

Bellaire Democrats

Newsletter

February, 2005

General Meeting - Tuesday, March 8, 2005 - 6:30 - 8:00 pm

Tio Pepe's Spanish Restaurant – 5213 Cedar St., in the heart of Bellaire - Come early to eat if you can.

Topic: School Finance in Texas – proposed solutions before the Texas Legislature

Speaker: David Thompson is an attorney for Bracewell and Patterson. He has represented HISD and is an authority on school finance

Fellow Democrats – and others concerned about the U.S.:

We face the New Year with new challenges – as concerned residents of Texas and citizens of the United States – and as Democrats.

Bush has launched his second term with an all-out campaign to end social security as we know it, to make permanent tax cuts that strip needed services from the poor and middle-class, and to continue supporting a far-right religious agenda. Our military men and women continue to be killed and wounded in Afghanistan and Iraq, our national deficit and debt soar, and Constitutional and legislative safeguards are eroded bit by bit.

Our state legislature is strongly linked to the religious right (who contributed heavily to campaigns of Republican legislators). Once again they seek to shift funding from our public schools to private and religious schools through vouchers, and to defeat efforts to restore funding to healthcare for the mentally ill and for poor children.

Mainstream media with its sound bites and conservative ownership fails to adequately inform the American people of these threats.

But, in the face of these challenges, candidates and party leaders at all levels are standing tough and resolute and ready to fight again. The Democratic Party has a new leader in Howard Dean. We look to the energy and innovation that he brought to his campaign to infuse our party and our country with new resolve and new ideas.

The Bellaire Democrats resolve to return our state and our nation to mainstream values that support our middle class and provide safety nets to the disadvantaged. The governor of Massachusetts has declared public education in urban schools “the civil rights issue of our generation.” Over 94 % of Texas children attend public schools. We resist any attempt to divert our tax money from our neighborhood public schools to private and religious school vouchers for the few.

And we will continue to inform – and to expand our communications network to include other Bellaire residents who are worried or ill-informed. We inform through our website, newsletters, e-mails, and informative programs.

So we are reaching out to all concerned residents. Let us know how we can best communicate with you. Become a member if you can – but at least let us keep in touch. See the form for this purpose on the following pages.

I invite your questions, concerns, and interest. Return the questionnaire and form – or contact me at 713-668-7075 or nlomax@houston.rr.com.

Nancy Lomax

President
Bellaire Democrats Adopt Rick Noriega for April

As many of you know, Texas State Representative Rick Noriega of District 145 is serving in the military in Afghanistan. Democratic clubs are sending support packages: deflated soccer and basketballs, good quality toilet paper, white socks, quart ziplock bags, current books and quality magazines (not Playboy), baby wipes, hand cleaning gel, skin moisturizer, disposable cameras, hard candy, nuts.

Please deliver contributions to Nancy Lomax - 4801 Maple (can leave on porch) by April 1st.

Support Harris County Democratic Party

You can contribute to ongoing efforts to shift Texas and the U. S. back to mainstream values by becoming sustaining members of the Harris County Democratic Party. HCDP depends upon these memberships for survival and is currently working toward funding for better organization and communication with Harris County supporters.

Sustaining memberships are \$120 per year (a mere \$10 per month) and can be mailed to Harris County Democratic Party, 1445 N. Loop West, Suite 110, Houston, TX 77008. Phone: 713-802-0085; E-mail: hcdp@hcdp.org

If you want to receive HCDP e-mails but are unable to contribute now, e-mail Sam Keeper at skeeper@houston.rr.com.

**Texas Legislature – Spring Regular Session 2005
Critical Issues Are Before Us Again**

The Texas Legislature is back in regular session, again with a Republican majority in both houses. Although we worked hard to send Jim Dougherty as our representative, Martha Wong was returned as Representative for District 134. (Jim received 44.4% of the district vote, to Wong's 53.6%.) AND – supported by successes on the national level – the religious right is pressing its radical agenda in Texas.

Recall that the 2003 Legislature passed an appropriations bill that cut funding for critical services such as education and health care for the children and the poor (150,000 disadvantaged children lost health coverage under CHIPS) -- forcing the costs of these services onto counties, cities, school districts, and future generations. The Rs are trying to make nice after the contentious and divisive redistricting battle, but there are issues before them that will test their unity and have implications for years to come.

