination of private contributions will strike at the power of the wealthy and corporations that have controlled politics for over a century. In addition, this "new independence" given to our elected officials will enable them to openly support and pass ideas like increasing Corporate Tax and implementing a Texas State Income Tax that before would have been politically impossible due to the extremely powerful influence that the wealthy and corporations had on both Congress and the Texas State Legislature.

A state income tax is something that every citizen in Texas should understand and support. A State Income Tax is similar to the Federal Income Tax in that it deducts a small percentage of your income to fund the various functions of the state government. Now, most people might be opposed to this idea, but if carefully analyzed, a State Income Tax will solve all of our problems, including the current lack of funding for our public education system. If a Texas State Income Tax were implemented, we would not only have enough money to fully fund public education, but we could also hire world class teachers and tutors that could help our children succeed through high school and prepare them for college. And with all the aforementioned plan carried-out successfully, a state income tax in Texas should not be at all difficult to pass through the State Legislature.

In the final analysis of this section, we must come to the realization that if we truly want to reform our

government, the key to success is incremental change. A massive movement to reform the government overnight is not politically possible and will only result in failure.

MAKING LAREDO INTO AN ECONOMIC POWERHOUSE

The issue of business growth is one that requires creativity and innovation. Currently, this is what our city "leaders" lack. Our city government is too industry-focused and not educated enough to understand that we live in a post-industrial economy, and although we should try to bring industry jobs to Laredo, my primary focus is to bring-in more service-industry jobs. The dream of bringing manufacturing-industry jobs to Laredo is one that, although San Antonio accomplished, is highly unlikely because we have a mostly uneducated population, live on the US-Mexico border, and cannot compete with Mexico's ultra low-wage job market.

My first plan is to work on bringing in more entertainment businesses to Laredo that will employ a large workforce. One idea is to entice large nightclubs to Laredo. Laredo currently lacks a diversity of nightlife entertainment and by bringing in more nightclubs, we will boost local diversity of entertainment and help employ a large number of people. We can attract these new businesses by having the federal government give our city government Economic Development Administration funds to purchase and clear the businesses' desired land and lay groundwork for road and sewer installation, which will save the incoming businesses hundreds of thousands of dollars. This along with large

tax abatements are sure to have businesses rushing to establish their firms in Laredo.

My second plan is to make Mall del Norte the Center of the Arts in Laredo. We will do this through a joint venture with the owners of Mall del Norte. My first idea is to make a drastic expansion to Mall del Norte that will create an area where music will be played by local musicians, painting and drawings will be sold by local artists, and Laredo's true culture will thrive. This new section of Mall del Norte will be the Beating Heart of Laredo's Arts and Culture. This will not only make Mall del Norte more attractive to tourists, but will create a sense of Laredo Pride in all our citizens.

My third plan is to make Lake Casa Blanca more attractive and appealing to tourists. First, we need to plant more exotic trees and flowers to increase the beauty of the lake. Second, we need to have a limited amount of RVs available for rent in various locations throughout the lake for tourists to stay in. Third, we need to install a sprinkler system to keep the land around the lake green with fresh grass, unlike the current dirt and rocks surrounding the lake area. Fourth, all the picnic areas need to be replaced with new chairs, benches, barbeque grills, and playgrounds. The current equipment for guests at the lake is very old and unappealing to tourists; therefore, it must be replaced with brand new equipment. Fifth, we need to establish a rental store near the lake's entrance where guests can rent everything from canoes to speedboats; thus making the lake more appealing. Lastly, we need to find secluded parking space in the lake area and develop it into

a Aquarium-Wildlife Museum. This Aquarium-Wildlife Museum, which will be a joint venture between the Laredo City Council and Texas state government, will focus on the wildlife of the surrounding region and generate a lot of much needed revenue for the city and state governments. And because of its close location to the Laredo Entertainment Center, the Hotel Industry will boom in the Loop 20 area. And with this new beautification of Lake Case Blanca, the nearby Golf Course, the soon-to-be Water Park, and the Laredo Entertainment Center, the city will have created the new center of economic and tourist activity in Laredo, which paves the way for my next plan.

My fourth plan is to make the surrounding area of the Laredo Entertainment Center boom by calling for a 20% tax abatement to businesses that establish themselves within a half-mile radius of the Laredo Entertainment Center including additional tax incentives where the business qualifies. The only catch is that the business must employ at least 10 full-time employees. In addition, businesses that offer nighttime entertainment will be given a 30% tax abatement in this area to encourage the creation of an Austin-style "Sixth Street" in Laredo.

My fifth plan is to offer a large two-year tax abatement of 35% to starting small businesses in Laredo. This would be a gift to all the middle-class families who have dreamed of establishing their very own small business in Laredo, but with such a large incentive there will be dozens of starting small businesses and not enough room. Not only will this create more small businesses

and offer the middle-class an opportunity of a lifetime, but it will also spur urban expansion and economic development.

My sixth and final plan is to increase funding for the Laredo Jamboozie Festival, which should change its current downtown location where it is held. Perhaps a better location would be the old Air Force base once the area has been cleared of all old buildings to make way for future tourist attractions, or another possible site could be the area surrounding the Laredo Entertainment Center. Today, we must choose whether we wish to make this event into a local family event or a tourist attraction. If we choose to make it a local family event, we must create a list of games and ideas for families to enjoy and charge a reasonable price for people to setup booths, much like a Catholic jamaica mixed with an outdoor concert. It will be a way for schools and organizations to make extra money by setting-up attractive gaming booths as well as an exhibition for local artists and bands, and it absolutely must end with a fireworks celebration, which the current Jamboozie lacks. If we choose to make it a tourist attraction, the Laredo Jamboozie Festival must be made into Laredo's annual Mardi Gras event and cannot be a conservative-version of the said event or else it will never succeed in attracting tourists. The price for setting-up booths must be very low, and there must be more emphasis on attracting younger tourists through attractions like bungee jumping, racecar exhibitions, dance contests, outdoor bars, and outdoor club events. This will not only attract more tourists to attend our celebration, but also give our city

the opportunity to create other tourist attracts in the future, such as a year-round carnivals, theme parks, and large water parks.

ENTERTAINMENT FOR THE PEOPLE

My first plan for improving local entertainment is to make it free for the public. First, we must eliminate all admission fees for swimming pools and recreational facilities. Second, we should hire professional instructors to create courses to teach young people how to swim, weight lift, play basketball and volleyball. The revenue generated through the course fees will then replace the minor loss in revenue from the elimination of admission fees.

My second plan is to initiate a massive Parks & Recreation Campaign to build more public swimming pools, tree-filled parks with barbeque pits and picnic benches, baseball parks, and recreational facilities with outdoor tennis courts, indoor racquetball courts, indoor basketball courts, and indoor weight rooms. The new recreational facilities will have a $1 entrance fee for the first 10 years, after which admission will be completely free. The temporary entrance fee is designed to help repay for the construction costs of the new recreational facilities.

My third and most costly plan calls on the Laredo City Council and the Webb County Commissioners' Court to expedite its plan to build a "Laredo Central Park." This tree-filled park will be complete with jogging trails, bike trails, chess tables, benches, tables

with chairs, bird water fountains, scenic outlooks, and one large water fountain. This will be Laredo's premier location for students to study, men and women to jog, families to take their children and pets for a walk, watch birds bathe in the mini fountains, play chess with a friend, or just escape from life to relax for a while in the shade. This is one of the major steps toward advancing our city into the image of a metropolitan area.

My fourth plan, as mentioned earlier, calls on the Laredo City Council to work toward creating an Austin-style "Sixth Street" in the area surrounding the Laredo Entertainment Center by offering a 30% tax abatement to businesses that setup in that area and offer nighttime entertainment, such as bars and nightclubs. And with Texas A&M International University less than two miles away, the businesses in this new "Sixth Street" area can be sure to always have guests.

PRESERVING GOD'S GREEN EARTH

My first plan calls on the Laredo City Council to strengthen the Laredo Green Spaces Ordinance. In its current form, it's very weak and unenforceable. My plan calls for the strengthening of the wording of the ordinance as well as the creation of an Environmental Protection Committee *with the authority* to enforce the ordinance within the city of Laredo. This will ensure that developers comply with the Laredo Green Spaces Ordinance for years to come and that the current unenforceable ordinance doesn't slowly dissolve into an widely ignored "voluntary" ordinance. Making the

compliance of the Laredo Green Spaces Ordinance voluntary is like asking an after-hours party host to lower the volume of their music; everyone at the party would laugh at you, just as the developers are doing right now at the Green Spaces Ordinance's lack of enforcement. Amending the Laredo Green Spaces Ordinance is the only way to guarantee that we can protect God's Green Earth for decades to come.

My next plan calls on the government and non-profit organizations to make Lake Casa Blanca more attractive and appealing to environmentalists and tourists. We must begin by planting more exotic trees and flowers to increase the beauty of the Lake. Then, we need to install a sprinkler system to keep the land around the lake green with fresh grass, unlike the current dirt and rocks surrounding the lake area.

My third and final plan calls on the Laredo City Council to initiate a massive "Make Laredo Clean and Green Campaign," in which volunteers and city employees will plant hundreds of new trees all over the city of Laredo and clean our creeks. This will ensure that our breathing air in the future is clean and not heavily polluted like cost major cities in the state of Texas. In addition, more trees in public parks provides shade during our hot, summer days and makes our public parks more attractive to nearby residents.

FUNDING OUR COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

My first plan calls for massive reform in who and with how much we fund third parties in the city of

Laredo. Why does the Society of Martha Washington receive more funding than the Sacred Hearts Childrens' Home and the Laredo-Webb County Child Welfare Foundation combined? Why are we under-funding the Laredo Veterans' Coalition that offers so many services to our heroic American veterans in Laredo? The City Council's first objective must be to determine which organizations truly serve the people of the Laredo, protect the environment, promote economic development, focus on education, increase tourism, and promote Laredo history and the Arts. Make no mistake, I believe that the organizations that are currently receiving city funding truly do meet the requirements and should continue to receive city funding; however, some organizations deserve more funding.

With the exception of the Society of Martha Washington and a few other elitist organizations, I respect most of the current funding that organizations currently receive and do not believe that any organization should have their funding decreased. On the other hand, I do believe that certain organizations deserve more funding because of their sole focus on helping members of our communities.

First, I believe the Laredo Development Foundation should have their funding increased by 15%. Despite their lack of understanding that we live in a post-industrial society, I believe increasing their funding is vital to ensure that this fine Industrial Development Organization continues to attract industry, develop the local small business community, and uphold environmental protection.

Second, I believe the Laredo Veterans' Coalition should have their funding increased by 30%. Despite a few who may be seeking to make this organization part of a "political machine," I believe increasing their funding is vital to ensure that our local veterans continue to receive decent healthcare and other benefits that should be guaranteed to all veterans in America.

Third, I believe that both Casa de Misericordia and the Catholic Social Services of Laredo should that their funding increased by 60%. Case de Misericordia offers shelter to women who are victims of domestic abuse, and while we work to increase the number of police officers patrolling our neighborhoods, I believe that Casa de Misericordia should have their funding increased. In addition, as an agent of compassion and hope, the Catholic Social Service of Laredo serves people of all religions with special concern for those most in need and calls on all Laredoans to embrace charity and justice. Despite the fact that this borders on violating the tradition of "separation of church and state," I believe this organization is truly working to make citizens in Laredo more moralistic, which is why I believe that increasing their funding is absolutely necessary.

Fourthly, I believe that the Laredo Crime Stoppers and Campus Crime Stoppers should both have their funding increased to $25,000. While we work to increase the number of police officers patrolling our neighborhood communities and schools, I believe that the Laredo Crime Stoppers and Campus Crime Stoppers should have their funding increased to ensure that crime

in our schools and neighborhoods is prevented.

Lastly, I believe that all other organization in Laredo should receive a 5% increase in their funding to show that I believe in equal treatment amongst organizations that serve the interests of the city of Laredo.

WATER IS THE PILLAR OF CIVILIZATION

My plan to improve the quality of our local water supply will be a controversial yet permanent solution to Laredo's water problem. While we have several options including the Laredo Sands Aquifer and the Carrizo Wilcox Aquifer, I support building a pipeline from the Gulf of Mexico to the city of Laredo, which would be left to the taxpayers' to approve or disapprove through a referendum vote because of the high cost of such an endeavor. However, if this passes, our water supply in Laredo will be so pure that we could drink a gallon a water from our kitchen faucet without consuming a dangerous level of any pollutant. It is also important to note that the cost of building this pipeline will be split amongst the surrounding city and county governments. As we lead the quest for a permanent water supply, others will follow. Because the pipeline will pass through several city and county governments, we can make an offer that they pay an equal or lesser portion of the construction costs and desalinization facilities in exchange for using our pipeline. This will effectively lower the cost of the project by nearly 35%.

My alternative plan is to have a massive reconstruction of our underground water pipelines that are deterio-

rating and adding pollutants to our water, which will probably have the same price tag as the construction of the pipeline. In addition, neighborhood water cleaning stations need to be constructed to purify all incoming water for each individual neighborhood. While this may not be a pleasant site, this will ensure that our water is always maintained for purity; however, it does not ensure that we will have water during a devastating drought like the one we experienced in 2002.

BEING CONSERVATIVE WITH EXPENDITURES

I want to make one thing clear to the people of Laredo, I do not believe in liberal tax & spend politics as most local politicians currently do. Tax & spend politicians like to collect taxes from the people and find a way to justify spending every single penny; not me. I believe that the local government should collect taxes, spend what needs to be spent, and save the rest. Over a long enough period of time, this money will eventually accumulate into a large surplus, which will allow the Laredo City Council to re-evaluate the current tax rate and determine by how much of a percentage it should be lowered and whether or not to issue a tax rebate to the public. This is the kind of fiscal responsibility that I adhere to.

Because of the lack of real leadership in the city of Laredo, we have seen a steady increase in our land appraisals, which in turn, increases the amount of taxes we pay. This is the Laredo City Council's current political tactic to avoid actually increasing the tax rate. I

believe that the Laredo City Council should try to spend as little of the taxpayers' money as possible. Although my policies call for an increase in funding for most departments, my other policies show that we can save the taxpayers a lot more in other areas. In addition, over a 6-year period, my policies will begin to generate millions of dollars in additional revenues for the city, thus making it a lot easier to reduce the outrageous current tax rate and land appraisals.

