



Bellaire Democrats Newsletter

Vol. 3, Issue 1 February 2003

General Meeting of Bellaire Democrats on March 18, 2003.

7:00 pm in the Bellaire Room of the Mason Jar Restaurant, 5125 Bellaire Blvd.

Our speaker will be Virginia Iloff, Volunteer Coordinator for the Harris County Democratic Party. All members of the Bellaire Democrats are invited, as well as anyone interested in joining the Club. (Please bring a friend!) The Mason Jar Restaurant is located behind the Community National Bank at the corner of Bellaire Blvd. and Rice Avenue. Refreshments will be served, and attendees are also encouraged to stay for dinner after the meeting.

Officers for 2002 - 2003

President: J. Coy Tow
Phone: 713-663-7200
jctow@hotmail.com

First Vice President:

Second Vice President: Pat Ohanian
Phone: 713-661-1548
pjohanian@academicplanet.com

Secretary: Dave Lavine
Phone: 713-665-7066
davidlavine1969@aol.com

Treasurer: Jane McNeel
Phone: 713-664-3316
mcneelj@yahoo.com

Parliamentarian: Lynn McBee
Phone: 713-665-0557
lynnmb@hal-pc.org

Newsletter Editors

Judy Viebig
Monica McHam
Jane McNeel

Hello, Bellaire Democrats!

Well, the elections are past, and we are into a New Year with Presidential candidates already lining up to take on George W and attempt to get this get this Country back on track. It might be easy for us to be influenced by the media and assume that we can just sit back and wait while the jockeying for position occurs.

The truth is that in Bellaire progress has been made in helping to elect future Democrats to office. In just a couple of years, we have managed to develop an infrastructure, active precinct chairs and relationships that will help us get our voters to the polls in upcoming elections. It would be easy to assume that our time and energy are not valuable during the quiet periods between elections, but the truth is that this is the time when our voices and influence are most important.

We need to stay focused on the issues – and be vocal and visible. We need to constantly inform ourselves and invite conversation with our neighbors and friends and challenge them to see that the current President and his party are leading our Country into huge deficits, war, growing economic distress, reduced funding for key social services such as education and health care, and that our civil rights are taking a beating as policies, attitudes, and laws change to reflect a “Conservative Agenda.”

We can and must make a huge difference in local, state, and national policy by paying close attention to the working agenda of our elected officials – as well as those actions that may be taken beneath the agenda – and reminding them that we are watching and waiting for outcomes that reflect policy, law, and funding that benefit all citizens and help maintain our freedom and individual rights.

Join us in making a difference! See you at the March meeting.

Volunteers Are Needed

If you are interested in participating in the Bellaire Democrats, please contact Coy Tow at (713)663-7200 or email him at jctow@hotmail.com. Volunteers are needed for various committees, but if you don't want that much commitment and have skills to offer, that's fine, too! You're welcome to attend the next Quarterly Planning Session, to be held on Sunday, March 2, 2003.

In addition, the **Annual Meeting and Election of Officers** is scheduled for June 2, 2003.

Democratic Precinct Chairs for Bellaire - 2002 - 2003

Precinct 128	Lynn McBee	713-665-0557	lynnmb@hal-pc.org
Precinct 182	J. Coy Tow	713-663-7200	jctow@hotmail.com
Precinct 214	Helen Fisher	713-664-3887	h2fisher@earthlink.net
Precinct 215	Guyleene Ebersole	713-665-6470	guyleber@sbcglobal.
Precinct 268	Patricia DiCoste	713-668-5158	langpro@swbell.net

In Memoriam

Bellaire Democrats have lost 2 valued members recently, Emily Ladner and Keith Ashmore.

Their dedication will be missed by all of us.

78th Texas Legislative Faces Huge Budget Shortfall – and an Unprecedented Shortage of Democrats

Contact Information and Useful Web Sites

The biennial legislative session convened January 13 to daunting budget challenges and the first House GOP majority since Reconstruction. The Democrats now hold only 62 House seats (to 88 Republicans) and 12 Senate seats (to 19 Republicans). Republican Tom Craddick has replaced Pete Laney as House Speaker.

Faced with a \$9.9 billion revenue shortfall, Governor Rick Perry abandoned efforts to write a budget proposal and sent a “zero-based” budget to the Legislature. This forces the Legislature to work within drastically reduced revenue of \$54.1 billion for the next two years with a vow of no new taxes, turning to fee increases and deep budget cuts to address the shortfall.

Democrats, pay attention to the issues and this process! All programs are targets for budgets, especially those social services such as children’s health insurance and mental health care, for which Texas already ranks 50th in per capita expenditures. Other key issues will be homeowner and medical malpractice insurance, funding for education, school finance reform, criminal justice, funding for federally mandated homeland security—and funding a \$188 million-a-year clean air requirement or avoid the loss of millions of dollars in federal highway money.

