

KINKY FRIEDMAN



*Texas' leading singing
Jewish cowboy speaks on
Illegal Immigration,
The Trans-Texas Corridor,
Alternative Fuels –
and other stuff.*

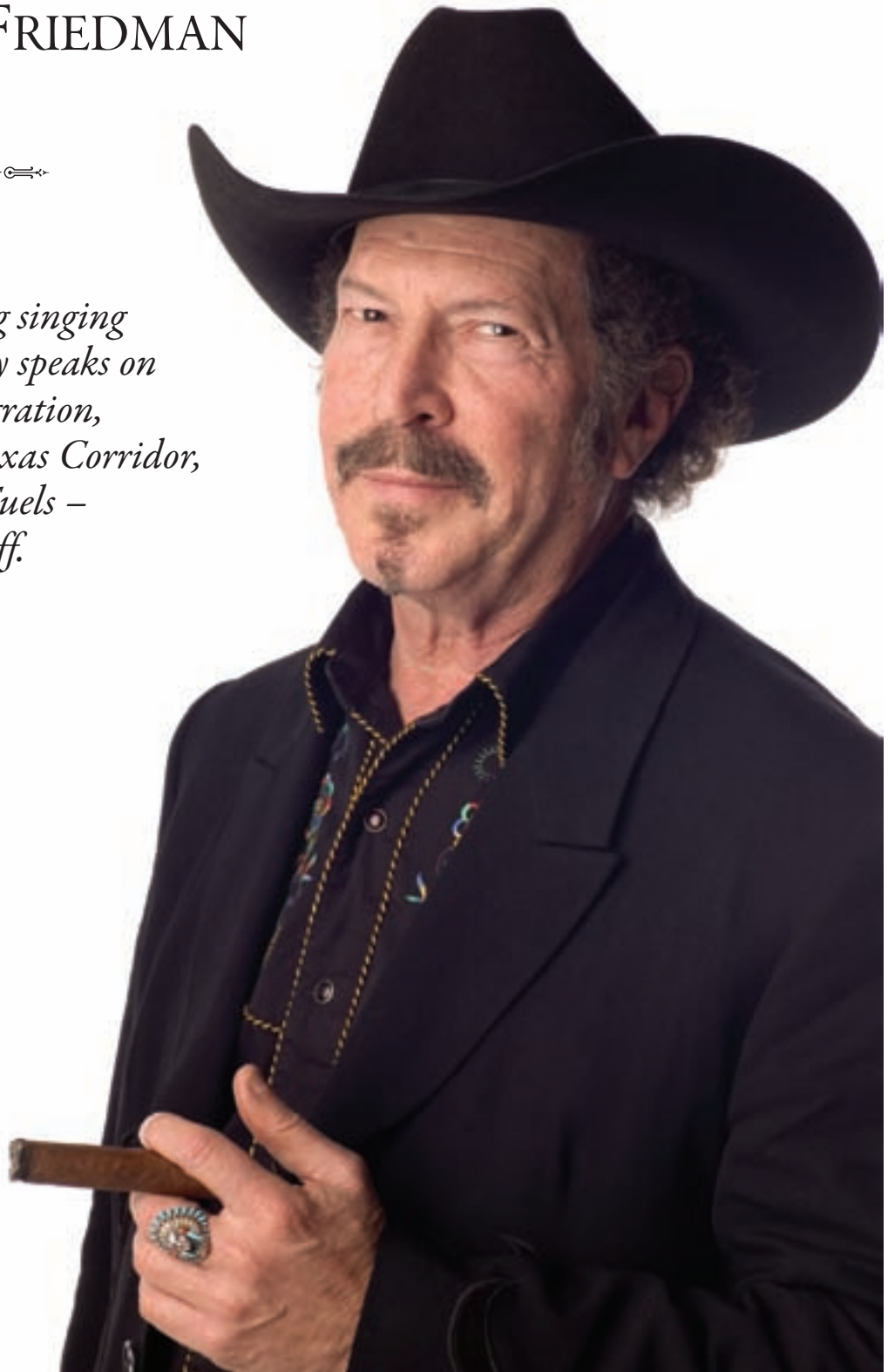


photo courtesy Kinky Friedman

Fact: In 1986, Kinky Friedman ran for Justice of the Peace in Kerrville, Texas. He lost.

