

THE TEXAS

OBSERVER

A Journal of Free Voices

A Window to the South

Oct. 17, 1975

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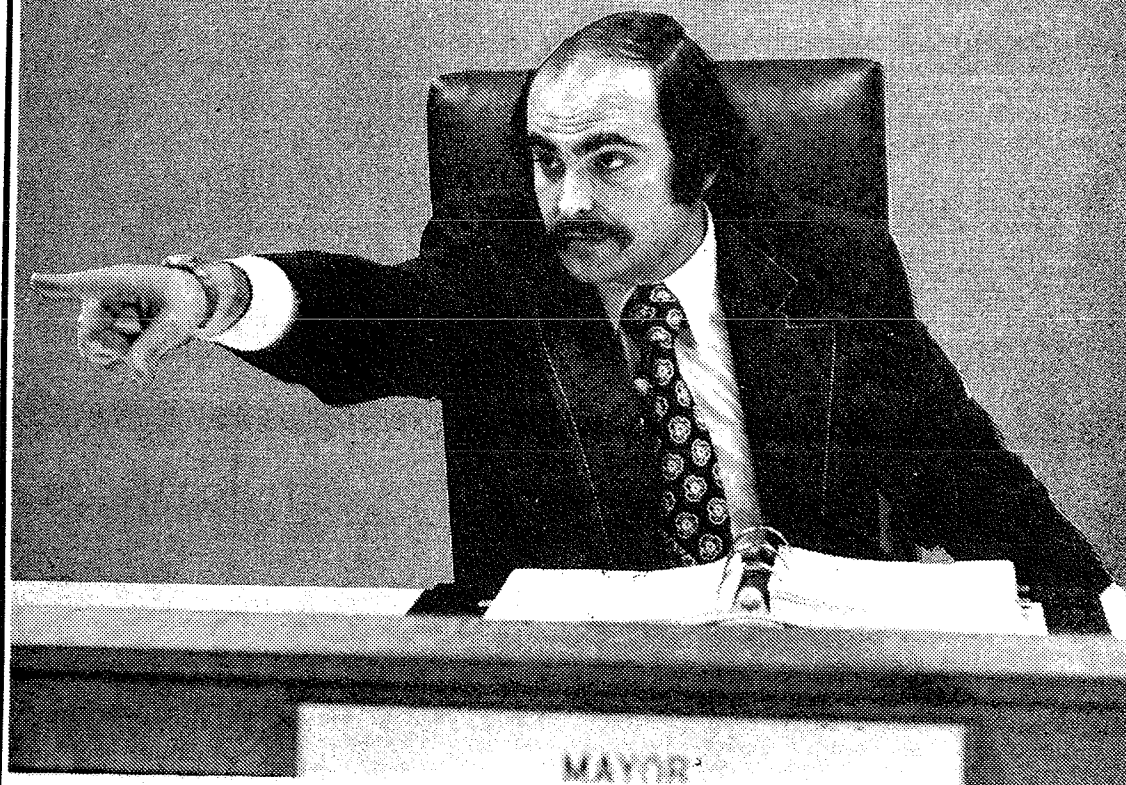
INVITATION TO SUBSCRIBE ENCLOSED

Progressive
power
in Austin

Austin

At first glance, the new Austin city council looks like an affirmative action program gone berserk. There's a 30-year-old Jewish mayor, a black man, a brown man, a blind white male millionaire, and three women. The women are (1) a Catholic doctor of psychology, (2) a wealthy Republican, and (3) a German Quaker immigrant who ran on a "Think Trees" platform.

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Austin Mayor Jeff Friedman

Mike Smith

IT'S A strange sensation for Austin libs. People who were never before able to pull together a believable campaign for city weicher are feeling the novel responsibility of electing a mayor and council majority as well as a state senator, all four Austin state representatives, and a humanist sheriff. There's a new sense of possibility stirring. "It's like the city is a laboratory and we're all working on changing the structure of government," said Rindy.

The new council feels that it has a mandate for change in city policy. What remains to be seen, of course, is whether the changes will be superficial or substantial. One of the major city issues is "controlled growth," as opposed to "unlimited growth." In the past, city policy has been in the hands of businessmen with a direct economic interest in the growth of the city. Past city councils discouraged heavy industry here, but in the Sixties they started courting light industry. The reasoning was that everyone in the city would benefit from the new jobs and new money brought in by industry. Today, Tracor, Texas Instruments, John Roberts, State Farm Insurance, and Motorola all have big facilities here and the Internal Revenue Service has built a major regional office.