In only seven years of my policies being in effect, the city of Laredo could expect to generate millions of dollars more in additional revenue, keep land appraisals at the current rate, become the fastest growing city in America, increase the minimum wage, decrease the current poverty rate, reduce funding for welfare programs, double the size of the local small business community, and reduce the current tax rate.

CONSOLIDATING OVERLAPPING DEPARTMENTS

First, I call on the local school boards to consolidate both the United Independent School District and the Laredo Independent School District. The total amount of our tax dollars spent on administrative salaries, supplies, and other costs adds to over $2.5 million every year. By consolidating the two school districts, we can save over $2 million per year, which could be used increase the salaries of our underpaid teachers.

Second, I call on the Laredo City Council and the Webb County Commissioners' Court to consolidate Webb County's Road & Bridge Department with the

City's Public Works Department, because the City Public Works Department's duty is to maintain, construct and improve roads; in comparison, the county Road & Bridge Department is to maintain, construct and improve roads and bridges. Therefore, we could decrease the tax burden imposed upon the citizens of Laredo by creating a City-County Consolidated Public Works Department whose duty would be to maintain, construct, and improve roads and bridges in both the city and county, which could save over $5 million a year, which could be used to fund my Pave Laredo Campaign, which is designed to ensure that every road in Laredo and Webb County is paved and always maintained.

Third, I call for the consolidation of the city and county's Purchasing Departments. Both departments purchase materials needed for nearly the same jurisdiction. Therefore, we can, once again, alleviate the people's tax burden by consolidating both departments that buy materials to serve the same people into a City-County Consolidated Purchasing Department whose duty would be to purchase materials and supplies for both the city and county governments.

Fourth, I call for the consolidation of the city and county's Planning Departments. Both departments enforce development and building standards within the same jurisdiction; therefore, we can save taxpayers a lot of money by consolidating these identical departments and creating a City-County Consolidated Planning Department.

Fifth, I believe we can consolidate the city and

county's Tax Assessor/Collector Offices. Both offices are involved in the collection of taxes owed by the people; therefore, I believe we can cut the local government's budget by consolidating these two similar offices and creating a City-County Consolidated Tax Assessor/ Collector Office.

Lastly, I understand that the consolidation process may and most likely will result in the loss of a few city and county administrative jobs, but in the long run, city employees will benefit. The employees that remain aboard will not only feel more important and valuable, but they will also be grateful and more productive in the workplace. Subsequent city legislation like a Civil Service City Charter Amendment and minimum wage increase will further increase worker satisfaction and productivity. Consolidation will also give the city government more influence in the decision-making processes of the county government and vice-versa, which will lead to unavoidable cooperation between the two local governments.

In the end, we could save more than $15 million per year if all the departments mentioned above are consolidated, and perhaps in the future, both the city and county governments could be consolidate as well.

THE STREETS OF LAREDO

My plan for improving Laredo's infrastructure first calls for an increase in the street paving contract. The current company hired to pave the streets of Laredo actually rewards their supervisors for spending as little

as possible when buying raw materials used to pave our streets. While this may sound like a fiscally-responsible plan, it is actually a poor infrastructure plan because it forces company supervisors to purchase the cheapest raw materials possible, which results in low-quality streets that crack and break apart every time it rains and the soil shifts. These companies have instituted this policy to obviously make more profits for themselves, which is part of the problem. This problem will end with my plan, which calls for a new contract with paving companies. The new contract will not only be slightly more valuable with a possible 20% increase, but it will include several requirements that the current contract lacks. One requirement will be that the company must spend a certain amount of the contract's value on raw materials. The second requirement will be that the company must purchase the highest quality raw materials, such as high quality asphalt mixed with rubber that lasts longer with a less likely chance of problems. The final requirement will be that the company must hire American citizens and cannot hire any subcontractors or employment firms for cheap labor. Due to these new contract policies and requirements, the infrastructure of Laredo will be noticeably improved and more Americans will be employed to do the paving.

My second plan call for an end to campaign contributions from companies that receive contracts from the city. For years, city contracts have been given to companies whose owners contributed to successful political campaigns. What's worse is that more often than not, these companies are not the best at what they do. For

example, the city gave a construction contract to a company to build federally-funded homes for low-income families in *Los Obisbos* not because they were the best company for the job, but simply because they were politically connected and supportive of certain politicians, which prompted a criminal investigation. The result was that the foundation of the land was not leveled properly and caused a lot of damage to the home. Because of problems like this, it is imperative that the Laredo City Council pass my "Clean Government Ordinance," which will bar campaign contributors from receiving city contracts or funds in any way, shape, or form. This is explained in further detail in Chapter Three of this book.

My third plan calls on the Laredo City Council to expand high-traffic roads like Del Mar Boulevard that are sometimes jammed for over an hour when Alexander High School students and teachers are released in the afternoon. Laredo has been one of the fastest growing cities in America for nearly four years, and because of this, many streets that used to have hardly any traffic are now high-traffic city streets. Because of this, we need the City Planning Department to develop a better strategy to either alleviate traffic on Del Mar Boulevard or create an access road close to Alexander High School that will travel behind the school, turn right and connect to one of the streets behind KFC on McPherson Road. This will effectively alleviate traffic. In addition, if we also expand the street by at least one lane, we can drastically alleviate the traffic in this area. A similar strategy must also be developed to alleviate traffic

around United South High School.

My final plan calls on the Laredo City Council to expand the City Planning Department. Because Laredo is expanding, so must our city's Planning Department. We need more professionals to deal with the infrastructure planning of our city because although I and others in the Planning Department have some ideas, we don't have all the ideas as a person with a Ph.D in Planning or a Masters' Degree in Urban or Regional Planning. With the utmost respect for current Planning Director, because Laredo is growing at such a fast rate, we need the best of the best to plan the infrastructure of our city, which means we need to hire at least one more person with a Ph.D in Urban Planning. This will give the City's Planning Department an extra professional to provide the city with orderly infrastructure development.

BEING FAIR WITH LAND APPRAISALS

The city's current plan in regards to land appraisals is to increase the property values of areas they want to "improve" in an effort to drive-out the less fortunate and make way for the more affluent families wishing to relocate in Laredo. Although this has proven to be an effective tactic in other cities and counties throughout Texas, it is a highly unethical and immoral practice. My plan is much more ethical.

Before I lay out my plan to deal with property appraisals, I must first address another equally important and soon-to-be controversial issue. Within the city limits of Laredo, there is still land being classified as

"Agricultural Exempt," which means the owners of those lands pay almost no property taxes. This is because the Webb County Appraisal District and the City Planning Department have become too politicized and politicians that have "connections" to people in the Webb County Appraisal District or the City Planning Department promise to "take care of" certain land owners in exchange for campaign contributions. For example, a land owner contributes to the political campaign of a candidate so that if that person is elected to public office, the politician will then use his or her political influence to keep the land owner's land classified as "Agricultural Exempt," which saves the land owner thousands of dollars in taxes. Or the politician will simply use his or her influence to keep his or her own land appraised at a low value. This is precisely why the FBI was investigating the City Planning Department in 2003 and a major reason why we need massive reform, which requires entirely re-writing the policies, procedures, and regulations for the Webb County Appraisal District and the City Planning Department. In addition, I propose that the Laredo City Council create a County Appraisal District Oversight Committee that will monitor the Appraisal District for honesty and integrity in land appraisals.

MOTIVATING THE PEOPLE TO VOTE

My plan to fight voter apathy is to make politics more appealing to the youth of Laredo. Year after year, election after election, the same kind of people with the

same family names are elected into office; people seeking power and profit with no dedication or devotion towards the cause of liberty, freedom, justice, and democracy. Right now, local politics is out of touch with the youth because its seen as something for the "older generation." The time has come for a new generation of American leaders to take an active role in their local government to show others that together, we can make difference.

The people of Laredo need young, vibrant candidates that have new ideas on how to lead and govern this city government. The people are tired of political insiders that are unwilling to expose the corruption that has infected many areas of our local government. We need to elect someone who has demonstrated the courage to stand-up to corrupt politicians and demand justice. Until we do that, there will continue to be apathy.

My first and most controversial plan calls on the local school districts to establish a new required course for all high school seniors that will focus on Current Political Issues. This plan is meant to generate political debate and discussion on high school campuses and get students involved in developing solutions to the problems facing their society. The focus of the course will be to debate and discuss local, state, and national political issues. While some may worry that this may be used by schools to brainwash the youth, the course will require the teacher to remain as neutral as possible by only allowing discussion amongst the students and serving as the moderator of the class. This will ensure that there are

no attempts made by anyone to "steer" students in a certain ideological direction.

My second plan calls on the local school districts to accept work performed by students with an political campaign or political party during an election year as community service. In addition, if a student can provide evidence that he or she voted during any election, the student should be given extra credit. This will once again serve to encourage students to participate in our nation's democratic processes.

My third and final plan is to make the public and various organizations aware that the Public Access Channel is available to them and make the city's production studios more available for the public to create independent political talk shows. This will allow watchdog organizations the opportunity to expose corruption in Laredo, which will assist the public in making sound decisions during election years. In addition, the city government should focus on improving the quality of the programs aired on the Public Access Channel by funding non-profit organizations to create their own programs that focus on various problems in the city. For example, the city should increase funding for Habitat for Humanity of Laredo, which would enable them to air programs that focus on the lack of quality affordable housing in our city and what we can do to change it.

Mobilizing students and exposing government corruption are the necessary steps to get-out the vote and reclaim democracy. Giving the people hope and getting them actively involved in the struggle to take back our democracy is how I plan to end apathy in Laredo.

Chapter Three:

Government Reform

"Associate yourself with men of good quality if you esteem your own reputation. For 'tis better to be alone than in bad company."

- George Washington

CIVIL SERVICE REFORM: THE FIRST STEP

The need for civil service, a concept originally developed by Conservative Republicans in Philadelphia in 1885, stems from the need for job protection in the city of Laredo that results from a long and dark past of Laredo Politics. For the purpose of making this analysis more effective and informative, I must address the problems that came to light under the administration of former mayor J. C. "Pepe" Martin. An organization, Taxpayers Organized for Public Service (TOPS), headed by Lawrence Berry in 1978, helped bring to light the problems that had corrupted our local government and led the movement to dissolve the previous strong-mayor form of government and implemented our current city-manager form of government. Since then, there have been many outstanding improvements, economically and democratically, but we, as Laredoans and Americans, still have much to do to preserve liberty and democracy for future generations of Laredoans. And one of the most crucial elements of a developing city is the implementation of a Civil Service System for all municipal employees.

In Laredo, the need for the implementation of a Civil Service System is absolutely necessary to reduce the increasingly politicized and sometimes oppressive working conditions that our municipal employees currently work under. While it is not as bad as some may say, I want you to ask yourself one question, "Should we wait until it gets to the worst possible point before taking action to implement Civil Service?" This

is important not only to our municipal employees, but to every single citizen of Laredo because patronage, which is the act of giving city jobs to political supporters, always starts within the local government before spreading to the state and national levels, and eventually, like Mexico, infecting our entire society. For example, the excessive patronage and corruption within the Mexican government, that their citizens allowed, has spread to all sectors and levels of their government and is devastating their entire society. *Maquiladores* that grossly underpay and oppress female employees; business leaders that use their workforces as political machines; and the slow decay of traditional Mexican values based upon their predominantly Catholic heritage. So I ask you, "Is that what we want for Laredo?" The answer is clearly no, and we must now seek to protect our democracy from the aforementioned possibility as our federal government has already done. We must set the example for the city of Laredo.

Civil Service is not something that should be viewed as a gift to workers, it is something that every American working man and woman deserves in this free and democratic nation. A Civil Service System would establish a fair and democratic hiring and firing process, create a "Civil Service Review Board" that would hear cases of discrimination, harassment, and other complaints, as well as allowing all municipal employees the opportunity to be heard by local politicians. It would also guarantee job protection and grant them the right to participate in city politics, which they are currently banned from being involved in. And on that issue, I will

expand. Municipal employees, two of which have relatives in Iraq fighting to liberate that soon-to-be democratic nation, are not given the same freedoms and liberties as every other American in the United States. This current lack of freedoms for municipal employees, however, is the fault of the employees themselves. After the collapse and resignation of former mayor JC "Pepe" Martin's administration in 1978, municipal employees were so fearful of local politics that they actually agreed to have themselves banned from involvement in local politics. This move, while at the time seeming sensible, was a regressive move and not a progressive one, because the reformers at that time did not have any other solution, but today, the solution is civil service.

In Laredo, we need civil service for many reasons. Among the most important reasons are to establish an efficient hiring and firing process to end the job control that politicians currently have the discretion to exercise to maintain power. Please keep in mind that although patronage is only remotely present in our city government, it is not abused, but the window is open for abuse, and because of that, we must, for the sake of liberty and justice, close that window of evil opportunity by implementing civil service.

First, a Civil Service System is designed to protect employees from unjust termination, not protect a city employee from termination altogether. Please keep in mind that an unproductive and ineffective city employee can still be terminated; the only difference is that, just as the American Justice System stresses, there must be procedure and guidelines to ensure that justice prevails.

On top of this, it would also create fair hiring practices. As a requirement for employment by the city under a Civil Service System, current and future applicants would be required to take a one-time examination to test their knowledge about the job they are applying for. This would ensure that every employee is there because he or she knows how to do the job and not because he or she knows certain people. In reference to current municipal employees, whether employed due to patronage or merit, their employment is secure and they are not required to take an examination as long as they remain productive.

Second, as I mentioned earlier, a Civil Service System would end job control and patronage that politicians currently have the discretion to exercise. In other words, candidates for public office would not be able to promise campaign supporters a city job because the official "hiring power" would rest in a group of many individuals and be largely based upon the results of a civil service examination that would test the applicant's knowledge of the job he or she is applying for.

Lastly, a Civil Service System would have an enormously positive long-term effect on the efficiency and effectiveness of the local city government. Over a long enough period of time, a civil service system will weed-out the uneducated, unproductive, and ineffective municipal employees; thus leaving the city with only the most educated and the most effective employees. This will result in a more expedient, effective, and efficient city government that will deliver high quality public services for the people of Laredo.

