



Episode 13: Election Shuffle

Let's be honest – REALTORS® face an ever-changing industry. With emerging tech, growing trends, and a booming market, it's vital to keep up. Join me, Gilbert Gonzalez, CEO for the San Antonio Board of Realtors, as I get real with experts on what REALTORS® need to know about this industry. It's time to get real.

GG (00:24):

Today we are with Greg Jefferson, Business Editor of the San Antonio Express News. He's covered the energy industry, city hall and politics for the newspaper. He's also edited the alternative weekly, the San Antonio Current, wrote for the San Antonio Business Journal as well. We want to talk a little bit about your takeaways on the election and what we can look forward to in the future. So, Greg, thank you for being with us today.

GJ (00:45):

Thanks for having me.

GG (00:46):

Uh we'll jump right into voter turnout. Nearly 11.1 million total votes cast for president. The previous record is 8.96 million in 2016, 10 million of those early voting and 64% voter turnout.

GJ (01:06):

Yeah, it was, it was an amazing thing. I mean, if you look at that 34% in, in relation to what you know, countries in Europe would do or, or, you know, in some parts of Asia and it's not the great. The United States, that's a great turnout. And certainly, you know, in the state of Texas and locally yeah, it was just gangbusters turnout. And it was great to see you know, I think that had everything to do with, you know, the, you know, the really the really strong sense that this was a very high stakes election. And it clearly was. I mean, you know, this, I can't think of another presidential contest in my lifetime where the future direction of the country was what the choices were as stark as they were in this election. So, I'm not surprised we saw the kind of turnout than we did

GG (02:05):

Now. You follow politics So, I feel comfortable asking, was it supposed to be this close of a race?

GJ (02:11):

It was not actually. You know, we had you know, we had a lot of talk in the weeks before the election. At least from, you know, we were hearing from, from well, I was hearing from my, my democratic and progressive friends and some in the media that there was a blue wave headed our way. That it would you know, impact local state and federal elections. And you know, it felt like heading into election day in the last week before, it seems that Joe Biden had had kind of the wind at his back, like he had the momentum and, you know, we hit election day moved on to election night and we were pretty quickly disabused of all of that. I mean, there was no blue wave. I mean, as we know now you know, Texas Democrats who had you know, they, they had a lot of enthusiasm.

GJ (03:19):

They really felt like they might be able to reclaim the Texas house of representatives. We see, they didn't even get close to that. You know, we saw you know, we saw John Cornyn handily win his race against a MJ Hagar at the national level, you know, just looking at Congress, we saw, you know, the democratic majority in the house shrink and Democrats failed to take the Senate at least on election night. We'll see, you know, there are two runoff elections in the state of Georgia that will decide who will control the Senate. But I mean, you know, as of, you know, election night, we knew it wasn't going to be the Democrats not outright. So yeah, I mean you know, a lot of progressives had hoped for a wave. We heard a whole lot about it, but it just didn't happen.

GG (04:19):

Do you think this, it would be characterized either way, Democrats underperforming or Republicans over-performing or can we even pick one?

GJ (04:30):

I think it's complicated. I think it's a combination of both actually. I mean, clearly, clearly Democrats once again, under performed and I think I think it has to do with this kind of rural, urban split that's become ever clearer over, you know, with every election cycle, it becomes more, more concentrated, more focused. You just have, you know, big cities and Metro areas. They are becoming basically the, the harbors for Democrats and progressive and the country Shrek countryside is, is getting ever more conservative and Republican leaning. And I think that's, you know, that had a lot to do with what happened with this election

GG (05:24):

With regards to that, if we go into the, the urban versus rural, one of the things that people have said is taking for granted any kind of minority agenda and whether an agenda is, makes it easy to determine, Oh, well, this minority group is always going to vote this way and that clearly didn't happen on this election. You know, if we go to Cuellar's race down South, he actually picked up he, he won, but Trump actually won a lot of those races down there.

GJ (06:00):

Yeah, that's right. He, yeah, Trump, actually, this was shocking to Democrats and they probably shouldn't have been yeah. So, Trump won Starr County, LaSalle County, and did, and did very well in other communities along the border.

