

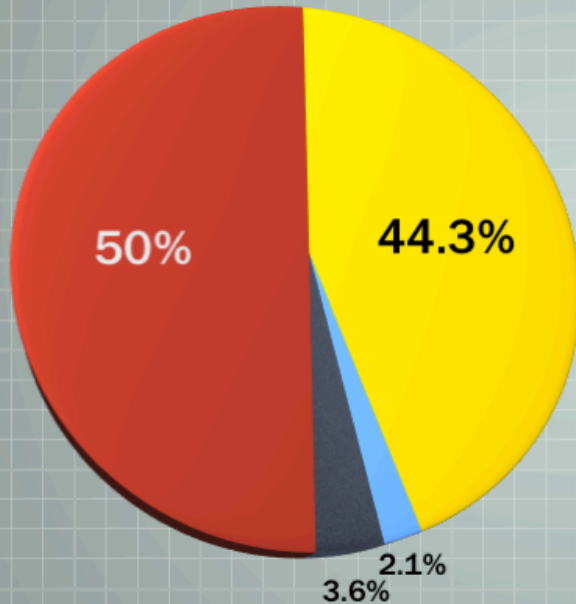
“INSIDE”

INTELLIGENCE

THE TEXAS TRIBUNE
TEXAS  WEEKLY

The insider's poll for the week of January 17.

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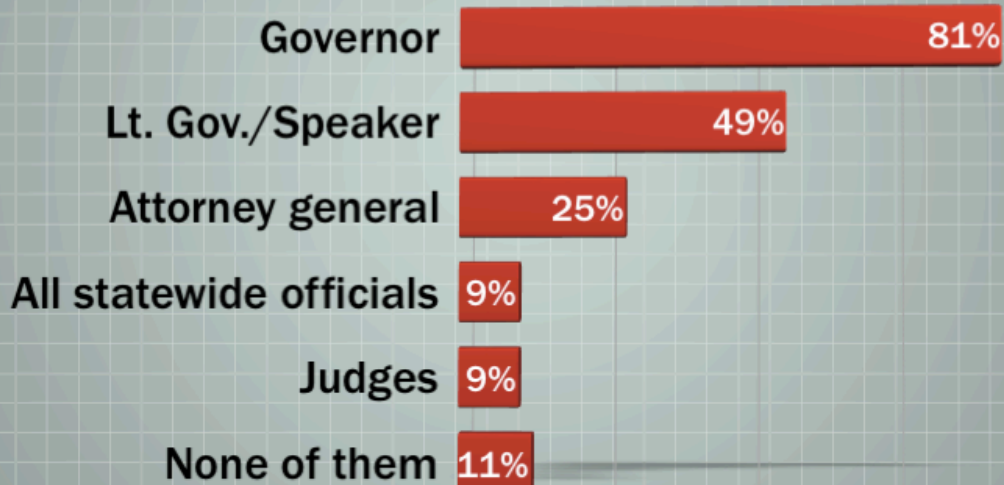


What do you think of the security at the Texas Capitol?

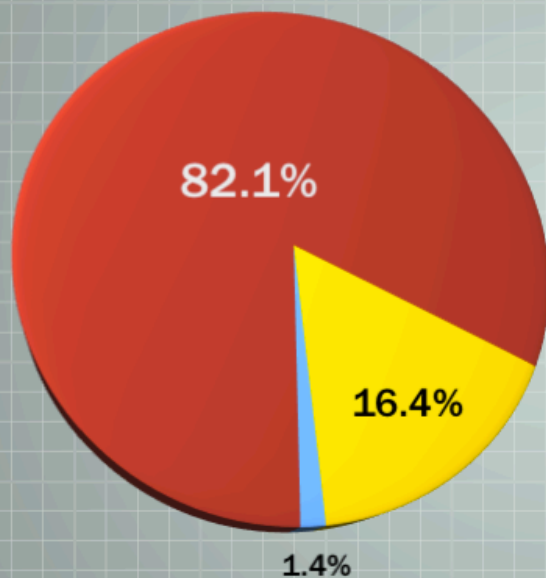
- Over the top
- About right
- Don't know
- Too lax

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Which officials should have security details?



