



# Bellaire Democrats

# Newsletter

January, 2004

## General Meeting Announced for Thursday, January 15, 2004.

**7:00 PM – Bellaire Civic Center Auditorium – 7008 So. Rice Avenue – 6:30 PM Social**

Charles Soechting, new Chairperson of the Texas Democratic Party, will speak at the meeting of the Bellaire Democrats on Thursday, January 15, 2004. Soechting, an attorney in San Marcos, was elected in October by the State Democratic Executive Committee to serve the remainder of the term of outgoing chair Molly Beth Malcolm.

Socializing will begin at 6:30 p.m.; the formal meeting starts at 7:00 p.m. This is the last meeting before the Texas Democratic Primaries, and Mr. Soechting will have much to report about the status of critical races and new Democratic strategies in Texas. Please plan to attend—and bring your neighbors and friends.

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### Fellow Bellaire Democrats:

We stand at the threshold of a profoundly important year in American history—one so serious that I hesitate to offer a glib "Happy New Year!"

Many of us who have been following the state of the economy, the deterioration of Americans' civil rights, the threats to our Constitution, the environment, education, and social services—the threats to the foundation of democracy—realize the importance of 2004 to our future and that of our children and grandchildren.

In three short years, the Republican administration under George W. Bush has handed us the biggest national deficit in history, an unstable international situation, the deaths of our sons and daughters in Iraq and Afghanistan, and an Executive branch usurping authority from the other branches and the people. The Democrats have been given opportunities to win back the White House...but we have nine Democratic candidates for the presidency who seem to spend too much time and energy attacking each other and undermining cohesiveness and coherence within the Democratic party.

It is an easy time to be gloomy. But I urge us all to hold on to our faith in our democratic process, in our rights to free speech and free elections, and in the basic belief of the Democratic Party that it is our responsibility to leave the world a better place for our children.

Soon the decision for the Democratic presidential nominee will have been made. Before the end of 2004, the leadership of our Country will be decided. We need the help of each of you—to stay informed about the issues, to encourage your family and neighbors to stay informed and active in the democratic process, to involve yourselves in our political process in any way that you can. Bring your friends to the Democratic precinct meetings at the close of Primary Election Day. We will share snacks and ideas for Democrats to succeed.

Can we really affect the power of the Republicans in Bellaire, in Texas? As Margaret Mead said: "**Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever does.**"

Contact me or any of our board members if you have ideas, or want to contribute. We have work to do in 2004!

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## The Democratic Primaries Are Upon Us

We go to press just two weeks from the 2004 Iowa caucuses and three weeks from the New Hampshire primary. There are still nine presidential candidates—although Bob Graham of Florida has dropped out and General Wesley Clark has dropped in.

As conscientious editors of a political newsletter, we have sought to evaluate the candidates according to their experience and qualifications and provide some guidelines for our readers. But those with the best resumes are dropping out (Bob Graham), spending precious campaign time attacking Howard Dean and apologizing for previous positions (John Kerry), or generally looking like a tired insider (Richard Gephardt) or a Bush-Lite (Joe Lieberman).

John Edwards is running a thoughtful, pro-active campaign, but is light on experience (one term in the Senate from North Carolina) and not showing well in the polls. Many are still optimistic about the possibilities of General Wesley Clark; others are skeptical of his inexperience in elective office and his earlier support of Bush.

Howard Dean is setting the pace, generating energy and new blood for the Democrats, and has been endorsed by Al Gore and several labor unions. Political writers (including Molly Ivins) are beginning to believe that Dean can defeat Bush. However, his experience is limited to governing a small state, and his campaign is fueled largely with anger against the Bush administration.

Dennis Kucinich, Al Sharpton, and Carol Moseley Braun are still in the race, but not considered serious contenders by political analysts. Here's how the next weeks will play out:

January 19 – Iowa Caucuses

January 27 – New Hampshire primary

February 3 – Primaries in South Carolina, Arizona, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Delaware, North Dakota, Missouri. At this point, strategists (and candidates) expect the contest to shift to a two-way competition with Dr. Dean.