Fact: In 2004, Friedman began a serious, yet eclectic, campaign running for Governor of the great state of Texas in 2006. 'Lost again.

Rumor: It was reported widely that year that Friedman is "considering" another run for Governor of Texas in 2010. "I'm open to running," Friedman said, "but if I do run, it would probably be as a Democrat, God probably couldn't have won as an Independent."

Fact: In what could be considered a form of frontier justice, Kinky Friedman is starring in a western – as of this writing still being filmed – called "Palo Pinto Gold." It's being filmed on location at the Enchanted Springs ranch at Boerne, Texas. He is playing the Governor of Texas.

In the Governor's election of 2006, the people of Texas spoke – at least 28% of them did anyway. They chose to keep Governor Perry in power in Austin, thwarting the efforts of one Richard "Kinky" Friedman who was running to help "de-wussify" Texas, one of his many campaign promises. After the election, the question arose, how could one not vote for a candidate whose campaign slogans included "How Hard Could It Be?" along with "Why The Hell Not?" and "He ain't Kinky, he's my Governor."

Kinky's was a candidacy of celebrity - and why not? The political trail had already been broken in other parts of America by the successful runs of other 'celebs-turned-governors' – Jesse Ventura, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and, of course, Ronald Reagan – so, "Why The Hell Not?" Kinky knew he fought the good fight and even though he lost, he achieved the amazing feat of getting on the Texas ballot as an independent something that hadn't been accomplished in over 100 years.

Born in Chicago in 1944, to Jewish parents, Dr. S. Thomas Friedman and Minnie Samet Friedman; Richard Friedman moved with his family to a ranch in Texas at a young age. He graduated from high school in Austin, Texas in 1962, and later from the University of Texas in 1966. His college experience also gave him his nickname "Kinky" in reference to his curly hair. After college he served two years in the Peace Corps. He formed his first band, King Arthur & the Carrots – a parody of '60s surf bands – while a student at the University of Texas. In 1971, he formed his second band, Kinky Friedman and The Texas Jewboys and the rest, as they say, is music history.

We caught up with Kinky at his home near Kerrville, Texas. Our intent was to chat about his new book, released this past October by Simon & Schuster. "*You Can Lead a Politician to Water But You Can't Make Him Think: Ten Commandments for Texas Politics*" is a wrap-up of sorts – a post-mortem, if you will – of his most recent political foray running for Governor. True to form, the "Kinkster" had already moved on, examining the political road ahead for himself and the rest of America.

LCE: Kinky, your book gives a very succinct definition of politics.

KF: Politics? Yeah, the word politics is the sum of its parts: *poly* means more than one and *ticks* are blood-sucking parasites. There's the problem right there.

LCE: Given that, how do you view the current crop of presidential candidates? Do you see any hope?

KF: Very little. I think they are a very uninspiring group. The ones I like best are probably the ones with the least experience.

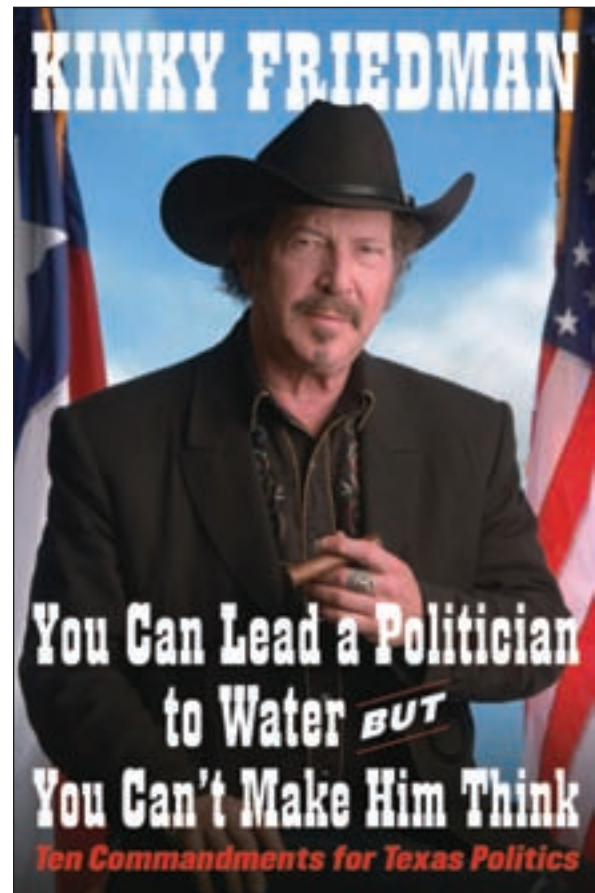


photo courtesy Kinky Friedman

The "Kinksters" new book.