According to a study by the International City and County Management Association, the strong-mayor form of local governments tend to be favored by very small or very large cities; while on the other hand, developing cities tend to favor city-manager forms of local government. This shows how there are certain requirements a city must take if it wishes to develop into a metropolitan urbanized city. One of those steps is establishing a city manager form of government and another is implementing civil service for all municipal employees. The reason he gives for this is that before reverting back to a strong-mayor form of government once we do become a Metropolitan city, there must have been certain protections established to secure all municipal employees from being taken advantage of by elected officials. For if we do not implement civil service for all municipal employees, develop into a Metropolitan urbanized city, and revert to a Strong-Mayor form of government; the corruption and political consequences of our inaction will be too disastrous to contemplate.

According to my own analysis, the five future tasks of this City Council will be: (1) Make it easy to discipline employees with poor performance. The last thing anyone wants is for employees to feel over-secure in their employment because it will lead to intentional poor performance. (2) Limit the levels and number of times an employee may appeal a termination. While we do want to afford terminated employees the opportunity to appeal a termination for the sake of justice, we must not allow individuals to abuse the system through unnecessary appeal after appeal. (3) Make the appeals process

short and simple. Allow an employee access to only a 5-step appeals process to object to a termination. The process should be limited to appealing the termination to their immediate supervisor, the department director, the Administrative Services Department Head, the City Manager, and then the Civil Service Review Board with the final authority. (4) Be specific with the jurisdiction that various departments have over personnel functions. Vagueness in regards to jurisdiction over personnel functions will result in overlapping duties and an inefficient bureaucracy that will seem excessively procedural and ineffective. (5) Have the city manager seek input from the employees themselves through the use of surveys, and have him meet with any and all employee associations and department directors. This will allow him to hear concerns about the efficiency of the local government and develop strategies to improve it. Although seldom, municipal employees sometimes do have good ideas on how to improve the efficiency of their department because they've been working in it for years.

In closing this section, the only question left is, "Why hasn't the city of Laredo implemented a civil service system for all municipal employees?" As a student of political science and public administration, I can tell you that a Civil Service System for all municipal employees is absolutely vital to Laredo's efficiency, growth, and progress. Ask any and all conservatives in Laredo, and they will tell you that a Civil Service System is absolutely necessary to bring about political diversity and end our politically-homogenous society.

And most of all, ask any and all municipal employees, and they will tell you that despite the fact that they too may lose their jobs during the "efficiency improvement phase" of the civil service process, it is necessary to create a peaceful and non-political working environment where each city employee can focus on only one objective; doing their job.

Therefore, I call upon the Laredo City Council to implement a Civil Service System for all municipal employees, which is not only necessary but inevitable. There is no major metropolitan city in America that has not implemented a Civil Service System for all its municipal employees; therefore, it is clear that resistance by corrupt bureaucrats and politicians in Laredo is futile.

MONEY IN POLITICS: RECLAIMING DEMOCRACY

James Madison wrote in *Federalist, No. 57* (1788), that "the aim of every political constitution (equivalent to the local city charter) is, or ought to be, first to obtain [public officials] who possess most wisdom to discern, and most virtue to pursue the common good of society; and in the next place, to take the most effectual precautions for keeping them virtuous whilst they continue to hold their public trust." In other words, Madison believed that our first goal must be to elect educated and intellectual leaders that are truly concerned with the advancement and progress of society, and he believed that once this had been accomplished, laws and regulations should be established to keep the elected leader away from corruption. Therefore, the first needed

reform is for the Laredo City Council to pass a "Clean Government" Ordinance that will require each member of the Laredo City Council and the Mayor to submit a list of all private enterprises and/or non-profit organizations, owners of enterprises, or people that sit on the Board of Directors of private enterprises or non-profit organizations that contributed money to their political campaigns. In turn, these companies would not be allowed to receive any city contracts or funds in any way, shape, or form. Any private enterprise or non-profit organization that violates this ordinance would be barred for a 4-year period from receiving public funds in any way, shape, or form. This plan along with an additional plan that calls for the creation of a City Campaigns Oversight Committee, which is detailed below, is certain to restore honesty and integrity to local politics and effectively prevent the corrupting influence of special interests' money in politics.

The second needed reform calls on the Laredo City Council to create a City Campaigns Oversight Committee that will monitor and receive complaints about the ethics of any person's political campaign. This committee would be given the duty of scrutinizing each candidate's campaign finance reports to ensure that companies are not trying to find loopholes to secretly fund "certain candidates" with "political contributions" in hopes of still being eligible to receive city contracts. Most likely, unethical companies would try to force their employees to make the campaign contributions, and it would be the duty of the City Campaigns Oversight Committee to investigate any suspicions that any

citizen or themselves may have. In addition, unethical companies may seek to donate to "certain candidates" and have them appoint members to the City Campaigns Oversight Committee that will then try to decrease the power and authority that the committee has over regulating local political campaigns; therefore, each member of the committee should be given the authority to initiate his or her own investigation and the authority for three members to jointly call for an official Committee Investigation which would then force the entire committee to convene to have complaints and/or evidence presented to the committee from the finding of any member(s). Once again, some members of this committee may seek to use this authority as a "political tool" to use their position to call for an investigation that may discredit "certain candidates" that are running for political office; therefore, all meetings of this committee should be in closed sessions, protected under the Privacy Act, and only available for public attendance if a citizen wishes to address the committee to air his/her concerns and/or complaints. In addition, the committee members should not be permitted to discuss matters of the committee's official business, unless an official investigation leads to an "ethics conviction," which the Laredo City Council must take action. If a person is convicted by the committee after winning the election, he or she may be removed from office by a majority vote of the Laredo City Council and a special election should be called as soon as possible, with the outgoing person still eligible for candidacy. If a person is convicted of receiving political contributions from a private enterprise or non-

profit that is routinely given city funds, the candidate should be ordered to return the contribution and the private enterprise or non-profit and barred from receiving any city funds whatsoever for four years. This will ensure that members of the committee as well as unethical companies and organizations, although extremely few, do not attempt to cheat the system and corrupt our local government.

OPEN GOVERNMENT: PRESERVING DEMOCRACY

The level of ethics in our local city government is, unfortunately, very low. Nearly every month, there is a new scandal emerging or a new accusation or arrest of a city official on public corruption charges. The purpose of this section is to research the level of ethics in our city government, summarize the findings, and explain how and why the city government is "ethically-impaired." The ultimate goal of this particular section is to create a plan to develop a more open and honest government, increase the ethical standards of the local government, and have them strictly enforced and followed by all city administrators.

My first plan calls on the Laredo City Council to establish strict guideline for the city's Public Information Office. I propose that the city establish new guidelines that will result in the Public Information Officer's termination if three or more legitimate complaints are filed with the Texas Attorney General's office within any one-year period and result in successful class action lawsuits against the city. This new "Three Strikes

Policy" will set the tone of a new era of real Open Government in the city of Laredo and make our city the beacon of honesty and openness in the State of Texas.

It began when two of our Founding Fathers, James Madison and Alexander Hamilton, argued that openness in government would assist citizens in making the informed choices necessary to a democracy. Sadly, it was not until 1966 that the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) was passed by Congress. Because of this, the state of Texas passed both the Texas Open Meetings Act and the Public Information Act because the Texas Legislature finally came to the realization that the public's Right to Know was vital to an accountable, democratic government.

Over the past few years, Laredo has been submerged in a reputation of public corruption and bribery scandals. It began with the unethical use of over $1,200 by our local City Manager during the 2003 Annual Washington DC visit and has temporarily ended with the arrest of both a city employee and former Commissioner David Cortez for bribery. Worse than these arrests and scandals is our local government's response or lack thereof. As Councilman Gene Belmares once suggested, the city of Laredo needs to establish an Ethics Commission and hire Ethics Lawyers for the City Attorney's Office. Despite Councilman Belmares' good intentions, would a simple commission and ethics lawyer really solve the problem? My own personal analysis found that much more, as listed below, is needed to reform the city of Laredo and increase the ethical standards of its city manager and department

The second needed reform calls on the Laredo City Council to create a Public Administration Oversight Committee that has impeachment powers in regards to the City Manager and Department Directors without council approval. Although this committee would be appointed by the eight members of the City Council and the Mayor, this nine-member committee, whose members cannot be contributors of any municipal political campaign that will be ensured by scrutiny from the Campaigns Oversight Committee, will have the authority to impeach the City Manager and any Department Director. At any time during one of its monthly meeting, three members can vote in favor of convening an impeachment hearing that will force an official investigation and public hearing for possible articles of impeachment against the City Manager or Department Director. A majority vote would lead to the impeachment and removal of the City Manager, with the Laredo City Council having the duty of selecting and appointing another City Manager with the approval of the Oversight Committee through a majority vote, whose approval is only needed in the event of an actual impeachment. The members appointed to this committee should serve a four-year term and should only be removed from their position if the Campaigns Oversight Committee can prove that the member made a political contribution to a candidate for a municipal elected position. This non-contributor policy for each member's eligibility would ensure that elected officials do not attempt to remove "certain members" that don't vote according to their wishes. This would give complete independence to the

committee members. If a member was removed from his or her position on the committee, it would be the duty of the appointing council member to appoint a new member with the approval of the Campaigns Oversight Committee through a majority vote. In addition, one committee member and a citizen, having obtained a required amount of petition signatures from registered voters in the city, preferably 10% of any given single district, can compel the Public Administration Oversight Committee to conduct an official investigation. The petition must clearly state the allegations, be signed by at least one committee member, and signed by 10% of any single district of the qualified voters in the city of Laredo.

My third plan calls on the Laredo City Council to allow each city council member and the Mayor to have a voluntary District Director, whose job will be to stay in-touch with the constituency and fix neighborhood problems. Their purpose will be to serve as a liaison between our public officials and citizens that wish to voice the problems that exist in the community. These District Directors will meet on a monthly basis to form the Public Complaints Committee, which I also call on the Laredo City Council to create, that will convene to discuss problems received by their constituency and issue specific "work orders" to various city departments, whose department director must fix or resolve the issue by addressing it to the City Council within 15 working days or suffer termination. This will effectively allow each member of the Laredo City Council to focus on governing the city while still effectively providing a

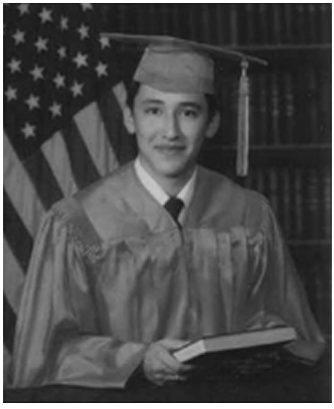
liaison to the public to fix community problems, which makes the government more efficient, democratic, and responsive. Keep in mind that it is absolutely vital that these "District Directors" will be voluntary and not compensated for their work in any way and may not be affiliated with the appointing official's political campaign. District Directors will also be prohibited from wearing any form of political propaganda at any time, on or off work, while serving as a Councilman's liaison to the public.

In closing this section, there is much needed reform in order to increase the level of ethics for the city of Laredo. While it may be viewed as expanding the bureaucracy and creating inefficiency, I believe that efficiency will have to suffer to ensure that democracy prevails. Keep in mind that nothing is more efficient, yet undemocratic and un-American than the internal proceedings of a corporation. Laredo can improve if it follows the vision outlined in this book.

Ret. SSG Juan M. Castro, United States Army's 7th Special Forces' Special Operations Command. Enlisted in 1973 and retired in 1993, Ret. SSG Juan M. Castro served his country honorably and instilled in his children the virtues of honor, honesty, and courage.

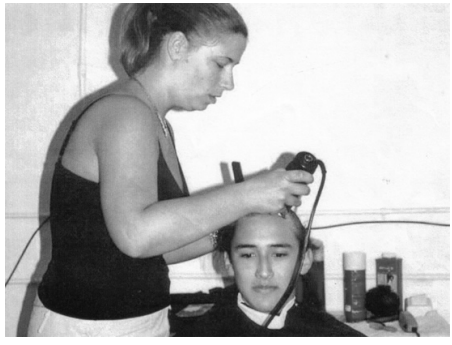
From left to right: John Anthony Castro, his mother, Isabel Castro, and his brother, Ronnie Castro. It was the seclusion of life in Germany that created the strong bond between the Castro Brothers that was pivotal to John A. Castro's success in the future.

John A. Castro on Easter enjoying a coloring book given to him as a gift from his parents. It was his parents that helped develop him into a young man of moralistic character.



John A. Castro graduated from United High School in May of 2002. Despite ranking only in the Top 20% of his graduating class, Castro earned a 1220 on his SAT, was nominated by Congressman Henry Bonilla to attend the United States Military Academy at West Point, passed the West Point Physical Aptitude Exam, and was accepted by the Board of Admissions at West Point.

The standard haircut for all military recruits. This was John A. Castro's very first day at the United States Military Academy's facilities in Fort Monmouth, New Jersey.



Duty, Honor, Country. Those three hallowed words reverberated through the mind of John A. Castro as he struggled to pull-through the first week of basic training at the United States Military Academy, commonly referred to as "Hell Week." Through the virtues instilled in him by his father and a spirit that could not be crushed, John A. Castro successfully completed basic training at the United States Military Academy, a feat that few have the ability to accomplish.

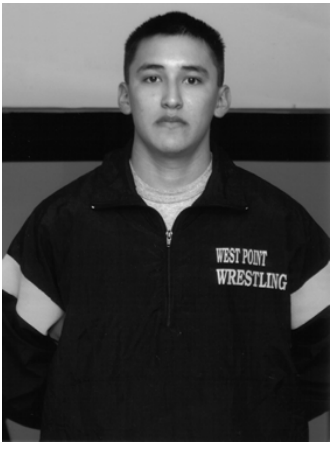
John A. Castro showed to be an outstanding cadet at the United States Military Academy. This picture was taken shortly after John A. Castro qualified as an expert with the M-16, A-1 Assault Rifle, outperforming nearly all other cadets. Cadet Castro also went on to receive recognition for outstanding scholastic performance and was ranked at the top of his class.

Cadets taking a well-needed and well-deserved rest after a 10-mile run with full gear during basic training. Every second of rest during basic training is priceless to cadets.

Charlie Company. John A. Castro is the second person to the left of the cadet holding the company's flag on the bottom row. Charlie Company went on to outperform all other companies at the United States Military Academy.

