

## **The Mandate of the New Mainstream**

A Speech by Chris Bell

Austin, March 2, 2005

*Chris Bell may deviate from the prepared text.*

I think it's time we came together and had a real conversation about what we should be doing.

Not too long ago, Rick Perry walked out of the Capitol, stepped up to a microphone and said something that I think pretty well sums up his record in office. He said that government "cannot dispense hope."<sup>1</sup> This is a country whose government first recognized God's gift of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.<sup>2</sup> This is Texas, a "free and independent state" founded on the "great and essential principles of liberty."<sup>3</sup>

Given that, the very idea that a Governor of Texas won't dispense hope concerns me and offends me deeply. In Texas, we must dispense hope. We know there's never enough money to solve every problem, but refusing to take responsibility for dispensing hope betrays a bankrupt spirit.

---

*"We know there's never enough money to solve every problem, but refusing to take responsibility for dispensing hope betrays a bankrupt spirit."*

---

From where we stand, outside Rick Perry's inner sanctum, what he said explains a lot of what he's done. Inside his closed circle, dispensing hope might sound like a radical notion.

---

<sup>1</sup> Rick Perry's full quote was as follows in the prepared text: "Government is not equipped to meet every need and while it can and should fund many worthwhile programs it cannot dispense hope or provide fulfillment for every citizen in need." Speech to Capitol of Texas Rotary Club February 21, 2005, Austin, TX, at [http://capitoloftexasrotaryclub.blogspot.com/2005\\_02\\_01\\_capitoloftexasrotaryclub\\_archive.html#110934486483662207](http://capitoloftexasrotaryclub.blogspot.com/2005_02_01_capitoloftexasrotaryclub_archive.html#110934486483662207) (last visited February 28, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Jefferson, Declaration of Independence, June 11-28, 1776, at [http://www.archives.gov/national\\_archives\\_experience/charters/declaration.html](http://www.archives.gov/national_archives_experience/charters/declaration.html) (last visited February 28, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Texas Constitution, Art. 1, Sec. 1, at <http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/txconst/sections/cn000100-000100.html> (last visited February 28, 2005).

We are not dispensing hope by ignoring problems and refusing to consider new solutions.

We are not dispensing hope by avoiding the two-way street of compromise and sticking to the dead end of bitter partisanship.

We are not dispensing hope by evading our fiscal and moral responsibilities so we can brag about budget cuts.

And we are certainly not dispensing hope to the next generation by hitting it with the highest tuition increase in the country.

There is a New Mainstream<sup>4</sup> in Texas that shares an optimistic vision of freedom, responsibility and accountability. The New Mainstream includes all of us who believe in rewarding hard work, recognizing new ideas and relying on each other and ourselves.

Because “we are the ones we’ve been waiting for.”<sup>5</sup>

Rick Perry leads a government that no longer reflects the ethics and values of the New Mainstream. Rick Perry only listens to divisive, partisan screeching or the gentle cooing of his staffers who cycle on and off the retainers of state contractors.<sup>6</sup> Rick Perry thinks he can afford to ignore the cost that his hopeless ideology passes down to the least of us.

No longer. Not because of what divides our political parties but because of the difference between right and wrong. Our shared moral code demands

---

*“There is a New Mainstream in Texas that shares an optimistic vision of freedom, responsibility and accountability.”*

---

---

<sup>4</sup> Economist Richard Florida originated this phrase. Richard Florida, “The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It’s Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life,” Perseus Books Group, 1st edition (April, 2002), pp. 210-11.

<sup>5</sup> Jim Wallis credits Lisa Sullivan, Ph.D. with this phrase. Jim Wallis, “God’s Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn’t Get It,” Harper San Francisco, 2005, p. 373.

<sup>6</sup> According to the Dallas Morning News, “the revolving door has become routine in Mr. Perry’s administration.” There are numerous examples of this in Rick Perry’s administration. When he was the Governor’s Chief of Staff, Mike Toomey “authorized the state lottery to hire a Las Vegas law firm to study the legalization of video lottery gambling in Texas. Toomey now is a lobbyist for one of the nation’s manufacturers of video lottery systems.” Andrew Wheat, “Texas’ First Postmodern Lobbyist,” Texas Observer, Dec. 17, 2004, at <http://www.texasobserver.org/showArticle.asp?ArticleID=1837> (last visited February 24, 2005).

that we consider the common good. Because in the New Mainstream, there are no big people or little people. We are all in this together, and we can't afford to leave anyone behind.

