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Anita Perry, the Governor's wife, visited the Wool Capitol last week, boosting tourism for San Angelo and the whole state. Fell at a time when the Capitol press was making it sound like Ol' Guv, the Honorable Rick Perry, was in a slump from his second term proposals failing to float.

We can't be sure in the outlands, as big-city Austin scribes can clean a worthy down to the bone slicker than a sand crab can peel the flesh off a beached red snapper. But a good guess is that the attractive first lady, along with bolstering tourism, might be hoping to give her husband a boost in the polls.

Among the ideas she offered, from the article I read in the daily newspaper, was a suggestion to keep the cowboy image alive, or take advantage of the image, as she thought it was very popular. She was on safe ground as long as she used "image." The real article, one who saddled a horse for an eight or nine mile ride to hunt a rogue bull, for example, would take more than a first lady's advice to find. But I am sure no help, as there have been times up here on the Divide when we'd hire an organ grinder's monkey if he knew how to ride a horse.

All the time, the cowboy image is cast around the shortgrass towns. It's routine to see an ol' boy drinking

coffee in a Dairy Queen, hunched slightly forward over the counter from the weight of a black hat banded in Mexican silver coins, while his truck idles on the driveway. Across the street at McDonald's, no surprise to see an hombre in a tan roll brim, wearing black high-top boots, waiting for his breakfast before hitting the car lot. Around the honky tonks, the western bands show more color and flavor than the most coyote cowboy to ever camp up on the wilds of Kiowa Draw.

Ostrich skin cowboy boots shod in walking heels are also very popular with Angelo doctors to go striding down hospital halls, or perhaps slip under a stockbroker's desk. As of this writing, however, Mrs. Perry might not have been able to see an Angelo doctor, or even meet one. Instead of the citizens fleeing town from a plague, the healers over there are taking off in droves. "Droves" being an undocumented way of saying "a helluva lot of doctors are skipping town, the tabulation supported by a city loaded with vibrant cell phone connections."

The Angelo doctor who has been checking the hinge of my elbows and wrists against the play in my knuckles and listening to the internal rumbling and throbbing in my chest and linking a heavily coated tongue to other symptoms

of merciless decline is one. He wrote the first of April that he was leaving town in a month.

Same day, I called an old friend, a prominent insurance handicapper, expert on all limitations pertaining to graybeards, who promoted the departing doctor five years ago in a glowing review only matched on the billboards of Broadway. In the call, I suggested that while he looked for a replacement in the yellow pages, to glance back under "A" to count how many members of the local bar are listed in the phone book. And then to estimate how many of the Wool Capitol's fixers and arrangers pose eager to collect astronomical fees to defend busybodies, handing out damaging, dangerous, mortal advice on picking a doctor.

During the meeting led by Mrs. Perry at the Chamber of Commerce, further recommendations in the article included encouraging Texans to visit other Texas cities, to share such sights and events in San Angelo as Fort Concho, the international water lily pond and the art museums with other places.

She was sure right, especially the international water lily pond. Not only is the lily pond a marvel of floating pads and exotic flowers, some as huge as wagon wheels, some as delicate as orchid petals, the gardener himself has the

touch of turning sweet potatoes growing in pickle jars into an abundance equal to the flowing gardens of Babylon.

One of the town's baby doctors, who doesn't wear cowboy boots and is going to stay in town, is heavy, heavy behind collecting money to support the pond. His pitch is so fine-tuned, he can switch back and forth between promoting lily pads and propagating bullfrogs. He keeps the books open for donations seven days a week. Every Sunday, the rector of his church has to deny a request to pass a second collection to support the lily pond.

The Governor is lucky to have his wife's support. In these partisan divided times, allies fade and we citizens bear the cost wherever the fight lands. But it'll be alright to project a cowboy image in town. The town dudes just want to be sure and not try to carry the ruse out on a ranch.