A few of the cadets from Charlie Company's 3rd Platoon take a photo during basic training. Cadet Castro is seen on the far left-hand side of the bottom row. In the photo, a few cadets jokingly show a hand gesture in the form of a "W" symbolizing West Point.

West Point's Parents Week. From left to right: Ronnie Castro, John A. Castro, and Ret. SSG Juan M. Castro. After four months of being separated by more than 1,000 miles, the Castro Family was reunited in New York for 4 days.



John A. Castro joins the West Point Wrestling Team as well as the Boxing Team. Despite little success or ability as a wrestler, Castro outperforms most upperclassmen as a boxer and was known for never losing a single boxing match. It was this reputation that earned Castro a lot of respect among his fellow cadets.

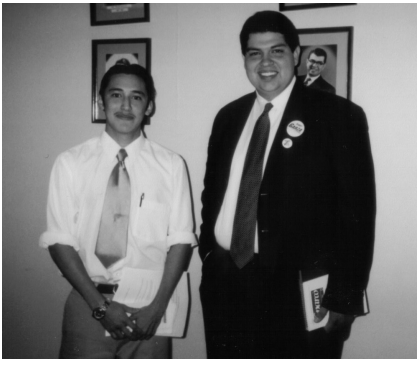
After honorably resigning from the United States Military Academy, John A. Castro began working as an intern with the United Steelworkers of America. As seen in this picture, John A. Castro (bottom-center) completed union organizing training in Pittsburgh, PA along with several others.

In 2004, John A. Castro assisted with the organizing of Citizens United Toward Fair Assessments and Taxes (CUTFAT). In this picture, Castro is seen holding the banner, between the U and the T, to the right of Dr. Xavier Cantu.

That same year, Castro reorganized Students in Democratic Action that quickly reached a total membership of 67 students in 4 high school chapters throughout Laredo.

John A. Castro announces his candidacy for Webb County Commissioner of Precinct 3 and organizes a small grassroots campaign mostly intended to address ideas for reform to the public through televised debates.

Sheriff Rick Flores and candidate John A. Castro during the 2004 Primary Elections. During the campaign, Castro worked closely with the Rick Flores Campaign. Although Castro lost his election bid for Webb County Commissioner of Precinct 3, he continued to push for his ideas to be implemented. Later that year, Castro organized and launched the Laredo Civil Service Campaign with the help of Jose Angel Gonzalez, President of the Laredo Association of City Employees.



John A. Castro and Commissioner Jerry Garza before the 2004 Primary Elections. Despite being opponents, Castro and Commissioner Jerry Garza developed a political strategy to defeat their opponents. After the primaries, Castro supported Jerry Garza who went on to win in the Runoff Elections.

Chapter Four:

An Analysis of Laredo

"It does not require a majority to prevail, but rather an irate, tireless minority keen to set brush fires in people's minds."

- Samuel Adams

LAREDO'S PAST: KNOW FROM WHERE YOU CAME

Before I begin this section, I would like to thank Dr. Jerry Thompson, Elena Holloway, Fernando Pinón, and Robert A. Caro for contributing their knowledge and studies to my research on the history of Laredo. Most of the information in this section was derived from Dr. Jerry Thompson's *Warm Weather and Bad Whiskey: The 1886 Laredo Election Riot*.

In 1905, poet and philosopher George Santayana wrote, "Those who cannot remember that past are condemned to repeat it." One hundred years later, his words still have meaning. Those who do not know of Laredo's past are sure to allow history to repeat itself, just as it is beginning to do this very day.

The explosive growth of Laredo in the 1880s led to the development of two political factions: the Botas ("Boots," a symbol of wealth and class) led by Raymond Martin, C. M. MacDonell, and Webb County Judge José María Rodríguez; and the Guaraches ("Sandals," symbolizing the lower class), led by Santos Benavides and Darío González.

Both parties vied for control of the city council. Political speeches, parades, excessive consumption of alcohol, and the shooting of firearms at anvils characterized the campaigns. On April 6, 1886, an election was won by the Bota candidates who led a mock funeral parade for the Guaraches the following day. On April 7, 1886, during the victorious political parade, they fired on them with a cannon, which sparked a street battle that left possibly 30 dead, and later came to be known as the

1886 Laredo Election Riot.

The 1888 election helped to mend differences, and by 1894, the rivaling factions united to form the all-powerful Independent Club, or Old Party (Partido Viejo) as it was called in Laredo and Webb County, which dominated Laredo politics for eighty-four years and had a major influence on regional, state and even national politics. It was widely known in the dusty streets of Laredo as well as in smoke-filled rooms of the state capital that the Independent Club had become the most powerful political machine on the Texas-Mexican Border. With headquarters in downtown Laredo's Jarvis Plaza, the Independent Club consisted of elected officials in the city, county, and school districts, as well as businessmen, lawyers, and citizens who were economically dependent under the *patrón* system, which can be studied more by reading Fernando Pinón's *Patron Democracy*. Besides controlling all city and county offices, the club endorsed state and national candidates with pledges that Webb County would vote as a block. It was also known to have helped elect Lyndon B. Johnson to the United States Senate, which was a major factor for him being chosen by 1960 Presidential Candidate John F. Kennedy to be his running mate.

Although a Reform Club challenged the Independent Club for power in 1898, by 1900 the Independent Club was firmly entrenched in the community. Amador Sánchez, mayor from 1901 to 1910, was one of the most influential Independent Club politicians during this period. From 1900 to his death in 1931 Antonio M. Bruni, an Italian immigrant, also had considerable

influence in the party as the Webb County Treasurer. From 1910 to the mid-1920s, there was a gradual trend toward solidification of political control. In 1910, the Independent Club elected Robert McCombs to the office of mayor of Laredo. He was followed in 1920 by Leopoldo Villegas, and in 1926, Albert Martin, son of Raymond Martin, was chosen to be "elected" the next mayor.

In 1932, the mayoral election was contested by the Progressive Peoples' Party, headed by Manuel J. Raymond. Although this "Partido de la Garra," as it was called, mounted a formidable campaign against the Independent Club, it failed to capture a single office. By 1934, Raymond, once a vocal opponent, had become a member of the Independent Club. Token opposition to party rule in 1936 was followed by none in 1938. After vigorous opposition in 1939 from William Prescott Allen, publisher of the Laredo daily *Times*, Martin decided not to run in 1940, and Independent Club candidate Hugh S. Cluck was elected with no opposition and served as mayor until 1954, when J. C. "Pepe" Martin, Jr., was elected.

In the 1950s, the Independent Club was seriously challenged by a group led by E. J. Dryden, Sr., but retained power. By 1956, a Reform party composed of several wealthy Laredoans whose livelihood did not depend on the Independent Club, as well as a number of World War II veterans, again challenged the party. Although the Independent Club defeated A. W. "Lonnie" Gates in the mayoral race in 1956, George Byfield and Norma Z. Benavides defeated Independent

Club candidates in 1959 and were elected to the Laredo Independent School Board, while Dalziel Cobb was victorious in the rural Nye Independent School District.

Political activism on the border in the 1960s as well as a growing Laredo middle class presented a new problem for the Independent Club. Although long-time opposition leader Tomás Flores garnered only 1,472 votes to Martin's 8,260 in 1970, two years later the Independent Club lost its first county elections, when Alfonso "Poncho" de la Garza beat Mario Novoa for Webb County Commissioner. Although the Independent Club lost two county commissioner seats in 1974, it continued to hold city offices. Mario Santos, however, beat Independent Club candidate Porfirio L. Flores for Webb County sheriff. Internal disputes within the Independent Club began to weaken the organization.

Beginning in 1977, Taxpayers Organized for Public Service, spearheaded by Lawrence Berry, a patriotic, self-employed handyman, began examining city accounts and uncovered fraud in the street department. The resulting scandal spelled the end for the Independent Club. In November of 1977, J. C. Martin Jr. announced he would not seek re-election. In the April 1978 city election, six candidates sought the office of mayor. Aldo Tatangelo, son of Italian immigrants and a political independent, was easily elected. A month after the elections Martin was indicted by a federal grand jury on one count of mail fraud and ordered to pay a $1,000 fine and $201,118 to the city in restitution, and was sentenced to serve thirty weekends in the Webb County Jail. In 1979, due to the growing progressive movement

and opposition to a strong mayor form of government, the city council approved a new city charter establishing a city council-manager form of government, which basically shifted political power from the office of the mayor to the office of the city manager.

The Independent Club was able to survive for eighty-four years because of its ability to attract new people into its fold and win over opponents. In the latter years, however, it failed to bring in younger members and could not adapt to the changing makeup of the county. The population of Laredo had increased, and with economic diversity fewer people needed Independent Club patronage. Its influence therefore waned, and according to researchers, the longest enduring political machine in South Texas ceased to exist.

Not much has changed since the collapse of the Old Party in 1978. In fact, the only thing that was accomplished by the progressive reforms that took place in 1979 was the banishment of the Old Party from city politics through the new city charter that was adopted. But what about county politics? The Old Party is still alive and breathing within the county government with many of the same families in power or seeking power at this very moment. County Judge Louis H. Bruni, a descendent of Independent Club loyalist Antonio M. Bruni (Webb County Treasurer from 1900-1931) and relative of former mayor J.C. "Pepe" Martin, is a fanatical supporter of the Patron Movement to reclaim power for the Old Party and once said, "Government is too precious to be left in the hands of the people," which is an obvious endorsement of dictatorship. But even

worse is the iron-fisted rule of Webb County District Attorney Jose M. Rubio, locally known as Joe Rubio.

Although it is not clear whether DA Joe Rubio has any relatives that were former members of the Independent Club, he is today, nevertheless, the leader of the Treacherous Alliance to reclaim power for the Old Party and subvert our democracy.

For example, in 1991, District Court Judge Manuel "Meme" Flores' son, Milo Flores, was implicated in the infamous Smiley Triple-Axe Murders. According to court documents, Milo Flores supplied the knives and axe used in the murders and was the alleged getaway driver. According to an employee in the District Attorney's Office, DA Joe Rubio and Judge Manuel Flores held an illegal meeting to shield Manuel Flores' son, Milo Flores, from prosecution. In response, Councilman Alfonso "Poncho" Casso held a meeting with law enforcement officers in the Laredo Police Department along with several other councilmen. When DA Joe Rubio became aware that Councilman Casso was seeking to bring federal charges against him for Obstruction of Justice, he immediately had Councilman Casso jailed on the technicality that since a majority of the city council's members were present at the meeting at the Laredo Police Department, it violated the Texas Open Meetings Act and possibly constituted Official Oppression. This showed District Attorney Joe Rubio's willingness to use the color of the law to carry out political attacks. In 1997, Lisa Zintsmaster, ex-wife of Laredo attorney Jim Jones, testified under oath that an illegal meeting to shield Milo Flores from prosecution

took place between Judge Manuel Flores and District Attorney Joe Rubio shortly after the infamous 1991 triple axe murders. In the end, Councilman Alfonso "Poncho" Casso lost his election bid for mayor of Laredo and left Laredo while no formal charges were ever brought against himself or DA Joe Rubio. This unexpected show of force and willingness on the part of District Attorney Joe Rubio to hide under the color of the law to carryout political attacks marked the revival of the Old Party and a new alliance to subvert our local democratic processes and justice system. In addition, it created a strategic alliance between District Court Judge Manuel "Meme" Flores, once an opponent of the Old Party, and District Attorney Joe Rubio.

Seven years later, Rubio's Treacherous Alliance took a serious blow from the 1998 FBI crackdown on corruption within the District Attorney's Office. Despite some evidence, the FBI failed to bring charges against District Attorney Joe Rubio because of his brother, cousin, and father's willingness to "take the fall" for the illegal operation and the FBI's lack of a eyewitnesses. According to several independent investigations, District Attorney Joe Rubio's father, Rubio Sr., served as a "middle-man" between defendants and Joe Rubio. Rubio Sr. would approach defendants, usually at their personal residences, and offer them the opportunity to pay a bribe in exchange for the case being dismissed by the District Attorney's Office. These illegal bribes would then be paid and Rubio Sr. would inform his son to have the charges against the individual dismissed. Now, according to FBI reports, this illegal operation

was "in the works" for several years, so how could District Attorney Joe Rubio not know it was occurring? According to his father, it was Assistant District Attorney Ramon Villafranca and not District Attorney Joe Rubio that dismissed the cases. That story would be believable if it were not for the fact that several people witnessed that Rubio's father, who was not an employee of the District Attorney's Office, was present in the office nearly every day. This shows that Rubio Sr. was obviously doing work for his son, and what more could an old man do other than drive to the homes of defendants and offer to fix their cases in exchange for bribes. Because Rubio Sr. was not willing to admit that his son, Joe Rubio, knew of and masterminded the entire illegal operation, the FBI was unable to bring charges against Joe Rubio. As a result, District Attorney Joe Rubio remained in power and his father, now viewed as a hero to Old Party members, was sentenced to prison; a prime example of *Omerta*, a strict code of silence originally developed by the Sicilian Mafia but now honored by all criminal syndicates and corrupt political factions.

It is now clear that unless the people of Laredo and Webb County seek to implement the reforms detailed in this book, history will repeat itself as it is beginning to at this very moment, and we will once again come under the authority of a new alliance of corrupt politicians similar to the one previously known as the Independent Club. The only difference is that this time, it will not be as obvious as it was in the past. With the Old Party's first collapse came the understanding that a new alliance could not be made public in the form of an actual

political organization as it was under the rule of the Independent Club. The new political alliance to subvert our democracy is one made in dark rooms and private meetings, not known to the public.

LAREDO'S PRESENT: THE DOMINO IS SET IN MOTION

Our city's current leadership is excellent. Excellent at making undemocratic policies look like democracy. Excellent at making inequality look like justice. Excellent at making environmental destruction look like progress. Excellent at making abuses of our rights look like management. But of course, all this can change through the planned reforms outlined in this book.

