



# Bellaire Democrats

# Newsletter

Vol. 3, Issue 3 Sept. 2003

## General Meeting Announced for Wednesday, September 10, 2003.

7:00 p.m. – Bellaire Room, Mason Jar Restaurant – 5125 Bellaire Blvd. – 6:30 p.m. Social

Scott Hochberg, State Representative - District 137 adjacent to Bellaire, will speak on the proposed Texas Constitutional Amendments to be voted on September 13. **\*\***(See page 2)

All members of the Bellaire Democrats and friends are invited. Refreshments will be available, and attendees are encouraged to stay for dinner after the meeting.

### Officers for 2003 - 2004

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### Newsletter Editors

Judy Viebig  
Monica McHam  
Jane McNeel

Fellow Bellaire Democrats,

This is a uniquely challenging time for Democrats in Texas and American history. Our state and national governments are controlled by the Republican party—in Texas, for the first time since Reconstruction. This breadth of power has led to an arrogance that has cost our nation dearly. On the national level, in only two and one-half years, the Republicans have squandered a \$5.6 trillion surplus and created unprecedented deficits for our children - in order to provide tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans and fund an ill-planned war. Our economy has faltered. Three million jobs have been lost. The Bush doctrine of preemption has alienated long-cherished relationships abroad, and left us with an expensive and unresolved war/occupation in Iraq. Fundamental civil rights are being denied, and environmental protections are being eroded. And this has been an administration of secrecy--misleading the public, taking actions without consultation, and refusing to provide information to investigators.

The poor economy and national policies have resulted in a State fiscal crisis, resulting in cuts in services - in education, in public health and health care for poorer Americans. In spite of big talk about "an education president," and "homeland security," educational funding is down and cuts are being made in fire and police protection. There are few voices for bipartisan cooperation.

This is a critical time to take back our country and our state. It is a critical time for Democratic organization and activism, beginning at the grassroots level. I urge the involvement of each of you. Stay informed. Volunteer to help through the Bellaire Democrats or the Harris County Democrats. Talk to your neighbors and friends. Write a letter to the editor. Help in voter registration. Work for and support Democratic candidates at all levels.

Contact me to volunteer your services and provide support and ideas (713-668-7075 or nlomax@houston.rr.com).

I look forward to working together over the coming year – together, we CAN make a difference!

Nancy Lomax

### Johnson-Rayburn Dinner

**Speaker: Senator Mary Landrieu, Louisiana**

Saturday, September 20, 2003 - Radisson Hotel-Astrodome - 6:30 PM - Silent Auction/Reception

7:30 PM – Dinner and Cash Bar - Individual tickets - \$100

Support the Harris County Democratic Party. Reserve your ticket online at [www.hcdp.org](http://www.hcdp.org)

### Officers for 2003-2004 Elected at General Meeting on May 27

After an entertaining and informative talk at our May meeting by Gerry Birnberg, Chair of the Harris County Democrats, an election of officers for the coming year was held. Nancy Lomax will hold the office of President, Phil Donahue first Vice President, Guyleene Ebersole second Vice President, and Jane McNeel remains Treasurer. Coy Tow remains in an ex-officio position, and the office of Secretary remains open.

### New Look for Bellaire Democrats Web Site

Have you seen the new design of the Bellaire Democrats web site? [www.bellairedemocrats.org](http://www.bellairedemocrats.org). Find Club announcements and links to informative web sites, catch up with the latest news from local, state, and national sources. Send us your ideas for the site - additional links, what you'd like to see on the site, what sort of information will help you stay informed.



### \*\*Important Election – September 13 – Constitutional Amendments – Don't forget to vote!

See the article on page 2 for an overview of the Texas Constitutional Amendments that will be on the ballot. The Legislature set this date to exploit a low voter turnout; this makes your vote even more important. Early voting runs from Thursday, August 28, through Tuesday, September 9. The closest early voting location is Bayland Park Community Center at 6400 Bissonnet. Your usual polling place should be open on September 13<sup>th</sup>, but check with the newspaper, your precinct chair, or <http://www.harrisvotes.com/elecinfo.htm> for any changes.

## CONSTITUTIONAL CONUNDRUM – SEPTEMBER 13 ELECTION

If you think that there are WA-A-A-Y too many constitutional amendments on the ballots in Texas—and if you tend to routinely vote “yes” or skip the constitutional amendments—you are in the majority. Most amendments are passed with little or no examination or opposition. Why is this so and why does it matter?