GJ (06:23):

I mean, pardon me, I think I said Starr now, he actually won the Zapata County, but he did pretty well in Starr County across the border though. I mean, he did better than he did in 2016 you know, almost, almost to a County. And I think, you know, I, I spoke with Congressman Cuellar who didn't, you know, he's Democrat, probably the most you know, conservative Democrat and the democratic caucus in Congress. I spoke with him last week about, you know, how that, how that came to be. And, you know, he made a pretty good argument that, you know, Democrats they, they just have a hard time communicating with voters in rural areas. I mean, you know, you know, he was, he was kind of walking me through what his voters' concerns are and you have to keep in mind. I mean, his, his district does take in part of San Antonio and it does take in Laredo, but it is, it's a very large expanse of, of rural areas along the border beyond those two urban centers.

GJ (07:34):

And, you know, he's, he said, look, when you're talking about defunding the police, and I know that, you know, it's, it's a deceptive you know, it's a deceptive moniker. I mean it, but people say defund the police, they're not talking about ending it, law enforcement. I mean, they're talking about moving money around you know, taking in San Antonio over over time, the police department has taken on more and more, it's almost like social work in a way, and they're saying, okay, take, you know, just, just make the police, you know, they're about law enforcement, so why don't we take this money and put it in social services? That's largely what people mean by defund the police. But I think a lot of voters take it at face value and they think that it means, you know, we're going to get your police department.

GJ (08:25):

And this point was you know, in South Texas, there are a lot of, a lot of voters who feel very strongly about, about law enforcement. I mean, you know, it is a law-and-order community. And beyond that, you've got, you know, you've got a lot of border patrol agents you know, they live in South Texas. They've got family you know, across the region and then they feel very strongly about it and they, they react badly to, to, to that particular movement. Gun rights is another issue. And this is where, you know, in his own district you know, views are diametrically opposed. I think, you know, his, his, his congressional district 28 takes in part of San Antonio's East side. And, you know, in a little bit Southeast. I think the views there are very different on, on gun rights than they are out in LaSalle County.

GJ (09:25):

Hey, you know, I mean, they just are. People feel very strongly about firearms and about their rights to bear them. And it's just different from what you would find in, in a city like San Antonio and, you know, his, his argument is Democrats don't know how to appeal to those voters who, you know, they respect, you know, they have a lot of they have a great respect for law enforcement and for gun rights. And by the way, a number of them are pro-life. And Democrats just have a very difficult time talking to voters about those issues in a way that that's appealing to them. So I, you know, I see his point and, you know, it's, it seems clear to me that, you know, with this election, you know, Democrats, again, demonstrated that they've really not made that effort. I think, I think Congressman Cuellar is right in that regard. You know, they're not going to vote if you don't talk to them, you don't even have a chance, you know, you don't even have a chance of getting their vote, but I think that that's, you know, a large part of what we saw nationally as, you know, the democratic majority in the house then on the election.

GG (10:48):

So if, if Congressman Cuellar is bringing up that issue, and one of the other reasons, I, I believe that the Democrats work reported to want have such an interest in a blue wave is cause redistricting is actually

coming up. So, compound that, how do you think redistricting is going to make future attempts to make a blue wave much more difficult?

GJ (11:11):

Oh, I think, yeah, it absolutely is. I mean, you know, the balance of state legislatures in the country are controlled by the GOP. And I think we're very likely to see you know, that what we were just describing kind of this, this urban versus rural dichotomy it's going to hurt. I think, you know, the, you know, you'll, you'll have a lot more districts that are anchored in rural areas and those are gonna be easier for Republican candidates to, to first win and then maintain. And it's, it's just going to be much, much harder for Democrats to break in to the rural settings that way just because of the way the lines are going to be drawn. I mean, that's, you know, that's, that should be a big concern for Democrats.

GG (12:04):

This was also the first year for no street party voting. Do you think that that influenced this in any way? The final results?

GJ (12:13):

Yeah, it's funny. I think my guess is I, I, you know, I couldn't tell you just based on facts at hand, if you get, you know, we, we just don't know them at this point, but it's my sense just from, from talking to, you know, a lot of voters you know, I got the sense that there was a lot of you know, there was a lot of voting for Joe Biden, among Republicans who then, you know, they, for, for whatever reason they, they weren't, you know, they weren't going with Donald Trump, but they liked John Cornyn and they liked Trish DeBerry and they liked, you know, they liked the Lyle Larson, so they, you know, they voted for them, but it was at the very top that they rejected the party that, you know, I think it was namely about Trump. And I'm not so sure that it, that, that, I'm not sure you could flip that. I don't know that, you know, if you were going to vote for Trump, my guess is you were probably even without, you know, the option of a straight ticket ballot and you would probably mostly go to vote for Republican, Republican candidates.