Unlike the city government that has home-rule status and the ability to regulate its own bureaucracy, the county government is under the authority of the state of Texas and is much harder to reform. However, the key to reforming the county government is to lobby the Texas State Legislature to remove the widespread discretionary powers of District Attorneys in the state of Texas and provide some sort of oversight committee or department to keep an eye on the internal affairs of every District Attorney's Office in the state of Texas. If this does not happen, one by one, District Attorney Joe Rubio will drop criminal charges against local politicians every time they break the law in exchange for their loyalty and political support; thus filling his pocket with more and more local politicians. For example, according to Laredo Police Department's report #02-27211, Councilman Johnny Amaya assaulted a young woman,

but District Attorney Joe Rubio never pursued the case. Instead, Rubio used this opportunity to save Councilman Amaya in exchange for his loyalty and political support, thus placing Councilman Johnny Amaya firmly "in his pocket." Now, after years of gaining political support through these illegal tactics, District Attorney Joe Rubio has mounted enough political "support" to make an attempt at reclaiming the city government for the Old Party, which is a major goal for Rubio's Treacherous Alliance. The biggest kept secret, until now, was that District Attorney Joe Rubio supported John Galo's campaign for mayor of Laredo.

However, if one single fact is true, it is that whether or not John Galo is elected, reform is inevitable now that this book is in circulation. In our current form of government, the mayor is powerless and at the mercy of the city council and city manager. The crucial positions to seek in the city government are city council seats, because they control who is appointed as both the city manager and chief of police. This should be the goal of any new progressive movement, which is beneficial because it focuses on running several grassroots campaigns in smaller districts as opposed to one large modern campaign citywide. Once the reclaiming of this area is secure, move toward the county government, and once again focus on taking it back piece by piece. Do not attempt any massive election movements to elect an entire slate of candidates, unless the incumbents have been arrested for crimes or resigned from office.

Regardless of District Attorney Joe Rubio's efforts to temporarily subvert our democracy in his quest for

money and political power, the first domino has been set in motion, which is the reading of this book by you. My plan for Laredo is now in your mind, and you must conceal it. Continue making them believe that you are "one of them," wait until you hold public office, and then rapidly push for all the legislative reforms outlined in this book. If this is done, you will be remembered as a hero of the people, forever.

LAREDO'S FUTURE: THE INEVITABLE

People give up their lives for many reasons. For friendship, for love, for a vision. And people kill for the same reasons. Once a progressive movement to restore democracy to the people resorts to violent, coercive, repressive, or subversive tactics to ensure political victory, that movement has failed and has become the very problem it setout to eliminate. The movement itself has become a threat to democracy and should instantly lose the support of the people, unless all peaceful and non-violent methods toward progress have been exhausted and the opposing factions have resorted to military or paramilitary attacks supported in whole or in part by the leader or leaders of the opposing factions. If the local progressive movement maintains a peaceful plan to reform our city and county governments and is not tempted by the easier violent methods of forcing change, then it will be successful. It is much easier to force people to vote for you through the use of violence, coercion, repression, and subversion; but those that resort to such tactics make themselves fascist and un-

American. Never forget that the will of good men will always overcome evil. If history has taught humanity anything, it is that power is an illusion that is only temporary; "for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword (Matthew 26:52)."

Having studied the political systems of many local governments in various states in our nation, Laredo is not too unique. Its history of repressive political tactics and current use of dying political machines and dirty campaign tricks is one that will require a small, educated movement to reform. Remember the words of Samuel Adams, "It does not require a majority to prevail, but rather an irate, tireless minority keen to set brush fires in people's minds." While there are those that believe forming a local political party or massive movement is required to be victorious, the truth is that all that is needed is a small group of well-educated citizens dedicated to restoring and improving American Democracy. Just as the Founding Fathers once said, this group of citizens must pledge to one another there lives, fortunes, and sacred honor. The only problem is that members of organizations in Laredo easily betray one another and break ranks to form their own organizations instead of uniting. As of today, all organizations should be abolished and a single Council for the Progress of American Democracy in Laredo should be formed where all active citizens with their own small-numbered organizations sit as equals and discuss possible courses of action to reform Laredo. Also, there need not be consensus among the group; if one side feels that a petition drive is best and another believes that lobbying

our elected officials is best, then each should follow their own course of action while still openly supporting the others' course of action. In addition, attacks on the local government for internal corruption should not be made in public because it gives the people a bad impression of the progressive movement. In fact, all attacks on the local governments should cease and local active citizens should instead focus on reforming the government and passing local legislation that will prevent such corruption for decades to come. Dedicate your life to preventing corruption through progressive legislation and the establishment of oversight committees, not endless attacks on various politicians for their actions. Seek to institutionalize watchdog organizations in the form of oversight committees within the local bureaucracy itself. For all else is like trying to kill a weed by clipping its leaves. Do not waste time starting petition drives to oust a politician from office, use the energy you have, if good-intentioned in the first place, to push for reform. If not, one corrupt politician will simply be replaced by an equally corrupt but more sly politician, better at "covering his tracks."

Using the example of the yin-yang, every strong organization has a central and vulnerable weakness, while every weak organization has a central and useful strength. For example, although strong and well-funded, Rubio's Treacherous Alliance relies heavily on its supporters' abilities to intimidate and repress uneducated neighborhoods into voting in the favor of Rubio and his candidates, which can be countered by educating the neighborhoods and arming them for self-defense.

Although this book promotes a peaceful, non-violent progressive movement, it is absolutely necessary that the people are armed to prevent the other side from escalating its use of force to ensure victory. Another example would be a small, weak organization like Laredo Watchdogs whose strength is the ability to move secretly throughout neighborhoods educating the people and using informants to find infractions of the law made by politicians like former-County Commissioner David Cortez. However, its weakness is obviously its size and lack of funding, which leaves them vulnerable to a swift attack by superior forces that could cripple a movement and have a devastating effect on the psyche of the masses and public perception of victory. In each apparent advantage lies the seeds of disadvantage. Use your advantages to their fullest extent while keeping a close eye on defending your weaknesses.

Equally important is to be fearful and quick to remove politicians that disguise their true fascist intents to subvert American Democracy by seeking to run our democratic government like a corporation in the name of efficiency. Nothing is more efficient yet fascist, undemocratic, and un-American than the internal proceedings of corporations that seek to "drain-out" the voice of the people as much as possible. Such politicians and institutions that uphold this un-American value, such as County Judge Louis H. Bruni and the World Trade Organization, are prime examples of who *not to elect* to public office. Such politicians and international institutions should be stripped of their power by all means necessary. In addition, be fearful of politicians who hide

under the color of the law and use their offices to carryout political attacks carefully disguised as seemingly lawful actions against an individual. Such politicians, like District Attorney Joe Rubio, pose a clear and present danger to the preservation of liberty, concept of justice, and renewal of American Democracy; but once again, action must not focus on the individual but rather the structure of the judicial system that gives such broad discretionary powers to District Attorneys in the state of Texas. For future problems that I have not presented solutions for in this book, clip the leaves of corruption to prevent it from growing out of control while formulating a plan to eliminate the problem at its root. Once the vulnerability and plan to deal with the root of the problem have been identified, cease "clipping the leaves" and dedicate all time and energy toward striking at its root; for this is the essence of not only waging a successful progressive movement, but also a successful military campaign.

Now that you have finished reading this book, I hope you will view what I have written as an outline for progressive change in Laredo and not a bible for reform. Remember that a good American is always open to new ideas and should never commit him or herself to one single ideology. Commitment to one ideology or political party blinds people into sometimes knowingly making a decision that will bring harm to the United States because they refuse to admit the "other side" has a better plan. As Americans, we must always take the more civilized approach of compromising with opponents. If our opponents are unwilling to compromise,

then all efforts should be made to prove that to the public before taking unilateral action. Know that you now possess the power to reform this entire local government. *Scientia est potentia*; knowledge is power. You now possess the knowledge to take down this entire local unjust system and reclaim democracy for the people. Use it.

Chapter Five:

Selected Writings by Castro

"Liberty without learning is always in peril. Learning without liberty is always in vain."

- John F. Kennedy

THE STUDY OF PUBLIC ADMINIATRATION SHOULD PROMOTE SOCIAL EQUALITY

The study of public administration and the US government should absolutely be concerned with promoting social equality in the workplace. In the United States Constitution, it clearly states, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal," but this has not always been the case in our history. Despite the understanding that equality has not always been present in our history, no one can deny that equality in the workplace has progressed over the past century and continues to progress due to government intervention. From simply being defined as having the basic freedoms of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" as others, to having the same constitutional rights and educational opportunities as others, to wanting preference over others for past cruelties; social equality is highly regarded by liberals as a tool toward egalitarianism but feared by conservatives as a tool by the previously oppressed to take the role of the oppressor.

This section will examine how a few radicals have sought to redefine sociality equality and manipulate its original purpose and how reactionaries have used this attempt by radicals to attack good-intentioned programs truly designed to promote social equality. This section will also seek to explain to the reader why it's vital that we do not abandon Dr. Martin Luther King's quest to have everyone in America treated equally and how a few programs like Affirmative Action need to be

reformed to adapt to the changing times and help put to rest our racially-segregated past, which in today's world is mostly segregated based on economic status that typically determines political affiliation. In addition, many other ideas, views, and needed reforms from the writer's perspective will be addressed to help the reader better understand both what is needed to increase the people's acceptance of the government's role in promoting social equality in the workplace and how progressives should establish a timeline for incremental success to balance majority acceptance with political evolution in an effort to avoid "creating friction" amongst the different groups in our society and prevent further social segregation in our communities based on economic status, ethnicity, political affiliation, race, religion, and sexual preference. To do this, we could begin at the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 that truly began government's involvement in promoting social equality in the American workplace, but to gain a true understanding of the progression of social equality as a whole and why it must be an incremental process with a set timeline, we must begin in 1849 when slavery was beginning to become a politically divisive issue.

The year was 1849 and slavery was beginning to hang like a cloud over the heads of politicians who felt a moral obligation to see to the South's brutal subjugation of slaves come to an end. One event in particular was the publishing of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harrier Beecher Stowe in 1852. Viewed by most scholars as a "wake-up call" to politicians with a conscience, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* revealed in graphic description the horrible

ordeals endured by slaves. Eight years later, northern states, which relied less on slavery economically, called for the abolition of slavery and demanded southern agrarian states, which relied heavily on slavery, to cease the use of slavery, free all slaves, and treat them as equals. Unfortunately, this civil call by the North led to a civil war with the South. After the surrender of the Confederates, slavery was declared unconstitutional, President Abraham Lincoln was assassinated, and southerners continued to oppress former slaves and deny them their constitutional rights through Jim Crow Laws. While in 1852, we certainly could not negotiate the freedom of human beings with the uncompromising South, we can definitely agree to push for progressive legislation and needed reforms today without resorting to civil war. Nevertheless, this event in our history proved that progress in the quest for social equality can meet violent resistance by reactionaries.

Over the next century, people of African-American decent were viewed and treated as second-class citizens. Society was segregated in nearly every aspect. It was not until the Civil Rights Movement led by Dr. Martin Luther King when the African-American community had begun to unite and demand social equality. On the more militant side of the movement, Malcolm X and his supporters demanded equality with the threat of force. After the movement bore the fruits of victory with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, it took only four more years for both Dr. Martin Luther King and Malcolm X to become the victims of reactionaries. Regardless, their spirit lives on in the wording of the

1964 Civil Rights Act, which signified the beginning of total government involvement in the promotion of social equality in the American workplace. Since then, there have been many additional improvements such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972. Although at the time these reforms were needed and well accepted, reform is needed for them to adapt to the changing times and have continued acceptance by the majority of Americans. Unlike 50 years ago when society was segregated based on race, today's society is mainly segregated based on economic status, which typically defines political affiliation. Because of this, programs such as Affirmative Action, for which the original objective was to eliminate "artificial barriers" for the advancement of colored people as well as the present effects of past discrimination, need to be reformed and seek to promote equality from an economic perspective.

Ask yourself one question, should a rich black youth who received a private school education be given preference when applying for a government position over a rich white youth who received a private school education? Should we allow right-wing administrations to secretly focus on hiring minorities with conservative political views, thus giving the impression of promoting social equality and undermining its original purpose? Clearly, the answer to both of these questions is no. A rich black and a rich white are statistically more likely to have the same political affiliation as well as obviously being of the same economic status; therefore, there is no need for preference due to the minority black youth's access to the same opportunities as others. So the

question we should be asking ourselves is, "Who has limited access to opportunities in America?" Ask yourself, "Who is disadvantaged in purchasing a $150 textbook for a university course, which is needed for certain government jobs that are raising the standards to only allow certain minorities to advance?" The answer and cause are clear, the economically disadvantaged who are mostly liberals and supporters of the Democratic Party are the ones with limited access in today's increasingly conservative and elitist America. Even President Bush uses the term "liberal" to demean certain politicians much like white southerners used the term "nigger" to demean African-Americans. The term "liberal" has become the "n-word" of our century, and Affirmative Action has become a patronage tool used by reactionaries to hire minorities with conservative political views as a reward much like slave masters would reward "faithful" slaves by making them house servants. It is because of this that there needs to be immediate reform in regards to affirmative action. All programs should focus on giving preference to those from lower economic status.

The only problem is that radicals have hijacked many of these programs and redefined their original purpose. As President Lyndon B. Johnson once said, "You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, 'You can compete with the others' and still justly believe you have been completely fair." The question that should be posed in response is, "Then using that analogy, if the race should

be delayed to give time for the discriminated person to catch-up, how much is enough time and when does it become cheating to give that person too much time to not only catch-up but have a constant advantage?" Because of increasing opposition to Affirmative Action even from minorities themselves today, it is clear that it is now viewed as cheating, which in political terms is reverse discrimination. For this reason, it is apparent that if the quest to promote social equality is to survive in this new conservative century, it must now focus on promoting equality for the economically disadvantaged, but why should government and the people even be concerned with promoting social equality in the work-place?

As "slippery slope" as it may sound, if the government takes no role in the promotion of social equality, our society and government will creep closer toward fascism. Because everyone except President Bush and the elite agrees that fascism should not be in America's future, we should seek to use government as a tool to advance social equality as much as possible. Affirmative Action should be abolished and immediately replaced with a program designed to give preference to applicants of lower economic status, and the hiring process should be decentralized as much as possible, which the Bush Administration drastically centralized when it issued a memo to all department requiring all hiring to be approved by the department head or his/her direct appointees, who will obviously seek to only hire individuals, preferably minorities, with conservative political views to "kill two birds with one stone." In

addition, educational and training programs for specific job opportunities should be made available to the economically disadvantaged to help them fairly compete with others for a certain government position. For example, in our education system, financial aid, which is not determined by race or ethnicity despite statistics that show it favors minorities, is based on economic status. This is precisely the reason why reactionaries are seeking to decrease the Pell Grant and other avenues for the economically disadvantaged, which are predominantly minorities, to have the same equal educational opportunities as others. While public administration should focus on promoting social equality for the good of democracy and creating a representative bureaucracy of the democracy it is serving, it is also intended to have an influence on society as a whole.