March 2 – Decisions will have been made in 30 states.

March 9 – Texas primary (postponed from March 2)

Our small straw poll reveals Democratic voters are still undecided, but dedicated ABBers – Anybody But Bush. This is our last newsletter before the Texas primary. We will, however, be communicating more by post card, telephone, and e-mail. Stay in touch. Stay informed. **Be sure we have your correct e-mail address! Contact Jane McNeel at mcneelj@yahoo.com.**

## "Improvements" in Voting Technology Present New Threats of Voting Fraud

Rice University computer scientist Dan Wallach recently presented a frightening picture of the impact on American democracy of the newest voting machine technology. Wallach and colleagues from Johns Hopkins University report that the machines are subject to error, vulnerable to attacks from both inside programmers and outside hackers, and make recounts impossible because they don't include paper ballots. According to Wallach, **"Paperless computer voting systems are unverifiable."** "When the computer companies say they are certified, it is meaningless. When you ask them how do you know the system worked, the answer is they don't."

Two companies, Diebold Election Systems (DESI) and Election Systems & Software (ES&S), produce machines on which nearly 80% of the votes are cast in the United States. Bob Urosevich, now CEO of Diebold Election Systems, together with his brother Todd, founded ES&S. Bob then went to Diebold, while Todd is still Vice President at ES&S. Both men are fervent supporters of and contributors to the Republican party. (Chuck Hagel, now a Republican senator from Nebraska, took Bob Urosevich's position at ES&S. Hagel then ran for the U.S. Senate, with ES&S machines counting his own votes, but failed to disclose that he had been both CEO and Chairman of ES&S on his disclosure documents.)

The Diebold paperless touch-screen voting system was first used in Georgia for the 2002 election. Republican challengers had trailed the Democratic incumbents in both the Senate and Governor races by 5 to 11 point margins the week before the race, and most Georgians expected incumbent Sen. Max Cleland to win. The Diebold voting system declared the dark horse Republican candidate Saxby Chambliss the winner with 53 percent of the vote. In the gubernatorial race, a Republican candidate won for the first time in 130 years. Chambliss reports on his web site: "With our win on Nov. 5, we returned control of the U.S. Senate to Republicans and gave President Bush the tools he needs to implement his agenda for America."

The Diebold machines have been named the "Worst Technology of 2003" by Fortune magazine, not exactly a left-wing publication. (<http://www.fortune.com/fortune/technology/articles/0,15114,558787,00.html>)

"The most fundamental problem with such a voting system is that the entire election hinges on the correctness, robustness, and security of the software within the voting terminal," the report said. When there is no observable vote count done at the local polling place, there is no "authentication" of the tally. Wallach said: "We found a list of flaws, any one of which could ruin the integrity of the election." Rubin told Associated Press: "I think they need to have paper trails, and I don't think these kinds of machines should be used for voting."

Aviel D. Rubin, an associate professor of computer science at Johns Hopkins headed the study. The group's report, "Analysis of an Electronic Voting System," was released on July 23, 2003. It is available at: <http://avirubin.com/vote.pdf>.

Harris County voters have been using the eSlate system by Hart InterCivic in Austin, Texas. There have been some complaints about the machines, but the Harris County Clerk Beverly Kaufman asserts the errors may lie with the voters, due to confusion about how to use the machines. According to eSlate's information, "the eSlate™ also has advanced auditing capabilities that allow for both manual (paper) and electronic recounts as necessary."

(Sources: Christopher Bollyn for the American Free Press; Duke University Chronicle 11/7/03). And for more information on this subject, go to: <http://www.verifiedvoting.org/> or <http://verify.stanford.edu/evote.html>

**WHAT YOU CAN DO: Write, call, or email your Congressional representatives and ask them to support HR2239/S1980 "The Voter Confidence and Increased Accessibility Act of 2003", which requires a paper trail.**

### PRIMARY DATE: TUESDAY, MARCH 9, 2004

The Texas primary will be held on March 9, 2004. Please check with your Precinct Chair or the Harris County Clerk's office for information on the address of your polling place. Please make plans to attend your Precinct caucus, to be held at your polling place after the polls close at 7 PM. Delegates for the state convention will be chosen at that time. This is grass-roots democracy in action!!