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Should there be a way for frequent visitors without concealed handgun licenses to bypass the metal detectors and scanners at the Capitol?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

This week's open-ended prompt was "Capitol security is a response to real and perceived threats of violence to public officials and others. To what extent do political rhetoric and the current political atmosphere feed that kind of violence and fear?" And here's how the insiders answered:

- "Way too much"
- "None"
- "We have fought two wars in this country because of heated political rhetoric, e.g., 'Common Sense,' the Declaration of Independence, and the seditious screeds before the Civil War. Are we really supposed to believe that cable news is making us all murderous?"
- "To a less extent than what is reported/ attributed"
- "When will the Austin insider community quit complaining about this issue? We live in a post 9/11 world. Be patient, wait your turn, go through the metal detector, follow security procedures. Does someone (or many) have to lose their life before this becomes a necessary reality?"
- "The political rhetoric is far too heated right now, largely due to talking heads who

get paid a lot of money to be as mean-spirited and divisive as possible. It's a business for them. Regardless of the rhetorical connection to the Arizona shootings, it's time for everyone to re-evaluate the level of political discourse in this country."

- "Significantly. Hatred and violence are not likely in a vacuum. Those traits are fed by something. The very best that could be said is that the overheated political rhetoric cannot possibly help. The worst is that they directly contribute to disturbed individuals concluding that violence against public officials is in some sordid way socially acceptable."

- "not sure"

- "Right wing definitely capitalizes on violence or threats of violence--e.g. Sarah Palin. Left also grandstands on issues, which doesn't help either. We seem to have lost the ability to compromise and work across the aisle."

- "It certainly plays a part...so does the style of media coverage."
- "When you sew the wind with insane rhetoric that those who disagree with you are not just wrong but evil you will reap the whirlwind of violence from some nut who believes your overheated rants and takes the 'logical' next step of seeking to destroy the evil with violence."
- "About the same as when the radical left was going after Bush with it hate rhetoric."
- "None. There will always be nut cases, no matter what the rhetoric or political atmosphere"
- "A lot"
- "not hard to figure really, w people threatening to water the tree of liberty with blood"
- "It certainly doesn't help."
- "very little."
- "There is an obvious and commonsense connection between overly heated political rhetoric and acts of incivility extending all the way to political violence even though it is often difficult to make straight line connections between individual acts of rhetorical excess and individual acts of violence."
- "90%"
- "Tons. We always overreach in these situations."
- "It's an expected extension of the current campaign atmosphere, jumping to worst case scenarios to push an agenda. Campaigns work better when based on fear than on a positive message."
- "Political rhetoric doesn't kill. Nut jobs kill. Thank God the lobbyists will all be armed this session."
- "major factor"
- "To a certain extent. It seems, however, that most incidents are carried out by people with personal grievances and extreme mental instability."
- "I'm not at the Capitol today because large events of a political nature, like opening day, are likely to attract those inclined to violence. I think the intemperate rhetoric does have an impact on the unbalanced in our society. Free speech is not the same thing as responsible speech and many who engage in political speech up and down the political spectrum clearly do not know the difference."
- "This hyperbolic stupidity has gotten out of hand. If you just take the tragedy in Arizona with Congresswomen Giffords and look at the math instead of the hysteria, maybe everybody would calm down. 2/10's of 1% of the Congress (.0018) have been shot. I guarantee those odds are substantially better than my just walking down the street. But rest assured that our elected officials will demand security and protection. I pray for Congresswoman Giffords recovery and I applaud her desire to communicate directly with her constituents. There are far more effective security measures available to the Texas Legislature than the scans in place but that doesn't comport with DPS's vision of importance and dollars."
- "My answer has changed since last Saturday. I do believe that Capitol Security is now a bigger issue."
- "Wingnuts and loons reside on both sides of the political spectrum . . . and all points in between. The recent uproar subsequent to AZ tragedy is political grandstanding and inappropriate. As an aside . . . I am a CHL holder to get access. Have been around the Capitol for 24 years. Would happily pay for a full access card to tunnels, pillbox entries, etc."
- "'It seems to us there is a very strong case to be made that the ugliest political rhetoric of the past 48 hours has been that coming from the side whose leading voices are attempting to make sense of a senseless crime by blaming their opponents for it.' -- James Taranto, WSJ"