The University of Texas regents have yet to put any enrollment limitation on the Austin campus and state government is in an expansionary period, all of which means that Austin is bursting at the seams. According to the US Bureau of the Census, from 1970 to 1973 Austin grew faster than any city in the United States except Tucson, Ariz. If it continues to grow at the current 4.5 percent yearly rate, Austin's 300,000 population will double in 15

years. That no longer seems like an attractive future to most Austin residents.

Fine Victorian mansions have been razed to make way for drive-in banks and parking lots. Ticky-tacky apartments are popping up in the midst of old residential neighborhoods. Austin is beginning to have a skyline, complete with heat-reflecting glass monstrosities. A number of neighborhood associations have been formed in self-defense. They are opposing such things as the MoPac expressway, which somehow got changed in the planning stage from an inner-city boulevard to an inner-city limited-access freeway designed to spill up to 60,000 cars a day onto feeder roads in quiet residential neighborhoods. Association members are fighting the destruction of old buildings, construction along the city's creeks, and other forms of commercial rapine and pillage. The neighborhood groups are becoming an important political factor in the city and new leaders are springing up within them.

The first major policy statement in opposition to Austin's willy-nilly growth came last year from an ambitious goals program called Austin Tomorrow. This was an attempt to get citizens to write a master plan for future development of the city. Approximately 3,000 residents participated (considerably less than the city planners had hoped for, but still an impressive number to get involved in such a project). The resulting goals statement was primarily concerned with the quality of life in Austin. A majority of participants reached the conclusion that the city's growth could not be stopped but that it could be intelligently controlled. Their plan calls for good public transportation and more routes for pedestrians and bicyclists; lots more open space, not just parks

with playground equipment, but greenbelts and wilderness areas as well; more land use controls in order to improve the quality of new developments both inside and outside city limits; prohibition of development in environmentally sensitive areas; better building codes and preservation and improvement of established neighborhoods; improved planning and funding for health and social services; better breaks for the poor and middle class in utility rates and property taxes; stronger pollution controls; upgrading employment and eliminating discrimination.

When the Austin Tomorrow goals were announced last year, the old guard insisted that the program did not really represent the beliefs of the Austin majority but rather those of an active, vocal minority. A couple months ago, however, the conservative *Austin Business Review* released the results of a survey designed to plumb the depths of anti-development sentiment in Austin. Forty-nine percent of those polled said they "usually disagree" with the "political opinions of Austin developers" while only 16 percent "usually agree." Fifty-three percent said they "usually agree" with "environmental groups" as compared to 21 percent who "sometimes agree" and 17 percent who are "usually opposed" to environmentalists. The editor of the *Review* concluded that the evidence of citizen concern with traditional developers' policies is "too overwhelming" for the business community to ignore.

THE NEW council has been in office only three months, but it's already taken some big steps to change city priorities. The council's most important action has been to do away with utility refund

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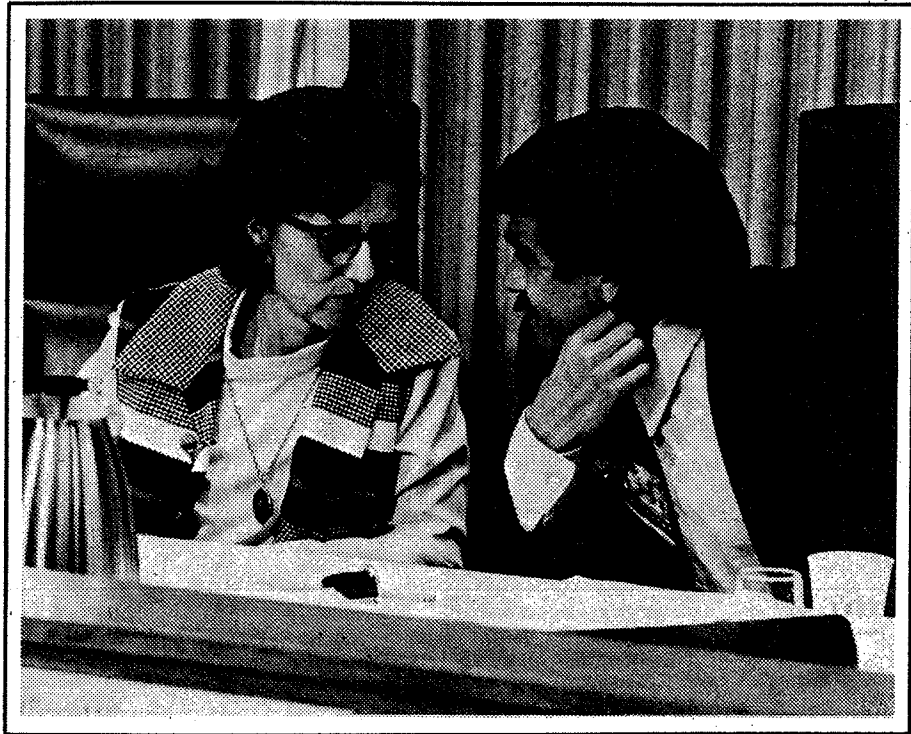
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Texas has never before seen a city council like this. Ten years ago, the middle-aged male WASP bastion of the Austin council had been stormed by only one woman, Emma Long, a sprightly independent, on whose solitary shoulders rested the responsibility for representing all of Austin's others—the students, the minorities, and what Sen. Grady Hazlewood called "the queer-minded social misfits." The Councilmen represented the merchant class, while the most powerful economic lobby at city hall was the real estate industry. Recent Austin mayors have included a restaurateur, a laundry owner, a furniture store proprietor, and a Lincoln-Mercury dealer. The remodeled 1975 council contains nary a merchant, although Lowell Lebermann, the millionaire, and Betty Himmelblau, the Republican, can be counted on to put in a few good words for fiscal responsibility and the importance of industry in Austin.