One additional Legislative issue to keep an eye on: After the recent redistricting and resulting increased Republican representation, Tom Delay and other Republicans are proposing another round of redistricting in hopes of redistributing the Texas Congressional delegation where

U. S. Senate: <http://www.senate.gov>

U. S. House: <http://www.house.gov>

The White House:

Comments: 202-456-1111

Switchboard: 202-456-1414

Fax: 202-456-2461

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/contact/president@whitehouse.gov>

vice.president@whitehouse.gov

U. S. Congressman for Bellaire

Chris Bell – District 25 (Democrat)

202-225-7508

<http://www.house.gov/bell>

United States Senators

Kay Bailey Hutchinson (Republican)

202-224-5922

<http://www.hutchinson.senate.gov>

John Cornyn (Republican)

202-224-2934

<http://www.cornyn.senate.gov>

The Texas Legislature

<http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/> -

Texas State House Representative:

Martha Wong – District 134 (Republican)

512-463-0389

<http://www.house.state.tx.us>

Texas State Senator:

Kyle Janek - District 17 (Republican)

512-463-0117

District: 713-272-8929

<http://www.senate.state.tx.us>

State House Representative (adjacent district)

Scott Hochberg – District 137 (Democrat)

(512)463-0389

832-252-7336

e-mail: renitacoleman@house.state.tx.us

<http://scotthochberg.com>

Harris County Democratic Party

2404 La Branch, Houston 77004

713-739-7785

<http://hcdp.org>

<http://txdemocrats.org> - Texas State Democratic Party

<http://democrats.com> - Lay Democrats website

<http://taxpolicycenter.org> - Independent economic and tax information

<http://www.moveon.org> - grassroots anti-war site

<http://democrats.senate.gov/> - Senate Democrats site

Harris County Democrats Regroup

Bellaire Democrats, like those across Harris County, were dismayed at the dismal results of the general election on November 5, 2001. The only bright spots were Chris Bell, elected in the 25th U.S. Congressional District, Sylvia Garcia, who became the first Hispanic Harris County Commissioner, and State Rep. Scott Hochberg, who won re-election to the Legislature in a newly drawn district widely considered Republican.

On November 13, Gerry Birnberg was elected the new Democratic Party County Chair after Sue Schechter announced she would resign to allow a new county chair time to solicit candidates for the 2004 elections.

Birnberg’s main goal will be to continue Schechter’s attempts to revive the once-dominant party by recruiting candidates to run for judgeships and other offices that Republicans often have won without opposition in recent years. Birnberg plans to raise additional money for the party so it can hire an executive director to devote full attention to local party issues, to express the Democratic message not just at election time, but throughout the year, according to a Houston Chronicle report.

Birnberg, 56, has been involved in the local Democratic Party for 30 years. He has served as legal counsel on election laws for the Harris County Democrats and in Mayor Lee Brown's 2001 runoff campaign. He ran unsuccessfully for Judge in 1994. Birnberg is an attorney and mediator and is the managing partner of the Williams, Birnberg & Anderson law firm.

Birnberg promises to adopt a more traditional Democratic Party message and move away from the strategy of Democrats who have tried to link themselves to the president, running as "Bush lite."

For more information about the Harris County Democratic Party log onto <http://www.hcdp.org>.

Election Update

Long time Democratic state representative Debra Danburg, a member of the Texas Legislature for over 20 years, lost to Martha Wong in the race in District 134, due in large part to the redistricting of Debra’s old District 137. Democrat Chris Bell was successful in his bid to take Ken Bentsen’s seat in the U.S. House of Representatives for District 25.

State Democrats Retain Malcolm as Chair

In the wake of Democratic losses in the November 2002 elections, the State Democratic Executive Committee voted 77-10 against a resolution urging Molly Beth Malcolm to resign as Chair. Malcolm will continue as Chair through

The 2003 Task for Responsible Democrats: Keep Our Eyes on the Ball!

It is critical that all Democrats stay abreast of the issues facing us--issues that will affect millions of Americans for years to come--and remember that what we are told by the Administration and the media is not the entire picture. We must work hard to stay informed and let our leaders--of both parties--know that we are paying attention and are holding them accountable. (Information on how to contact our representatives is included in this newsletter.)

The Republican administration appears to be using the distractions of Iraq and the war on terrorism to operate beneath the radar and divert attention from their failure to deal with the deteriorating economy; the fragile political states in North Korea, Pakistan/India, Israel/Palestine; the shambles of America's foreign policy; the environment; women's reproductive freedom; race relations; health care; education; critical social services; the list goes on...

