

Bellaire Democrats *Newsletter*

November, 2005

Bellaire Democrats - 4801 Maple St. - Bellaire, TX 77401 - www.bellairedemocrats.org

General Meeting -Tuesday, November 15, 2005 – 7:00 to 8:00 p.m.

**Tio Pepe's Spanish Restaurant – 5213 Cedar St., in the heart of Bellaire – Come at 6:00 to eat if you can.
Come and learn grassroots campaign strategies from Dan McClung!**

Dan McClung of Campaign Strategies has been Democratic campaign consultant for over thirty years. He is widely considered to be the best in Texas. We are gearing up to take back the Texas Legislature in 2006 – and maybe even the Governor's Office. And who knows what else in 2008! Please come and join us in our efforts.

Dear Friends,

The Bellaire Democrats are creating a Roadmap to Victory. We join the Democratic Party in a national kickoff of the 50-state plan to take back America on November 15.

Tired of the Republican Culture of Corruption and Cronyism, Democrats are determined to restore honor and honesty to American politics. We cannot wait until a few months before 2006 elections. We need to start organizing now, and we need you to be a part of the plan.

At our general meeting on November 15 at Tio Pepe's, we will provide information on our party-building efforts nationally and locally. Texas and Houston have some great opportunities to change the depressing course we have been traveling.

Every one of us must take responsibility for the Democratic organization in our own neighborhood, and November 15 is your opportunity to come together and focus. We have to be organized to get our message out. We need a network in place now to persuade voters and activate our supporters. Howard Dean has listened to frustrated Democrats and taken the unprecedented step of putting paid organizers on the ground in Texas and building a state party infrastructure across the country.

We need each of you to commit to working for victory on Election Day 2006. But to be victorious, we need to build the Roadmap now for a year of sustained commitment. That's why we are meeting each month from January until May. We have exciting candidates running for U. S. Congress, the Texas Legislature, and Governor who want to meet you and use your ideas to develop a strong platform.

Inept and arrogant Republicans are helping our cause every day. But it is up to us to seize the moment, and drive our cause to victory. See you November 15!

Nancy Lomax
nlomax@houston.rr.com
713-668-7075

Campaign Kick-off Party for Ellen Cohen, Candidate for State Representative for District 134

Wednesday, November 30, 2005 – 6:00 p.m
Home of David Mincberg and Laney Gordon - 5406 Braeburn – Bellaire

Ellen Cohen, President and CEO of Houston Area Women's Business Council since 1990, has served on dozens of Houston area boards and committees and received numerous awards. Her primary for this election will be held in March 2006 for the election in November 2006.

Ms. Cohen plans to take a leave of absence from HAWC beginning in January 2006 to work full-time on the campaign – and the Bellaire Democrats are working right along with her to ensure success!

Come and meet Ellen -- and help us prepare to bring responsible representation to District 134!

Bellaire Democrats Support Richard Schechter, Candidate for Houston Community College Board of Trustees

The Bellaire Democrats support Richard Schechter for election to the Houston Community College Board of Trustees. He is a Houston attorney and a graduate of Rice and the University of Texas.

2005 Election Dates to Remember

November 4 - Last day of early voting November 8 - Uniform Election Day

Call 713-368-2200 for information on your polling place for the election - have your precinct number on hand. Information should also be available at www.harrisvotes.com.

Election – November 8, 2005 – Constitutional Amendments - Oppose #2 and Support #7

Our newsletter analyst reviewed the information available on proposed constitutional amendments and put together a comprehensive summary, which is being posted on our website at www.bellairedemocrats.org. The conclusion, however, is that most of those confusing and incomprehensible amendments to the Texas Constitution are...well...confusing and piddling. While some may be required by our cumbersome Constitution, most address matters affecting few citizens and often supporting only certain business interests (such as the railroads in Proposition 1). In most cases, our tendency is to vote against them.

The Legislature proposes constitutional amendments in joint resolutions which may originate in either the House or the Senate (HJR or SJR). A joint resolution must be adopted by at least a two-thirds vote of the membership of each house of the Legislature (100 votes in the House of Representatives, 21 votes in the Senate) to be presented to voters. The governor cannot veto a joint resolution.

Some things to consider in making voting decisions on Constitutional amendments: (1) Why should these changes require expensive elections to revise the Texas Constitution? Are there easier ways to resolve the issue? (2) Do they reward special interest groups? (3) Although most of these bills were sponsored by Republicans, many were passed almost unanimously.

Proposition 2 – "The constitutional amendment providing that marriage in this state consists only of the union of one man and one woman and prohibiting this state or a political subdivision of this state from creating or recognizing any legal status identical or similar to marriage."

From the ACLU opinion: Same-sex marriage is illegal under current Texas law, and this amendment goes much further, prohibiting equitable treatment for unmarried couples and non-traditional families in housing, employment benefits, and health care. By permanently outlawing any arrangements "similar to marriage," this amendment would give the government unprecedented power to dictate personal decisions. The sweeping language of the amendment threatens even the most basic legal protections for unmarried couples: bereavement leave, visitation rights in public hospitals, even protection from domestic violence. **The amendment is not only unnecessary, it's downright dangerous.**

Harris County Democratic Party position: "Firmly committed to the values of fairness and equality, and unalterably opposed to discrimination in any form, the Harris County Democratic Party urges Democrats and all other voters in Harris County and Texas to **vote NO on Proposition 2** on the November 8 ballot, and thereby to reject amending the constitution of the State of Texas in a way which places unnecessary restrictions on marriage and limits civil unions and other relationships."