THE STURDY burghers on the affluent side of town are predicting disaster. The Rev. Harold G. O'Chester of the Allandale Baptist Church (speaking, he emphasizes, as an individual and not as a representative of his religious establishment) complains, "The people in our part of town, the taxpayers, don't feel that they have hardly any representation on the council. I'm not saying that taxpayers are the only ones who should be represented. But these people who are paying the bills need the voice. The people in the north end of town feel that this council is basically out to get them and everything that has happened so far seems to bear that out," O'Chester says. "There isn't a day that goes by that I don't pray for the city council. It's a difficult position. I am appalled to see some people on the city council who don't even have regular jobs, and who are in the position to spend millions and millions in tax dollars."

Dr. Emma Lou Linn, the psychologist on the council, has a radically different interpretation of what's happened to Austin politics. "It all goes back to voter rights," she says. "Allowing everybody to vote was the biggest fear of those who used to be in office. They were afraid that if they let the people vote the people would do them in—and that's exactly what happened." Dr. Linn thinks that implementation of the new federal Voting Rights Act will guarantee that the merchants will never again control Austin politics.

The first chink was hammered into the old guard's armor in 1971 when university students and the black and brown folks in East Austin formed a coalition and elected three councilmen. They chose Jeffrey Friedman, then 26 and just a year out of UT law school; Berl Handcox, a manage-



Council members Hoffman & Trevino

Mike Smith

ment type from Texas Instruments, the first black man ever elected to the Austin council; and Dick Nichols, a real estate man who professed liberal leanings (his student constituency later decided he wasn't sufficiently liberal).

Electing three council members was not exactly a revolution, but it was enough to alarm the Texas Legislature. Later that year, legislators passed a bill requiring college students who receive at least half of their income from home to vote where their parents reside. But a federal court ruled the law unconstitutional about the same time as the 18-year-old vote came into effect, and the Austin student vote grew to impressive proportions.

In 1973 the students again showed their clout by reelecting Friedman and Handcox and by replacing Nichols with Bob Binder, a former UT student body president and anti-war activist (Binder has since lost some of his revolutionary zeal and moved to California to become a personal injury lawyer). This year the student-minority coalition, bolstered by like-minded people in state government, neighborhood preservation groups, teaching, the arts, the unions, and other nooks and crannies of progressivism, took five of the seven council seats, electing Friedman, the youngest mayor in the city's history. The students cast 15,000 of the city's 72,600 total votes.

It is generally conceded that students put the progressives over the top, and that's some accomplishment in the sober Seventies. A front page article on Austin politics in a recent *Wall Street Journal* noted, "... in most cities, young voters have remained apathetic, fragmented, and without political clout, even after the

voting age was lowered to 18 in 1972. While students have helped elect activist candidates to municipal offices in Madison, Wis., and Berkeley, Calif., these have proved the exception rather than the rule."