President Bush has proposed **a second tax cut plan**. In view of the growing deficit, many of its provisions are troublesome even to members of his own party. The President's plan is estimated to cost the U. S \$670 billion; the *top 10% of the taxpayers* will receive 60 % of the benefits. In Texas almost 4.5 million taxpayers would receive \$100 or less; almost 3 million Texans would receive no benefits. In addition:

- ◆ The Dow Jones average is down over 33% since its high in January of 2000, down almost 17% in 2002 alone
- ◆ The budget deficit is down from a \$281 billion surplus to a projected **\$199 billion deficit for 2003**, *not including the cost of the President's proposed tax cut or the cost of a war in Iraq*
- ◆ Unemployment has risen from 4% in 1999 to 6%; the U.S. has lost 2 million jobs since Bush took office. Texas and other states face enormous state deficits and decreased funding for education, the environment, health care, and social services.

At the same time, the President has proposed **the discontinuation of the Estate tax**, which would cost this country an estimated \$850 billion in revenues over a decade, and would benefit *fewer than 2% of the richest Americans*.

A quiet campaign to **dismantle the past 30 years of environmental regulations** is underway. Evidence includes the administration's expressed doubts of the validity of global warming; a proposal to allow more arsenic in drinking water; weakening of anti-pollution rules for old electric power plants; permits to mining companies to operate in wetlands; intervention to block a program to stem the flow of raw sewage into America's oceans and waterways--not to mention Bush's proposal to drill for oil in the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge.

The White House has said little about **women's reproductive rights**, and Bush couches these issues as "reverence for life"--yet executive orders, regulations, legal briefs, legislative maneuvers, and appointments over the past two years indicate that reversing or eviscerating Roe vs. Wade is indeed Mr. Bush's agenda. A few examples:

- ◆ On his first day on the job, the President reimposed the global "gag" rule barring health care providers from receiving American family planning assistance for counseling women about abortion or providing abortion services, even with their own money.
- ◆ The President's judiciary nominations reflect individuals with documented histories of hostility to Roe vs. Wade.
- ◆ In 2002, Bush delegates to the United Nations Special Session on Children tried to block a plan to promote children's well-being and rights, taking offense at language promising "reproductive health services" and opposing special efforts to help young girls who are victims of war crimes (rape).

Health care – In his State of the Union address, the President proposed Medicare reform with a drug benefit for seniors, a call which is reported to have alarmed many Republicans, who recognize the ambitious and politically difficult decisions that will be required. This is a critical need for America; Democrats must monitor this issue closely and ensure care for our seniors.

Race relations – In the wake of Trent Lott's embarrassing racial comments and forced resignation, the President has spoken out against university affirmative action programs, specifically at the University of Michigan, accusing Michigan of "quotas."

War on terrorism - A Homeland Security Program has been mandated; the government has initiated a program of racial, religious, and ethnic profiling of Arabs, Muslims, and South Asians; onerous airport security inspections have been initiated – but we hear little about Osama bin Laden or the Al Qaeda as we wait tentatively for another attack.

(Sources for articles in this newsletter include mainstream media: the New York Times, TIME Magazine, PBS, NPR, and various U. S. Government data sources which are available online. Search via Google is suggested.)

NOTICE: Per Article VII of the Bellaire Democrats Constitution and Bylaws, the following changes to the Constitution and to the Bylaws are proposed and may be adopted by a majority vote of the members present and voting at the General Meeting to be held on March 28, 2003:

Amendment to Bellaire Democrats Constitution, Article III, Paragraph D

Article III - Members and Dues

- D. Dues shall be paid annually, and shall be payable by the date of the Annual Meeting held in June. Each member in good standing shall be entitled to one vote. Dues paid by new members on or after May 1 will be considered as covering membership for the following membership year.

Amendment to Bellaire Democrats Bylaws, Paragraph A

- A. Membership dues for the Bellaire Democrats shall be \$15.00 per person per year. Membership year for dues will be June 1 through May 31.

Become a Member of Bellaire Democrats, or renew your Current Membership

I wish to join the Bellaire Democrats. Annual Dues: \$ 15.00 Per Year Date: _____

Name _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Telephone: (h) _____ (w) _____ Personal email: _____

Occupation: _____
(Optional for contributions of less than \$50)

I will: (check each box that applies)

- Attend Meetings - add me to you notice list
- Give permission to receive email notices at home (not at employer address)
- Volunteer for Club committee work
- Volunteer for Democratic candidate campaigns
- Volunteer for Harris Country Democratic Party projects
- Serve as an Election Day precinct clerk in my precinct
- Other Interests or Skills _____

Please enclose your dues check made payable to Bellaire Democrats and send to:
Treasurer, Bellaire Democrats, 4401 Lafayette St., Bellaire, TX 77401

For more information, please contact Jane McNeel, Treasurer: 713-664-3316 or email: mcneelj@yahoo.com

HOT OFF THE PRESSES!! THE FIRST BELLAIRE DEMS NEWSLETTER OF 2003!

GENERAL MEETING ON MARCH 18TH

IN THE BELLAIRE ROOM OF THE NEW MASON JAR RESTAURANT. MORE INSIDE...

Get the real story on the economy at: <http://democrats.senate.gov/>

Bellaire Democrats
4401 Lafayette
Bellaire, TX 77401

www.bellairedemocrats.org