LCE: So, they haven't been ruined yet?

KF: Yeah. I favor an Obama or a Huckabee. I like Ron Paul because he doesn't put party first and every great leader we've ever had in American history was like that. That's what my grandma taught me. You don't vote for the party; you vote for the person. That's disappeared.

LCE: The term "statesman" in its classic sense, really hasn't been applied to a political figure much lately. Do you see any statesmen – or women out there?

KF: John McCain. I don't know what his chances are, but I see elements of greatness in him. You know, I've said that a politician is somebody who thinks about the next election and a statesman is somebody who thinks about the next generation. That's the difference between the two.

LCE: It's very clear you have a great love of this country, and obviously for the great state of Texas. So, when you were announcing your candidacy back in February of '05, in the shadow of the Alamo – asking for Governor Perry's surrender, I might add – what did that feel like standing there at such a special place for not only Texas, but for the rest of America?

KF: It felt great. It felt like I was doing the right thing, and doing the right thing is what we need to do. That, by the way, is a slogan over death row in Livingston, Texas. "Do the right thing." And the right thing, I would contend, is not killing people because they kill people. Doing the right thing, if you're a Christian or a person of any faith, is to realize that's not our job. We're not the ones supposed to be killing people. So if I run for governor in 2010, it would be to abolish the death penalty. That would be one of the big things. I'm very disappointed that George Bush thinks we've never executed an innocent man. I don't know how he knows that. I do know one thing, we've never executed a rich man. That I do know.

I hate to be a Jew lecturing the Christians, but our religion, Judaism, is the oldest – much older than Christianity. The Christians borrowed one idea from us, and that was the Jews were the first ones to believe in one God. And, the Christians took that and ran with it and made it the centerpiece of their religion. And, the idea that you're a Christian if you stand by and hold hands around a platter of fried chicken on Sunday morning, and say you're a Christian - doesn't make you a Christian – if you stand by with the

same people who are running the post office and execute people in Texas and doing it in the name of the people.

LCE: Why, because we're not sure who's really guilty?

KF: It's more than that. But yes, we're not sure. We're not sure if people are guilty – that's why I say, let's 'DNA' death row. Let the governor and the Harris County D.A. 'DNA' death row here in Texas and let the chips fall where they may. And if we find some people there who've been in for decades that couldn't possibly have done the crime, then what happens? Can you imagine?

LCE: A little legal issue?

KF: That's why nobody will ever do it unless I'm governor. The only way it's going to happen. And I think there's a good shot at winning the Democratic nomination with part of the platform being to abolish the death penalty.

LCE: You would have that as part of your platform even though somebody may put a trap door in there, as you say?

KF: That's right. That's right. I'd take that chance because I think it's important. I don't think many people feel the death penalty is a major issue today, but I think it's a defining issue of our time, and I think that if Texas abolishes the death penalty, the world is going to stand up and cheer for Texas.

LCE: Well, as you say, if 2010 really is your time, in another couple of years the advancements in criminal justice technology will probably allow much easier ways of finding out whether or not death row inmates really did what they have been convicted of doing.

KF: That's right. I mean, do we want justice, or not? I've got a lot of evangelical friends, people who are pretty right wing who favor the death penalty, and it doesn't take long talking to them to start them thinking about it. And once they think about it a little bit, they get it. They know that they can't support the death penalty. For example, there're people like this guy, John Cooley in Florida, who raped and buried the girl alive next to his mobile home. I mean, people like this you want to strangle with your own hands. But that's where faith has to step in, even if it's someone in your family.

LCE: What do you do with a guy like that?

KF: Well, you keep this guy away from the sun – forever.

"I JUST WANT TEXAS TO BE NUMBER ONE IN SOMETHING OTHER THAN EXECUTIONS, TOLL ROADS AND PROPERTY TAXES."