School finance reform is a top issue; the current school finance law has been struck down by a Texas judge. A 128-page bipartisan bill (HB 2) was passed by the Senate in its first week in session and sent to the House. Not surprisingly, it has lots to worry about. (See analysis of HB 2 at www.BellaireDemocrats.org.)

NOTE: One of the experts on school finance, attorney David Thompson, will speak to Bellaire Democrats at the March 8 meeting. See the notice in this newsletter and plan to attend.

School vouchers are the subject of several proposed bills; it's rumored that efforts will be made to tack one of them to the school finance bill at the last minute. House Bill 12 by Corte is the most threatening. These bills would undermine our public education system by draining hundreds of millions of dollars from public schools to fund private and religious schools. (See analysis of HB 12 at www.BellaireDemocrats.org and contact your representatives.)

Other bills endanger Texas children by opposing efforts to restore funding for the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIPS) and limiting the authority of Children's Protective Services.

Gay rights, reproductive rights, and stem cell research are additional targets of the religious rights, as reported by Linda Friedman in the last Bellaire Democrats general meeting. A constitutional amendment against gay marriage is proposed, although gay marriage is already illegal in Texas. Other bills bar legal recognition of all same-sex and opposite-sex unmarried couples, bar gays from foster care and adoption, restrict promising stem-cell research, and (believe it or not!) allow pharmacists not to fill contraceptive prescriptions.

Higher education was targeted early on; universities were asked for budget requests based on 5% cuts in funding, following cuts in recent appropriations.

We urge all Texans to keep informed and to contact their representatives regarding these dangerous bills. See contact information in this newsletter.

For additional information on voucher bills and public education issues, see www.coalition4publicschools.org .

For a listing of bills on major issues and analysis of HB 2 and HB 12, see www.bellairedemocrats.org .

For text and status of bills, go to www.capitol.state.tx.us/tlo/legislation/bill_status.htm or call the legislative hotline at 877-824-7038 - M-F – 8-5 (or until that day's adjournment).

If you can help track these bills for us, contact Nancy Lomax at nlomax@houston.rr.com .

Help Wanted

Volunteers needed to serve on the nominating committee and/or to serve as Bellaire Democrats officers. Also needed, a volunteer to create and manage a comprehensive Bellaire Democrats list serve and to manage the website.

Please respond via the form on the back of this newsletter or call Nancy Lomax at 713-668-7075

Make No Mistake: Bush's Social Security Initiative is NOT Good for Our Country!

People – the experts and ordinary folk – have long acknowledged that Social Security faces financial shortfalls at a future point, and the sooner we face up to some thoughtful adjustments the better – fixes probably involving raising the retirement age and/or the salary cap on payroll tax deductions or modest tax increases. But—what our president is proposing solves none of the shortfall problem and creates many more.

As he did with the situation in Iraq, Bush has decided what he wants to do and is selling it to the country as a pending catastrophe.

The program will **not** be "flat broke" by 2018, the estimated date when benefits payments will exceed payroll tax revenues. Because the creators planned for the variables of the future, surpluses were invested in a trust fund, and the trust fund surplus will be able to cover 100% of benefits until 2042 (according to conservative Social Security Administration estimates) or 2052 (according to Congressional Budget Office estimates) and most of the benefits for decades after that.

Bush's proposal to allow workers to invest in "private" or "personal" accounts would **not** save the program, but would require borrowing of up to \$4.5 trillion over the first 20 years, when funds would be invested, rather than go to the trust fund, and benefits would be paid to older retirees. In addition, administrative costs of tracking these accounts will be 10 to 30 times the cost of administering the current system.

Most analyses conclude that in the very best of scenarios, personal accounts would rarely provide a cent of additional retirement for the investor, and in many cases, would prove risky and leave the worker worse off – possibly much worse off.

So—**what could possibly be motivating Bush's** proposal? Two things. It provides a financial payback to his Wall Street financial contributors (although even they are not excited by the administrative headaches presented by these accounts). And, as Paul Krugman indicated in the New York Times, "His plan is... to **dismantle** the program, replacing it with a system that may be social but doesn't provide security."

