

# Bellaire Democrats

## *Newsletter* June, 2005

Fellow Democrats,

As I look back over my term as President of the Bellaire Democrats, what a time in the political life of this country these last two years have been!

These have been “the best of times and the worst of times.” I treasure the friendships we have made and the work we did together. These relationships will strengthen and sustain us for the work to come.

As I write this, the U.S. Senate leadership still seeks to obliterate the checks and balances that are the core of our democracy in order to force extreme activist judges into our courts, even after valiant bipartisan attempts at compromise. Bush continues to tout deadly changes in our social security system, despite the unpopularity of his proposals across the country. He threatens to veto a bipartisan bill on stem cell research. Our Legislators – both Republicans and Democrats—register their lowest approval ratings in decades. And, the radical religious right continues its efforts to mold our policies and our lives at every level.

The Texas Legislature limps to the finish line with as yet no agreement on woefully inadequate public school financing plans. They’ve protected us from cheerleaders and proposed a constitutional amendment against gay marriage, while sustaining cuts to already dismal social services. So far, we have escaped several last minute ambushes to allow your tax dollars to support private school tuition (vouchers) that would bankrupt our under-funded public school system.

Each of the issues we face is critical, and failure is impossible! I urge your continued involvement in our club, and in our political process at every level. Come to our meetings, join the 4<sup>th</sup> of July Parade, volunteer to help with telephoning or our website, and volunteer to help the Harris County Democratic Party.

I have enjoyed our work and play together. Thank you for your support. I look forward to continuing our work in new ways to build a strong Democratic party in our neighborhood, our state, and our nation.

Nancy Lomax  
President

**Annual Meeting and Picnic – Tuesday, June 7 - 7:00 p.m.**  
**Bellaire Park Gazebo – behind Bellaire City Hall at the corner of So. Rice Avenue and Laurel St.**

Pot luck – bring a food dish to share and folding chairs.  
Drinks, paper plates, and utensils will be provided.

The program will include the election of officers for the coming two years. A slate of nominees will be announced; and nominations will be taken from the floor.

**Monday, June 13 – 7:30 p.m. – The Progressive Forum**

Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. and Mayor Bill White – Our Environmental Challenges  
The first chapter of Kennedy's book *Crimes Against Nature* is entitled "The Mess in Texas."

Hobby Center, Sarofim Hall

Contact Guyleene Ebersole at 713-665-6470 or guyleber@sbcglobal.net for \$12 tickets (limited number available).  
See [www.bellairedemocrats.org](http://www.bellairedemocrats.org) for more information.

## **Harris County Democratic Party's Tribute to Democratic Texas Legislators**

Friday, June 10 (Postponed from May 6) – The Longhorn Cafe – Mexican Buffet - 1200 McKinney at San Jacinto – 4<sup>th</sup> floor

The Bellaire Democrats are a White Hat Sponsor – Tickets \$35 - Contact Harris County Democrats at 713-802-0085

## **Monday, July 4<sup>th</sup> - Make plans to attend the July 4<sup>th</sup> parade and march with the Bellaire Democrats**

(for more information, contact Pat Durio at 713-667-5508 [patrick.durio@durio.cpa.pro](mailto:patrick.durio@durio.cpa.pro))

## **The Harris County Democratic Party needs YOUR help!**

Contribute to the party's efforts to recruit and elect Democratic state candidates by becoming sustaining members for \$120 per year (only \$10 per month). Mail your membership to Harris County Democratic Part, 1445 N. Loop West, Suite 110,

Houston TX 77008. Phone: 713-802-0085; e-mail: [hcdp@hcdp.org](mailto:hcdp@hcdp.org).

**Contribute your time and talents to the Harris County Democratic Party** – For information on the committees that need your help, call the telephone number listed above, or see their website at [www.hcdp.org](http://www.hcdp.org).

**Annual Bellaire Democrats Garage Sale:** September 2005 - (date and details to be announced)  
Save your treasures - volunteers will be needed!