You keep him away from people and he never gets out, and I don't care if you project images of the victim on his cell. If he wants to hang himself, I'll happily give him a rope, but the State should not continue to spend millions of dollars in appeals on this guy, which is what we have to do when people go onto death row. Folks don't understand that we're spending a fortune. We've got a huge death row here in Texas. And, every one of these guys is making an appeal every other month. You and I, the taxpayers are paying the legal tab to defend these guys, and they all can appeal. This is nuts. It'd be much cheaper to keep these guys somewhere in the back of a pen, and never let them out. That's a much worse punishment than killing them.

LCE: Not much of a gamble there, is there?

KF: Don't mention gambling. I'm a gambling addict. I can't gamble here in Texas, but that's another matter. That's a whole other help line.

LCE: Speaking of that, in California, there are a number of initiatives on the ballot for 2008 regarding various Indian casinos wanting to add additional slot machines, saying it's a benefit to the state because of the revenue that'll come in.

KF: Well, there isn't any question that if gambling is run effectively, it can pay for education. No doubt. There's enough money made. Now, whether the people that are doing it are doing it honestly or are corrupt, that's another matter. In Texas, we're not even trying.

LCE: Can Indian tribes in Texas have casino gambling?

KF: No, we've been shut down. It's real wrong. Wrong to the Indians, and it's wrong for education. What's happening is Texans are going out of state and voting with their feet every week. We invented Texas Hold 'Em and we can't even play it. So, Texans go to Vegas or Tunica or Louisiana, Oklahoma, New Mexico, and that's where all the money goes. It's just not logical when the vast majority of Texans favor legalized casino gambling.

LCE: Why has this not been brought up as a ballot issue?

KF: We don't have initiative and referendum. There are a lot of things wrong with I&R, yet there's a lot of things right as well. There's a lot of important stuff in the country that I&R has brought about: Social Security and women's rights among others made their way through this kind of

methodology. So, we should have it and if we did, you'd find that Texans hate toll roads and that they favor legalized casino gambling.

LCE: Toll roads? What about the Trans-Texas Corridor?

KF: Well, don't get me started. We're paying billions. We're paying almost as much – well, not quite as much as Iraq, but close. I call it the Santa Ana Highway, as the money goes to “foreign” governments. It doesn't go to the people or help the people, and at this point, the Government has taken so much land on either side of this Trans-Texas Corridor that all it's going to do is destroy some of the oldest farms and ranches and little towns in Texas. And here's something—it's not accessible to any of the major cities at this point. No one knows where the hell it's going. It's all very secret, need-to-know stuff.

LCE: Isn't this eminent domain at its most destructive?

KF: Yes, and it's going to be terrible. We haven't seen anything yet. I think our Governor and our President are much more comfortable with foreign governments than they are with us – the citizens. Bush is not comfortable with the American people and Rick

Perry certainly is not comfortable with Texans. It appears our Governor is living in some rarified air-filled room somewhere and really not getting out and seeing the concerns the people have. But, of course, he's a ribbon cutter and when only 28% of the people is all that vote for governor, you're going to get a ribbon cutter every time.

LCE: It brings up the point that you are the first independent, in what was it, 154 years –

KF: That's it.

LCE: – to get on the Texas ballot. And what was it you said about when you got elected you wouldn't get much done in the morning?

KF: Yeah, musicians are better than politicians as far as running the state. We won't get much done in the morning, but we'll work late and we'll be honest.

LCE: You indicate throughout the book of the lurking danger of voter apathy. What do you think can be done to get folks more engaged in the process?

KF: Well, if I had the answer, I'd do it. The answer for me was to try working outside the system as an Independent. I

ON BIG GAME HUNTING:
“SOMEBODY THAT GOES
OUT AND KILLS A POLAR
BEAR OR HAS TO GO OUT
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I BELIEVE GOD PUNISHES
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ERECTILE DYSFUNCTION...
THAT’S JUST A THEORY,
THOUGH.”



believe that the Democrats and Republicans are becoming the same guy, admiring themselves in the mirror. I want the Democrats to be Democrats again. I want the spirit of Molly Ivins and Ann Richards and JFK. That's what I want the Democrats to be, to be Democrats again. And if they'll do that, then we've got a chance. I've tried working outside the system and it did not work. I've said that I don't think God would have won if He'd run as an independent against Rick Perry. I believe He would have lost. That's just the way of the people— we're not in Minnesota, Toto. That's all. This is a very big state and the people are very set in their ways as far as voting patterns. And, I'll tell you what, it's a tragedy that the Republican Party celebrates when they see the voting turnout is low. They knew it. Before the votes were counted on election night, when they saw the turnout was 28, 29 percent, they knew they had it in the bag. They knew that if it had been 45 percent or higher, I would have been the governor.