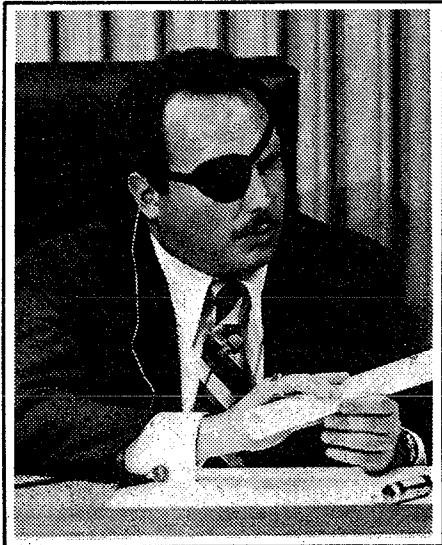
Dean Rindy, a new member of the City Planning Commission, thinks students got activated in Austin because they were the first group of middle-class white voters to be seriously affected by Austin's transportation and housing problems. "Students have always been considered a leftwing influence, but that's not because of ideology," Rindy explained. "It's because they are inner city residents with needs for certain kinds of city services." They, as much as the citizens of East Austin, need decent mass transit and comfortable, cheap housing.

Student block captains canvassed 32 of the city's 77 precincts, the precincts with a high proportion of UT residents. They made three separate visits before the election, first to urge people to register, second to promote the progressive slate, and third to remind residents to vote. Meanwhile in East Austin, various minority organizations were working equally hard. BVAP, the Black Voters Against Paternalism, endorsed seven candidates and campaigned for them on the basis of issues rather than personalities. "We had eight to twelve people who worked every night, sometimes all night," said Linda McGowan, a new black planning commissioner. "We delivered East Austin for Friedman. He pulled all the black boxes by 70 to 80 percent, despite the fact that the average black voter didn't know that much about him."

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contracts, the curious practice whereby the city has paid more than \$20 million over the last two decades for developers to install water and sewer lines wherever the developers choose to build new subdivisions. Past councils have simply rubber stamped developers' choices of building sites. But Friedman and the council majority now want to exercise some discretion over where new growth should be encouraged and they don't see any need for the city to subsidize middle- and upper-class housing projects. There was no problem getting a majority to agree to end the refund contracts. The crunch came on whether to go ahead and pay for the 29 projects currently in the works. The city legal department opined that Austin has no binding agreement with the developers of the 29 projects, and Dr. Linn moved not to honor the contracts, but a majority of the council decided that the city has a "moral obligation" to pay for them. Leftwing critics of the council say this vote is an illustration of how the council is moving toward the center after only a short time in office.

On another front, the council cut way back on the city funding for Chamber of Commerce tourist projects. The state requires that a certain portion of the hotel-motel tax go to developing tourism. But, instead of giving it all to the C of C, as the city has done in the past, the council decided to keep about half of the tax money and spend it on projects like the new city arena and improving Waller Creek,



Mike Smith

Council member Lebermann

projects that both tourists and citizens can enjoy. Needless to say, the decision has rankled the Chamber of Commerce. Dr. Linn insists the council's action was not anti-Chamber but rather "anti-special interest. There was no reason why we should single out the Anglo C of C for funding while there's also a Mexican-American Chamber of Commerce and other civic groups. Besides," Linn says, "Austin is



State Rep. Sarah Weddington swears in Dr. Linn (in hat)

Kit Brooking

the state capitol and we're going to have tourism here no matter what."

Wray Weddell, the industry-boosting editor of *The Austin Citizen*, chalked up the council's action on the C of C to "political spite." Weddell's front-page column in the twice-weekly *Citizen* is filled with stirring condemnations of the ruinous policies of the "hyperliberal" council. His invective rose to new heights when the council members decided to raise their salaries from \$95 a week to \$12,000 a year. The action made the Austin council the highest paid municipal governing body in Texas, according to the *Citizen*.

"Council pay hiked; taxes will increase," blared the *American-Statesman*. The headline left the impression that the city's \$49,000 a year increase for council salaries (out of a total budget increase over last year of \$49.7 million) was solely responsible for an eight-cent per \$100 valuation increase in property taxes.

All five of the council majority members campaigned on a promise that they would vote themselves a \$1,000 a month salary because they wanted to work full-time for the council. (Of course, a full-time council, like a full-time Legislature, could result in more government spending, as many opponents to the Texas Constitution fear.) Lebermann, who voted for the salary increase, commented that a full-time salary changes council members from public servants to city employees. In the past, most council people have been sufficiently wealthy to "donate" their time to the city. None of the progressive members of the council is independently wealthy, however, and none could afford to serve for \$95 a week without serious injury to the family budget.