Bellaire Democrats lost one of our staunchest supporters recently. Helen Fisher died after a courageous fight against cancer. Helen was one of the original organizers of our Club. She served as chair in precinct 214, and was active in Harris County Democratic politics for many years. Helen, along with her knowledge, dedication, and tireless work for the Democratic Party, will be sorely missed.

## **What the 79<sup>th</sup> Texas Legislature has done – besides adopting "the Official Cooking Implement of Texas...."\***

School Finance - In March, Mark Trachtenberg, one of the team of attorneys representing the 47 Texas school districts in the school finance reform lawsuit, explained the basis for the lawsuit (many forces are fueling the need for more financing - and most district property taxes are at their max). Trachtenberg also offered a long-range look at needs in Texas based on dramatically changing demographics – and explained why the current bills being reconciled in Austin are far from adequate.

Martha Wong has proudly reported on her vote for HB 2 and \$3 billion new dollars for school districts, but Trachtenberg (and the plaintiffs he represents) indicated that \$7 – 8 billion would be required to fund schools "adequately." To bring TAKS test passage up to 90%, it would take \$10 billion; to close the education gap

between whites and minorities – who will soon be the majority in Texas – it would take an increase of as much as \$143 billion.

The current estimate is that – if they manage to agree upon a school finance bill in these last few days – the resulting bill will add \$3 billion to schools, provide a salary increase at some level for teachers, and move the start of classes to after Labor Day. If a bill is not passed, reports are that they'll let the courts decide. The case will be heard by the Texas Supreme Court in July.

The more generous Democratic version of the school finance bill sponsored by Scott Hochberg was defeated early in the session. Hochberg, our neighbor representative, has continued fighting valiantly for our schools.

Note: The Conference Committee appointed by Speaker Craddick and Lt. Gov. Dewhurst includes only one Latino and no one from large inner-city school districts. Of the 4.4 million current Texas students, 43.8% are Latinos; of the pre-K students, 64% are Latinos.

Tax bill to fund school reform (and numerous supplemental bills) – Conferees are at work attempting to reduce the state's property taxes – while coming up with funding for our schools from other sources. The results are too close to call at this point, but it seems clear they'll raise the regressive State sales tax.

Public Education – Vouchers - After diligent lobbying efforts by school districts, advocacy groups, and many of us – it looked as if all of the voucher bills were dying. But, no, on May 19<sup>th</sup> most of the provisions of HB 1263 were added to the bill reauthorizing the Texas Education Agency – provisions that would cost HISD approximately \$200 million in the first two years! The battle in the House was fierce – and the voucher measure was defeated by a point of order at 10:00 p.m. on May 23<sup>rd</sup>. In the words of one House employee in attendance: "It was great! I would have paid to see it! And the good guys won!" (Martha Wong voted against the proposal to remove the voucher provision – she voted for vouchers!)

CHIP – More than 175,000 children lost Children's Health Insurance coverage because of cuts to social services by the 2003 Legislature. Every state dollar for CHIP is matched by \$2.65 in federal funds; Texas is losing \$330 million for health care for Texas children. Groups have lobbied for the return of these CHIP funds, and a number of bills have proposed to restore funding and liberalize the time frame for applying. At the last minute, final passage is still pending.

Gay marriage - The bill proposing a constitutional amendment against gay marriage passed the Senate at the last minute, capturing the votes of three Democrats who had been committed to its defeat, possibly as a result of heavy lobbying by their constituents. This will now go to the people for vote. (Martha Wong was present, but declined to vote on this measure.)

Women's Reproductive Rights - The bill allowing pharmacists to refuse to fill prescriptions for contraceptives died. But—a bill requiring written parental consent for abortions of minors, as well as restricting the medical conditions under which a woman can obtain an abortion after the 28<sup>th</sup> week, appears headed for passage. (Martha Wong voted for both these amendments.) These provisions were judged less harmful than competing language – but the religious right continues its assault on women's reproductive rights.

Medical malpractice, Workers' Comp, Insurance – Attorney Troy Chandler spoke to the Bellaire Democrats on May 10 regarding a number of bills that illustrate that the insurance lobby is making out like a bandit in legislation this year.

