

Political Field Trips with Kyle Rearden: A Texans for Accountable Government (TAG) Meeting

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Reformism, [as I have mentioned before](#), is any attempt at working inside of the system in order to change it from within, which itself is largely based on the presumption that [infiltrating the State](#) actually works. Whether it be by way of [grassroots lobbying](#), [suing the government](#), or [popular electoral voting](#), reformists cling to their belief that if they only begged those who falsely imagine themselves to be our rulers to “Please, be nicer!” to the rest of us, then liberty can be restored, once again. What they fail to realize is that whenever anyone decides to make all kinds of concessions against libertarian principles, whereby [Leviathan](#) gives you an inch of your freedom *here* all the while stealing a mile over *there*, then mainstream politics is really just an elaborate game of begging [the State](#) for undue favors, where the only way to truly win is to never play in the first place.

It has been [three years almost to the day](#) since my last political fieldtrip, and I was curious whether [Texans for Accountable Government](#) (TAG) had changed in any remarkable way during the interim. As a local reformist group, TAG defeated the Austin Police Department’s enjoyment of [greenmail](#) from the federal government that was earmarked for training police officers to [extract blood samples](#) from drivers at DWI checkpoints, [according to then-executive director John Bush back in 2010](#). TAG has also grassroots lobbied the Texas legislature to halt the passage of a variety of bills that, for instance, would have expanded the powers of DFPS (which is a CPS-type [administrative agency](#)), as well as further developed the infamous [Trans-Texas Corridor](#).

Interestingly enough, despite “push backs” against the establishment of the [Austin Regional Intelligence Center](#) and the use of public water fluoridation (the latter of which was done in solidarity with [Fluoride Free Austin](#)), it only took about a year and a half for John Bush to switch from reformism to [direct action](#), considering his promotion of [agorism](#) during the [Houston End the Fed rally](#) in November of 2011. Originally as a spin-off of Ron Paul’s 2008 campaign, according to Bush, TAG has used the political means of making money in the attempt to secure liberty within [Greater Austin](#). Considering how Bush has evolved from mimicking the [New Hampshire Liberty Alliance’s ratings of legislators](#) to his current advocacy of [freedom cells](#), I’d say I wouldn’t be surprised at all if it turned out that TAG has experienced some noticeable turnover in its membership.

My suspicions were proven correct when I arrived at [Sherlock's Pub](#) about 20 minutes before their [monthly meeting](#) got started. I recognized almost no one except for the charismatic [Katie Brewer](#) and the wonderfully firebrand [Heather Fazio](#), both of whom I had the pleasure of chatting with briefly years ago, so I doubt they remember me. Justin Arman, TAG's current executive director, cordially greeted me as soon as I walked into the reserved group area of Sherlock's. When I had mentioned to Arman that it had been a few years since I had been to a TAG meeting, he proceeded to sell me on TAG's latest successes, which included him receiving an award from the [Citizens Commission on Human Rights](#) for assisting in getting a bill vetoed by Governor [Greg Abbott](#) that would have given unprecedented police powers to mental health workers to detain anyone they deemed to be "suspiciously ill" for up to four hours, absent a police officer. Needless to say, this self-backslapping was a recurring theme throughout the entire meeting.

When I asked Arman where the meeting's agenda was, he informed me that there were no hard copies to give out, so he then proceeded to tell me the lineup of speakers for this evening. First up was [Dr. Laura Pressley](#) who would be speaking about her ongoing lawsuit against the Travis County election judges, followed by Vince May's attempt to entice the Austin City Council into accepting his business proposal for developing a [Personal Rapid Transit](#) (PRT) system in order to alleviate Austin's traffic congestion. I was disappointed that Arman did not continue TAG's practice of printing and handing out meeting agendas, [like they used to do back in 2012](#).

Once Arman and Brewer diverted their attention from me to greeting the newcomers after having answered my follow-up questions regarding DFPS' latest efforts in trying to expand their powers (again!), I proceeded to pick a stool in front of a table at the side of the room. The reason I did this was that last time, I sat on a chair that, although rather uncomfortable for my derriere, was comfortable enough that I began unintentionally dozing off, so this time, I figured the stress of having no backrest would force me to concentrate, thereby keeping me alert, no matter how dull or irritating this meeting became, which it inevitably did.

As kickoff time approached, Arman got on TAG's microphone/amplifier PA setup to tell the audience to move closer to the front of the room, although they stubbornly refused to budge, which is not surprising given that [trying to order libertarians to do anything is much like herding cats](#). Attendance was initially around twenty people, and by the time the meeting was underway, it failed to exceed thirty; if you doubt me, I counted heads at least four times just to make sure I didn't err on this detail. I remember last time when attendance exceeded forty easily, since I had to share a table with complete strangers given the lack of room back then, as opposed to sitting alone this time. Sadly, throughout the evening, Arman was no match for Bush's entertaining showmanship, which, if nothing else, provided an additional value to what was otherwise bland reformism.