- "None. We are too sensitive to just about everything. Hell people feel the need to change Huck Finn. We live in a perceived world of cause and affects driven by the media and elected officials."
- "A significant degree"
- "It is the milk that feeds the baby!!!!"
- "It's all a big CYA exercise. If someone really wanted to do harm to the Capitol or the people in it, he still could."
- "It's feeding the beast"
- "NONE"
- "significantly"
- "Substantially. We need leading statesmen in both parties to jointly condemn such behavior, both verbal and physical threats."
- "The lack of civility in our political discourse and the increase in confrontational rhetoric creates an atmosphere which can stimulate the emotionally unstable to take actions which otherwise might well be suppressed."
- "It's like mother's milk to babies. The constant and steady stream of hate (also know as political rhetoric) triggers thoughts that lead to fear and then to violence."
- "It may be some catalyst to some, but it is not a significant factor in the vast majority."
- "In recent years political rhetoric at the national, state and local levels has heated up so significantly that the 'politics of personal destruction' have become the norm instead of the exception. It is disgusting. Words do matter!"
- "Not much. Attacks are typically by crazy people, like the man who shot outside the Capitol last year."
- "Extreme reactions to extremists are not realistic. We can blame it on the rhetoric, or atmosphere, but there will always be some nut job.... John Wilkes Booth, Lee Harvey Oswald,* Sirhan Sirhan, John Hinckley"
- "Absolutely feed it. We can't stop the fringe from this sort of behavior, but our culture should be such that legitimate people never engage in inflammatory rhetoric of any kind. We should be able to expect that in our society."
- "Only the most outrageous rants that make a direct or indirect reference to violence are in any way responsible."
- "None."
- "from 1-10 about 7"
- "Much of the political rhetoric on both sides fuels this activity. If there is to be security before entering the Capitol ALL who enter should have to pass through including staff and elected officials."
- "Almost all terrorist activities in the US and elsewhere have come from groups that spew hate, much like the Astroturf groups have been doing. No one can be sure which ones are harmless and which ones are Texas' new Branch Davidians. So the rhetoric does feed the fear! Didn't they assign detail to the Speaker and his wife yesterday because of all the noise??? I think the rhetoric opens the door to allow the crazies to follow through on their threats of violence."
- "We managed to get through reconstruction, the Depression, civil rights, and Viet Nam without metal detectors. Some folks just want to carry guns everywhere and all this rhetoric lets them do that."
- "It ain't helpful."
- "Over-the-top hyperbolic rhetoric has always existed. The difference is the media megaphone given to the few who engage in this type of vitriol. It has not served to elevate the debate, but rather to feed more of the same. We shouldn't encourage these people by elevating their platform."
- "Before we get to Rhetoric, a CHL will NOT allow you to bypass security at the Capitol. You need 3 things: you must have a CHL, and be carrying at that moment, and not have any briefcase or bag subject to search. Maybe that will shift as the crowds

grow. ... Also, question #2 is broken - won't allow me to choose 'other.' ... On rhetoric: Isn't it interesting that many of the liberal media talking heads who for years laughed at the idea that violent movies and video games caused any real world behavior are now telling us that political rhetoric leads to assassinations? The mass media will say anything to get ratings and sell advertising. The concept of journalism is all but dead (excluding TT, of course). If the public valued thoughtful, responsible reporting then overheated and wild rhetoric would not have the place that it does today."

- "Hard to say on whether or not it actually feeds violence - let hope it is always something we wonder about. However, I do think it feeds fear. That's exactly the intent of threats of any kind - intended or not."
- "We need to quit pointing fingers. There are real nuts out there. We need to address real threats not blame those who we may or may not agree with. Toning down the political discourse is a laudable goal--but it is a separate issue."
- "Not too much but President Obama referring to Republicans as 'the enemy' and saying 'if they bring a knife to the fight we'll bring a gun' was certainly inappropriate and only added to the atmosphere of adversity."
- "To a large extent."
- "At the end of the day, people are responsible for their own actions, and they know in their heart of hearts that firing on innocent people is wrong."
- "Tremendously. Fights rarely start without words first."
- "Minimal!!!"
- "Not much. If somebody is sufficiently unbalanced to be a shooter, anything from a 'wrong' vote to a perceived slight can set him off."
- "Although unintended, harsh political rhetoric that goes beyond issues into personal attacks and anti-government spin could well be seen by misguided and

mentally deranged individuals as validation for their irrational acts."

