

# What do election results tell us about Texans?

## They finally have a government that mirrors their beliefs

Texas now has a state government that thinks like the people — a dream team, if you will, reflecting the mood of Texans. It is about time.

Many pundits are suggesting that the big conservative wins across the Lone Star State on Tuesday were due in large part to national emotionalism stirred up by the war on terrorism.

But in reality, conservatives prevailed mainly because they offered new solutions to old problems. Conservatives succeeded also because of years of solid, steady gains — not at the ballot box but in the beliefs of citizens across the state.

Even as conservative beliefs took root during the last several decades in Texas, they weren't fully represented in the Legislature, thanks to political lines previously drawn to benefit Democrats. Texas conservatives have long held all or most of the statewide offices and even made amazing strides in legislative races stacked heavily against them.

In a year that, by conventional wisdom, should have favored Democrats, Texas Republicans literally walked away with every prize and then some. Tony Sanchez's millions garnered him an embarrassing defeat. And John Sharp's near-iconic status with the media elite was handily defeated by a relative newcomer.

Even in the Legislature, long-serving incumbents — like House Democrat Bob Glaze and his Senate colleague David Cain — fell to fresh faces like Bryan Hughes and Bob Deuell. A Republican speaker will control the House for the first time in more than a century, while the Senate's Republican majority has been increased.

The commanding majority in the House reflects the pent-up conservatism of Texas held at bay by the old guard.

Apologists for the left, and even

lightweight conservatives unaccustomed to victory, are crediting factors outside philosophy for Tuesday's win. Sure, the potential for war played a part. Yes, the popularity of President Bush was a factor.

But the fact remains that the margins were so great, the majorities were so decisive, only a fool could presume conservatives don't have a mandate to govern as conservatives.

Texas' growth during the past decade was driven principally by individuals fleeing the high taxes and over-regulation of other states and nations. Having made themselves at home in the Lone Star State, those new Texans evidently are unwilling to see repeated here the liberal mistakes of big government and high taxes that they ran away from in the first place.

From the Governor's Mansion to the lowliest of state House freshmen, the people of Texas have said in no uncertain terms that they are ready for significant changes in both the style of governance and the state's approach to issues. They want conservative ideals — not compromising deals — reflected in the new laws that will govern this state.

Let the state reporters, pundits, lobbyists and liberal apologists beware: The way government approaches issues is going to be different. The people have demanded it. The debate has changed: New spending will be scrutinized more, and old spending must be justified. Once sacred programs now will have to prove their worth to the taxpayer. An income tax is dead on arrival. Significant reform of our schools can get under way, and building our way out of traffic congestion can begin.

The old way of doing things finally is passing away, even if 20 years behind the will of the people.

The mantle of leadership has

MICHAEL SULLIVAN



been laid at the feet of Texas conservatives. The question remains as to how effectively they will wear it, how efficiently they will usher in the new ideas.

Stripping away everything else, the election tally simply inaugurates political leadership that finally looks philosophically like the beliefs Texans have held for a long time.

*Michael Quinn Sullivan is director of media and government relations for the Austin-based Texas Public Policy Foundation, a nonprofit think tank.*



JIM MEEHAN