The council has also instituted a strong new equal employment ordinance concerning hiring, firing, and promotion. During

recent budget hearings, they asked each city department and social agency requesting funds to provide information on the total number of women and minorities in the operation and the total number in management positions. In addition to that, when two equally qualified companies are competing to do work for the city, the council has been investigating the companies' hiring records to determine who gets the contract.

City boards and commissions that used to be filled with white men in business suits are now open to all manner of riffraff. The Board of Equalization, which mediates disputes between citizens and the city Tax Department, last year was composed of three white men — a retired banker, a retired contractor, and a retired federal employee. This year there's a black real estate man, a young female lawyer, and a Mexican-American accountant.

There are new priorities in the city budget which reflect the goals of the Austin Tomorrow program and the fact that East Austin has more representation on the council. Social services are in and concrete is out. There's new money to purchase a portion of endangered Barton Creek and funds for neighborhood health clinics and drug and rape counseling programs.

THE POLICE department is in for some changes. As a councilman, Friedman carried on a one-man campaign to get Police Chief Bob Miles to resign. Friedman charged that the chief was insensitive to the needs of the black and brown community. Shortly after Friedman became mayor, Miles quietly announced his retirement. A new chief has yet to be named.

There has also been a major change in

the department's policy on marijuana offenses. Under an agreement made by Mayor Butler, the federal Drug Enforcement Agency had been operating a special task force in Austin. Four DEA men and 26 local narcotics officers (twice as many as any other division of the force) had been busy, busy, busy making arrests for marijuana possession and chalking up impressive statistics in the fight against crime. Simple possession of four ounces or less is now a Class C misdemeanor, but Austin police were hauling in dope smokers by the carload and stacking them up like cordwood in the overcrowded jail. *The Austin Sun* estimated that if the busts continued at the same clip for 12 months, one out of every 100 Austin residents would have been arrested by Christmas.

Friedman mulled the problem for a few weeks, dodging reporters' questions on the subject (he did condescend to call the DEA people "turkeys" at one press conference), and then, smoothly enough, a DEA official announced that the task force would be leaving town immediately, rather than staying on for another year as originally planned. The same day, Friedman and the retiring police chief proclaimed that henceforth in Austin simple marijuana possession would be a ticketed offense.

the Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, are holding an election to see which union will be allowed to collect dues from willing city workers. The controversy is over the fact that the ballot will have only two choices—CWA or AFSCME. Some city employees also want the ballot to have a no-union option, just to make it perfectly clear that certain employees have no intention of affiliating with a union. The whole affair has become very confusing. It's probably the biggest dust-up over an insubstantial issue since the last city council changed Nineteenth Street to Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard (merchants on the west side of town are challenging the name change in court on the basis that it hurts their businesses.)

Oh yes, the council also extended drinking hours from midnight until 2 a.m. The fear of more late night carousing in this honky-tonk town moved the Reverend O'Chester and some of his friends to initiate a referendum on the drinking question. It was a real squeaker, pitting beer-loving UT students against the Baptists of Northwest Austin. The students won by a mere 101 vote margin out of 40,000 votes cast.

(The late-hour question had been a very difficult issue for the previous council,

to flatten the utility rates of the city-owned electric company. Past councils sold electricity like popcorn, offering reduced rates to bulk consumers. The bulk rates are probably on their way out, but there are some people on the left who don't think that's enough. Jeff Jones, one of Emma Lou Linn's appointees to the city Charter Revision Commission, points out that profits from electric bills are the city's main revenue base. "That's the most regressive way the city could raise taxes," Jones said. As an alternative, Jones suggested that the city reduce its profit on electricity and raise money instead by putting a transfer tax on land or stocks and bonds.

Other issues the council is thinking about include a moratorium on development on Lake Austin; making the MoPac expressway back into a boulevard and generally deemphasizing street expansion and highway construction; drawing up financial disclosure and ethics ordinances; and channeling more money into black and *chicano* neighborhoods.

All the new members are working hard. Rindy says the council has spent more time studying city issues than any other council he's ever observed. But he and Linda McGowan and most of the other council-watchers the *Observer* interviewed confirm that the new members, particularly Margaret Hoffman ("Think Trees"), Jimmy Snell (the black insurance man), and John Trevino need some seasoning before they are fully competent to deal with difficult budget and economic issues.

Emma Lou Linn has surfaced as the strongest voice on the left, the council member least likely to cave in under pressure. There is speculation that Linn has reconciled herself to being a one-term council person. She told the *Observer* that she chooses not to think about her political future. "That way I can vote right. I didn't run for the council in order to run again," she explained. "I ran for the council to change things."