The problem is the Constitution. The Texas Constitution is a long, convoluted and absurdly detailed document, in contrast to the U. S. Constitution, which is a broad statement of government and the government’s powers. Originally adopted in 1876, the Texas Constitution has resisted every attempt at revision and simplification.

Because the Constitution is so detailed, voters are frequently asked to approve changes. Often proposed amendments do not significantly impact most Texans. The danger lies in the fact that some amendments *do* have serious and wide-ranging impact. Such is the case this upcoming election, in which 22 amendments are presented for voter approval.

Constitutional amendments are normally voted on in November, when local elections are held. This Republican-controlled legislature, however, called a special election on September 13, assuming low voter turnout. This election wastes precious tax dollars—to win easy approval of certain amendments. The 22 amendments are a mixture of good and bad and cover a variety of issues. Two proposed amendments are of particular importance and deserve your attention.

### **Proposition 9 - The constitutional amendment relating to the use of income and appreciation of the permanent school fund.**

The Permanent School Fund was created in 1876 as a protected source of funding for public schools. Interest and dividends are distributed to school districts through the Available School Fund and used primarily for school books. Under the proposed amendment, additional funds would be distributed and constitutional protections would be weakened, reducing the body of the fund for future years.

According to proponents (including Scott Hochberg), the proposition would "remove an outdated investment restriction and provide more money for the state's budget without any cost or risk to taxpayers." We encourage voters to attend the September 10 general meeting and question Hochberg about the impact of this proposal!

### **Proposition 12 - The constitutional amendment concerning civil lawsuits against doctors and health care providers, and other actions, authorizing the legislature to determine limitations on non-economic damages.**

This so-called “lawsuit abuse” amendment deals with personal injury damages. It would give the *legislature* the power to limit the amount a jury can award you if you or someone in your family is injured by another person or company. Lawmakers would set the maximum value of "pain and suffering" damages, such as the value of loss of companionship of a spouse or child, disfigurement, etc., and a jury could not order a payment beyond that amount *regardless of the circumstances*. (Remember the young girl in Florida who died recently when the wrong organs were transplanted?)

This amendment undermines one of the oldest and most basic tenets of American law—the jury. By setting the limits it deems appropriate, the legislature usurps the jury’s authority to hear the facts, determine liability and award appropriate damages to the injured party. The insurance industry will be the big winner if this amendment passes.

All 22 proposals should be read and considered before voting. The Houston Chronicle opposes Propositions 9 and 12 and considers at least four additional proposals problematic--Propositions 3, 8, 15, and 18.

To thwart this most recent and blatant attempt to circumvent voter discretion, **know the issues**. When constitutional amendments are passed without examination, the people lose. To read the full text and some analysis of the proposed amendments go to:

<http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/hrofr/frame9.htm>  
<http://www.houstonchronicle.com/recommends>  
<http://www.sos.state.tx.us/elections/voter/2003sepconsamend.shtml>

For information on the September 13 election in Harris County, including poll locations, go to:

<http://www.harrisvotes.com/electinfo.htm>

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

Your feedback regarding the Newsletter is always welcome. Please email Jane McNeel at [mcneelj@yahoo.com](mailto:mcneelj@yahoo.com) with your comments and suggestions.

## INFORMATION

The White House:  
Comments: 202-456-1111  
Switchboard: 202-456-1414  
Fax: 202-456-2461

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

United States Senators  
Kay Bailey Hutchison (R)  
202-224-5922  
Houston: 713-653-3456  
Houston Fax: 713-209-3459  
<http://www.hutchison.senate.gov>

John Cornyn (R)  
202-224-2934  
<http://www.cornyn.senate.gov>

U. S. Congressman for Bellaire  
Chris Bell – District 25 (D)  
202-225-7508

<http://www.house.gov/bell>  
Local: 713-383-8600 - Houston  
281-991-1300 - Pasadena  
281-837-8228 - Baytown

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

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

Texas State Senator:  
Kyle Janek - District 17 (R)  
713-272-8929  
<http://www.senate.state.tx.us>

Texas State House Representative:  
Martha Wong – District 134 (R)  
512-463-0389  
<http://www.house.state.tx.us>

State House Representative (adj. dist.)  
Scott Hochberg – District 137 (D)  
(512)463-0389 / 832-252-7336  
e-mail: [renitacoleman@house.state.tx.us](mailto:renitacoleman@house.state.tx.us)  
<http://scotthochberg.com>

