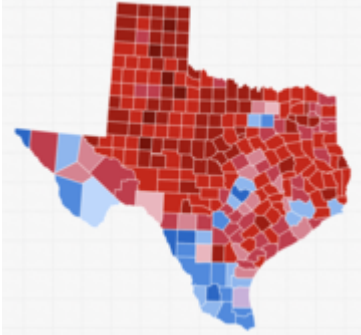


# Letter from San Antonio: Texas Power Politics?



*Our friend R in San Antonio reports on the current weather situation in Texas...perhaps giving new meaning to the idea of "power politics." He asked that his name not be used. –[Anita Harris](#)*

To our friends who have been worried about us because of the crazy weather:

Thank you for your expressions of concern. We are fine. Here is the story.

We heard that last Saturday, the temperatures would go below freezing and our insurance company (State Farm) advised us to keep the water running to prevent the pipes from freezing. We did that, and the pipes never froze. In addition, the external parts of our pipes have long been covered with insulation. What I did on Saturday was to put heating pads on the external pipes and turn the temperature of the pads up to the maximum. I plugged the heating pads into an outlet in our bedroom. The window there is open a crack and I put towels there to keep from freezing. We have slept very comfortably.

On Sunday night, it snowed about 4 inches. and that is when the problems started, mostly for the city, not for us, but unfortunately for many of our friends. The electric company

instituted rolling blackouts. In theory they were supposed to be 15 minutes on, 45 minutes off, each hour, but in reality, they morphed into 5 minutes on, 23 hours, 55 minutes off, every day or simply being off for a couple of days straight. Since we use gas for heating and since our power never went off, we were fine, but many people we know were not. Collecting the data from these people I gathered that the electric company was punishing the major individual users (i.e., people who use electricity for heating) and neighborhoods that are major users (i.e, ones with small houses close together). Our neighborhood has houses that are pretty far apart so, collectively, I doubt that the neighborhood uses much electricity compared to many other parts of the city. Also (alas) much of our neighborhood votes Republican and even though the city government is Democratic and progressive, the individuals in charge of the power grid are Republican appointees. They have done a miserable job.

To make matters worse, because of the power failures and the bursting of pipes, the city water company has had to cut off water from many people (add these to the people who have no water because their own pipes burst). The water company fears that the water will back up and that raw sewage will come out of the faucets so they have advised people to boil their water. (Of course, if you have no power, you can't boil water). In our case, we get our water directly from the aquifer, via a pump located at least 300 feet underground. As long as we have power, we will have no water problems but we are stockpiling some water, just in case. So, many people have been freezing in the cold and darkness and suffering from thirst. Our former governor, Rick Perry, a Republican, says that Texans would rather freeze than endure federal regulation. The city has opened the Convention Center and other buildings to people who need to keep warm. Naturally, these places would be superspreaders of the Covid virus. And just when the city had turned the corner and cases in San

Antonio were going down rapidly!

It was very unusual to see our cars buried in the snow. We had not had a real snowstorm here since January 1985. The temperature on Monday dropped to about 10 degrees.

In terms of our personal situation, the weather has affected us a little bit. First, L's second Covid vaccination, scheduled for yesterday, had to be canceled. They are supposed to contact her soon to re-schedule. Our internet connection vanished on Tuesday and has just resumed today (Thursday). I called AT&T and they told me that the cold weather had damaged some of their centers so that the internet was going down all over Texas and Oklahoma. Our newspaper stopped being delivered as did our mail and the recycling has not been picked up. We even ran out of coffee, meaning that we are threatened with the end of civilization as we know it. Yesterday, our daughter volunteered to go out to get coffee. Fortunately, much but not all of the snow and ice had melted by yesterday. There was such a mob at the grocery store that she decided to try a drugstore. It too was closed. Then another one had all the shelves stripped bare. The next place she tried was also mobbed. She observed that the traffic lights on Bandera Road were off and the traffic was not moving. She spent about 20 minutes at the same spot before the police came and pushed a non-functional car out of the way. The next place she went to was closed but finally she found an open drugstore and was still unable to get the coffee.

We tried phoning people. I could call or text some people but my efforts to contact my Argentine relatives failed. Linda and Sara had similar problems with their phones.

This morning when we got up all the snow had melted. The driveway had turned to a sheet of ice so I had to navigate it very carefully as I went to look for the newspaper, which was not there. Then at 8 AM it started to snow and it has not

stopped. It looks like it could be a blizzard although no blizzard is forecast. It will probably taper off. The forecast says that we will be above freezing by Saturday and that next Thursday the temperature will be 77.

Interesting that our Republican senator, Ted Cruz, who fought until the last minute, claiming that Trump won in November, has flown off for a Mexican vacation in Cancun, while his constituents freeze in the dark and are afraid of drinking the water here. I propose that, in the spirit of denialism, which he is very good at (e.g. climate change), Ted demonstrate that the water situation is fine by drinking a glass of tap water in Cancun.

Life is interesting here. So far, we are all fine and likely to stay that way.

Un abrazo, as they say in Texas. R

*—Anita Harris is a writer and communications consultant based in Cambridge, MA. R is a childhood friend.*

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