

and he is a threat.' It wasn't very long before we started hearing about Karl and the FBI agent. Bullock was consumed by that."

In the years Rampton was in Texas, he cut a swath that left several careers and reputations in ruin, and he never went after Republicans. (His first victim had been an ambitious Waco district attorney named Vic Feazell.) Following Bullock's warning, Mauro began to hear from veterans and contributors that an FBI agent was calling them. He told his general counsel at the land office to call Rampton and tell him they'd provide any records he wanted. Mauro thought the trouble had gone away, but in June 1984, as he was preparing to make a speech at the state Democratic convention in Houston, a reporter with leaked information called and asked him to comment on the FBI's subpoena, half an hour earlier, of 70,000 land office documents. Mauro was suspected of overseeing a land appraisal scheme associated with the veterans' programs.

"There were fourteen of them," he recalled of the guys in black. "They showed up first thing in the morning, and we had rows and rows of boxes waiting. They'd demanded that we provide two computers, and they installed their software and started looking. They must not have found much, because by ten o'clock they were gone. Rampton's thesis was that any contribution from a veteran or a developer had to be *quid pro quo*." Mauro had a two-year-old son; Bullock was the child's godfather. Mauro found himself being thankful his son was too young to read. The press was brutal; Rampton did not always observe the FBI custom of declining comment on an active investigation. Mauro thought he was going to be indicted and hired a top criminal defense lawyer, Gerry Goldstein of San Antonio. In the argot of Texas courthouses, he feared he was about to go off to the big rodeo.

"I saw Rampton one time after that," he said. "I walked out in the hall, and he was just standing there. He handed me his card, and I asked him into my office, and we had a little chat. I never found out what he was doing there. I just assume he was trying to intimidate me."

The federal indictment never came. No charges were ever filed. Nor was Mauro ever cleared. There was just an FBI letter to Goldstein saying vaguely that the investigation was suspended. Mauro served two more terms as land commissioner, refusing to give up his dream of being governor. But those headlines would always be there, ready-made for any opponent's admaker. What was the political damage? Long afterward, Mauro chuckled at the question. "Well, let's just say I was no longer the Boy Wonder."

If Mauro was the boy wonder, Jim Hightower was the *enfant terrible*. By 1990, the folksy Texas Agriculture Commissioner represented a real threat to the Republican Party in Texas—and perhaps even beyond Texas. He had led his party's ticket in 1982 and 1986, winning by 60–40 margins. He had considered, then backed away from, making a run for the seat of one of Rove's star clients: Senator Phil Gramm. Hightower had worked for Ralph Nader in Washington in the 1960s, then joined the staff of liberal Democratic Senator Ralph Yarborough. He had a blue-collar message that combined Nader's pro-consumer politics with Yarborough's fiery populist oratory.

Before Hightower's election in 1982, the agriculture commission had been a sleepy service bureau for Texas farmers and ranchers—with a growing focus on the big agribusiness combines displacing