Some people have called me a "reform candidate."<sup>7</sup> I guess I can't blame them. You file one little ethics complaint, and suddenly you have a reputation.<sup>8</sup>

But I'm not here because I lost my seat in Congress. I never had a chance to feel safe in Washington, and that's probably a good thing. If politicians get to feeling too safe, if there's less turnover in Congress than there was in the Politburo,<sup>9</sup> then politicians are no longer accountable to the people. So I'm not here because I lost my seat in Congress. I'm here because we've all lost our seat at the table.

As my wife and kids would be happy to volunteer, I fall far short of perfection. But I've always tried to stand up for what I thought was right, and that's made me friends and enemies in both parties. When I was on the city council in Houston, I raised my voice against corruption and wasting your money. I earned a reputation as an independent voice and as a real pain in the rear, but the voters sent me to Congress anyway. I told myself, do right and speak the truth, and you'll be fine up there in Washington.

---

*"I'm not here because I lost my seat in Congress. I'm here because we all lost our seat at the table."*

---

Then I met Tom DeLay.

---

<sup>7</sup> Vince Leibowitz, "Chris Bell Comes to Town," Burnt Orange Report, February 15, 2005, at <http://www.burntorangereport.com/archives/003297.html> (last visited February 28, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> Press Release, Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, Jun. 15, 2004, at <http://www.citizensforethics.org/press/newsrelease.php?view=16> (last visited February 24, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> In his book "Rome Wasn't Burnt in a Day," former Republican Rep. Joe Scarborough touched on this very subject: "In the last election (2002), only four outsiders in the entire country defeated a sitting member of the House of Representatives. That means the other 431 breezed to re-election. Those numbers highlight just how sick our political system is, especially when you consider that the old Soviet Union had a higher turnover in their Politburo than America has in Congress." "RWN's Favorite Quotes From Joe Scarborough's 'Rome Wasn't Burnt In A Day,' Right Wing News, at <http://www.rightwingnews.com/quotes/scarborough.php> (last visited February 28, 2005).

And it's not just Tom DeLay. It's the corrupt culture of Washington that you never really see until you're on the inside. I never really saw the walls that divided us until the voters of Houston gave me the keys to the kingdom. I had no idea how partisan it was, how locked out people really are.

You want to know how broken the system is? When I was thinking of filing the ethics complaint against Tom DeLay, leaders of my own party tried to get me to back down. They wanted to preserve the so-called "ethics truce."<sup>10</sup> Have you ever heard of anything so ridiculous? Only in Washington, D.C. would an "ethics truce" make sense.

I did what any Texan would have done. I did what I thought was right. To paraphrase someone who knows a lot about Washington ethics, I had to choose between Tom DeLay and y'all, and I chose y'all.<sup>11</sup> But after that whole experience, I'm beginning to understand why Davy Crockett said what he did when he lost his congressional seat. He said, "you all can go to Hell, and I'm going to Texas."<sup>12</sup>

That's where I find myself right now, and there's no place that I'd rather be.

I am a free man. But it is a taller order to meet the measure of a reform candidate.

But if reform means rejecting the old battle lines in search of common ground, then I'm a reform candidate.

If reform means raising my voice against the silent crisis in higher education, then

---

*"Leaders of my own party tried to get me to back down. Only in Washington would an 'ethics truce' make sense."*

---

---

<sup>10</sup> The "ethics truce" was a seven-year-long cease-fire in which neither Democrats nor Republicans filed ethics complaints about anyone in Congress. According to the Washington Post, this left the House Ethics Committee "largely dormant." Charles Babington and Dan Morgan, "Ethics Truce Frays in House: Democrats Torn Over Investigating GOP," Washington Post, March 17, 2004, at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A64604-2004Mar16?language=printer> (last visited February 28, 2005).

<sup>11</sup> This of course is a reference to Phil Gramm's line, "I had to choose between Tip O'Neill and y'all, and I decided to stand with y'all."