ON EDUCATION IN TEXAS:

“THIS SYSTEM IS REALLY BROKEN.
NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND HAS REALLY
FAILED AND THE ONLY WAY TO SOLVE
EDUCATION IS TO LEAVE ONE
GOVERNOR BEHIND.”

LCE: You got a half a million votes?

KF: Yeah, about that. Yeah.

LCE: That would have been a landslide if you had been in Montana or Wyoming—you'd have gotten the whole state.
KF: Yeah, it's too bad. But, if you look at the Hispanic vote, they liked me a lot. I was their second choice all around. But they've voted Democratic for so long. You know, when your parents and grandparents are Democrats, it's very hard to break that. Plus, I do think the Democrats traditionally have listened to the voice of the people better than the Republicans. I don't think they're doing it today, but I think they have in the past and that's a reason to vote Democratic. I also think that the Democrats care about what I care about, which is education and abolishing the death penalty. And there're other things. You've seen what the politicians have done about immigration? Nothing. You've seen what they've done about healthcare? Nothing.

So what the hell are they doing? I'll tell you what they're doing. They're keeping me 20 feet away from a door of a restaurant with my cigar.

LCE: Do you feel personal freedoms are continuing to degrade?

KF: Absolutely. We are turning this country into a condo association with rules and regulations and political correctness strangling the thing that's best about America—freedom.

LCE: You have a unique plan about the border issue. Tell us about the “Five Generals Plan.” I was fascinated with John McCain's comment. If I can paraphrase here, he said, “It beats the hell out of anything we're doing now.”

KF: That's exactly right and it still does. The Five Mexican Generals Plan is better than anything that's going on. It goes like this: We divide the border into five jurisdictions and we appoint a Mexican general in charge of each. Then we place a million dollars (or two million, whatever it takes) in a bank in the name of each general and we hold the money in escrow. Then, every time we catch an illegal coming across through his section, we withdraw \$10,000. This will effectively shut off illegal immigration into Texas.

LCE: Many young people in Texas today obviously admire you and were supportive of you in the election, you got people up and motivated who were voting for the first time. You're a patriot and you love this country and obviously because you're still in the process, you're not going to lose faith in it. What keeps you going?

KF: Well, you know, this is a wonderful country, but it has been and could be a great deal better. Looking for inspiration, it's slim pickings sometimes these days. I'd like to see a guy like Lance Armstrong run because he can inspire millions of people. I've talked to Lance about it and he says politics is too vicious a rat race for him – and you know all tough the races he's been in – they're nothing compared to a political campaign. Good people like Lance don't want to get into politics. That's wrong. It's not what this country was built on. People really want somebody to vote for of substance. Ron Paul is a guy that is not putting party first. That's for sure. He's saying what he believes. Obama is fresh enough to have a chance, but I'm afraid it's not going to be long before any of these candidates lose their political way.

LCE: Once they get in, the system infects them?

KF: Yes, it does and as I say, it's the only field in which the more experience you have, the worse you get. So once you've been senator for 20 years, it takes its toll.



LCE: Are you in favor of term limits?

KF: Yeah, I'm in favor of never reelecting anybody. I think it's time real people got involved, and of course, you can't just pull a switch and start a revolution. We tried to do that. Of course, Texas is a big state. But you're right. If it had been Vermont or Montana, we would have won. But it's not. It's Texas, and we have a lot of wide-open spaces between our ears.

LCE: So as you reflect on this past election, your sergeant-at-arms, Willie (Nelson), obviously was very supportive of you, and still is. Does he want you to run again?