GG (13:23):

So, one of the things that everyone is, everyone is always asking the pandemic, how does it affect everything? So, you know, how the pandemic, it made the campaign cycle start earlier. Some candidates took different approaches to campaigning, which I know I want to ask about. Did it have any influence with money, like more money was spent on, on campaign?

GJ (13:45):

No, I don't think so. I think the, the money you know, from all the reports I've seen the money has, has, you know, it flowed as freely as it did before. I don't think on, on fundraising, it really made much of a difference. But on the campaigning on that side, I think it really did. And I think you can look at, you know, Tony Gonzalez, you know, he was, he was the Republican running against Gina Jones Ortiz for Will Hurd congressional seats, which, you know, runs basically from San Antonio, nearly to El Paso is in fact the largest congressional district in the country. And those two candidates, Gonzalez and Joseph, they took very different approaches. You know, he, in a way he kind of mimicked president Trump. I mean, he, you know, he, he had in-person events, you know, he went door to door, he didn't let the pandemic really get much in the way of his campaign.

GJ (14:53):

Jones did a lot more you know, she did online town halls, a lot of her, you know, get out, you know, a lot of her sessions with voters was online. And I think that's, it's it's just hard to compare the two, I think pressing the flesh is more meaningful to voters. You know, when you're actually pressing the flesh, when it's, when you've got a candidate in front of you you know, they're connecting with voters in a way you just can't, you can't do that, you know, in a way that you can't do online.

GG (15:31):

Do you think that they were following the national candidates? I mean, do you think Gina was trying to follow Biden's lead?

GJ (15:39):

Yeah. Yeah. I mean, I, I think you know, from, from Biden on down and, and in fact, I mean, I think Joe Biden in a lot of ways set the tone for other democratic candidates, as far as campaigning during the pandemic. I mean, he was very, you know, he was very scrupulous about mask wearing about social distancing and you know, a lot of his, you know, all of his campaign events were, you know, two days that they could be socially distant or online. And yet Trump didn't concern himself with that clearly, I mean, that's, you know, he had a lot of rallies in the runoff and, you know so they were just two very different approaches. And I do think, you know, both Trump and Biden did set the tone and the manner of, of campaign for all of the candidates that their respective parties under them.

GG (16:39):

You know, some of, one of the other races that was Celina Montoya and Steve Alison, and the expectation of that to be highly competitive. And that didn't turn out.

GJ (16:52):

It didn't turn out that one, you know, I know it kind of turned out the way I thought it was going to turn out. I mean, Steve, Alison I think, I think he, I think he's a really good reflection of his house district, you know, I, you know, I think, and you have to keep in mind, this is, this is the district that, you know, Joe Strauss, you know, held for more than a decade. I mean, if it's not, it's not a heart, right. District it's, you know, it's, it, it is Republican, but it's, it's fairly moderate. And I think I think Steve, Alison, you know, I, I always considered him to be you know, a strong candidate and a strong office holder. I mean, you know, I think he talked about education, you know, a lot more than a number of his other republican colleagues in the house.

GJ (17:52):

So, I always felt like Celina Montoya was going to have a hard time in that race, but yeah, I mean, it's, again, you know, in the last month or two before, you know, November 3rd, there was just, there was a lot of, a lot of enthusiasm among progressive. And I think it just, you know, there was a lot of you know, self-delusion, I think, I think this was part of that. I, I think she always was going to have a difficult race and it turned out to have been a, both a difficult and a losing race for it.

GG (18:26):

So, you, you mentioned self-delusion, how does polling play into that? You know, cause as soon as the election was happening, everyone just started talking about polling and how unreliable or

GJ (18:40):

I I'm, I'm wondering when okay, so we've had two presidential election cycles now where polling has, has failed us in general. I mean, yeah. Okay. There's gonna be some polls that were, that were closed. I mean it's like the machinery polling is just is broken down. I think they just don't know how to, you know, they certainly don't know how to count votes for somebody like, you know, for such an unusual candidate as, as Donald Trump. That's for sure. And you know, I'm, I'm beginning to question, you know, we're in a period of, of just hyper political polarization, right? I mean, we're, we're, we're becoming more you know, more tribe, more tribal in our politics. And I'm wondering now, like is, is if we reached a state where polling just can't, you know, it's going to have to change in some kind of fundamental way to really begin to, to reflect what's actually happening in the electorate.