*\*In case you missed it: it's the Dutch oven.*

## Texas rankings -- to keep in mind when considering our Legislature's actions

		<u>Ranking in U. S.</u>
<b>State Spending</b>	Total general expenditures	50 <sup>th</sup>
	Sales tax dependency	2 <sup>nd</sup>
<b>Education</b>	% population graduated from high school	46 <sup>th</sup>
	State aid per pupil	41 <sup>st</sup>
<b>Health Care</b>	% population without health insurance	1 <sup>st</sup>
	% poor covered by Medicaid	44 <sup>th</sup>
<b>State of Children</b>	% without health insurance	1 <sup>st</sup>
	% fully immunized 2-year-olds	50 <sup>th</sup>
	% under age 18 living in poverty	9 <sup>th</sup>

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, www.taxadmin.org, National Education Association, Morgan Quitno – State Rankings 2002, United Health Foundation, U. S. Centers for Disease Control, Kids Count Data Book – Annie E. Casey Foundation 2002.

"This is what I mean by my constant insistence upon "moderation" in government. Should any political party attempt to abolish social security, unemployment insurance, and eliminate labor laws and farm programs, you would not hear of that party again in our political history. There is a tiny splinter group, of course, that believes you can do these things. Among them ... a few other Texas oil millionaires, and an occasional politician or business man from other areas. Their number is negligible and they are stupid." President Dwight Eisenhower, a Republican, November 8, 1954 *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower Volume XV*

Thanks to everyone who responded to the Bellaire Democrats questionnaire – February newsletter "What issues would you like us to keep you informed about....?" These comments were received:

- Proposed changes to Social Security and Medicare
- U. S. International relations
- CHIP (Children's Health Insurance Program)
- Medicare and Medicaid
- Campaign Finance Reform
- Legislative issues
- Taxation
- Health insurance
- Funding for public schools
- We will address these subjects as we can in future issues of this newsletter. In this issue, we address the adjourning Texas Legislative session, which includes funding for public schools and CHIP.

### **A Nation of the People, by the People, and for the People?**

Amnesty International reported that the United States bears most responsibility for the bleak picture on human rights around the world. The U.S. government was cited for its treatment of prisoners held without trial at Guantanamo Bay in violation of international law, calling the prison "the gulag of our times". Also cited were the Bush administration's attempts to re-define torture, and the inadequate investigation of the abuse of detainees at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. (Reuters, May 25, 2005)

Recently 49 Republican Senators, including Sens. Hutchison and Cornyn, voted to kill an increase in the minimum

wage of \$5.15 per hour, which hasn't had an increase since 1996. That's \$10,600 a year for a 40-hour work week. Note: Senators have voted themselves a raise each year for the past five years, for a total increase of \$28,500.

Do you wonder what may be behind Bush's campaign for private accounts for Social Security? Consider the top five contributors to his 2004 campaign: Morgan Stanley - \$600,480; Merrill Lynch - \$580,004; Price Waterhouse Coopers - \$512,500; UBS Americas - \$468,075; and Goldman Sachs - \$388,600. It remains to be seen how many Americans will buy Bush's proposals. So far, not many.

One bright spot... seems that President Bush's appeals to the religious right can occasionally backfire. Bush gave a commencement speech at Calvin College in Michigan, an evangelical Christian institution. Prior to his speech, more than 100 faculty and staff signed a letter, published in a local newspaper, criticizing his policies on the Iraq war, his generosity to the wealthy instead of the poor, his environmental rulings, and his generally un-Christian-like policies. Many graduates wore buttons protesting the use of Christian teachings to justify a political agenda.

