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TO: Representatives Donna Howard and Rafael Anchia, Interested Parties
FROM: Leland Beatty
DATE: August 10, 2016
RE: Texas Democratic Opportunity in 2016

Texas Democrats Have Greatest Opportunities in 20 Years

Last month, our statewide poll suggested that Texas voters were on a path to give the Democratic Presidential nominee a larger vote share than Barack Obama received in 2008. That year Texans sent 74 Democrats to the Texas House. **Those poll results have since been confirmed by a poll conducted during the same time period by the Texas Politics Project at the University of Texas.** The UT poll also indicated that Texas voters had a negative opinion of every Texas Republican in the survey, except Gov. Greg Abbott. Combined with our poll's discovery that an overwhelming majority of Texas voters believe corruption is a problem in Texas state government, we can be confident that this fall Texas Democrats have their greatest opportunities in a generation.

Statewide, Republicans have recently had almost a 1.5 times advantage over Democrats in straight ticket votes (according to a respected study by Austin Community College Prof. Stefan Haag) This advantage is equal to 10% of the total vote.

Since those polls were conducted, the national Republican party has split, with both their Presidential nominee and Texas Sen. Ted Cruz discouraging Republican voters from voting a straight ticket. **Every national poll conducted since shows significant increases in the Clinton lead over Trump, most increasing more than the Clinton deficit in Texas.** Additionally, the first family of Texas Republicans has joined the fray, with virtually all the Bush family (except George P.) openly discouraging Republican straight ticket voting.

Best Opportunities

We have identified 20 Texas House races where Democratic candidates appear to have real opportunities. Additionally, should statewide Democratic candidates have appropriate resources, one or more could finish as winners.

In particular, the Railroad Commissioner race, which tops the statewide ballot with both parties' candidates virtually unknown by Texas voters, should offer a real opportunity for an upset statewide Democratic victory. Judicial races are also significantly impacted when voters are concerned about corruption. Last month's poll told us corruption was already a major issue.

House Districts That May Be In Play

There are 39 districts with Republican incumbents and Democratic candidates. Modeled poll results suggest that a majority of the expected vote in all of these districts believes corruption is widespread in Texas government, ranging from a

high of 72% to a low of 52%. Four Democratic incumbents are not candidates, and Democratic candidates are strongly favored in all four.

20 of these appear to have significant potential for Democratic gain and with some support, could possibly win in November. At a minimum these races present opportunity for base-building for future elections. Our current model is too shallow to accurately pinpoint a likely margin by House District, but when used with previous results and modeling, offers some guidance.

However, most Democratic candidates in these races do not appear financially ready to compete, although Super-PACs may hide funds actually intended to help Democratic candidates. Thirteen of these Democratic candidates reported less than \$5,000 on hand at June 30. Others topped \$5,000 on hand only by loaning their campaigns significant amounts of money.

This financial weakness is part of the public record and Republicans will use it to reinforce retreat narratives of the last decade. Democrats on the other hand are facing a rare high tide and can use this weakness to proactively spur additional fundraising. **Given the current sentiment of voters, the drumbeat of news of corruption at the highest levels of State government, the disastrous Trump candidacy and a poor outlook for Republican straight ticket voting- Democrats won't need as much money as their counterparts to be competitive.**

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