It is when power is wedded to chronic fear that it becomes formidable.  
Eric Hoffer, *The Passionate State of Mind*

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; many sources are available online. Search via Google is suggested. Your feedback regarding the Newsletter is always welcome. Please email Judy Viebig at [jviebig@att.net](mailto:jviebig@att.net) with your comments and suggestions.

## INFORMATION

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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:  
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Texas State House Representative:  
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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)

## Can This Nation – So Conceived and So Dedicated – Endure?

*"...our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are ....testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure."*  
Abraham Lincoln, November 19, 1863

While it's hard to imagine that anyone reading this newsletter doubts the trouble this country is in, it is difficult to illustrate the full gravity of the situation—and impossible to do in one short newsletter.

We all cringe over the continuing loss of life in Iraq and deteriorating international relations. We watch with alarm as the national deficit grows at unprecedented rates to unprecedented levels. We watch jobs disappear, healthcare costs grow and services cut; we see elaborate educational and security programs mandated and then not funded. Kudos are given to an elaborate and expensive prescription drug program that doesn't begin to provide the help needed. Environmental programs are eroded and women's reproductive rights denied.

The Bush Administration is taking power in unprecedented ways—and to a degree that is damaging, perhaps irreversibly, our democratic system. The time may have come to ask whether the ultimate test to our democracy is upon us.

The growing gap between the increasingly rich and the increasingly poor is part of a conscious political strategy that is eroding the tenets of democracy, and—in the opinion of Joe Hough, President of Union Theological Seminary, in a recent interview with Bill Moyers—the most serious concern for all people who believe it is the obligation of the children of Abraham (in the traditions of Islam, Christianity, or Judaism) to care for the least, the poorest.

"The policies of this country are disadvantaging poor people every day of our lives and every single thing that passes the Congress these days is disadvantaging poor people more....And it is not at all in the spirit of American democracy to generate inequality and to contradict equal opportunity in our society. Those are not the norms we've lived by."

Hough continues: "There is no justification under Heaven for some corporate executives to make 1,000 times as much as their average worker....Management guru and certainly nobody's fuzzy headed liberal, Peter Drucker says, 'This compromises the integrity of a corporate executive.' Why? Because it does not accept, and it does not in any way acknowledge the incredible contributions of people who work at various levels." Hough refers to the writings of Nobel Prize winner, Amartya Sen: "No society can claim to be fair if there are substantial number of its citizens who are not receiving enough assistance or income to have the capability to function....to buy food, to have a place to live, to have their children educated, to get reasonable health care and a job."

Hough suggests making this the litmus test of every single political leader we encounter: "What are you gonna do in order to help make this happen?"

What is happening to civil liberties and security under this Administration, through the U. S.A. Patriot Act or Executive Orders or active refusal to respond to requests for information? The extent to which executive powers can be exerted and liberties denied in the name of "security," when "terrorism" is invoked and fear ignited, is remarkable.

In a recent speech sponsored by MoveOn.org and the American Constitution Society, Al Gore addressed these concerns, providing familiar examples and challenging the assumption of the Bush Administration that we have to give up traditional freedoms in order to be safe from terrorism. "Our founders knew—and our history has proven—that freedom is best guaranteed by a separation of powers into co-equal branches of government within a system of checks and balances—to prevent the unhealthy concentration of too much power in the hands of any one person or group...."

"This Administration has attempted to compromise the most precious rights that America has stood for all over the world for more than 200 years: due process, equal treatment under the law, the dignity of the individual, freedom from unreasonable search and seizure, freedom from promiscuous government surveillance. And in the name of security, this Administration has attempted to relegate the Congress and the Courts to the sidelines and replace our democratic system of checks and balances with an unaccountable Executive."

