

## **SPEAKER BIOS**

### **Elyse Yates - Digital Advance**

Elyse Yates is the founder and CEO of Digital Advance. Elyse offers more than two decades of experience and expertise in arenas as diverse as politics, high-tech, public affairs, nonprofits, and entertainment – not to mention amazing big-picture vision, incredible insight, and strategies that work – all delivered with a zest for life that you wish you could bottle and sell.

Prior to launching DA, Elyse was a managing director for Public Strategies, Inc., the recognized leader in public perception management for Fortune 500 companies. During her tenure there, Elyse built an interactive business unit and a media relations division, managed the firm’s marketing and branding, and led teams consulting for a broad spectrum of clients, including Perot Systems, the San Antonio Spurs, Seton Healthcare Family and Bank of America. Previously, Elyse was a media relations specialist at IBM, where she worked with broadcast media nationwide, specializing in the use of technology to distribute content. Among her earlier political credentials, Yates served as deputy spokesperson for then-Governor Ann Richards.



### **Genevieve Van Cleve - All On The Line, Texas**



Genevieve Van Cleve is President of Vanvella Industries, a political consulting firm. She is a seasoned political and communications professional who is committed to assisting great candidates and everyday people leave a lasting positive impact on the public offices they win and the communities they serve.

### **Laura Guerra-Cardus - Children's Defense Fund Texas**

Dr. Laura Guerra-Cardus, MD, joined CDF-Texas in 2007 and serves as Deputy Director in CDF’s Austin office. She helps lead statewide policy initiatives, including Cover Texas Now, which works with coalition partners to ensure that all Texas children and all Texans have access to affordable, comprehensive health care coverage. Since 2008, CDF-Texas policy efforts have connected more than 1,000,000 children to health coverage. From 2009–2010, Laura served as CDF-Texas’ Interim Director.



## **The Honorable Vilma Luna - Former Representative and Legislative Expert**



Vilma is currently a lobbyist drawing on her years of legal and legislative experience to focus primarily on issues involving state budget and revenue, health care policy and finance, and other general government issues.

Previously, she maintained a private law practice and was a partner at the Watts Law Firm before joining HillCo Partners in 2006. She also worked as a Child Protection Services case worker prior to attending law school.

Luna represented District 33 (Corpus Christi) in the Texas House of Representatives from 1993 until 2006. She was the first Hispanic woman elected to the Texas House of Representatives from Corpus Christi. During her tenure in the House, she served on the Appropriations, Ways and Means, and Calendars committees. She was also appointed to the Legislative Budget Board. She spearheaded legislation including state budget and tax revenue, children's issues, special education, coastal management and protection, teacher and state employee pay raises, and health care.

Luna has won numerous awards and recognitions from professional and civic organizations, including Texas State University's prestigious Walter Richter Humanitarian Award (1997). Luna currently volunteers with local nonprofit organizations, her church and the Diocese of Austin.

She received her Bachelor of Social Work from Texas State University in 1979. Luna received her Doctor of Jurisprudence degree from the University of Houston Law Center in 1985.

## **Rachel Cooper, Center for Public Policy Priorities**

Rachel joined the Center in 2012 with a focus on food and nutrition programs as well as obesity. Before joining the Center, she worked for the Food Research and Action Center (FRAC) where she was in charge of research and data analysis and authored reports such as the School Breakfast Scorecard, Hunger Doesn't Take a Vacation, and State of the States. Cooper also worked for the Children's Defense Fund (CDF), in their New York office, where she focused on helping families gain access to programs that provide work supports, such as tax credits, Medicaid, SCHIP, and food stamps. Cooper received her Masters in Human Development and Social Policy from Northwestern University.



## **Beaman Floyd - Floyd Consulting**



Beaman Floyd is a consultant and lobbyist with more than 30 years of experience in public affairs. He owns his own lobby firm, and has worked on behalf of a variety of clients, among them property and casualty insurance companies and trade associations, public education associations, parents' rights groups, local government subdivisions, higher education groups, and religious groups. His activities include legislative strategy and direct lobbying, media relations, grass roots strategy, and academic research.

Mr. Floyd has been highly involved in several major policy issues in Texas, including property and casualty insurance reform, catastrophe policy, workers' compensation reform, healthcare, public school finance, and higher education policy. He frequently represents clients in both the print and electronic media, both in Texas and nationally. He is also a regular guest lecturer to college faculty groups, in college classrooms, policy forums, and other political and educational settings. Mr. Floyd works with several organizations to advance the understanding of public affairs advocacy, and is currently working with international officials in emerging democracies to establish ethical lobbying practices. He is a Charter Member of the Professional Advocacy Association of Texas.

## **Reverend Remington Johnson - Austin Presbyterian Seminary**

Rev. Remington Johnson is a teaching elder and healthcare chaplain in Austin Texas. She has served at the bedside of the sick and dying for the past seven years both in acute care and post acute care. Remington's time in bedside ministry inspired her to turn her efforts toward increasing the support and the role of the faith community for those impacted by trauma and chronic diseases. She believes that our faith communities are uniquely equipped to care issues that arise from trauma and chronic diseases.



Alongside her work in health and faith, Remington lives an active life with her family where they do all the things that five year old boys like to do.

## **Abel Vega - Rio Texas Conference, United Methodist Church**

Abel Vega serves as Director of Mission, Service, and Justice for the Rio Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church with work emphasis on community development, immigration / migration response, and general outreach and mission ministry resourcing and support for local churches and communities. His learning in outreach ministries began in 1995 through the development of programming for children and youth that eventually became a non-profit entity serving families on the west side of San Antonio. Vega is a 1983 graduate of the University of Texas at Arlington – B.S. Architecture and former U.S. Peace Corps Volunteer – Philippines 1985.



## **Dr. Daniel Brinks, Department of Government, UT Austin**



Daniel Brinks is Professor of Government and of Law. He is the Chair of the Government Department, and is active in the fields of Comparative Politics and Public Law. Dan's research focuses on the role of the law and courts in supporting or extending human rights and many of the basic rights associated with democracy, with a primary regional interest in Latin America. His most recent book, written with Abby Blass, *The DNA of Constitutional Justice in Latin America: Politics, Governance and Judicial Design*, examines constitutional change in Latin America since 1975, focusing especially on judicial institutions and constitutional review. The book was awarded the C. Herman Pritchett Award for Best Book on Law and Courts in 2018, by the Law and Courts Section of the APSA.

Recent projects address the use of courts and law to enforce social and economic rights in the developing world, the development of the rule of law in Latin America, the judicial response to police violence in Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay, judicial independence, and the role of informal norms in the legal order. He is also interested in the study of democracy more generally, and has written on the classification of regimes in Latin America, and on the global diffusion of democracy. Prof. Brinks was born and raised in Argentina and practiced law in the United States for nearly ten years before turning to academia.