Not long after, the good doctor began her lecture, with her husband operating the PowerPoint slides. Dr. Pressley informed everyone that the [Texas Election Code](#) was being flagrantly violated, but it wasn't until Fazio handed out the [Executive Summary of Pressley v. Casar](#) to the audience that her grievances began to make sense to me. Simply put, Dr. Pressley is accusing the Travis County bureaucracy of committing electoral fraud, thereby sabotaging her candidacy for a

seat on the Austin City Council. Despite the fact that [the presiding district judge ruled against her last May](#), Dr. Pressley had a [Notice of Accelerated Appeal](#) filed last June, although it seems to me that her appellate [lawsuit for election fraud](#) will be just as successful as [Charles Dyer's numerous appeals for his criminal conviction](#).

Oddly enough, Dr. Pressley's reformism had some quirks I think are worth mentioning. For example, at one point she asked the audience whether any of them had ever worked on an election, to which 3 of them raised their hands. Without hesitation, Dr. Pressley announced that "everyone" in the room had worked on elections. She went onto say that the voters are the "true" victims of electoral fraud, as well as her claim that she has spent \$67,000 on the appellate lawsuit, if I heard and understood her correctly.

Fascinatingly, Dr. Pressley mentioned that the seriousness of her lawsuit has implications regarding the efficacy of TAG's other reformist projects. If I were to take her seriously, which I don't, then that would mean that the legitimacy of (at least) those portions of the Texas government come into question; considering [how Texans does not enjoy the legal ability](#) to perform [recall elections](#), then I am left to conclude that unless [Article I § 2 of the 1876 Texas Constitution](#) is brought up, which it wasn't, then all of this reformism peters out into nothing. Although Dr. Pressley is certainly right about how electoral fraud would be a way to maintain barriers to entry of average citizens into "local" government, I would suggest that she is ignorant of [Naomi Wolf's frustration](#) with just even trying to comprehend the very process of learning how to run for public office in the first place.

Vince May was up next regarding his advocacy of PRT as a "market solution" to Austin's government roads; this "solution" is really just fascism in practice, as I will explain shortly. Mr. May has testified before the Texas legislature at least a few times, and he said that Austin's transit system has lost 40% of its market share since 2012. So, despite being able to build a PRT system without subsidies, May will still have to send a business proposal to the Austin City Council, which the Council, in consideration of all the other proposals, will proceed to bid on if they like it enough. I really don't see how such an example of government largesse in action is in anyway a true market solution to a real problem, but then again, this is what happens when these self-proclaimed advocates of liberty attempt to make these kinds of compromises and concessions with the State.

To round out this cacophony of anti-libertarian sophistry, May said at one point that the only reason to broach the Austin City Council with a business proposal is because the City of Austin owns all the land within its incorporated boundaries, and this includes the government roads. Unless he misspoke or I misheard, I would imagine that all the Austinite owners of both mortgaged and "fully paid off" homes within city limits would have loved to had learned this tiny yet crucial fact when they decided to put down roots for the next twenty to thirty years or more. Then again, [without government](#), who would assert coercive dominion over the property rights enjoyed by homeowners ([civil asset forfeiture](#) notwithstanding, of course)?

After those two presentations, some random fella announced his candidacy for Texas Railroad Commissioner under [the anti-libertarian LP](#) ticket, and two other men were concerned about the

establishment of a 14-story courthouse somewhere I couldn't quite tell where, which is about the time I left the meeting early. My derriere had fallen fast asleep, and since my patience for all the reformism permeating the air was quickly running out, I decided to take advantage of my full bladder by going into the main portion of Sherlock's, taking a leak, and then walking straight out the door without anyone from TAG being the wiser.

What I will say positively about this fieldtrip is that parking was simple and easy, as opposed to [my previous excursion](#). TAG has really gone downhill over the years, and without John Bush and [Catherine Bleish](#), whom I've considered really the heart and soul of any libertarian culture here in Austin, I doubt TAG will continue to exist for another five years, if that, especially considering that Arman made a point to extend a round of gratitude towards the on-duty manager and server by explaining that TAG will no longer be meeting at Sherlock's, as they have done for the past five years. The only reason I'd even consider attending another TAG meeting in the future is if there was an opportunity to develop rapport with either Katie Brewer or Heather Fazio; absent that, I'd rather let TAG die off from its inherently reformist strategy towards "local" government.