GJ (19:48):

It just seems like they are, they're just missing a lot of cues. And I couldn't, I couldn't, you know, I'm not a pollster, I'm not a statistician if so, I'd be making a lot more money and working for a hedge fund because that's what you do as a statistician. But I mean, they're, they're clearly, you know, unable to, to really get at what the electorate is. I think they're just having a hard time defining what it is and finding where new voters are going to be coming from, because that's really, you know, I mean, we had, you know, in some places just record turnout and a lot of those were new voters and, you know, I think polling was just unable to kind of see where, where the electoral was going to see where it was going to expand and to pull those people, those, those new voters.

GG (20:42):

So I want to take us to the County commissioner's race. This is the first time two women have been elected to serve on the court. So exciting news. There's, there's two parts. One is there's the endorsement by the Express news, which ultimately was pulled. And then the question is also was Hortick expected to get as much of a percentage of the votes as she did. You know, we're talking about polling, they would have thought DeBerry in that district would have done a lot better. What can you take away from the County commissioner's race.

GJ (21:19):

Well, I mean, like I said, in the last two weeks before, before May 3rd, or pardon me now, I'm already, I'm already moving ahead at the city election. In the last two weeks before November 3rd. Yeah, I mean, there was, there was a lot of attention paid to Trish DeBerry's, you know, communications and public relations firm, The DeBerry Group. You know, as it's said, they've got, they've got a number of government contracts, SARAs, SAWS that the County, I think they did flood control communications for the County. And, you know, she, she is, you know, unwilling to divest yourself the company. And, you know, actually this is, this is a country, a company she founded. I mean, you can understand her attachment to it, but I mean, you know, she's, she's now you know, she's a County commissioner, County commissioner elect, and, you know, so she'll be making a pretty good salary.

GJ (22:19):

It's not bad. So I mean, that did raised a question in, in some voters' minds about whether she will be you know, an independent commissioner, whether they have to worry about you know, the contracting for the DeBerry Group. Is this going to blow up at some point in her tenure? I mean, you know, Trish DeBerry is, is obviously, you know, she's, she's, she's smart, she's politically astute. And, you know, I I'll be surprised if, if she gets into trouble, but there's always that possibility. And I think, you know, in part it was voters reacting to that too. I mean, she's still won there's no, you know, let's, let's be clear, like a majority of voters still favored her over Hortick. And you know, you have to wonder also you know, we

heard a lot about you know, we heard a lot about Trump's problems with suburban, suburban women. I mean, was, was there some kind of Trump drag in her race? I don't know. I mean, I very seriously doubt that, but it's a possibility, I don't think you can rule it out entirely that, and I think you know, her opponent ran a very good race, you know, I think she ran a solid credible campaign and I think she probably did as well as she was, you know, was capable of doing in that precinct.

GG (23:59):

And I know she had run for either mayor before or city council.

GJ (24:05):

DeBerry?, yes, yes. She ran for mayor in 2009. And yeah, she was running against Julian Castro at the time and, you know, you have to keep in mind. Yeah. You know, you have to go back and remember you know, Julian Castro ran for mayor the first time in 2005, he lost to Phil Hardberger basically because city hall had been through, you know, and it had a fairly weak mayor in, in Ed Garza for four years you know, you had a bribery scandal involving, you know, to, you know, two, I think it was at least one city Councilman, I think two. And you know, it was a very rough period and Phil Hardberger looked like kind of a palming influence, kind of a senior statesman. So, he was elected, you know, it was a close race. I mean, you know, Phil Hardberger did not beat Julian Castro in a landslide and, you know, Castro and Hardberger did the smart thing.