As recently as two years ago Lowell Lebermann was generally considered to be Mayor Butler's political heir. He chose not to challenge Friedman, however, and now that he's in the minority he seems to have lost interest in the council. Himmelblau is more energetic. The day the *Observer* visited the mayor, she popped into his office to confer about something. The day the *Observer* visited Dr. Linn, she put in an appearance there too.

It is as yet unclear whether the council majority will be able to work consistently as a team. They were not elected as a slate. They simply received support from the same areas. And they are an independent, contrary lot. Of the five, only Friedman has any previous council experience. He'll have quite a time cajoling them into a working majority. Still, for a bunch of neophytes, they've done quite a bit already. Nothing earthshaking, but enough to start Wray Weddell beating the drums for a recall effort. Yes, the next two years in Austin should be some chivaree. K.N.



Council members Snell & Himmelblau

Mike Smith

Surprisingly enough, there has not been much criticism of Friedman's lenient marijuana policy. What *does* have the right-wingers up in arms is the council's decision to let city employees affiliate with a union. Texas, of course, prohibits the closed shop and city employees are not allowed to strike or bargain collectively; so joining a union is not such a big deal. (It's the *thought* that counts.) Two unions, the Communications Workers of America and

which teeter-tottered pro and con and finally came down against later drinking hours. Last year Mayor Butler voted to close down the bars at midnight, but since then he has been awarded the Coors franchise for the Austin area, leading many people to speculate that Butler probably has changed his tune on this particular issue. Indeed, his wife donated \$500 to the 2 a.m. proponents.)

Friedman and a number of the other council members campaigned on a promise

Friedman—the center moved left

Austin

Depending on whom you're talking to, Jeff Friedman, Austin's new mayor, is (A) an aging "dirty nothin'" (Frank Erwin's vintage appellation for campus protestors), (B) a mustachioed flunky of the banking class, or (C) the new progressive center of Austin politics. The mere fact that Friedman has successfully negotiated three city council elections speaks for the third interpretation. Being in the center of Austin's new progressive arena is not the most comfortable political position in the world. From all directions, from *The Austin Citizen* on the right and *The Rag* on the left, Friedman's performance is scrutinized and found lacking. His honor somewhat resembles a young lion who's been thrown to the Christians.

Friedman, 30, is a big, powerful man, until recently the star pitcher on the Aardvarks city softball team. He sports a dark, bushy moustache, and when he puts on his black cowboy hat he looks more like a Mexican desperado than a mayor. A few weeks ago he introduced Kinky Friedman (no relation) and the Texas Jewboys on the stage of Armadillo World Headquarters. In his hat, floral cowboy shirt, and boots, he looked so much like a typical Armadillo emcee that he had to make about five references to the city council before most of the audience grokked that this dude was indeed the mayor.

Linda McGowan, a new member of the Planning Commission, describes Friedman as "ambitious, stubborn, sharp, and really cocky." Back in grade school, Friedman was probably the fat kid with the big mouth who opened it just once too often. He has a swift and ready, if not too sharply honed wit and a quick temper to go along with it. He and former Mayor Roy Butler carried on a year-long battle of the press conferences that did neither of them any good. There's still some sniping between the two. In a recent interview in *The Austin Sun*, Butler commented, "I noticed Mr. Friedman has seen fit to say a thing or two that wasn't particularly complimentary about my administration. . . . To me it shows a lack of class, but that's still his privilege."

It's probably very hard for Butler, a suave businessman who is close to John Connally both personally and philosophically, to accept the fact that Austin's electorate could turn in two short years from Butler's urbane conservatism to Friedman's youthful pragmatism. (Butler chose not to run again.)

FRIEDMAN is certainly not your typical Texas mayor. He's young, a Jew, and an outlander as well. He was born

in Forest Hills, N.Y., the son of a retail clothing merchant. Friedman didn't get to Texas until 1967, when he enrolled at the UT law school. He didn't go in for the Connally-Butler vein of campus politics (student body offices, Curtain Club, service organizations, etc.). Instead he got involved in community-related projects. He ran a criminal law program in which law students accompanied uniformed policemen on their nightly cruises (the mayor proudly maintains that he's carried the cop vote ever since). He got to know something about the students' gripes when he created the first student legal aid program at the University of Texas.