The Texas Legislature  
<http://www.capitol.state.tx.us/>

Harris County Democratic Party  
713-739-7785  
<http://hcdp.org>

Texas State Democratic Party  
<http://txdemocrats.org>  
Independent economic and tax information  
<http://taxpolicycenter.org>  
Moveon.org  
<http://www.moveon.org> - grassroots site  
TrueMajority.com  
[www.truemajority.com](http://www.truemajority.com) - Ben Cohen's site  
Mother Jones  
[www.motherjones.com](http://www.motherjones.com)  
Bellaire Democrats  
[www.bellairedemocrats.org](http://www.bellairedemocrats.org)

### Other Information Sources

National Public Radio (NPR) KUHF - 88.7 FM

BBC News, Democracy Now with Amy Goodman on Pacifica KPFT - 90.1 FM

Public Broadcasting System (PBS) Channel 8, particularly NOW with Bill Moyers (Friday, 8 PM), Washington Week with Gwen Ifill (Friday, 7 PM), Frontline (Thursday, 9 PM)

New York Times online [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)

The Guardian online [www.guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk)

## Democratic Nominee for President - 2004 – Liberal or Bush Lite?

As the Democratic primary slips into high gear, Democrats (and other Americans looking for a saner administration) must choose the best of at least nine Democratic presidential candidates to face a powerful Republican regime that is rapidly eroding the fundamental tenets of our democracy.

More worrisome than the choice of a candidate is the lack of cohesive leadership in our national Democratic party. We want to know: What do we stand FOR? If the Democrats win, what will we DO? To win—even against a Republican administration that is losing its supporters—the wonderfully diverse Democratic party must unite behind one strong, clear focus that includes: the return to a strong economy; a multilateral foreign policy; a recommitment to civil rights; a **genuine** commitment to national security, protection of the environment, health care, education and social services. In the words of James Carville, we need to reinstate "the generational promise"—the commitment to America to make each generation better. We need to stop being polite about and tolerant of the Bush administration's excesses. We must be BOLD.

With no clear frontrunner, we are challenged to identify and support the best candidate to defeat George W. Bush and return the country to our democratic principles and a sound fiscal position. Credentials vary and political positions seem to vary from the left to those characterized by their critics as "Bush Lites."

Dennis Kucinich, U. S. Representative from Ohio, has won the support of much of the farthest left, is the only candidate who voted against U.S.A. Patriot Act and one of two who voted against war in Iraq. He has been articulate on major issues, but has a light resume and is currently considered a long shot.

Howard Dean, former Governor of Vermont, is generating the most energy and new blood and is a frontrunner with fundraising. He has been an outspoken critic of the Iraq war, tax cuts, and other Bush policies. He seems, however, uninformed on many national issues and is bluntly critical of the Democrats at a time when team-building is critical.

Bob Graham, Senator from Florida, has the best resume, is considered hardworking and meticulous, and voted against war in Iraq, as well as against both tax cuts. Former Chair of the Senate Intelligence Committee, he has been knowledgeable and outspoken about intelligence gaffs and security inadequacies. So far, his campaign has not caught fire.

John Kerry, serving his fourth term as Massachusetts Senator, is considered a frontrunner by many. He has outstanding military credentials, with two tours in Vietnam and outstanding service medals. He is characterized variously as a liberal and a moderate, but is not considered liberal enough for Democrats angered by his support of the war in Iraq.

Richard Gephardt, U.S. Representative from Missouri, has the most legislative experience, as well as ties to traditional sources of Democratic support, including Labor. He voted for war in Iraq, but opposed the unilateral, pre-emptive approach, and advocates full repeal of the Bush tax cuts.

John Edwards, first-term Senator from North Carolina, is considered smart, disciplined, charming, hardworking and able to master complex issues and communicate in plain language to ordinary people—but too inexperienced to be a serious candidate. He is considered a viable Vice Presidential candidate.

Joe Lieberman, Senator from Connecticut since 1988, benefits from the highest name recognition and a reputation for being moral and ethical. However, as a self-proclaimed centrist Democrat, a "Bush-Lite" who has vocally supported war with Iraq and tax cuts, he is considered by many to be too moderate for the current anti-Bush mood in the country.