Although they are aggressively opposed in the South, which still maintains its treacherous Confederate identity to this day, policies geared toward promoting social equality should have the intention of reforming society attached to their overall objective. While reactionaries are trying their hardest to keep minorities economically disadvantaged by cutting-off access to educational opportunities and funding for job-training programs, we can use this to our advantage by passing legislation aimed at giving preference to the economically disadvantaged. Once this has been accomplished, the economically disadvantaged, whom are nearly all minorities, will begin to climb the economic status ladder and have higher education opportunities available to them. Once this has been accomplished, the South

will begin to reform and inevitably bury and put an end to its racially segregated past.

While an official plan for progressives is still lacking, the overall goal has now been clearly stated. There is still a lot of work to do in the midst of much of our past work being trampled by multinational corporations and the World Trade Organization. One thing we must never stop doing is being creative and designing new ways to further the quest for social equality and using government as a tool to both advance that cause and reform society as a whole. We must also never forget that incremental change is the key to success and must always seek to balance our goals with limits of reactionaries and political evolution.

THE USE OF FORCE AGAINST IRAQ WAS LAWFUL

As of July 23, 2005, 1,774 US soldiers, 93 UK soldiers, and 101 other coalition forces been killed in action in Iraq. In addition, 6,556 US soldiers have been permanently wounded in Iraq and unable to return to duty. So far in 2005, we have lost an average of 62.85 soldiers a month. Nearly every day, there is a car bombing that wounds our soldiers, or Iraqi insurgents launch attacks against US-UK forces. By the end of the year, and estimated $245.4 billion will have been spent funding the War in Iraq that has taken the lives of an estimated 19,000 Iraqi civilians. The economy in Iraq is improving and the newly formed quasi-democratic government is beginning to shows signs of legitimate representation and stable governance. US-trained Iraqi

soldiers are beginning to demonstrate their ability to one day, perhaps eight to ten years from now, take complete control of securing the peace in Iraq. Looking back, Americans on both sides of the political spectrum find themselves asking, "How did things go so far? Why were no weapons found, which was suppose to be the basis for this war? Was it worth the lost American lives and billions of dollars spent? But more importantly, was the US invasion of Iraq a lawful use of force?" To answer these questions, we could begin at the passage of UN Resolution 678 on November, 29, 1990, but to gain a more in-depth understanding of the justifications for the invasion of Iraq, whether legitimate or not, we must start from the very beginning.

In the early morning hours of September 22, 1980, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein launched a massive air and land invasion of Western Iran due to a territorial dispute over the Shatt al Arab, a waterway that forms the boundary between Iraq and Iran and empties into the Persian Gulf. The invasion, although in violation of Iraq's 1975 treaty with Iran that gave Iranians partial control of the waterway, did not get much international attention even when Saddam Hussein used mustard gas and a nerve agent in Iraq's southern front against Iran's "human wave" of assaults in 1984. As David Segal explains, "The Iraqis [had] to choose between the possible adverse effects of offending world opinion and the certain effects of being overrun by Iranian soldiers. Under the circumstances, the choice was easy." In comparison, the United States used three atomic bombs against the Empire of Japan in 1945 when it felt as

though there was no other option because the Axis and Nazi Germany were seeking global domination. Whenever a nation seeks total domination, not merely victory, over another, there can be no doubt that the invaded nation will use all weapons available regardless of moral values, treaties, or international regulations like the 1925 Geneva Protocols. This is precisely why the international community condoned Iraq's use of chemical weapons against the 1984 Iranian invasion forces in southern Iraq. It was not until 1987 when the United States and several other Western European nations became involved in the war in response to Iranian attacks on Kuwaiti oil tankers traveling in the Persian Gulf. Intervention was accomplished by re-flagging Kuwaiti vessels as US-registered ships in order to establish a genuine link as defined in the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which was a fairly easy task. The reason for mentioning this is to show the willingness of the United States to manufacture justifications and create loopholes for foreign intervention, which may be a bit unethical but certainly not unlawful.

As the Iran-Iraq War drew to a close in the spring of 1988, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein appointed his cousin, Ba'th Northern Bureau Secretary-General Ali Hasan al-Majid, to launch chemical attacks against Kurdish villages in Northern Iraq for seeking Iranian support for their insurgency during the Iran-Iraq War. After the savage chemical attacks, Iraqis began referring to Ba'th Northern Bureau Secretary-General Ali Hasan al-Majid as "Chemical Ali." In August of 1988, Iran's

leaders agreed to sign UN Cease-Fire Resolution 598, which showed they had made a costly strategic error when they decided to continue the war in the summer of 1982. After being victorious and signing UN Cease-Fire Resolution 598, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein ordered additional chemical attacks on Kurdish villages to drive them away from Iraq's common border with Turkey. The reason for mentioning this is to show the willingness of Saddam Hussein to use chemical weapons against all enemies, foreign and domestic.

Over the next two years, Iraq was deeply in debt to other nations such as Kuwait who had lent $10 billion in interest-free loans to fund Iraq's war against Iran. In the fifteenth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, it stated that in order to prevent an economic depression, Iraq called on Kuwait to raise the minimum price of oil by $3 a barrel and cease the overproduction of oil from its country, which was keeping the market value of oil and domestic prices for gasoline in the United States relatively low but costing Iraq an estimated $14 billion a year. After Kuwait steadfastly opposed the proposed Iraqi policy, Iraq walked out of the talks with Kuwait on August 1, 1990, and that same evening, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein reportedly had 120 of his own military officers executed for opposing aggression against Kuwait. Just before dawn the following day on August 2, 1990, an estimated 100,000 Iraqi soldiers led by the elite Republican Guard supported by tanks and aircraft stormed into Kuwait, seized the country in only five hours, encircled the capitol in Kuwait City, and abducted several members of the ruling Sabah family.

Minutes before Iraqi troops reached the emir's palace, he sped in his limousine across the Saudi border. The same day, the United Nations Security Council adopted UN Resolution 660 which stated, "The Security Council... [c]ondemns the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait... [and] [d]emands that Iraq withdraw immediately and unconditionally all its forces." The United Nations Security Council later passed subsequent resolutions such as UN Resolution 662 that declared the Iraqi annexation of Kuwait "null and void," UN Resolution 664 that demanded that Iraq free all "third state nationals" taken hostage from the battlefield in Kuwait, UN Resolution 665 that authorized the use of force to enforce the embargo on Iraq, UN Resolution 670 that imposed an air embargo on Iraq and created the no-fly zones, UN Resolution 674 that reminded Iraq that it was liable for any loss as a result of the invasion of Kuwait, and UN Resolution 677 that condemned Iraq's attempts to "alter the demographics" of Kuwait. At the same time, a coalition of 39 countries began deploying troops to Gulf region, primarily to defend Saudi Arabia, as a part of Operation Desert Shield. During the passage of these countless UN Resolutions and the military build-up in the Gulf region, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein publicly called for an Islamic holy war against US forces in the region on September 5, 1990. One day after the passage of UN Resolution 677, the United Nations Security Council passed UN Resolution 678, which authorized "Member States co-operating with the Government of Kuwait, unless Iraq on or before 15 January 1991 fully implements, as set forth in paragraph

1 above, the above-mentioned resolutions, to use all necessary means to uphold and implement resolution 660 (1990) and all subsequent relevant resolutions and to restore international peace and security in the area." Basically, UN Resolution 678, which was passed on November 29, 1990, set a deadline of January 15, 1991, for Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait or face the estimated 570,000 coalition forces that would forcefully expel Iraq from Kuwait. For further clarification, UN Resolution 678 authorized the United States to use all necessary means, including military force, to enforce UN Resolution 660, which demanded that Iraq withdraw from Kuwait, and uphold all subsequent resolutions. On January 15, 1991, the United States found no evidence that Iraqi forces had withdrawn or begun to withdraw from Kuwait. At 0230 hours Baghdad time on January 17, 1991, Operation Desert Storm began with massive air and missile attacks on targets in Kuwait and Iraq. In response, Iraq launched Scud missiles into Israel and Saudi Arabia and publicly stated on January 21, 1991, that it would use coalition prisoners as shields against air attacks, which constituted a gross violation of the 1925 Geneva Protocols that prohibits such inhumane wartime actions. On February 16, 1991, Iraq's UN ambassador threatened to use weapons of mass destruction against coalition forces, which once again demonstrated their complete disregard and lack of respect for the international community. Six days later, Iraq dynamited 732 Kuwaiti oil wells resulting in more than 650 catching fire. On February 26, 1991, coalition forces took control of Kuwait, and two days later, an

informal cease-fire began. On April 3, 1991, after most Iraqi soldiers had either surrendered or retreated, the United Nations Security Council adopted UN Resolution 687 that outlined the terms of the formal cease-fire between the coalition and Iraq, such as the "destruction, removal, or rendering harmless" of all "chemical and biological weapons" and all "ballistic missiles with a range greater than one hundred and fifty kilometers." In addition, Iraq was forced to submit to "urgent, one-site inspection[s]" for any evidence or traces of such weaponry.

Later studies of Operation Desert Storm by CIA Analyst Patrick Eddington found that logs of the 101st Airborne Division had evidence of repeated detection of chemical agents that the Pentagon first denied but now admits to having in their possession. According to the analyzation of those logs, an estimated 20,000 soldiers may have been exposed to chemical agents, for which Marine Corps Major Randy Herbert testified before Congress and stated, "The Pentagon knew from Day One that chemical weapons were used." In my view, the government has been reluctant to admit that Iraq used chemical weapons against our soldiers, which resulted in development of Gulf War Syndrome, because it would cause the Defense Department millions of dollars to provide extra health care for affected soldiers despite no known cure and force the United States government to spend hundreds of millions of dollars to find a cure for only a few hundred soldiers that may still be alive once research is complete. This would not only place an unreasonable time burden on the Defense Department,

but also drain the defense budget, which would only serve to bolster other nations to advocate the use chemical weapons to both cause damage to military units and drain the invading army's nation economically. Nevertheless, this once again demonstrated Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's willingness to use weapons of mass destruction in his possession even when his survival did not depend upon their use.

Nearly two years later on January 7, 1993, Iraq refused to remove missiles that the United States claimed was moved into southern Iraq. In response, President George H. W. Bush ordered allied warplanes and warships attacked missile sites and a nuclear facility near Baghdad. Once again, this demonstrates a lawful use of force under UN Resolution 678, which authorized the to use of all necessary means to bring peace and security to the area. On June 27, 1993, US warships fired 24 cruise missiles at intelligence headquarters in Baghdad in retaliation for what the Clinton Administration called a plot to assassinate former President George H. W. Bush, which yet again illustrated how Saddam Hussein was a menace to peace, stability, and all who had or planned to oppose him. Five years later on August 5, 1998, Iraqi President Saddam Hussein announced his government was cutting ties with weapons inspectors because he felt as though there was no set date for lifting the sanctions crippling his economy and ability to raise an army, and on October 31, 1998, Iraq officially suspended access by UN personnel to any and all sites in Iraq. In response, on December 16, 1998, President Clinton ordered a strategic 4-day air strikes

campaign, code-named Operation Desert Fox, against military targets in Iraq to "degrade [Saddam Hussein's] capacity to develop and to use weapons of mass destruction or to threaten his neighbors." Three days later, the Iraqi government cut off all cooperation with weapons inspectors. One year later on December 17, 1999, the United Nations replaced the UN Special Commission, which had been responsible for weapons inspections since the end of the war, with the UN Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission known as UNMOVIC, which gave the Security Council more control over the inspection process, and on March 1, 2000, Hans Blix assumed the post of Executive Chairman of UNMOVIC.

In the early morning hours of Tuesday, September 11, 2001, news stations all over the nation reported that a plane had crashed into the World Trade Center in New York City and were uncertain whether it was accidental or intentional. Moments later, a second plane hit and it immediately became apparent that the United States was under attack. Later that morning, the Pentagon and State Department were also attacked and Washington scrambled to find out who was behind the attacks, which was later understood to be Osama bin Laden and his international terrorist network, Al-Qaeda. These attacks upon the United States forced a shift to a first-strike, pre-emptive war doctrine to eliminate any and all threats to national security.

One year later on September 12, 2002, in a speech to the United Nations, President Bush stated that world leaders needed to either get tough with Iraq or stand

aside as the United States took action. Fearing pre-emptive attacks and a possible invasion, Iraq announced four days later that weapons inspectors were welcomed to return unconditionally after nearly four years. But if Saddam was willing to defy the United Nations by continuing to develop weapons of mass destruction while United Nations inspectors were in his country, do you think he would stop when they were not inspecting for four years? In addition, Saddam Hussein had already proven not to be trustworthy person based on the November 1997 planned air strikes that were called off by President Clinton due to Saddam Hussein's promise to cooperate with the weapons inspectors, which he did not fulfill and resulted in the December 1998 air strikes.

On October 16, 2002, Congress passed the Authorization for the Use of Force Against Iraq Resolution of 2002, which specifically stated the following:

> "(a) AUTHORIZATION. The President is authorized to use the Armed Forces of the United States as he determines to be necessary and appropriate in order to-
> (1) defend the national security of the United States against the continuing threat posed by Iraq; and
> (2) enforce all relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions regarding Iraq."

In short, the Authorization for the Use of Force Against Iraq Resolution of 2002 passed by Congress gave President Bush the discretion of single-handedly determining if Iraq posed a threat to the United States, and if so, authorized the President to unilaterally use the

Armed Forces of the United States to invade and topple Saddam Hussein's regime. On November 8, 2002, the United Nations Security Council adopted UN Resolution 1441, which found that "Iraq has been and remains in material breach of its obligations," and warned Iraq that it would "face serious consequences as a result of its continued violations of its obligations." In addition, UN Resolution 1441 called for a "currently accurate, full, and complete declaration of all aspects" of Iraq's programs to "develop chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles, and other delivery systems," which, at the time, was assumed to be in their possession by UNMOVIC Executive Chairman Hans Blix, the United Nations Security Council, and the Bush Administration.