The idea of becoming a politician — in Austin — dawned on Friedman only slowly. "I've always been interested in the way people's lives are affected by politics," he explained. "It wasn't until I started working with the anti-war movement that I became interested in politics as a politician." He served as a marshal at various demonstrations. Then, in 1970, the city council denied students a parade permit after Cambodia and the Kent State killings. The march was scheduled anyway. City police and Department of Public Safety riot squads geared up in tear gas masks and formed a physical barricade between town and gown. "That got me interested in running for city council," Friedman said. He filed a quickie federal lawsuit to force the city to grant a parade permit and a judge ruled in the demonstrators' favor just minutes before 20,000 Austinites, by no means all of them students, were to launch a march on downtown sidewalks. It turned out to be the biggest, gentlest anti-war demonstration in Austin's history. The next morning the front page of the *Austin American-Statesman* carried a photo of a happy marcher shaking hands with an amiable policeman in riot gear. It was one of the earliest victories for Austin's new politics.

"I had intended to go into practice on the West Coast or New York," Friedman explained. "I had some offers from good law firms. I was a big city kid and I thought that would be a pretty good thing, but I was plagued by the belief that Austin was a super place to live; so I opened up an office here." He represented a few street vendors before the city council, but most of his early legal work was criminal, a whole lot of drug cases.

When he first announced for the council in 1971, Friedman remembers, "There was some reaction to my being a newcomer — a student, a non-taxpayer, hippie, young. . . . There was some undercurrent of anti-Semitism." He was lucky to have Wick Fowler for an opponent, a right-wing

humorist whose primary vocation was packaging and touting his own special Two-Alarm chili seasoning. The chili king talked incessantly about marijuana, welfare malingerers, and obscenities in the local underground paper. Friedman ignored him and ran a moderate campaign, talking about upgrading the police department, finding new approaches to community affairs, and doing away with utility refund contracts for developers. He beat Fowler in a runoff by about 5,000 votes.

In 1973, when Friedman ran for a second term on the council, Bob Gray, his conservative opponent, tried to brand him as "the voice of the radical element in Austin." "These people," Gray advertised, "move in and out of town causing unrest and discord and living off the city at the same time. They are for nude bathing, legalized drugs, and abolishing the Texas Rangers." The radical tag didn't stick, and Gray, who happened to be Mayor Butler's friend and nextdoor neighbor, went down in flames.

This year Friedman beat yet another weak conservative candidate. With three elections under his belt, he has moved well beyond his original student constituency, although some student precincts still give him upwards to 95 percent of their vote. Friedman has considerable support among the middle class. His ability to woo moderates and even some conservatives assures his future as a successful pol, but predictably enough, it creates distrust among his left-wing supporters.

No sooner had Friedman been elected than some of his original allies began to grouse. *The Rag*, Austin's underground paper, started calling him a sell-out in 1971 and it hasn't let up to this day. *The Daily Texan*, the UT paper, took out after Friedman in 1973 when he sat on his hands for a time and then decided to support a bond proposal to finance a nuclear power plant. The proponents of "going nuclear" won the bond referendum by a narrow squeak and it will be some time before anti-growth people and environmentalists get over that one. The *Texan* at the time condemned Friedman for "desperately attempting to secure moderate support" for his '75 campaign.

MOST EVERYONE describes Friedman as ambitious. He is generally assumed to aspire to Rep. Jake Pickle's congressional seat. And there are many Friedman watchers who say condescendingly that although his basic instincts are liberal, he'll do whatever it takes to get

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elected. Dean Rindy, a new member of the Planning Commission, counters that it's ridiculous to criticize Friedman "for being what he is — a practicing politician. The left cannibalizes its own," Rindy says. "Friedman has never campaigned as a radical. He isn't a radical. He's the new center." Most of the mayor's liberal and radical supporters seem to accept Rindy's conclusion, although many of them continue to pressure him to move to the left.

Ed Wendler, the more liberal of the locally-famous Wendler brothers (Ken is Travis County Democratic chairman), says he has been disappointed by Friedman's performance as mayor. "I'll support him next time," Wendler says, "but I'll be fussin' every step of the way. I don't want to just walk off on him. I think that's probably the consensus of the people I've worked with. And Friedman is clever enough probably to know he's got us in this spot."

Mike Cox, a veteran city hall reporter for the Austin daily, faults Friedman for "a certain amount of arrogance — especially

to the press. I voted for Friedman and most of the news people I know did," Cox says. "But ask him a serious question and he comes back with a joke. At least Butler could be counted on to answer a question or say 'no comment.' And Butler answered phone calls promptly."