Proposition 7 – "The constitutional amendment authorizing line-of-credit advances under a reverse mortgage"; i.e., allowing reverse mortgage borrowers to draw down varying amounts of loan funds according to their needs.

In 1997 Texas approved home equity loans. Reverse mortgages are a type of home equity loan in which a borrower at least 62 years old receives periodic loan advances, but repayments do not begin until borrowers no longer occupy the house. However, lines of credit – which allow seniors to withdraw funds in differing amounts as needed, at lower interest rates than home equity loans – have not been available.

Pro: This amendment would provide more options for seniors and allow them to obtain the most economical and appropriate type of loan that will allow them to live with financial security in the comfort of their own home. Counseling is required, and this type of lending is not appealing for unscrupulous lenders.

Con: Fewer assets will remain for the homeowner and heirs.

As the Economy Rolls On... What's Really Happening? Keep an Eye on that Deficit!

As Molly Ivins asked in a recent column, choosing the "Outrage of the Week" is impossible lately. The governance or lack thereof of our country and our state is so appalling, it's hard to focus.

Regardless, remember to watch the spending that—combined with the tax cuts—**continues to increase our National Debt**. Rather than give you the usual matrix of economic data, we have a few things to point out about what's going on with our taxpayer money and with the economy. (Give this to your friends in that other party.)

- ⊙ When Bush took office in 2000, we had a budget surplus of \$236 billion and the National Debt was \$5.67 trillion. Today the National Debt stands right at **\$8 trillion** and growing.
- ⊙ The estimated 2005 budget deficit is \$333 billion, pre-Katrina. Most of this damage has been done by the tax cuts to the rich, now costing us about \$250 billion a year.
- ⊙ The Senate recently approved a six-year, \$286.4 billion transportation bill loaded with pork, including a "Bridge to Nowhere" in Alaska. "There are nearly 6,500 member-requested projects worth more than \$24 billion, nearly 9% of the total spending," six concerned groups complained in a letter to Bush. Republicans and Democrats supported this bill, and Bush signed it.
- ⊙ The Iraq and Afghanistan wars have so far added an estimated \$252 billion to the National Debt. The war now costs each U.S. citizen around \$250 per year. The human cost, however, is incalculable.¹
- ⊙ Bush proposes spending \$200 billion for assistance to the victims of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita—then proposes cutting items such as Medicare, housing, and other assistance to the poor and needy. To date Congress has appropriated \$51.8 billion, most going to FEMA.
- ⊙ Meanwhile, as the President, Senator Frist, and House Republicans are pressing to cut \$35-50 billion from crucial safety net programs, they are proposing tax cuts of about \$70 billion for the rich. They are opposing a bipartisan \$8.9 billion Disaster Relief Medicaid bill that would provide 100% federal funding for emergency health and mental health care for Katrina victims.

The U.S. Census Bureau recently released the following economic information, based on data gathered through 2004.

- ⊙ The real income of most household incomes has fallen 5 years in a row.
- ⊙ The percentage of persons living in poverty increased last year, from 12.5% to 12.7%, the fourth consecutive increase since poverty hit a low of 11.3% in 2000 (the last time the poverty rate fell). Earlier this year 49 Republicans in the Senate voted against an increase in the minimum wage.

- ⊙ The overall number of Americans without health insurance increased for the fourth year in a row.
- ⊙ While the share of total national income flowing to the bottom 60% of households was essentially unchanged, the share going to the top 5 % was up 0.4 % – a sign of a diminishing middle class.
- ⊙ While the average real income of middle-income households fell slightly, that of households in the top 5% grew by over \$4,000 (+1.7%).
- ⊙ As of 2004, the top fifth of households held 50.1% of all income, tying 2001 for the highest share on record.

What can we do? Write, phone, or email anyone who matters! Contact Senators, members of Congress, newspapers, news magazines, presidential hopefuls. Let them know that the declining standard of living for all but the wealthiest in our country is unacceptable, that welfare for the rich is just plain wrong, and that the huge debt accumulating in this country is dangerous to our future. Letters to the Editor make an impact, even if they're not always printed. Even though you feel your elected representatives may not support your position on some issues, let them hear from you.

¹ **Over 2,000 American soldiers have died in Iraq and 247 have died in Afghanistan** (as of 10/27/05); 15,220 have been wounded in action in Iraq, 7,159 so seriously hurt that they haven't returned to duty. (The Pentagon does not report the number of non-hostile U.S. deaths or the number of Iraqis who have died.)

Scott Hochberg Speaks to Bellaire Democrats on Public School Finance

Scott Hochberg, State Representative for neighboring District 137, spoke to the Bellaire Democrats at our September 13 general meeting. He reported on the political impasse over school finance reform that has been illustrated in the recent unproductive Legislative sessions.