- "The intolerance has reached a new high. Irresponsible statements inflame those individuals who perceive government as a threat."
- "I read of a lot of comments on stories about the shootings in Arizona. It was enough to make me very depressed. The hate, the vitriol, the attacks and counterattacks in the posts made it clear that the current political rhetoric is simply red meat for the masses. For the most part, politicians give the people what they want--after all they do want to get reelected. The current hateful political rhetoric is just vox populi repackaged by the communications staff on the way out the door."
- "Not much. I see little evidence that the Capitol and its inhabitants are as much at risk as the nearest H-E-B."
- "absolutely...."
- "fairly limited extent."
- "There is already a great fear in our society towards a perceived lack of security from our government. There is a fear in illegal immigration, corrupt elections, terrorism and big government spending. That fear can be seen in the news, read on the internet, and felt through the most recent elections. Most politicians know how to cultivate society's fear and use it as an advantage. Unless society is willing to change the political atmosphere, then expect the politicians to continue to feed the same beast that got them elected."
- "While the hostile political atmosphere may not be the direct cause of violence it certainly can be a contributing factor."
- "Political rhetoric is the most high protected form of free speech. ANY attempt to silence it will do nothing but foment more of it. If the enemy is the government then the government attempts to remove rights will just inflame the masses. The people need to be left alone to live freely and the political figures should live under the same laws and circumstances as the citizenry in

general. Metal detectors at the Capitol only serve to inconvenience Texans."

- "All you had to do was watch the vitriolic protests before and during the GOP Caucus meeting to see how a protest could spiral out of control."
- "The rhetoric on the extremes of both sides definitely adds to the angst that exists among people."
- "Unfortunately the rhetoric does have consequences as we have seen in AZ most recently and in other cases all too familiar to those who follow political debate and current events. From family planning clinic bombings, to verbal and physical assaults and even murder of public figures, the lack of civility in our public discourse and the vitriol and ridicule of public servants by those who make millions deftly appealing to the dark side of the human personality to turn a crowd into a mob, is tragic, yet altogether predictable with a basic understanding of sociology and human nature."
- "to a great extent..."
- "I believe it feeds concern or fear, but not actual violence. Historically, acts of violence against elected officials are by lone actors with obscure grievances unrelated to the political debates of the day."
- "indirectly"
- "Political rhetoric has reached the level in the country, that makes it a threat to safety for elected officials"
- "greatly- allowing people with guns to whiz through without being searched and questioned makes no sense- that is exactly who we should be giving greatest scrutiny to!"
- "Greatly."
- "To a very large extent."
- "A lot"

• "No more than video games cause kids to kill classmates!"

- "It serves to intensify and inflame existing anger and cynicism"
- "An enormous amount and in 2 ways: 1. by creating a perception of a threat where none exists, and 2. by directing the unhinged to a defined outlet for their rage and confusion"
- "I don't know how you would put a cap on political rhetoric. It's the world we live in, and I guess for now, we'll have to live with the notion that crazy people live among us and do the best we can to catch them before they act."
- "Not a significant factor."
- "A great deal. You talk about targeting a candidate, you live with the consequences."
- "Very little."
- "low"
- "not at all, political rhetoric is as old as the country and a tradition."
- "Divisive and angry rhetoric can do a lot of damage (angry rhetoric can also do good, by the way), but I don't believe it can make a person go crazy and shoot up a crowd."
- "Political rhetoric gives the kooks the idea that they are doing a heroic service for the public or are carrying out the wishes of a political faction."
- "People are responsible for their own actions, but it infuriates me that there are people who have made an incredible political ordeal out of the shooting in Arizona. They didn't even pause to mourn with the families, but used it instead for their own political platform. I do believe that inflammatory language must be addressed, but the bottom line is that there are some disturbed people in this world who may or may not choose to go off the deep end."