<sup>12</sup> Davy Crockett was elected to Congress in 1833 as a Whig after serving two terms previously as a Democrat. He lost his re-election effort in 1835 and reportedly said, "You can all go to Hell and I'm going to Texas." "Davy Crockett," Answers.com, at <http://www.answers.com/topic/davy-crockett> (last visited February 24, 2005).

I'm a reform candidate.<sup>13</sup>

If they mean that I will make state government as accountable as it holds our school children, then I'm the reform candidate.<sup>14</sup>

If reform means shining a spotlight on not just an ethics truce, but an ethics surrender in the governor's office, then I'm a reform candidate.

If they mean I will demand real ethics reform, not later, not soon, but without delay, then yes, I am your reform candidate.

I have no desire to spend the rest of my adult life stuck in a partisan trench, never giving an inch toward common ground. We need to stop pretending that what we are doing is working and start an honest discussion about how we can make things better.

---

*“I have no desire to spend the rest of my adult life stuck in a partisan ditch, never giving an inch toward common ground.”*

---

This is the mandate of the New Mainstream. We know that the moral courage to hold government accountable is linked to our ability to raise the next generation of entrepreneurs.

We cannot sustain budget cuts that demand compound interest from our children. We pay a moral price when we pass the cost onto the next generation whether they're trying to get into college, into a doctor's office, or out of an abusive home.

---

<sup>13</sup> Thanks to tuition deregulation passed under Rick Perry, UT hiked its tuition by 37 percent, the highest jump in the country. Victor Diaz, “UT students lobby for tax break on textbooks,” News 8 Austin, January 17, 2005, at [http://www.news8austin.com/content/top\\_stories/default.asp?ArID=129349](http://www.news8austin.com/content/top_stories/default.asp?ArID=129349) (last visited February 28, 2005). Statewide, tuition at all Texas state colleges and universities rose 23 percent on average since fall 2003, forcing the Comptroller to freeze enrollment in the Texas Tomorrow Fund. “Texas Tomorrow Fund Freeze Continues: Tuition Fluctuation Since Deregulations Puts Program In Jeopardy,” KSAT, February 14, 2005, at <http://www.ksat.com/education/4194914/detail.html> (last visited February 28, 2005).

<sup>14</sup> Joshua Benton, “Tools may stem cheating on tests: Scores, analysis available, but TEA doesn't use information,” Dallas Morning News, December 19, 2004, at <http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/dn/education/stories/122004dnmetchea.4c687.html> (last visited February 28, 2005).

In Sunday School I learned that as much as we have done to the least of our fellow Texans, we have done to ourselves.<sup>15</sup> Because we are not alone in this endeavor called Texas. Texas connects us to each other like one big complicated family.<sup>16</sup>

Most of the nation is learning that political openness is one of the precursors to economic prosperity, yet we have a political system designed to prevent access to all but high-rolling lobbyists and entrenched partisan ideologues.<sup>17</sup> We need to renew our democracy, opening it up to real collaboration, creativity, and cooperation. We need politicians who pay more attention to November's voices than to the partisans of March.

We know that an investment in higher education trumps the economic development benefit of a toll road<sup>18</sup> or a tax break for yet another big box superstore.<sup>19</sup> Every family in this state knows that the next generation will join the New Mainstream when our state government realizes that the law of diminishing returns does not apply to our children.

---

*“We know that an investment in higher education trumps the economic development benefit of a toll road or a big box superstore.”*

---

---

<sup>15</sup> Matthew 25:40.

<sup>16</sup> This paraphrases Chief Seattle's statement, "All things are connected like the blood which unites one family." <http://www.cs.rice.edu/~ssiyer/minstrels/poems/184.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Rick Perry called three special sessions to pass redistricting and signed HB 3, the bill that instituted congressional maps with districts now relatively immune to general elections.

<sup>18</sup> Richard Florida, "Creative Class War: How the GOP's anti-elitism could ruin America's economy," *Washington Monthly*, January/February 2004, at <http://www.washingtonmonthly.com/features/2004/0401.florida.html> (last visited February 28, 2005).