Hochberg explained the complex interrelationship among property taxes, school finances, and other sources of revenue. Perhaps more to the point, he explained the political conflicts that exist among Perry, Dewhurst, Craddick, Republican and Democratic lawmakers – and the big Republican campaign contributors – especially Texas businesses and Republican friends in the moneyed Highland Park area of Dallas.

Since Governor Perry refuses to allow any net tax increases and a state income tax is still off the table, it proves impossible to lower property taxes without: (1) increasing the state sales tax (which taxes lower-incomes disproportionately and makes the situation worse long-term) and/or (2) spreading the tax burden to businesses (which are, of course, big political contributors, and have been avoiding payment of existing franchise taxes).

Where do we go from here? We now await the Texas Supreme Court decision on school finance, which is due any day. And we hope that Republican lawmakers will return to the task, sufficiently energized by concerned constituencies to revolt against leadership and get the job done.

Proposed Change in Dues and By-laws

As announced in the September newsletter and at the September meeting, a change in by-laws is proposed in order to simplify membership dues and record-keeping and to make membership available to all. Discussion following the September meeting resulted in a minor modification to the original proposal, as follows:

A. Membership dues for the Bellaire Democrats shall be from \$5 to \$15 per person per year and from \$5 to \$25 per household per year, based on the ability to pay, and shall convey the full privileges of membership to all eligible members of the household whose names are provided on the membership form. Membership year for dues will be June 1 through May 31.

Election Season - Harris County Democratic Party Seeks Volunteers

HCDP is getting really busy and needs our help. If you have four hours each week that you could give to the Democratic Party, they can put you to work staffing the office or working on special projects. If you can't commit to regular work, contact them and see what you can work out.

Contact Demvols@sbcglobal.net or call 713-802-0085.

**Bellaire Democrats
General Meetings 2006
Tio Pepe's Spanish Restaurant
5213 Cedar St., Bellaire**

Tuesday, January 10
Tuesday, February 7
Tuesday, March 14
Tuesday, April 11
Tuesday, May 9

**Bellaire Democrats
Executive Committee Meetings 2006
Home of Nancy and Jim Lomax
4801 Maple, Bellaire**

Tuesday, January 24
Tuesday, February 21
Tuesday, March 28
Tuesday, April 25
Tuesday, May 23

Officers for 2005-2006

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Precinct 214
Precinct 215
Precinct 268

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Patrick Durio 713-667-5508
Catherine O'Harra 713-758-4588
Guyleene Ebersole 713-665-6470
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INFORMATION

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Switchboard:202-456-1414
Fax: 202-456-2461
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/contact/president@whitehouse.gov>
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
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1728 Longworth House Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515-4307
(202)225-2571 Fax:(202)225-4381
Houston: 10000 Memorial Drive, Ste. 620
Houston, TX 77024-3490
713-682-8828 Fax: 713-680-8070

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
<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: www.moveon.org
TrueMajority.com: www.truemajority.com
(Ben Cohen's site)
Mother Jones: www.motherjones.com
Center for Public Integrity:
www.publicintegrity.org

Other Information Sources

KUHF - 88.7 FM: National Public Radio (NPR)
KPFT - 90.1 FM BBC News, Democracy Now with Amy Goodman on Pacifica
Channel 8: Public Broadcasting System (PBS) particularly NOW (Friday, 7:30 PM),
Washington Week with Gwen Ifill (Friday, 7 PM), Frontline (check for day & time)
New York Times online www.nytimes.com
The Guardian online www.guardian.co.uk

Become a Member of the Bellaire Democrats or Renew Your Current Membership

The Bellaire Democrats organization maintains a membership list and a mailing list. We love to have memberships; it helps defray the cost of our communications. But we can also carry you on our non-member mailing list. Annual dues are \$15.00 per person.

I wish to join/renew my membership in the Bellaire Democrats. My payment is attached. ?

I don't want to join now, but I would like to be on your mailing/e-mailing list. ?

Name _____ Precinct _____

Address/zipcode _____

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

Date: _____ Occupation: _____ (required for contributions of \$50 or more)

Interests and volunteer opportunities (optional):

- | | |
|---|--|
| Telephone committee | Intern for future leadership position in Bellaire Democrats |
| Publicity | Democratic candidate campaigns |
| Special events | Technical support: website/listserve |
| Program committee | cannot come to meetings, but would like to assist from home. |
| Other interests, skills, comments _____ | |

Please return your dues check made payable to the Bellaire Democrats to:
Bellaire Democrats, c/o Jane McNeel, 5112 Locust St., Bellaire, TX 77401

For club use: Amount paid _____ Date received _____

"(Preaching about the end time is) inherently interesting. If you have a sign out for the sermon 'Our obligation to the poor', you won't get anybody. If you have a sign out for 'The Internet and the Antichrist' you'll bring them in."

--Craig C. Hill, a professor of New Testament theology at Wesley Theological Seminar in Washington and the author of In God's Time: the Bible and the Future, about biblical prophecy, explaining the recent focus on the Apocalypse by Christian conservatives.