KF: Since you mentioned Willie, let me just say one thing about the Hillbilly Dali Lama. During the campaign when I said Willie would be the energy czar of Texas, people laughed. They still do. They thought it was really a good joke. The fact is, had I won, Willie would have had the farmers of Texas organized into a regular network of farmers' alternative fuel and biodiesel co-ops all along the highways and byways of this state supported by the State of Texas. And the campaign would have been a grand experiment and the first one of its kind, and I believe it would have been very possible. This is what we ought to be doing, exploring alternative fuels in a big way. It would finally give us freedom from the Middle East and from the Saudis and other people who control us in many financial ways right now. Right now they own the jukebox; we are dancing to their tune – along with the big oil companies. So this would have been something we could have tried that might have worked. Why? Who better than Willie to organize the farmers of Texas? It been a big thing, now of course, we'll never know.

LCE: Would he work with you in '10 if you go again?

KF: Yeah, Willie would. In fact, Willie feels as I do if I could get the Democratic nomination, we have a shot at winning this thing, a real shot. And, there's a good shot at winning the Democratic nomination, especially if the field is crowded with the usual suspects because there's a huge independent vote in the state, bigger than the Democrats in the last race, as a matter of fact. And if this vote comes



photo courtesy Kinky Friedman

Kinky and "Mama" at the Utopia Animal Rescue Ranch – www.utopiarescue.com

with me to the Democratic primary, we're going to swamp the thing. We will win.

LCE: Has Texas been supportive of Willie's biodiesel efforts?

KF: No. No, of course not. The legislature is not visionary. What we've got to do is get the wooden horse inside the city one way or the other. We've got to get an honest broker as our governor who has a bully pulpit who can say we are really going to do this thing with Willie and alternative fuels in Texas, or we're going to abolish the death penalty in this state and we're going to lead the American parade

“MUSICIANS CAN RUN THIS STATE BETTER THAN POLITICIANS. WE WON’T GET
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because it means something when Texas says “we’re abolishing” something. It doesn’t mean a thing if California abolishes it tomorrow. California is already progressive. We all know that. But Texas? Texas is being held back by the death penalty.

LCE: Does Governor Perry want to be President?

KF: He wants to be Vice President. Being President’s too hard for him. Here’s my theory. He really was counting on being Rudy’s running mate. Even when he was running for governor, he didn’t want to be governor. That’s clear. He wants to have a big house in Washington, to be Vice President, and it’s a perfect job for him. It’s a perfect dead-end job. If he did get to be Vice President and anything happened to Rudy, Perry would be President of the United States, and that would be the one thing that might salvage George Bush’s legacy. It would make Bush look like Thomas Jefferson. People would love George Bush. But now Perry has so forfeited the trust of the people that whatever he does is suspect. It’s the same way with George Bush. I mean, if Bush or Perry wanted to plant flowers along the highway, we’d ask, “what’s he really up to?”

LCE: That takes us back to the Trans-Texas Corridor, people who read about it seem fearful that the border crossing’s going to be in Kansas, and that control will be delegated.

KF: Let me tell you, you could buy a helicopter for every Texan for the price of the Trans-Texas corridor. This thing is going to facilitate massive drug running, while it kills the people whose land it comes through – 23 miles on either side can go right to the state, and of course, it’s not going to the state; it’s going to the cohorts of the governor. We’re going to be paying tolls to Spanish corporations for 50 years – and the people tolerate this?

LCE: Do you feel the area’s mainstream media has buried this story for some reason?

KF: Well, let me say this – the media – during the campaign – I found to be very lazy. They didn’t look into the Corridor or what it means to the people of the United States let alone Texans. They didn’t explore why the Governor’s entire inaugural party – costing several millions

of bucks – was paid for by the toll road companies. They didn’t seem to care about that. It hardly came up. And Perry made a big deal of it. He said, “Don’t worry. The taxpayers aren’t paying for this. It’s all private corporations.” They’re the toll road people!

LCE: And there’s no watchdog group that’s chasing –

KF: Well, if there is, I don’t know about it. It just seems to me that the media is playing kind of a “gotcha” journalism. You give them some red meat, they’ll run with it. But as far as investigating what’s important to the people of Texas, no, they don’t have time for that.

LCE: Well, given that, who in the media do you admire?