- "The fear mongering rhetoric on radio and TV - used primarily to increase listenership and ad revenues - accounts for a great deal of the violence and fear. If present trends continue, 'free speech rights' may be abridged in our lifetimes when more victims become more outraged and begin to speak out."
- "Heated rhetoric and hate speech help nut cases rationalize their violent acts and in some cases encourages irrational behavior by exaggerating imagined or perceived threats."
- "The current political atmosphere and rhetoric feed the kind of violence and fear our nation is currently experiencing with the AZ mass murders. The nation must stop the current hateful discourse against communities of color, the immigrant community and the senseless violence. The nation and state must pass stricter gun laws. America is better than what we are currently experiencing, we need to be a leader in civil discourse, an open society, a society that respects the diverse communities that make up the nation."
- "The real threat is minimal -- the only ones who perceive a danger are the politicians who believe people care enough about them to harm them"
- "A lot of the current talk involves forcibly taking back 'our' government, so the threat is real. Unfortunately, often those with legitimate beefs about the current state of affairs are used as a front for the really evil and destructive people in society. Nuts are nuts. If someone really wants to hurt an individual or group of people, they will. Rhetoric might underscore someone's willingness to act, but I do not believe it to be a root cause."
- "None. We're talking about mentally unstable people. No matter what, if violence is where they are going, it's not going to be political debate that will do it."
- "Considerably. It is over-reaction to a problem that has arisen only one in 25+ years that I know of. Before this, people just shot themselves--one for real and a lot of people in their feet."
- "'Rhetoric ain't the problem. Official policy is: Carry a concealed handgun to get into the Capitol quicker. What kind of message does this send?'"
- "Unfortunately, they feed off each other when now is the time for elected officials to stand up and say it is OK to be mad at government and express that frustration by learning the issues and voting. It is never OK to shout down other voices and limit the or access to the system and we will prosecute anybody who takes violent action within the system."
- "It certainly gets fed to some extent, but were you at the Capitol yesterday? I've never seen so many nut jobs in one place in my life!"
- "No relationship"
- "It is to simple minded to attribute political rhetoric to violence. Tucson, University of Virginia, Fort Hood -- violence done by insane individuals driven by their own demons rather than politics."
- "NOT AT ALL"
- "It's imaginary and product of an institutional ego that is way over the top. Which might be okay if it was calculated to be a meaningful, substantive and productive response to a real threat. Alas it is none. It is but huffing and puffing and most inconvenient."
- "There is a strong evidence that the two are linked. At the tea party rally on Monday, some speakers railed against the 'tyranny of government' even while the Legislature was preparing for the peaceful transfer of power -- it wasn't like Jim Dunnam was barricaded in his office with semiautomatic weapons refusing to leave office. There can be no tyranny if the people can vote in free elections and the results of those elections are honored by all participants. The tea party is the militia movement of the 21st century and to think otherwise is naive."
- "The Tucson and Killeen murders were NOT the fault of political rhetoric, but of mental illness and radical Islam. We must support the First Amendment, while

encouraging help for those who make real threats as we the case in both incidents."

- "I believe that it feeds the fantasies of those who are mentally unbalanced"
- "Sadly, The rhetoric fuels the fire."
- "not fit to print."
- "A LOT!"
- "Very little. Individuals who engage in acts of violence should be held individually accountable."
- "Hugely. The situation has gotten ridiculous. And all the 'security' in the world is not going to protect us from the one deranged individual who slips by or has a concealed weapon permit. Speaking of which, it is monstrous for the state to give priority Capitol access to people with concealed weapons permits without making an alternative certification available to those who can't afford the weapon permit or who object to it (like pacifists)."
- ""(surprised you did not ask about whether the handgun licensees should have that option??) Answer: 19%. (Seriously, though, the lack of civility seen recently at OUR state house (Giant 'Straus is a Louse' sign Tuesday; behavior at Senate HHS/State Affairs hearing 11/23/10) are disturbing.""
- "very little. no direct ties established from any of the perpetrators of this violence, the incident at the south steps or Tucson, AZ to any organized political effort i.e. tea party, etc. These were deranged people. Individuals with many issues."
- "Hate speech and anger isn't healthy for society, but it isn't the reason crazy people do crazy things."
- "From a policy perspective, the biggest problem here is the de facto veto wielded by the NRA. Banning the oversize magazines is a perfectly reasonable policy response from a public health perspective. But it's a no go, primarily because the NRA has conditioned members of Congress to avoid any and all legislation related to gun violence. Toxic rhetoric didn't kill and

injure all those people -- an unbalanced guy with ready access to weaponry designed for killing or hurting people did."

- "Anything that nurtures violence and fear is not needed to solve our common problems."
- "There is a greater connection to media violence, that is portrayal in video games, films and television that random violence is acceptable than any notion that political shrillness is contributing to such heinous acts.
<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=giffords-shooting-vitriol>"
- "Very little"
- "It feeds perception more than reality."
- "Media rhetoric and political rhetoric feed fear, bias and injustice feed anger."
- "Despite all their negative and hateful political rhetoric against President Bush and Vice President Cheney, we cannot blame this on Pelosi and other outspoken liberals. The fact is there are just bad people in this world."
- "I think the political atmosphere could play a part in some cases, but in general this is something that has always been in the air. I mean, an anarchist shot Garfield in 1881, right? Crazy people will find a way."
- "It is very difficult to establish causation between political rhetoric and violent action, and those who have rushed to do so in the wake of the AZ shootings have been irresponsible. Equally, irresponsible, however, is contributing to a rhetorical vernacular that casually demonizes political opponents and ever suggests that violence is appropriate. We should be more careful, not just because of the potential effect of such language on the unstable, but because of the example it sets for the rest of society, particularly our children."
- "it has been very damaging --they should focus on how individuals with psychiatric problems can and should be helped to find help thru reporting to parents authorities etc by those who observe their strange

behavior. Our privacy laws have gone to far!"