On the evening of March 17, 2003, all diplomatic efforts ceased when President Bush delivered an ultimatum to Saddam Hussein and his sons to leave Iraq within 48 hours or face an invasion and overthrow of his government. In his live televised speech to the nation, President Bush, in reference to the lawfulness of the use of force against Iraq, stated the following:

> "In the case of Iraq, the Security Council did act, in the early 1990's. Under Resolution 678 and 687, both still in effect, the United States and our allies are authorized to use force in ridding Iraq of weapons of mass destruction. This is not a question of authority, it is a question of will."

On the evening of March 19, 2003, President George W. Bush formally declared war on Iraq and launched Operation Iraqi Freedom's first mission of conducting

air strikes targeting Saddam Hussein and other Iraqi leaders in Baghdad. The second round of air attacks were aimed at Baghdad, and coalition forces invaded Iraq in the south from Kuwait. Followed by the southern invasion was the major phase of the war defined by heavy aerial attacks on Baghdad and other major cities in Iraq, largely publicized as the "Shock and Awe" campaign, which was meant to decrease the morale of Iraqi troops and citizens in an effort to thwart Iraqi opposition to coalition forces. On a personal note, this method of attack is effective if not followed by occupation, which will only serves to allow Iraqi citizens enough time to recover psychologically and plan vengeful insurgent or suicide attacks against the occupying coalition forces. Less than one month later on April 9, 2003, coalition forces took control of Baghdad with a few sporadic firefights carried out by random, unorganized militant Iraqis, and on May 1, 2003, President Bush announced an end to major combat operations and declared that coalition forces had successfully completed the mission of liberating Iraq.

While coalition forces were liberating Iraq, millions of people around the world were organizing massive demonstrations in their nations' capitols to protest the US' "coalition of the willing" and their invasion of Iraq. At some of these demonstrations, protestors held signs that read "No Blood for Oil," while others held signs that read "Bush War Criminal." While there is some merit to the "No Blood for Oil" signs, the "Bush War Criminal" signs were extremely misleading because President Bush was completely justified in his decision

to use military force against Iraq to disarm and remove Saddam Hussein from power. Despite the fact that the 9/11 Commission Report concluded that there was "no credible evidence that Iraq and al-Qaeda cooperated on attacks against the United States," which was one of the justifications for the invasion of Iraq, UN Resolution 678 specifically authorized the United States to use all necessary means to bring peace and security to the region, including the use of military force previously used under the Clinton Administration. There should be no misunderstanding that many of the other justifications used by the Bush Administration for toppling Saddam Hussein's Iraqi regime were simply to bolster domestic support for the war because justifying an entire war on the technical wording of a single resolution would not gain any domestic or international support. Because the Bush Administration manufactured weak justifications for the invasion of Iraq as we did to intervene in the Iran-Iraq War when Iran attacked Kuwaiti oil tankers, massive opposition to the invasion of Iraq was seen worldwide. The weak justifications, along with the alleged profiting from corruption within the UN Oil for Food program by top politicians in Russia and France, may have played a large role in the reason for such widespread lack of support among the top industrialized nations of the world, most of whom are members of the United Nations Security Council. In addition, no international body can prevent any nation from preemptively defending itself. For example, during the Cuban Missile Crisis, President Kennedy gained international support from both the United

Nations and the Organization of American States to preemptively attack missile sites in Cuba, because if they would have become operational, the window of opportunity to prevent an attack without resulting in the death of millions of Americans would be significantly diminished. If the United States under the Kennedy Administration had waited for the medium-range nuclear ballistic missiles in Cuba to become operational and used in a hostile manner before reacting self-defense, more than 10 million Americans could have been instantly killed by an attack with a mere five-minute warning and a possible 40 million more could have died from radiation poisoning due to the nuclear fallout. Therefore, the Cuban Missile Crisis example is a clear indication that a preemptive attack on another nation does not automatically make that action an unlawful use of force. After the passage of UN Resolution 1441 and prior to the invasion of Iraq, the Bush Administration consulted with the United Nations Security Council and clearly communicated the need for immediate military action to end the threat posed by Iraq to US national security because of the Administration's belief that Iraq possessed weapons of mass destruction and intentionally omitted such possessions in his report to the UN Security Council, which constituted a further material breach. When this call was ignored and the Bush Administration had exhausted its final means of a peaceful resolution, President Bush, under the authority granted to the United States by UN Resolution 678 to use all necessary means to bring peace and security to the area, issued an ultimatum to Iraqi President Saddam

Hussein and invaded Iraq 48 hours after doing so to end the imminent and growing threat posed by Iraq.

When the American people view the current situation in Iraq on television, they see images of massive demonstrations against the US occupation and public calls for the US to withdraw from Iraq. What Americans and Iraqis fail to realize is that the mere fact that Iraqis are now able to rise up and protest shows that freedom is flourishing. If such demonstrations had been carried out against Saddam's regime prior to his overthrow, each and every one of the demonstrators would have been executed. Many Iraqis fail to realize the great freedoms they now possess and how to constructively use them in the political arena, but as they grow to accept their quasi-democratic government and begin to politically mature and evolve, their nation will inevitably transform into a stable, democratic government, which will serve as a new image for the middle east and hopefully result in rebellions, revolutions, and uprising in other nations devoted toward establishing democratic government as well. While some may view this war as immoral, it was absolutely necessary to the cause of women's rights in the middle east and one day achieving world peace and stability.

The only question is whether or not the people of Iraq will accept their new government or rebel against it for a thousand years. I pray that they accept it.

THE USA PATRIOT Act: DEMOCRACY IN PERIL

On October 26, 2001, "President" Bush signed the

USA PATRIOT Act (Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism). On the surface, the Act appears to help the government battle terrorism, yet the Act actually attacks and criminalizes our basic rights to disagree with policies set by the government. The Act is unpatriotic in that it opposes our country's founding principles as listed in the Bill of Rights. The so-called PATRIOT Act came into being as the U.S. launched a controversial war in the wake of 9/11 and is being used to inhibit dissent at the very time when citizens and non-citizens alike need the freedom to express themselves and protest government actions such as the unnecessary abuse of prisoners in Guatanamo Bay, Cuba for recreational purposes.

The USA PATRIOT Act compromises the First Amendment, which states, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or of the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

The PATRIOT Act's definition of terrorism extends well beyond attacks on innocent civilians. It criminalizes any act that would "appear to be intended.... to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion (Section 802)." The PATRIOT Act could easily be used to interpret strikes, protests, or other forms of legitimate dissent supported by the First Amendment as "dangerous to human life." With every movement such as the Civil Rights Movement, there are

always a few in the movement of 50,000 people that may resort to violence, thus enabling the government to take action against the entire movement rather than the 10 or 20 individuals that resorted to violence. In some instances, it was proven that members of the Chicago police sent undercover police officers to incite riots at antiwar demonstrations in the 1960s, thus giving the police an excuse to arrest every protestor in the name of "law and order." Therefore, the definition of terrorism in the PATRIOT Act could be used to target and attack peaceful movements, effectively discouraging the right to peacefully assemble.

The PATRIOT Act's Section 411 infringes on our First Amendment rights as well. For example, it deems soliciting funds for an organization that the government labels as a "terrorist group" as "engaging in a terrorist activity." The government often defines such organizations without due process, using alleged "secret evidence." In fact, a few international non-governmental organizations that have participated in drafting of international treaties for environmental protection such as GreenPeace, have been labeled by a terrorist organization by the Bush Administration. Today, marching outside City Hall with the Laredo Civil Service Campaign to support a Civil Service System could be considered an "intimidation tactic" and you could be arrested and detained for up to 60 days by the Department of Homeland Security for "engaging in a terrorist activity" without due process or the right to speak to an attorney. The PATRIOT Act's Section 411 is making the exercise of our constitutional rights during wartime a

terrorist activity.

The PATRIOT Act uses Section 215 to allow the FBI to acquire lending and purchasing records from libraries and bookstores; government access to such records jeopardizes our free speech rights to read or recommend certain books.

The PATRIOT Act's Section 216 threatens free speech by authorizing the use of the "Carnivore" system, an electronic tracking system that is capable of capturing all forms of internet activity.

The USA PATRIOT Act compromises the Fourth Amendment, which states, "The right of the people to be secure in their person, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable search and seizures, shall not be violated, and no warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or Affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized."

The PATRIOT Act's Section 213 allows the government to conduct "sneak and peak" searches, or to search your home when no one is home, and they can delay notification of the search indefinitely.

The PATRIOT Act's Section 218 grants the Executive Branch the most far-reaching surveillance powers ever, effectively eroding separation of powers. Section 218 eliminates the need for the FBI to show "probable cause" before conducting secret searches. This means that if police involved in an investigation want to evade the Fourth Amendment, all they have to do is claim that there is a need to gather intelligence as part of their investigation into so-called "terrorist activities," which

could be mean anything from a Civil Rights Movement to a Civil Service Campaign. In fact, if former President Richard Nixon had Section 218 at his disposal in 1971, the Watergate break-in that led to his resignation would have been completely legal.

In 2003, President Bush expanded the PATRIOT Act to compromise even more of our rights and civil liberties. On February 7, 2003, the Center for Public Integrity reported that the government has been drafting a sequel to the USA PATRIOT Act called "Domestic Security Enhancement Act of 2003." In late 2003, the Act was passed. Among other items, the draft includes provisions that would: collect every citizens' DNA information in a national database, curtail public access to information normally available under the Freedom of Information Act, secretly detain citizens, and restrict requests for information concerning the effects of dangerous chemicals accidentally released into communities by private businesses as provided for by the Clean Air Act. We are witnessing the greatest expansion of the Executive Branch in modern history, which threatens the separation and balance of powers that may destabilize the entire federal government.

Today, it is now possible that by simply donating money to an organization that the government has secretly labeled a terrorist organization, an American citizen can be investigated, have their home secretly searched, be arrested with no charges and imprisoned for months with no legal counsel.

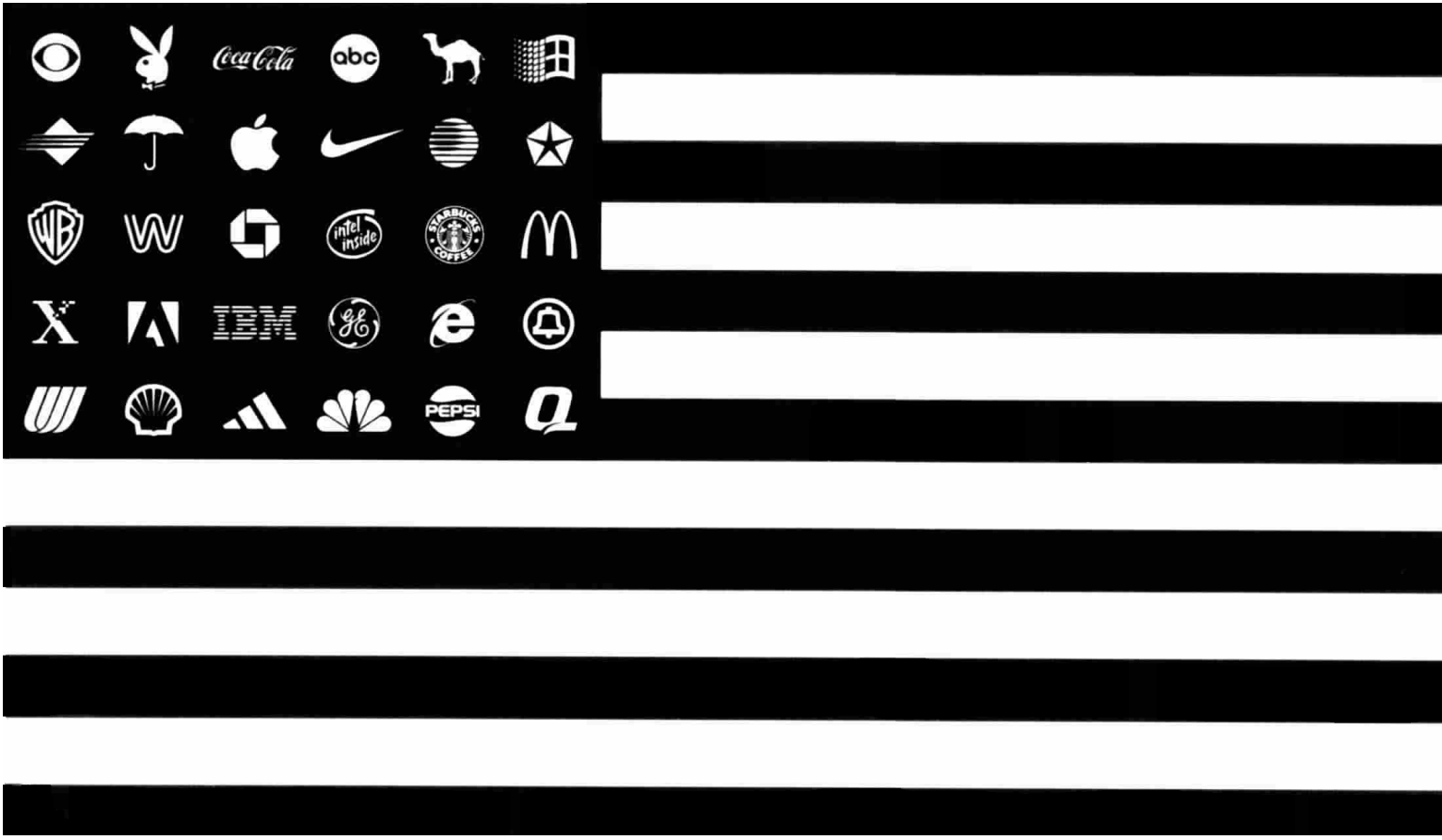
Our Founding Father, Benjamin Franklin, once said, "Those who would give up essential Liberty to purchase

temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety." In eroding our civil liberties, President Bush has taken away the very thing that makes us proud to be Americans, which is our freedoms, while making us more hated by our nation's allies and previously neutral nations like Venezuela. We cannot and must not allow the freedom and democracy that millions of men and women of our Armed Forces have died to uphold to be destroyed through the slow erosion of our constitutional rights by unpatriotic legislation like the so-called PATRIOT Act.