<sup>19</sup> The Texas Enterprise Fund, which the Center for Public Policy Priorities called a "slush fund for the Governor," has given mammoth subsidies and tax breaks to big-box stores, including \$8.5 million for a new Home Depot in Austin, \$600,000 for a Cabela's in Buda, and Mike Ward, "How Texas plays 'let's make a deal' for jobs: Officials swear by largely secret process of doling out big bucks of Enterprise Fund," *Austin American-Statesman*, February 21, 2005, at [http://jobs.statesman.com/wl/Content.jsp?Content=/careercenter/articles/20050221\\_text.html](http://jobs.statesman.com/wl/Content.jsp?Content=/careercenter/articles/20050221_text.html) (last visited February 28, 2005), and "78<sup>th</sup> Legislature—1<sup>st</sup> Special Session, Center for Public Policy Priorities, Jul. 7, 2003, No. 196, at <http://www.cppp.org/products/policypages/191-210/html/pp196.html> (last visited February 28, 2005).

Rick Perry seems blind to this simple truth. He continues to brag about cutting the budget and not raising taxes on one hand,<sup>20</sup> and he declares an emergency in protecting children from abuse on the other.<sup>21</sup> Forget a Republican primary—Rick Perry needs to debate himself.

The budget cuts that forced caseloads for child protective services to skyrocket contributed to the deaths of kids we should have protected. Now—after five hundred kids have died of abuse and neglect—the Governor wants to put the money back into protecting kids, and all he accomplished was making the problem more expensive to fix.<sup>22</sup>

Budgets are moral documents because they reflect our common priorities,<sup>23</sup> and sadly it seems that the priorities of our state government are out of balance.

You can't brag about balancing a budget that saves a dollar today by making a ten-dollar mess for tomorrow.

No budget is balanced that passes the tax burden down onto local businesses and homeowners and calls that fiscal discipline.

No budget is balanced that relies on raising the barriers to a college education.

---

*“Budgets are moral documents because they reflect our common priorities, and sadly it seems that the priorities of our state are out of balance.”*

---

---

<sup>20</sup> “Texas Gov. Perry's Remarks at Heritage,” Citizens for a Sound Economy, September 24, 2003, at [http://www.freedomworks.org/processor/printer.php?issue\\_id=1572](http://www.freedomworks.org/processor/printer.php?issue_id=1572) (last visited February 24, 2005).

<sup>21</sup> Executive Order RP35, July 2, 2004, at <http://www.governor.state.tx.us/divisions/press/exorders/rp35> (last visited February 28, 2005).

<sup>22</sup> Polly Ross Hughes, “Protective services top Legislature's agenda: Top lawmakers and the governor agree that agencies for children and adults need change,” Houston Chronicle, January 9, 2005, at <http://www.chron.com/cs/CDA/ssistory.mpl/metropolitan/2984033> (last visited February 28, 2005).

<sup>23</sup> Wallis, p. xxi.

No budget is balanced that buys textbooks censored by partisan ideologues on both the right and the left.<sup>24</sup>

No budget is balanced that turns away a billion dollars for health care and fails to account for the human cost.<sup>25</sup>

And no budget is truly balanced when it fails so miserably to dispense hope to the weakest among us.

---

<sup>24</sup> Liberal activists in California and their conservative counterparts in Texas have succeeded in bullying the few companies that still publish textbooks and tests into excising anything controversial from their products to such an extent that they have deeply offended common sense. The results are crappy, boring textbooks that have put ideology over knowledge and gave rise to Jon Stewart's "America: The Book."

How bad is it? To preserve profits, textbook companies now practice self-censorship with no regard for reality. The Association of Education Publishers bans the following terms so as not to offend either side in this ideological conflict: God, Third World, slave, regatta, Middle East, and paper boy, among others. One publisher's guidelines tell writers not to depict women as caregivers, men as professionals, old people as feeble or children as disobedient. Diane Ravitch, "The Language Police: How Pressure Groups Restrict What Students Learn," 2003.

According to the New York Times, "textbook battles are legendary in Texas." The paper profiled the 2002 adoption of social studies and science textbook that riled conservatives because of mentions of birth control as an historical event and global warming as the occasion for scientific consensus. The ongoing embarrassment had its most recent flare up last year when a member of the State Board of Education threw a nationally publicized snit over the definition of a family. "Textbook Publishers Learn: Avoid Messing With Texas," New York Times, June 29, 2002, at A1.

