

Houston Philosophical Society

642nd Meeting

Cohen House

February 17, 2011

Under the leadership of President Herb Ward, the Society gathered for a reception and dinner meeting. Following dinner, visitors and guests were introduced by Patrick Hughes.

President Ward introduced Edward M. Emmett, Harris County Judge.

He became Harris County Judge on March 6, 2007, following Robert Eckels' resignation and elected in his own right on Nov. 4, 2008.

A member of the Texas House of Representatives from 1979 to 1987, Judge Emmett was chairman of the Committee on Energy, a member of the Transportation Committee, and represented the state on numerous national committees relating to energy and transportation policy.

In 1989, President George H. W. Bush nominated Emmett as a Commissioner at the Interstate Commerce Commission. After being confirmed unanimously by the United States Senate, Judge Emmett served on the commission for three years.

Judge Emmett has a wide breadth of experience in transportation and logistics policy. He was named one of the Top 20 Logistics Professionals by the Logistics Forum in 2003, and the Transportation Clubs International gave him its "Transportation Person of the Year" award in 2005.

As county judge, Judge Emmett also is director of Harris County's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Management, a role that took on special significance when Hurricane Ike struck the Gulf Coast in September 2008. Judge Emmett was widely praised locally and nationally for his calm leadership during and after Ike's devastating landfall.

Judge Emmett also serves on numerous boards and committees, including chairman of the Harris County Juvenile Board and the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative Executive Steering Committee. He also is a board member of: the Joint City-County Commission on Children; the Advisory Board of the Tejano Center for Community Concerns; the Houston-Galveston Area Council; the Houston-Galveston Area Council Transportation Policy Council; and the American Society of Transportation and Logistics.

During his tenure, Judge Emmett has received numerous awards from local, national and international organizations.

Judge Emmett attended Bellaire High School. He graduated from Rice University in 1971 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Economics and from the University of Texas at Austin in 1974 with a Master of Public Affairs degree.

## **Presentation**

Judge Emmett discussed the global consequences of local politics and policy. He focused on policy decisions made at the county level that impact state and national policy, sometimes with dire consequences. He reminded the group that the population of Harris County is now over four million people and is the third largest county in the country. The county population is larger than that of twenty-four states.

An example of this concept is Jefferson County many decades ago. Jay Gould of New York offered to bring the trains to Jefferson County docks and enhance the port's size and national influence. It was the second largest port in Texas after Galveston. They refused to make the investment in their future. Houston then dredged what became the Houston Ship Channel. The rest is history.

Judge Emmett pointed out that in the future ninety percent of trade will go by water in the world. The Port of Houston is a fraction of what it could be. He believes that we need a conglomerate of Freeport, Galveston, and Houston to enhance the future of our area. He believes that the major trade growth will be the Indian subcontinent. The trade will go through the Panama Canal and should go to Houston. One-third of Mexican goods go through Houston now. We need to invest in the future now. We should consider trains to dock to expedite freight handling as is being done in several foreign ports.

Another example of wrong policies promoted was the opposition of cafes and service stations and small towns to the Eisenhower era superhighway system. The lobbying was fierce, and President Eisenhower coined the term "hunker down" for the big fight. Fortunately the right idea won.

Judge Emmett touched on how the Harris County Hospital District is attempting to help the problem of illegal immigrants and the one million plus people with no health insurance who are choking the emergency rooms. The county has established neighborhood clinics to divert the numbers and promote preventive health. He also believes that we should stop creating an ethnic class of Hispanics separate from Anglos in reporting data.

He believes that both Republicans and Democrats are going to have to compromise and stop ideologic posturing.

Judge Emmett's views on immigration are straightforward and clear. We are not going to send eleven million Mexicans back to Mexico even if we could.

His last discussion promoted his second main goals for his tenure: Mental Health. He gave a personal experience in his family about mental health and the needs. The Harris County Jail is

the largest mental health facility in Texas with no follow-up of discharged prisoners. The situation is deplorable and getting worse with budget cuts in the future.

Judge Ellett concluded that his two main desires and goals are Transportation and Mental Health needs for the county.

Recording Secretary

Earl J. Brewer MD