We cannot allow fear-exploiting politicians to lead us to a place where we abandon our most precious traditions of liberty, freedom, justice, and democracy. Our Founding Father, revolutionary hero, and First American President George Washington once said, "If the Freedom of Speech is taken away, then dumb and silent we may be led, like sheep to the slaughter." Our constitutionally-protected and guaranteed freedoms clearly outlined in the Bill of Rights must be honored by all. While most provision in the USA PATRIOT Act are still necessary to combat terrorism within the borders of the United States, there are a few provisions that must be eliminated to protect Americans against tyranny. For the sake of liberty, I call upon the Congress of the United States to begin removing dangerous provision within the text of the USA PATRIOT Act and only authorize provisions that are absolutely vital to the War on Terrorism.

Let us never forget the sacrifices that so many American Patriots endured to ensure that our children

would be raised in a nation that guarantees the right to freedom of speech, the right the peacefully assemble, the right against unreasonable search and seizure, the right to be informed of the reasons for your arrest, the right to due process of the law, and the right to speak to an attorney. In the words of General and President Dwight D. Eisenhower, “Here in America, we are descended in spirit from revolutionaries and rebels - men and women who dared to dissent from accepted opinion.”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Chapter Six:

The Case Against the WTO

"I see in the near future a crisis approaching that unnerves me and causes me to tremble for the safety of my country... corporations have been enthroned and an era of corruption in high places will follow, and the money power of the country will endeavor to prolong its reign by working upon the prejudices of the people until all wealth is aggregated in a few hands and the Republic is destroyed."

- U.S. President Abraham Lincoln
Nov. 21, 1864
(letter to Col. William F. Elkins)
Ref: *The Lincoln Encyclopedia*,
Archer H. Shaw (Macmillan, 1950, NY)

GATT, NAFTA, AND THE SUBVERSION OF THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

The Global Enforcer. The World Trade Organization (WTO), the new "governing" structure [of GATT], was crafted at the end of the Uruguay Round negotiations [in the Fall of 1994] to organize and enforce this new system of limits on every nation's laws and policies. The new global agency was not in the original plans for the Uruguay Round when its terms of reference were agreed upon in 1986. The WTO was hatched to provide a global executive branch that would judge a country's compliance with the rules, enforce the rules with sanctions, and provide the legislative capacity to expand the rules in the future.

The WTO gives the trade rules both a permanent organizational structure (powers that GATT did not have) and the kind of "legal personality" enjoyed by the U.N., the World Bank, and the I.M.F. The binding provisions that define the WTO's functions and scope do not incorporate any environmental, health, labor, or human rights considerations. Moreover, there is nothing in the institutional principles of the WTO to inject any procedural safeguards of openness, participation, or accountability. The WTO provides no mechanism for non-governmental organizations to participate in its activities and, in several key provisions, requires that documents and proceedings remain confidential.

The WTO "dispute resolution system" is the mechanism that enforces WTO control over democratic governance. Disputes are not decided by democratically

elected officials or their appointees but by secret tribunals of foreign-trade bureaucrats from a preset roster. Only national government representatives are allowed to participate in the dispute resolution process. State and local government representatives (such as a state attorney general), citizens, and the press are locked out.

For U.S. citizens, the notion of delegating "judicial" review to forums that do not have the procedural safeguards of the U.S. federal and state judicial systems is troubling. Trade dispute panels, whether in the WTO, NAFTA, or I988 Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, share highly problematic traits:

1. Tribunals have no guarantee of impartiality or economic disinterest of decision-makers.
2. There is no required disclosure of potential conflicts of interest. (In a recent timber dispute under the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement, two of the five members of the panel were attorneys from firms representing Canadian lumber interests directly affected by the case.)
3. All documents, transcripts, and proceedings are secret.
4. No media and no citizens can sit in and observe the proceedings. And there is no outside appeal or review available.

The WTO text lists qualifications for dispute tribunal members that ensures they will represent only a "trade uber alles" perspective. The qualifications primarily include experience in a country's trade delegation or experience as a lawyer on a past trade dispute. Such qualifications produce panelists with a uniformly pro-trade perspective.

There is no mechanism to expose such panelists to any alternative perspectives or expert opinions on environmental, health, labor, consumer, or human rights issues. The WTO tribunal rules also forbid identification of panelists who have supported particular positions and conclusions, adding an additional layer of secrecy and lack of accountability.

Ironically, the only specific procedural requirement for WTO tribunals is that they be conducted in secret. Unlike complaints, briefs, and affidavits in the U.S. court system, documents presented to the WTO tribunals are kept confidential. Thus it is only as a result of a Public Citizen lawsuit that the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) must finally release the U.S. submissions to the GATT panels. Even so, these submissions are censored by USTR officials in order to conceal the arguments of the other party. Documents from other parties in the dispute are still not available. So, if a state law were to be challenged, governors or state attorney generals would only have access to those documents or proceedings that the federal government chose to make available.

The Old Rules and the New. A comparison of the rules of the old GATT and the recently established WTO reveals much about the intentions of the people who created the system. At nearly every turn, with nearly every rule, the clear intention is to diminish if not eliminate the democratic process, not only in the internal operations of the GATT bureaucracy and the WTO but also among Member nations. The new rules clearly favor the largest, most developed, and most powerful

nations. Here are some examples of those rules:
1. Unlike the old rules of GATT, the new WTO requires that all members agree to be bound by all the Uruguay Round accords. The old GATT rules did not require this all-or-nothing standard. From a trade perspective, this rule seems a good idea because it eliminates free riders- countries that do not accept certain provisions but benefit from other countries' compliance. But from the point of view of democracy, the rule forces many countries, usually small ones, to accept trade in areas that might be undesirable in the long run. Their choice is to agree or to forfeit participation in the world trade system. Such all-or-nothing international laws are very rare, because they pose choices incompatible with national sovereignties.
2. When countries join the WTO, they authorize the WTO to conduct ongoing negotiations on WTO provisions; many may never be submitted for approval by any elected legislatures. Only a simple majority vote is required to initiate these WTO negotiations; under the old GATT that vote had to be unanimous. Thus the new rules lead to a higher potential for coercion of small nations by larger ones.
3. Perhaps the most ominous change is this one: WTO rules and restrictions are now enforceable as regards all existing federal, state, and local laws, and future laws too. As the text says, "Each Member shall ensure the conformity of its laws, regulations and administrative procedures with its obligations as pro-

vided in the annexed agreement." So, U.S. law and the laws of every other nation must "conform" to the WTO and each other. Perhaps with this provision in mind, the Clinton administration announced that all future U.S. environmental proposals would be put through trade reviews that ensured their compliance with U.S. trade obligations. In effect, the administration voluntarily sacrificed U.S. sovereignty.

4. Under yet another WTO provision, a law of a Member nation can be challenged if "the attainment of any objective (of the WTO) is being impeded" by the existence of the law. The vagueness of this provision makes it possible to "smuggle" into the WTO's grasp many national laws that would seem to be free of any implications for trade.

5. One additional point of difference concerns the WTO's attack on its Members' democratic and sovereign decision making: Under the old GATT rules, there had to be unanimous approval of all GATT's contracting parties before trade sanctions were imposed on a GATT nation by the other nations. Under the new WTO rules, the determinations by WTO tribunals become automatically binding. This holds unless all Member countries vote to stop the decision within ninety days. This is another case where anti-democratic procedural rules determine much of the out come; the obvious result is that few, if any, tribunal decisions would ever be voted down unanimously. This requirement of consensus to stop the action of an international institution rather than to authorize it is uniquely empowering for the WTO; it means its bureau-

cratic decisions will be honored and feared, thus further intimidating any resistant strains among nations. Under the old GATT, the opposite rule applied: Decisions were not adopted unless all countries agreed; any single country had the right to block a GATT ruling and thus maintain greater autonomy.

Thus the Bush administration was able to freeze an old GATT tribunal ruling against the Marine Mammal Protection Act, which prevented the import of Mexican tuna caught in a manner that also killed dolphins. A GATT tribunal called that an illegal trade barrier, but Bush, under massive public pressure, was able to veto the ruling by the requirement of unanimity. The new WTO removes all countries' veto power and effectively their ability to maintain laws that protect people or the environment from WTO challenge.

As mentioned above, the WTO rules require that Members' future laws also comply with WTO rules. So WTO Member countries are now required, when promulgating new federal, state, or local laws, to take into account whether or not the new law will conform with WTO rules. Thus the WTO has a chilling effect on policies that are now being written and rewritten with the fear of a future WTO challenge in mind. In some cases, such as a I994 child labor law proposed in the U.S. Senate, conflict with the WTO was a primary weapon used to squash the bill's progress. To avoid the time and expense of later having to defend a law against a WTO charge, countries can use regulatory discretion, annual budgets, or legislative re-authorization to alter democratically achieved laws to meet WTO rules.

Another example of the WTO's effect occurred in the I995 New York State budget. Buried in the voluminous state legislation was a list of laws to be eliminated because they conflicted with the rules of the WTO. The list included a tropical timber procurement ban, a law requiring that state contractors only purchase from Northern Ireland companies that maintain certain human rights standards (called the MacBride Principles), and a small preference for New York-produced food. Luckily, an enterprising reporter discovered the provisions. The embarrassing revelations and the outrage they generated ultimately forced New York Governor Pataki to withdraw the provisions-at least for the moment. However, such stealth rollbacks of democratically supported policies undoubtedly lurk in other state-level proposals, and the provisions could be tucked into some other bulky state legislation later.

As a legal matter, the WTO's rules and powerful enforcement mechanism promote downward harmonization of wages, environmental, worker, and health standards and the undermining of democratic procedures and policies. However, in practice, the race to the bottom set off by the WTO is even more devastating than the sum of the WTO's provisions. Both NAFTA and GATT have actual provisions requiring harmonization of environmental, safety, food, and other standards. For instance, under NAFTA, the trucking industry is working through a land transportation harmonization committee to get an increase in truck weights and lengths for all North American trucks, which would lower U.S. safety standards through the back door.

By giving up the right to make investment in a country conditional on certain standards or the entry of products into domestic markets conditional on compliance with national rules, countries have eliminated whatever leverage they had on corporate behavior. U.S. corporations long ago learned how to pit states against each other in "a race to the bottom" to profit from whichever state would offer the most miserable wages, the most lax pollution standards, and the lowest taxes. Now, via NAFTA and GATT, multinational corporations can play this game at the global level. After all, externalizing environmental and social costs is one way to boost corporate profits. Paying child laborers slave wages in some countries may increase a U.S. firm's bottom line. It is a tragic lure that has its winners and losers determined before it even gets underway: Workers, consumers, and communities in all the countries lose, short-term profits soar, and the corporation "wins."

Under the WTO, the race to the bottom is not only in standard of living, environmental, and health safeguards but in democracy itself. Enactment of the free trade deals virtually guarantees that democratic efforts to make corporations pay their fair share of taxes, provide their employers a decent standard of living, or limit their pollution of the air, water, and land will be met with the refrain, "You can't burden us like that. If you do, we won't be able to compete. We'll have to close down and move to a country that offers us a more hospitable climate." This message is extremely powerful -communities already devastated by plant closures and a declining manufacturing base are desperate not to lose

more jobs. They know all too well that threats of this sort are often carried out.

Stopping Globalization. One of the clearest lessons that emerges from a study of industrialized societies is that highly centralized commerce is environmentally and democratically unsound. Some international trade is useful and productive, while other global trading favors corporate advantages over those of workers, consumers, and the environment.

But societies need to focus their attention on fostering community-oriented production. Such smaller-scale operations are more flexible and adaptable to local needs and environmentally sustainable production methods. They are also more easily subjected to democratic control, less likely to threaten to shift their operations abroad, and more likely to perceive their interests as overlapping with community interests.

Similarly, allocating power to reachable governmental bodies tends to increase citizen power. Concentrating power in international organizations, as the trade pacts do, tends to remove critical decisions from citizen control. You can talk to your city council representative but not to some faceless international trade bureaucrat in Geneva, Switzerland.

If a foreign country's simple cry of "non-tariff trade barrier" can jeopardize local or state laws, if a country must pay a bribe in trade sanctions to maintain its own laws, if a company claims that the burden of citizen safe guards are so great that it will pick up stakes and move elsewhere, then global living standards will continue to spiral downward.

In the United States, where most wages are at their lowest level in real terms since President Johnson initiated the war on poverty in 1964, a major swath of the American population is working harder to earn less. Polling continues to show a growing "anxious" class. A sense of despair and loss of control is at least part of the explanation for the tumultuous electoral behavior of the past two U.S. federal elections. This new anxious class is politicized and looking for answers.

We must make the clear connection between our local problems and the multinational corporate drive for economic and political globalization. If we don't, then others will blame these increasing problems on other causes. "It's the immigrants!" "It's the welfare system!" "It's greedy farmers or workers!" Allowing the camouflage of the real causes of these multifaceted problems means that citizens are divided against each other to the benefit of the corporate agenda.

We now face a race against time: How will citizens reverse the devastating globalization agenda while democratic options and institutions are still available? The degree of suppression and subterfuge necessary to continue to globalize will be hard to maintain in the presence of any democratic oversight. To obtain this oversight and to actually reverse NAFTA, GATT, and the push to globalization will require a revitalized citizenry here and abroad. There will be no dearth of provocations.

Excerpted from the book:
The Case Against the Global Economy
Edited by Jerry Mander and Edward Goldsmith

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From the founding of Students in Democratic Action at United High School in 2002 to attending the United States Military Academy at West Point in 2003 to being the youngest candidate for any public office in the history of Webb County in 2004, Laredo's John A. Castro now shows his ideas and intellect in his first published book for 2005, My Plan for Laredo.

This is John A. Castro's first and only collection of the realistic ideas, bureaucratic reforms, and legislative actions needed to improve our communities and local governments. Make no mistake, after reading this book, John A. Castro will have proven that he has the knowledge and vision to lead the city of Laredo into the 21st century.

John A. Castro is currently a full-time student of Political Science at Texas A&M International University in Laredo and has made plans to attend Law School in 2008.

"John gives his readers inspiration, creative solutions, and optimism... the words of this political prodigy will inspire all readers..."

- Attorney Hope Williams

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