**So, fellow Democrats:** Keep informed. Write checks. Get involved; staff phone banks. Support Democrats who are bold and speak out on critical issues. Register voters. Talk to your neighbors and friends.

### Primary Schedule

Iowa Caucuses – January 19

Decisions in 31 states by March 2

New Hampshire primary – January 27, 2004

Texas Primary - March 2 (moved forward 2 weeks by 2003 legislative action)

Next: South Carolina, Arizona

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### The Sad Story of the (Ongoing) 2003 Texas Legislature

By now we all know that despite our best efforts to affect legislative outcomes, the 2003 Texas Legislature balanced the biennial budget on the backs of the state's children and needy. Dominated by Republican majorities for the first time since Reconstruction and vowing not to increase taxes, Legislators covered the \$9.9 billion shortfall through cuts in services—cuts that will now affect Texans at the local levels through increased reliance on county hospital services, cuts in public education, increases in college tuition, decreases in police and fire fighters, and lost or decreased services to the indigent.

(One positive note: a temporary injunction has been awarded to suspend implementation of a legislative rider denying access to public funds for family planning services for low-income women to 33 Planned Parenthood clinics. If a permanent injunction is forthcoming, services to 115,000 Texas women will be saved—in spite of our Legislators.)

We reported in May that Congressman Tom DeLay was pushing for Legislative action on his redistricting plan. By law, redistricting was settled by the Texas courts in 2001, when the Legislature and Governor Perry did not redistrict. In spite of the fact that Governor Perry, Lt. Governor Dewhurst, and Speaker Craddick had indicated little enthusiasm for redistricting and an unwillingness to "disrupt the bipartisan relations required to solve Texas' problems," the proposition was brought to a vote. It was defeated when the Democratic Legislators went to Oklahoma to avoid a quorum.

Governor Perry has now apparently deferred to pressure from Congressman DeLay—and from his own ego—and called a series of special sessions; our Legislature is locked in a standoff, oblivious to the concerns of Texans or the costs involved (\$1.7 million per session). At this writing, Democratic Senators are in exile in New Mexico, avoiding a Senate vote; and Lt. Governor David Dewhurst—who had spent the regular session developing positive bipartisan Senate relations—has ditched the two-thirds rule, squandering these valuable relations to satisfy Republican demands. (If you think the behavior of the Democratic Senators is childish, in the words of Molly Ivins: "There are some important principles at stake here. Like, you're supposed to play by the rules. And you're not supposed to change the rules in the middle of the game. And then...there is the small matter of democracy." Ah, democracy! To gain more Congressional seats, the Rs propose districts that deny minority and rural representation, split towns, and stretch districts from Austin to Mexico.)

An insider in the Legislature has observed that there is little to admire in the behavior of the Legislature and no fair-minded process going on. The right-wing Republicans are drunk on their new power. Bills proposed to appoint a special commission to address redistricting are being ignored in the political struggle. Our own District 134 Representative Martha Wong seems to be a pawn for the Republicans, going along to gain a few special favors.

**(Bellaire Democrats, NOTE:** We need to do what it takes to elect a Democrat to represent us in Austin!)

**Become a Member of Bellaire Democrats, or Renew Your Current Membership**

I wish to join or renew my membership in 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 County 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, 5112 Locust St., Bellaire, TX 77401**

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

**Democratic Precinct Chairs for Bellaire**

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	helenfisher@hal-pc.org
Precinct 215	Guyleene Ebersole	713-665-6470	guyleber@sbcglobal.net
Precinct 268	Patricia DiCoste	713-668-5158	langpro@swbell.net

**Last Minute News Flash!** Bellaire Democrats traveled to Austin on August 9 with four busloads of Harris County Dems to protest the disgraceful behavior of Republican Legislators. Democratic Senators participated by phone hook-up. The Capitol grounds were packed with 3 – 5,000 protestors from all over Texas – Democrats made their voices heard!



**YOU'RE INVITED TO A COLUMBUS DAY ITALIAN DINNER!!!**

**Sunday, October 12th, 2003 at 5 PM - Lomax Residence - 4801 Maple in Bellaire**

**Lasagna, Salad, Desserts, Beverages - and tickets can be delivered to your door!**

**Please Purchase Tickets in Advance - \$10 Adults - \$6 for 10 & under**

To Order tickets, for more information, or to volunteer to help out - please call  
Guyleene Ebersole - 713-665-6470 • Pat Ohanian 713-661-1548

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