**State of the U. S. Economy**

Fiscal Year	Surplus (+) Deficit(-)
2006 (Bush)	-365 billion (est)
2005 (Bush) Deficit	-\$427 billion
2004 (Bush)	- \$412 billion
2003 (Bush)	- \$377 billion
2002 (Bush)	- \$157 billion
2001 (Bush)	+ \$128 billion
2000 (Clinton)	+ \$236 billion

**Growth of U. S. National Debt**

Est. FY 2005	\$8. trillion +
As of 5/23/05	\$7.79 trillion
FY 2004	\$7.35 trillion
Debt as of 9/30/00	\$5.67 trillion

**Cost of Iraq/Afghanistan Wars**

American Deaths as of 5/24/2005 (Iraq only)	1,639
American Troops Wounded as of 5/24/05 (Iraq only)	12,516
Military and Reconstruction Costs through FY 05	\$ 300+ billion

So far the federal deficit has siphoned more than \$1.6 trillion from the Social Security Trust Fund, and Republicans are warning that it's going to be hard or impossible to pay it back.

Sources include CNN, the Hightower Lowdown, and Reuters

**Election of Officers To Be Held on Tuesday, June 7th, 2005**

All offices are up for election—please attend the General Meeting on June 7th and consider running for office. All nominations from the floor will be accepted if seconded. The Nominating Committee is chaired by Lynn McBee. Please contact Lynn to volunteer or suggest names for officers – 713-665-0557 – lynnmb@hal-pc.org .

All current members who have been members in good standing for three months are eligible (please make certain your dues are paid and current). Serving on the Executive Committee takes very little time, and it's a great way to participate!

The **President** shall preside at all meetings and be the official spokesperson for the Executive Committee and for the organization. The President shall create committees as needed and shall appoint their members and chairpersons, with the consent of the Executive Committee. The President shall have the power to call special meetings. The President shall be the official spokesperson at all meetings or gatherings with other Democratic organizations, Democratic officeholders, and/or candidates seeking office.

The **First Vice President** shall preside in the absence of the President. The First Vice President shall additionally be responsible for arrangements of membership meeting locations and programs.

The **Second Vice President** presides in the absence of both the President and First Vice President. The Second Vice President shall additionally be responsible for planning and implementing special and social events.

The **Secretary** shall keep the minutes of all meetings and be prepared to report those minutes at the next scheduled meeting if requested by the President. The Secretary shall make such records available to all officers as requested. The Secretary shall additionally be responsible for coordinating publicity for the organization through newsletters and/or in the media.

The **Treasurer** shall receive and deposit all monies of the organization and shall record all financial transactions and report them to the Executive Committee and the general membership. Membership dues received by the Treasurer shall determine active membership status and the Treasurer shall supervise the accuracy of membership records. The Treasurer shall additionally be appointed by the President to be the Treasurer of the Bellaire Democrats Political Action Committee and be responsible for filing all reports required by law with the Texas Ethics Commission.

The **Parliamentarian/Sergeant at Arms** shall help keep order at the meetings, as may be needed, and use Roberts Rules of Order, Newly Revised, to make sure proper parliamentary procedures are maintained during all meetings when requested by the President.

NOTE: Dues for all members are payable effective June 1.

*(The full text of the Bellaire Democrats Constitution and Bylaws can be found on our website:  
[www.bellairedemocrats.org](http://www.bellairedemocrats.org))*

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):

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer for telephone committee                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer for program committee                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Assist with publicity  | <input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer for Democratic candidate campaigns       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Assist with social events                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Volunteer for technical support: website/listserve |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I cannot come to meetings, but would like to assist from home. |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 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 Guyleene Ebersole, 4301 Bissonnet St., Apt. 9, 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](mailto:jviebig@att.net)

### **INFORMATION**

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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](mailto:vice.president@whitehouse.gov)

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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>

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U. S. Congressman for Bellaire  
John Culberson, District 9  
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

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

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

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### **Other Information Sources**

KUHF - 88.7 FM: National Public Radio (NPR)

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

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

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

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State House Representative (adj. dist.)  
Scott Hochberg – District 137 (D)  
(512)463-0389 / 832-252-7336  
<http://scotthochberg.com>

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

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

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

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

Moveon.org: [www.moveon.org](http://www.moveon.org)  
TrueMajority.com: [www.truemajority.com](http://www.truemajority.com) (Ben Cohen's site)  
Mother Jones: [www.motherjones.com](http://www.motherjones.com)  
Center for Public Integrity: [www.publicintegrity.org](http://www.publicintegrity.org)

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

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

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

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