GJ (25:13):

They very quickly kind of, you know, mended fences and essentially you know, Phil Hardberger kind of gradually, you know, he, he brought in Julian Castro kind of embraced him, you know, think he did a fundraiser for him and gave him the designation is like, okay, you're could be your next mayor. So he, he positions Julian Castro very well for 2009. And that's what Trisha Barry was up against. And I don't remember what her vote total was, but, you know, she had a really respectable showing. And yet with, I think it was five or six competing candidates, Castro still won outright. There was no runoff, but she was, you know, she came in second place. She was an incredible candidate. I think she probably learned a lot from that race. And, you know, I think it definitely helped her in the County commissioners race. Just that experience.

GG (26:16):

We're talking about the mayor's race. The mayor, if you will had the San Antonio workforce development initiative on the ballot, is this a win for the mayor?

GJ (26:28):

It is, it is a win for the mayor. I don't think it is, is going to mean as much as he thinks it will, heading into the mayor's race next May. Part of, part of the problem is at this point we still don't have we still don't have a lot of detail about this program and it's not really going to get started really in earnest until fall 2021. So, you know, we're talking about training 40, roughly 40,000 people who are currently unemployed training them for jobs in Healthcare, IT, Cybersecurity. So, the fruits of this program, you know, we're not going to really see them until, you know, way after election day. And in the meantime you know, people are going to be paying these sales taxes. And this is like, we just don't know, you know, we don't have a lot of detail on how this program is going to work. So yeah, I mean, I, I have real questions about how much that's going to help him and in, you know, heading into the, to the May election.

GG (27:46):

Do you think one of the other things in fast forwarding to may there was also some petitions going around at early voting sites on an election day, CPS Energy and SAWS petitions. What can you tell us about those guys?

GJ (28:02):

Yeah, so recall CPS is it's a petition being circulated by a group of mostly environmentalist, but also a public citizen is living in support. What this would do really the bottom line is they're talking about replacing CPS's board of trustees, essentially with the city council, and this would be a model like Austin energy. It's, it's basically its board of trustees is the Austin city council. So they're talking about replicating that in San Antonio. Now the, the environmentalists are doing this for a couple of reasons. One is you know, they're frustrated with the pace at which CPS energy is moving to reliable power sources. They really want you know, they want CPS to close is spruce one and two coal, coal fired plants. Those two units much sooner than CPS currently is thinking about, they're talking about sometime after the 2030. This group wants, you know, those units taken offline sooner than that, they think that, that by putting the governance of CPS energy under political control under the control of city council, that, you know, they can make that happen much more quickly than they could otherwise.

GJ (29:31):

Because right now, I mean, CPS energy is governed by a five member board including the mayor. So the mayor is the ex-officio member, and then you've got four trustees who represent they each represent one quadrant of CPS's service and service area. And, you know, the, the, the problem with this board is in here, I think you know, I think, I think the environmental community and other critics, they've got a point here. This is it's a self perpetuating board unlike SAWS whose, you know, their, their trustees are appointed by city council, basically the CPS energy board selects its members. And you know, it does go to city council, but it's kind of, it's this kind of ratification really it's, it's, it's the council signing off after the fact. But yeah, so the real power of appointment actually lies within the board itself.

GJ (30:41):

And, you know, I think just as a matter of transparency and public accountability like that is, you know, that's a problem, you know, why, why is CPS energy's board not, you know, structured in the same way as, as its SAWS board, for example. So that's, that's really, what's at the heart of this recall CPS petition on the the SAWS petition. Basically they want to, they're trying to replicate what the Fire Union did with the city manager's office in the 2018 election or 2019 election, Pardon me, I lose track of my years anyway. So the fire union supported as city charter amendments that essentially term-limited the city, the city manager to eight years and capped his or her salary, I think no more than 10 times the annual pay of the lowest paid full-time city employee. Basically they were talking about doing the same thing with the CEO of SAWS, basically capping their time in that position at eight years and capping their salary. So, I mean, there's not, you know, this particular petition, isn't going at the heart of its governance. They're not aimed at, at SAWS Board but they are aiming directly at their top management.

GG (32:10):

Why though, what's the logic.