<sup>25</sup> Rick Perry's administration recently proposed changing the Medicaid payments to public hospitals to save \$100 million, but it would cost the hospitals \$125 million in federal matching funds. San Antonio Express-News, February 13, 2005.

Cutting the Children's Health Insurance Program has cost the state \$808.1 million in unspent federal matching funds since 2000, according to the Health and Human Services Commission. Michelle M. Martinez, "Children's health insurance funding turns political: Did Texas 'forfeit' or 'return' federal CHIP money? Depends on whom you ask," Austin American-Statesman, February 7, 2005, at [http://www.statesman.com/metrostate/content/auto/epaper/editions/monday/metro\\_state\\_247002cc216552ee00d3.html?Found\\_Session=true&UrAuth=%60NcNUOcN\[UbTTUWUXUTUZT\[UUUUWUcU\\_UZUaU^UcTYWVVZV&UrAuth=%60NcNUOaN\UbTTUWUXUTUZTZAaUWU\\_UcUZUcU\\_UcTYWVVZV](http://www.statesman.com/metrostate/content/auto/epaper/editions/monday/metro_state_247002cc216552ee00d3.html?Found_Session=true&UrAuth=%60NcNUOcN[UbTTUWUXUTUZT[UUUUWUcU_UZUaU^UcTYWVVZV&UrAuth=%60NcNUOaN\UbTTUWUXUTUZTZAaUWU_UcUZUcU_UcTYWVVZV) (last visited February 28, 2005).

Finally, the Republican-controlled Legislative Budget Board says that the state could save up to \$900 million over two years if it reimported pharmaceutical drugs. "TPA Legislative Priorities," Texas Pharmacy Association, at <http://www.texaspharmacy.org/tpaweb/legislation/texasLegislative.cfm> (last visited February 28, 2005)

Texas failed to dispense hope to Jovonnie Ochoa. He deserved hope, but more than that, he deserved our protection. Jovonnie was our responsibility, but he got lost under a mounting caseload at child protective services.

But by the time an overwhelmed CPS case worker found him two years ago on Christmas morning, hope had run out for Jovonnie Ochoa.

He was four years old, and one of several dozen kids we asked the case worker to protect from abuse.

He was four years old, and his relatives tied him up on his bed and starved him to death.

He was four years old, and he weighed sixteen pounds when they found him.<sup>26</sup>

No budget is balanced that refuses to dispense hope to Jovonnie Ochoa or to any of the hundreds of thousands of kids kicked off a children's health care plan, kept out of college or left unprotected by a system that demands sacrifice without dispensing hope.

---

*“We have not earned their sacrifice if we abide a closed political system that surrenders the common ground.”*

---

We have not earned their sacrifice if we ignore the responsibility we all share to the common good.

We have not earned their sacrifice if we abide a closed political system that surrenders common ground. Because common ground is where we need to put our feet if we are to reach and dream and achieve in the New Mainstream.

God gave us Texas to teach the rest of the world about freedom. And when John Kennedy asked the nation to do something not because it was easy, but because it was hard, he didn't go to Washington, he came to Texas.<sup>27</sup> This is where we make our stand. And we start by making it our top priority to dispense hope.

You're either dispensing hope, or you're spreading despair. You're either for opening democracy, or you're defending a closed political ideology.

---

<sup>26</sup> Hughes.

<sup>27</sup> President John F. Kennedy gave his “moon speech” at Rice University on September 12, 1962. “John F. Kennedy Moon Speech,” NASA, at <http://vesuvius.jsc.nasa.gov/er/seh/ricetalk.htm> (last visited February 28, 2005).

You're either for lifting the next generation into the New Mainstream, or you're just another brick in the wall.<sup>28</sup>

I know what the odds against us are. But these my friends are the fights worth fighting. We must forgive ourselves if we feel discouraged. But now we must stand up. If you are with me, if we are together, the November voices of the New Mainstream will dispense hope all over the Lone Star State.

And then may God bless Texas.

---

<sup>28</sup> Chris Bell in no way advocates going to laser light shows or listening to Pink Floyd without adult supervision. He generally cautions against listening to Pink Floyd and specifically against taking mind-altering drugs.