One of the innumerable examples cited is the Justice Department's recent criminal prosecution of the environmental group Greenpeace under an obscure 1872 law against "Sailormongering"...while dropping investigations of 50 power plants for violating the Clean Air Act. Gore cites these acts as "part of their larger agenda to roll back the changes in government policy brought about by the New Deal and the Progressive Movement—cutting back on Civil Rights enforcement, Women's Rights, progressive taxation, the estate tax, access to the courts, Medicare, and much more."

These are serious tests. The year 2004 may well determine the future of democracy as we know it.

## Textbooks, Politics, and Religion – The Battle Continues in Texas

You may believe that the flurry of controversy over science and evolution in textbooks has been over for decades, but Texas has just escaped renewed efforts by the religious right to eliminate evolution from Texas textbooks. On November 6, 2003—following months of lobbying, calls, letters, testimonies, and petitions—the State Board of Education (SBOE) by an 11 to 4 vote, approved the eleven controversial biology textbooks that teach evolution. Dissenting were far-right board members Terri Leo (Dist.6, Spring) David Bradley (Dist.7, Beaumont), Don McLeroy (Dist.9, Bryan), and Gail Lowe (Dist. 14, Lampasas).

While fundamentalists argued that evolution causes degeneration of morals, teen suicide, road rage, and the killings at Columbine High School, supporters including scientists, educators, and clergy argued in favor of teaching evolution. The Rev. Roger Paynter of Austin's First Baptist Church testified: "It is my deep conviction that creation flows from the hand of the creator God. But this is a statement of faith and not something that I or anyone else can prove in a scientific experiment. To lead children to believe otherwise is a disservice to them."

Two days prior to this decision, the national public interest law firm, Trial Lawyers for Public Justice (TLPJ) in Dallas, filed a lawsuit against the SBOE, charging it with violating First Amendment rights. The charge is based on the 2001 disapproval of the textbook, *Environmental Science: Creating a Sustainable Future* by Daniel Chiras. The well-respected textbook had been attacked by fundamentalists and representatives of the oil and gas industry as anti-Christian, anti-free enterprise, and anti-American because of its teachings about global warming.

Since Texas is the nation's second largest buyer of textbooks, and Texas-approved textbooks are often marketed across the country, these controversies have national consequences. And, because of Texas' centralized approval process, a small amount of pressure from the right wing can yield enormous consequences—thoughtful and concerned people must continue to be diligent!

*From a comprehensive report compiled by Hana N. Ginzburg. The complete report can be found at [www.bellairedemocrats.org](http://www.bellairedemocrats.org). Thanks to the Texas Freedom Network List Serve and their tireless efforts informing the public and defeating the assault on science textbooks.*

**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

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: (h) \_\_\_\_\_ (w) \_\_\_\_\_ Personal email: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ 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 \_\_\_\_\_

If you haven't renewed your membership with the past 6 months, or wish to join, please return your dues check made payable to Bellaire Democrats in the enclosed envelope. Without the envelope, the mailing address is:

**Bellaire Democrats, c/o Jane McNeel, 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**

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Precinct 215	Guyleene Ebersole	713-665-6470	guyleber@sbcglobal.net
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If you are interested in serving as an officer of the Bellaire Democrats please contact Nancy Lomax, 713-668-7075 or nlomax@houston.rr.com.

**Did you know that in Texas, state legislators' votes are often not recorded?**

In fact—according to the Fall 2003 Texas Voter, a publication of the League of Women Voters of Texas—in the 2001 session, fewer than 50% of the votes passed were recorded. Under present rules, the legislators can decide whether votes are individually recorded. This means that Legislators:

- Can and do avoid recorded votes on controversial issues.
- Have been known to change their votes when they are being recorded.
- Do not even have to be present to vote.

More than 40 states require recording of votes; of the four most populous states, only Texas does not.

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