GJ (32:16):

Well, it, it all goes back to you know, it all goes back to unhappiness about Vista Ridge. You know, this is this massive project that is moving water through this hundred and what 141 mile pipeline from

Burleson County to, to San Antonio. This is this is, you know, really expensive project. It's, it's a done deal pretty much. I mean, the, of, you know, the long-term contract has been signed, but the pipeline's been built and we're getting the water. And yet there's a lot of residual unhappiness you know, among, among critics, they feel like it was too expensive. You know, we're paying for water, we don't need you know, it's undercutting conservation efforts within San Antonio's because the feeling is that, Hey, we've got all this water, you know, what are we conserving water for if we're buying it? And you know, I, I think they, they want to see a full-blown audit and that that's also actually part of their, their petition. They want, they want an audit of this project, but they're putting the blame for it pretty squarely in the lap of a Robert Puente. And I think that's, what's fueling this petition and that's why he's being targeted or his position is being targeted in the way it is. I mean, when you get down to it, it's all about unhappiness about the Vista Ridge project.

GG (33:54):

You know it seems like there's different reasons why people want to participate in the political process. Do you think that this level of participation that we're at you started us off and as we head into the end, you mentioned in Europe, there's much higher participation rates and that the 64% for us is pretty big. I mean, do you think we're going to keep these levels of participation or is this just,

GJ (34:18):

I really don't. I mean, I think I think it's very possible that in the next midterm election in, you know, 2022 you know, the turn out might be higher than it was in the last midterm, which was you know 2018. But yeah, I mean, I just, I, I just have a hard time envisioning a, another election two years from now with, without presidential candidates on the ballot, ginning up this much interest. it's I just don't think it's going to happen. And the governor's race they've got, you know, the, the governor will be on the ballot. I just don't think it's going to generate the kind of excitement the Trump - Biden contest did. So, no, I mean, I, I think, I think we've hit a, probably a high watermark, you know, you hope you hope that's not the case. I, you know, I certainly do, you know, it would be great to see this level of participation that, but kind of realistically speaking, I, I just don't think we're going to replicate this anytime soon. Although maybe, maybe if, if you know, Donald Trump is we've heard is, is likely to run again in 2024, we might see these numbers again. But yeah, I don't think until that happens, I just don't that.

GG (35:38):

So we have no predictions for the future, but what lessons, what single lesson, if you will, could we take away from this election moving forward?

GJ (35:49):

You know, it's at this point and this is, you know, I don't know this is a big lesson for me. I don't know if it's looking back on it a year from now, if I'll think it's still the, the, the biggest lesson, but you know, the, the fact that the, of the election process and the tenants, like the sacred nature of the transfer, you know, the peaceful transfer of power, I think all of that is being you know, it's in the spotlight now because we're seeing those norms violated. I mean you know, we're seeing a president who clearly lost this election hanging on to power, not, not giving the incoming president access to anything he needs or very little what he needs to begin to build an administration to, to plan for the near term.

GJ (36:50):

And that to me is very disturbing. And, you know, I was talking with somebody the other day. I mean, I don't, I doubt if this could happen in this political environment, we've got it in Washington now, but it

would be great to see so that this doesn't happen again something codified, you know, some, you know, rather than leave the transfer of power just as, as a norm, you know, just kind of a tradition. I mean, maybe we should write this thing into law. I mean, here's how you transfer power here. Legally is what has to happen. And you know, it, it could be because I think what we're seeing now is so alarming, maybe, maybe, maybe it's just influenced by thinking too much. And I will regret having said that in a few months, or in the next year, maybe there's, you know, that happens a lot. You re-read stuff you say, but but yeah, I mean, it's, there's gotta be a better way than what we've seen in the last two weeks. So that for me is the takeaway really the, the, the sanctity of, of a peaceful transfer of power and respect for, you know, the electoral process. And those are things right now, those are, those are, those are norms. You know, these are, you know, these are traditions they're not, they're not written into law and they're being trashed right now. I just find that very disturbing,

GG (38:27):

You know, Greg, I appreciate you being with us. And my hope is that we can check in in a couple of months or in a year and say, you know, have we rethought the transfer

GG (38:36):

Power now, or

GJ (38:37):

Yeah. Like, I, I would be happy to come back on. It's been a lot of fun and yeah, like, trust me, there's a lot of stuff I say that I regret later. This could very well be half second later,

GG (38:52):

Greg, I appreciate you giving us your time today. And thank you everybody for listening.

Speaker 4 (39:01):

[Inaudible]

GG (39:02):

Thanks for listening to get real. Be sure to subscribe for future episodes and share us with your friends on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. More information on this episode can be found at sabor.com/getreal. Until next time.