Jeff Nightbyrd, editor of *The Austin Sun*, thinks that Friedman seriously compromised himself in raising money to pay his campaign debts. The race for mayor cost Friedman \$63,000, much of it in borrowed money. Since the election, he has accepted contributions to diminish that debt from builders and general contractors, the traditional council money men. "The reality of electoral politics is that the guy has to deal with his campaign debts," Nightbyrd said. "Friedman has to become more moderate on economic issues." On other fronts, however, Nightbyrd has high hopes for the new mayor: "I think that on the cultural issues which don't threaten the banking class, he can be quite progressive. That means a reasonable stand on marijuana, improving things like jail conditions; allowing skinny dipping, and tolerance and

encouragement of black, *chicano*, and longhair cultural activities."

It seems a cinch that Friedman won't be a kamikaze liberal. In his office in city hall, there's a framed quotation from Teddy Roosevelt which sums up the new mayor's pragmatic activism: "It's not the critic who counts, not the man who points out how the strong man stumbled; or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena; who, at the best knows the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at the least fails while doing greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who knew neither victory nor defeat."

So far, most of Friedman's personal victories have been victories for Austin's progressive movement as well. Even if the new mayor turns out to be more moderate than his left-wing supporters anticipated, well, as Ed Wendler concludes, "I don't ever want to lose sight of the fact that his worst is so much better than anything we've ever had before." K.N.

Sit-com city

A reporter that spends much time around the new Austin council can get the feeling she's somehow gotten trapped in an overly-ambitious ethnic television comedy. One recent council day, during the luncheon break, Friedman, Snell, Trevino, Linn, Snell's female aide, and a *Observer* editor all squeezed into the city-leased Lincoln Town Car and tore out to the airport to give the key to the city to Vicki Carr, a singer. Ms. Carr is a *chicana*, much committed to providing scholarships for needy Mexican-Americans. Trevino was the councilman in charge of actually reading the welcoming proclamation and presenting the key to Carr, and he was as excited as a kid about to meet his first football star.

Being the mayor and all, Friedman got to drive, which he did with gusto and more than one reference to having learned all he knew at the knee of a New York cab driver. Snell, being of the Negro persuasion, countered with an offer to put on a cap and do the chauffeuring. "Lemme drive, Boss Man," he said.

Friedman, having none of that, kept to the wheel. As we swooped around the airport parking lot, a uniformed policeman pointed toward a truck, which led us to the airport tarmac. The Town Car's red lights were blinking and we made an impressive entrance onto the field. "Makes you feel as important as shit, don't it?" the mayor commented gleefully.

Carr got off the plane carrying a pillow ("my security blanket," she explained), which made it a little difficult for her to receive the rose and the key and the proclamation. She handed her pillow to one of the AquaFest commodores (who regularly pipe VIPs aboard the city, complete with a red carpet and a tape-recorded nautical ditty), took the roses, kissed Trevino and assorted children, and made a gracious escape to the baggage area.

Then it was on to Symphony Square for lunch with the *grand dames* of Austin's cultural scene. "Can't we go to

Greasy Joe's instead?" lamented Snell. "Don't quote me on that." The luncheon was light and greaseless, but pleasant. The symphony women and conductor Akira Endo didn't waste a second getting down to a tough-minded spiel on the importance of city funding for the arts.

On the way back to City Hall, Dr. Linn and Snell's aide speculated about Endo's origins and whether it is the Chinese or the Japanese who are reputed to be such great lovers. "It's the *chicano*," Trevino insisted. "No, the black," Snell said. Friedman, thank God, missed his cue to put in a good word for the Jew.

What the reporter realizes with new clarity is that Americans do indeed talk like refugees from the ethnic sit-coms. Of course, the Austin council members don't know one another very well yet, and they were just making what passes for jocular conversation in liberal circles. This new willingness to bring up differences is refreshing for a time . . . until it begins to sound as dull and limiting as the good ol' boyisms that are the standard repertoire of conservative legislators.

So maybe it's just style, and then again maybe it's something deeper. Meg Greenfield took out after the ethnic TV shows in a recent *Newsweek* column. Greenfield sees the shows as somehow linked to "the increasing tendency of government, political parties, and an array of private institutions to deal formally and officially with individuals on the basis of their ethnic background." She asks, "Do we really want government and the various institutions that have some power over our affairs to believe that we *should* be rewarded or penalized or otherwise dealt with on the basis of whether we were born Lassiters or Vitales or Jeffersons or Morgensterns?"

If our politicians think informally in terms of racial clichés, mightn't that attitude slip over into public policy? It's something to consider. K.N.

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