KF: My campaign won the support of the late and legendary journalist, Molly Ivans. She was something. Oh, and I had a couple of beers with Jim Hightower the other day. He’s one of the last great journalists, I think, of that breed too. People that have beliefs, you know. Whether you agree with them or not is not what’s important. They really have principles. Jim does and Molly did. I would say that Rick Perry and George Bush are important people, but I think Molly was significant. I think there’s a difference between being important and being significant.

Historically, Mark Twain was significant. You know, if we could have a President Mark Twain today or a President Will Rogers, I think the people of America would just snap it up to have someone who’s clearly above politics. This man Mark Twain was somebody. He’s the guy that was decried as a racist the whole last half of his life, and wrote a book called *Huckleberry Finn*, which is much more than a children’s adventure story. That’s what many in the mainstream hasn’t picked up on. They don’t get satire. They don’t get irony. The left and the right – both want to ban *Huckleberry Finn*. There’s a woman named Jocelyn Chadwick, she’s a scholar, who travels around the country speaking to school boards defending *Huckleberry Finn*. She’s spent a lot of time and energy on this. Her point is that not only is Twain not a racist, but that his creation of the slave character, Jim, as the only man in the book who has integrity, decency and humanity in a world of



scoundrels and hypocrites is the greatest thing Twain ever did. It's why everyone should read *Huckleberry Finn*. Did I mention Ms. Chadwick is black?

LCE: I would be remiss if I didn't throw an olive branch to you as the Gandhi-like figure at Utopia Animal Rescue Ranch. I see you donate all the proceeds from your salsa line to the ranch. It's sort of a Paul Newman-y gesture.

KF: Well, we've done more than that. Now, with the new Kinky Friedman cigars – KFC ...

LCE: And that's Kinkycigars.com?

KF: Yeah, Kinkycigars.com. Anybody who buys Utopians, the Utopian brand, the money goes right to the ranch. It's the only cigar in America that benefits animal rescue. The Utopia and the Willie are our two biggest sellers so far. The Willie has a little twist on one end of it.



Sales from Kinky Friedman cigars and his signature coffees support his work at Utopia Animal Rescue Ranch.

LCE: Just as a little high-concept design element?

KF: Hmm. That's right. Yeah. And my message to young people is cigarette bad, cigar good. I'll tell you what. The government with all this prohibition and smoking regulations is really helping us at Kinky Friedman cigars. I mean, they are taking off.

LCE: Oh, so there's a wonderful backlash then there?

KF: Oh, terrific backlash, and smoking a cigar has become a political statement.

Like Bill Clinton, we don't inhale.

LCE: So what's next for you? Are you starting a plan for 2010 now or are you laying in the weeds a little bit?

KF: Our band (The Texas Jewboys) and I are going to be doing a tour in May and June of Ireland, England, and Scotland. A Musical tour with Little Jewford and Ratso. That's going to be great fun.

LCE: Is there a new album or anything coming, too?

KF: No, there isn't. In fact, the songs are older than the people that listen to them. But, I rotate the crop. You know, people change.

LCE: Since it is '08 and the presidential campaigns started two years ago, should you choose to run in 2010, would you announce your candidacy in a similar dramatic fashion at the Alamo?

KF: Yeah, except there's cosmetic differences about being a Democrat instead of being an Independent. I think my wardrobe would go through a little makeover possibly. You can't quite speak like an independent populist. You'd be an Independent-Democrat. But in many ways, it'd be a lot easier, with the force of the party behind you. And there're so many people I know that if I had a little 'D' by my name would feel very comfortable. Plus the law of averages has got to catch up with us. The way to do it is for Democrats to really be Democrats again, and I think I can help.

LCE: So, you will still communicate to the throngs of loyal "Indie" Kink-ites out there?

KF: Oh, yeah, of course. It's very important that the Independents vote Democratic and vote in the Democratic primary. And it's also important that Evangelicals and Christians realize that this is a statement against the death penalty, that if they feel that way, and I think many of them do in their hearts, that this will be their chance to be heard. Because when I'm governor, there will be no death penalty.

LCE: Well, I hope we have an opportunity to talk again when you decide. Thank you, Kinky.

KF: I'd like that, and may the God of your choice bless you.



“MONEY CAN BUY YOU A FINE DOG, BUT ONLY LOVE CAN MAKE HIM WAG HIS TAIL.”