Don't be fooled about this. It's too important.

For more information on the social security system, see the full article posted on www.BellaireDemocrats.org.

Sources: New York Times; Time Magazine

Bush's Initiative on Tax Reform

In addition to his aggressive plan for Social Security reform, our president is proposing a plan for radical tax reform. Most of us would agree that the current tax system needs work. But Bush's tax cuts so far have further mangled the system and added to its inequities. So even though he has appointed a high-minded bipartisan committee to propose changes, we tend to be suspicious of what he has in mind.

Stay tuned: the Bellaire Democrats Newsletter will be covering this critical issue in the coming months.

TRUE BLUE CORPORATIONS

These companies were listed in the latest issue of *The Jim Hightower Lowdown* for their support of Democrats. Please buy their products or give them your business whenever possible. (Percentage of political contributions to Democrats and total 2004 contributions.) For more information on True Blue companies, see www.chosetheblue.com.

Working Assets Phone and Credit Cards	100%	\$273,450	Sony Corp. of America	69%	\$287,535	Torchmark Insurance Cos.	88%	\$314,441
YES Network	100%	\$218,825	Apple	81%	\$104,901	Gallo Winery	90%	\$202,581
Barnes & Noble	98%	\$101,773	Westwood One	79%	\$104,912	Progressive Insurance	91%	\$23,763
Costco	98%	\$203,646	Viacom	78%	\$892,513	Bed Bath & Beyond	93%	\$76,725
Spring Industries	97%	\$178,237	Time Warner	77%	\$1,713,621	Boar's Head Foods	100%	\$69,500
Dreamworks SKG	92%	\$189,920	Walt Disney	70%	\$606,504	IBM	68%	\$397,936
Estee Lauder	91%	\$112,712	News Corp.	61%	\$689,549	Cablevision	68%	\$326,842
Mitchell Gold	91%	\$137,610				Hyatt Corp.	87%	\$123,474

State of the U. S. Economy

Fiscal Year	U. S. Government Revenues	U. S. Government Spending	Balance (-)Deficit/(+)Surplus
2005 Estimated Deficit			-\$427 billion
2004 (Bush)	\$1.88 trillion	\$2.29 trillion	- \$412 billion
2003 (Bush)	\$1.78 trillion	\$2.16 trillion	- \$377 billion
2002 (Bush)	\$1.85 trillion	\$2.01 trillion	- \$157 billion
2001 (Bush)	\$1.99 trillion	\$1.86 trillion	+ \$128 billion
2000 (Clinton)	\$2.05 trillion	\$1.79 trillion	+ \$236 billion
1999 (Clinton)	\$1.83 trillion	\$1.70 trillion	+\$125.5 billion

Growth of U. S. National Debt

Debt as of 2/10/05	\$7.623 trillion
Debt as of 9/30/00	\$5.674 trillion

Cost of Iraq/Afghanistan Wars

FY 2005 (est)	\$105 billion
FY 2004	\$ 88 billion
FY 2003	\$ 77 billion

Stay a part of the Bellaire Democrats network! Help us serve you better.

Let us know what we can do for you. What issues would you like us to keep you informed about (Texas or U.S.) ?

The Bellaire Democrats 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.

I wish to join/renew my membership in the Bellaire Democrats (Annual Dues: \$ 15.00). _____

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):

- Volunteer for telephone committee
- Assist with publicity
- Assist with social events
- Volunteer for program committee
- Volunteer for Democratic candidate campaigns
- Volunteer for technical support:

website/listserve

- I cannot come to meetings, but would like to assist from home.
- Other interests, skills, comments _____

Annual Membership runs from June 1st through May 31st - Dues are Payable now for 2005-2006

Please return your completed form to Nancy Lomax, 4801 Maple St., Bellaire, TX 77401

If you wish to renew or to join, please include your dues check made payable to Bellaire Democrats

For more information, please contact Judy Viebig: 713-665-0587 or email: jviebig@att.net

D e m o c r a t i c P r e c i n e t C h a i r s f o r B e l l a i r e

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2004 - 2005*

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This newsletter has been converted to a Word document in order to post it on the web site.