- "Not much. The people who strike out violently are unstable. We as a society should be more aware and get people with mental health issues help to prevent violent occurrences"

- "Political rhetoric definitely feeds fear and is intended to raise anger to a level where people believe they must 'take action.' It probably leads to more threats of violence than actual acts of violence, but since you cannot predict which threats will be carried out, precautionary measures become necessary. However, allowing people who have a handgun license to slip through an expedited line makes a mockery of 'security' at the Capitol."

- "None"

- "The media is filled with extremist messages that is meant to provoke, anger, enrage and incite. History tells us that the use of this language by political 'leaders', organizers and folks who have both a microphone and an audience only exacerbates the tensions and feeds the divisiveness in our society."

- "to the fullest extent"

- "toxic to civil discourse, maintaining a political center and its vital role in pursuing enlightened self interest policies; less significant as a trigger mechanism for acts of violence by the deeply disturbed; those are ironically failures by the state to restore and preserve mental health systems"

- "An unbalanced individual is more susceptible to the influence of political dialogue--just as we've seen with abortion clinic/doctor violence. Without question the tone of the right's political dialogue has caused even balanced people to adopt extreme or absurd positions on issues that can't be backed up with facts (birthers, triggers, etc)."

- "Individuals are responsible for their own actions but we should all work to avoid rhetoric and language that gives permission to violent behavior"

- "I don't believe political rhetoric adds to any additional fear of violence or threats."

- "Present political rhetoric is no more vitriolic than it was 10 or 100 years ago. It's a red herring."

Our thanks to this week's participants: Cathie Adams, Victor Alcorta, Clyde Alexander, George Allen, Doc Arnold, Jay Arnold, Jim Arnold, Kip Averitt, Louis Bacarisse, Charles Bailey, Tom Banning, Walt Baum, Eric Bearse, Dave Beckwith, Tom Blanton, Hugh Brady, Steve Bresnen, Andy Brown, Terri Burke, Jose Camacho, Lydia Camarillo, Kerry Cammack, Snapper Carr, Janis Carter, Corbin Casteel, Jim Chapman, William Chapman, George Cofer, Rick Cofer, John Colyandro, Harold Cook, Hector Deleon, Scott Dunaway, Anne Dunkelberg, David Dunn, Jeff Eller, Alan Erwin, Gay Erwin, John Esparza, Jon Fisher, Robert Floyd, Terry Frakes, Wil Galloway, Neftali Garcia, Machree Gibson, Scott Gilmore, Eric Glenn, Daniel Gonzalez, Thomas Graham, John Greytok, Marta Greytok, Anthony Haley, Billy Hamilton, Wayne Hamilton, Bill Hammond, Albert Hawkins, Adam Haynes, Susan Hays, Jim Henson, Shanna Igo, Cal Jillson, Cliff Johnson, Jason Johnson, Robert Kepple, Richard Khouri, Tom Kleinworth, Sandy Kress, Tim Lambert, Pete Laney, Dick Lavine, James LeBas, Donald Lee, Luke Legate, Leslie Lemon, Lance Lively, Ruben Longoria, Robert Looney, Vilma Luna, Jennifer Lustina, Matt Mackowiak, Bryan Mayes, Gray Mayes, Richard McBride, J. McCartt, Dan McClung, Scott McCown, Carol McDonald, Mike McKinney, Bee Moorhead, Steve Murdock, Craig Murphy, Keir Murray, Todd Olsen, Gardner Pate, Bill Pewitt, Jerry Phillips, Wayne Pierce, Royce Poinsett, Kraege Polan, Steve Pringle, Jay Propes, Bill Ratliff, Tim Reeves, Chuck Rice, Carl Richie, Kim Ross, Luis Saenz, Mark Sanders, Jim Sartwelle, Stan Schlueter, Steve Scurlock, Terri Seales, Bradford Shields, Patricia Shipton, Ed Small, Martha Smiley, Terral Smith, Tom Smith, Todd Smith, Larry Soward, Bryan Sperry, Tom Spilman, Jason Stanford, Jeri Stone, Bob Strauser, Colin Strother, Frank Sturzl, Michael Quinn Sullivan, Russ Tidwell, Bruce Todd, Jill Warren, Ken Whalen, Darren Whitehurst,

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