

state

2-party state

Review of Texas politics in 70s shows scandal, turmoil

United Press International
AUSTIN — A cold wind whipped around the pink granite Texas Capitol building Jan. 19, 1971, while sun splashed across a wooden platform where Democrats were being inaugurated as the state's governor and lieutenant governor just as they had been every two years since Reconstruction.

Gov. Preston Smith had just won overwhelming election to a second term, and Ben Barnes, considered the brightest star in Texas politics, was bidding his time as lieutenant governor, waiting for the opportune time to make his bid for the Governor's Mansion. But before Smith and Barnes placed their hands on the Bible to take their oaths of office, there were whispers in the crowd of a Securities and Exchange Commission suit that would spark the biggest scandal in Texas politics in years, and usher in a decade that would see:

— indictment and conviction of half a dozen state officeholders;
— the first impeachment trial of a state official in three decades;
— the forced resignation and conviction of a Supreme Court justice;
— an increase in the forces of Republicans and blacks in the state Legislature;
— and election of the first Republican governor of Texas in modern history.

In its lengthy petition filed in Dallas, the SEC alleged that Smith, House Speaker Gus Mutscher and several of Mutscher's top aides had made handsome profits on stock deals financed by Houston financier Frank W. Sharp in exchange for their votes in passing legislation that would have benefitted Sharp's Sharpstown State Bank.

Smith eventually vetoed those bills, but before the scandal died down Mutscher, Rep. Tommy Shannon, D-Fort Worth, and Mutscher aide Rush McCinty had been convicted of conspiring to accept a bribe. Smith and Barnes had been thrown out by Texas voters angered at the scandal at the highest levels of state government, and a South Texas rancher and banker, Dolph Briscoe, had been elected governor on a platform of restoring confidence in government.

Briscoe's administration as chief executive was a quiet one. His "no new taxes" campaign theme was popular with voters and kept him in office until 1978, when Attorney General John L. Hill defeated him in the Democratic primary and set up a showdown between Hill and William Perry Clements Jr. of Dallas.

In a major upset Donald B. Yarborough defeated Charles Barrow of San Antonio and won election to the Texas Supreme Court in 1976. But he served only seven months before being forced to resign in the face of charges he had lied to a grand jury investigating allegations he had also attempted to hire the murder of a former associate and forged the title to an automobile. He later was convicted of aggravated perjury, and sentenced to five years in prison.

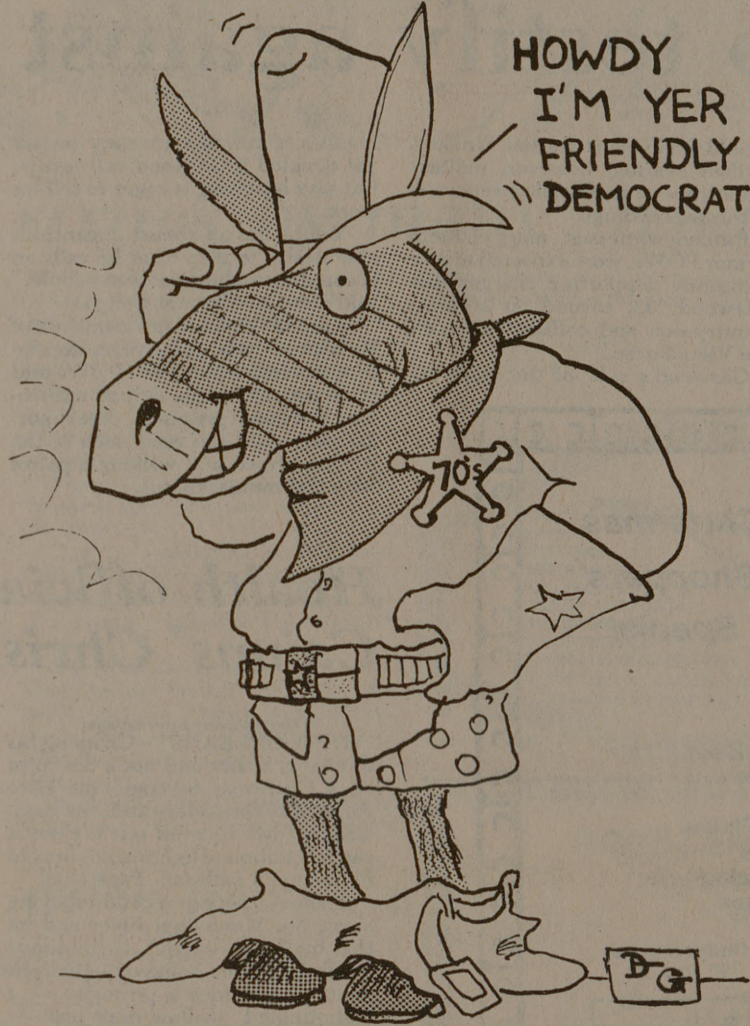
triggering a feud between the Parr and Carrillo factions that resulted in impeachment charges being filed in the Legislature against District Judge O.P. Carrillo of Benavides.

The Senate, in the first impeachment trial in Texas since 1931, convicted Carrillo on one article of impeachment, removed him from office, and banned him from ever holding public office again.

The Texas Legislature, long dominated by rural lawmakers, grew steadily more urban during the 1970s, with the number of Republicans increasing from 12 in 1971 to 26 by 1979. The number of blacks in the House and Senate increased from three in 1971 to 12 by 1979.

But the scandals of the early 70s were superceded by another political event in 1978 that carries over into the 1980s, and leaves Texas on the brink of becoming something Republicans have long sought: a true two-party state.

Clements, who had never before run for elective office, put together a statewide campaign organization unmatched in previous GOP campaigns in Texas, and let it be known early he was not merely a token candidate against Democrat Hill.



— the Democratic nomination without a runoff, and Clements smashed highly regarded state GOP chairman Ray Hutchison in the GOP primary with such ease that Democrats began to show concern at the force and finances of the Clements campaign.

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Top stories selected

United Press International
DALLAS — The top 10 stories in Texas during the 1970s, as selected by the state's newspaper and broadcast editors, based first on headline value and then significance:
— **Headline value** 1. Houston homosexual mass murders. 2. The trials of T. Cullen Davis. 3. Fred Gomez Carrasco leads prison break attempt. 4. Wichita Falls tornado. 5. Energy crisis of 1973. 6. Hurricane Celia. 7. Election of the first Republican governor in a century. 8. Ixtoc I oil washes onto Texas beaches. 9. Death of Lyndon B. Johnson. 10. Texas stock fraud scandal. Close: Lubbock tornado, central and western floods of 1978 kill 33, grain elevator explosions, Federal Judge John Wood assassinated and federal prosecutor James Kerr shot at, and the Texas Legislature's "killer bees."
— **Significance** 1. Energy crisis of 1973. 2. Election of the first Republican governor in a century. 3. Population explosion in the Sunbelt. 4. Mexican-American gains in civil rights; 5. Mexico discovers oil; international influence increases. 6. Hurricane Celia. 7. Allegations of police brutality. 8. Retirement of six veteran congressmen in 1978. 9. Texas stock fraud scandal. 10. Houston mass murders. Close: Ixtoc I oil slick, construction of D-FW Regional Airport, cutback of the space program, and decline of the George Parr political machine in South Texas.

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