

# Bellaire Democrats

## *Newsletter*

September, 2005

**General Meeting -Tuesday, September 13, 2005 – 6:30 to 8:00 p.m.**

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

**Speaker: Scott Hochberg - State Representative for neighboring District 137**

**Subject: The Texas Legislature and Education and Public School Finance in Texas**

Democrat Scott Hochberg is serving his seventh term as State Representative from District 137, to the west of Bellaire. He serves on the House Committee on Public Education and the House Committee on Corrections, and in past sessions has chaired the Education Subcommittee and the Select Committee on Public School Finance. He is considered an expert on school finance in Texas and will speak to us on the failure of the Texas Legislature to pass education and school finance bills.

**Garage Sale – Saturday, September 10 – 8:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. – 4709 Maple - Volunteers and Good Stuff needed!**

Bring contributions to 4801 Maple between Monday, September 5, and Friday, September 9  
Household items, books, games, CDs, DVDs, clothing, furniture, toys.....etc.

Volunteers are needed Friday to set up, Saturday 7:00 – 3:00 to assist in sale and clean up.  
To volunteer, call Barbara Donovan at 713-664-9416.

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**Bellaire Democrats to Sponsor a Non-Partisan "Bellaire Election Ballot Forum"  
Thursday, October 6, 2005 - Candidates available at 7:00 p.m. – Program at 7:15 p.m.  
Bellaire Civic Center Auditorium. 7009 South Rice Ave., Bellaire**

The forum will provide the opportunity for residents to meet the candidates for positions on the ballot November 8<sup>th</sup> and to hear them speak. The Bellaire ballot will include City of Bellaire Mayor, City Council Positions 1, 3, and 5; and two City Bond Propositions; nine State Constitutional Amendments; Houston Community College District V Trustee; and Houston Independent School Trustee, District V.

### **2005 Election Dates to Remember**

October 11	Last day to register to vote
October 24	First day of early voting
November 1	Last day to apply for ballot by mail
November 4	Last day of early voting
November 8	Uniform Election Day

### **Bellaire Democrats Receive an American Flag from Rick Noriega in Afghanistan**

In appreciation for the packages sent to the his military unit in Afghanistan and the local Afghan children, State Representative Rick Noriega gave the Bellaire Democrats an American flag flown at the Kabul Military Training Center on July 4, 2005. Rep. Noriega is serving as Garrison Commander in the training center. The Bellaire Democrats plan to carry this flag in next year's Fourth of July Parade.

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### **School Finance in Texas**

*How much incompetence does it take to demand a change in government....?*

Texans who have been following **Texas public school funding** the last few years must have been asking that question.

Since January 2003, the Texas Legislature has met in two regular and six special sessions – most of them dedicated to school finance reform – at a **cost to Texas taxpayers of \$23,000 a day** just for Legislators' per diems. The last session adjourned this month with **nothing to show** on school funding – except a delay in delivery of school text

books and teachers disillusioned from seeing their pay raise proposals go down in defeat.

**Who or what is to blame?** The Houston Chronicle points to "The Three Stooges," Governor Perry, Lt. Governor Dewhurst, and Speaker of the House Craddick. Perry's office blames the Legislature. Craddick has blamed the school superintendents, as well as Dewhurst and the Senate. Martha Wong blamed Scott Hochberg's amendment to HB 2 in this last session. The President of the Texas PTA takes the blame for successful pro-education lobbying against bad bills.

**The issues are clear....but solutions will take steadfast dedication to Texas schoolchildren and accountability of the business community:**

- Since 1989, five major court orders have pressured the Texas Legislature to increase funding for public schools and reduce funding disparities among school districts.
- State aid and local property taxes are the primary sources of funding for public schools. Property taxes are capped by law at \$1.50 per \$100 valuation. Most districts are at the cap, amounting to a state property tax, prohibited by the Texas constitution.
- Governor Perry and our Legislators Martha Wong and Kyle Janek promised lower property taxes. Perry mandated that school funding must be "revenue neutral": Increase school funding and lower property taxes without net tax increases.
- Defeated proposals shifted taxes by increasing sales taxes and replacing the Texas franchise tax (that 90% of Texas businesses avoid) with an alternate business tax.
  - Increased sales taxes shift the overall tax burden to families earning less than \$100,000.
  - Business taxes are opposed by Texas businesses, big contributors to Republican lawmakers.
- Any of the proposed school finance bills would have amounted to no more than short-term Band-aids on Texas' rapidly growing school finance problem.
- In spite of ostensible gubernatorial and legislative commitment to teacher pay raises, in the end there were no raises. (An education bill containing raises passed in this year's regular session and was vetoed by Perry.)
  - The state's minimum teacher salary scale starts at \$24,240.
  - During the 2003-04 school year, Texas teacher pay ranked 33<sup>rd</sup> in the nation.
- Nationally, only about two-thirds of students who enter ninth grade graduate with regular diplomas four years later. The number is smaller for minorities; only one in five students of color is prepared for college. In 2002, the high school completion rate in Texas ranked 45<sup>th</sup> in the nation; one source recently put Texas at dead last.
- Texas ranks 41<sup>st</sup> nationally in state aid per pupil. All educational rankings are equally as dismal.
- This month, the U. S. Census Bureau announced that minorities—who have historically had lower levels of educational attainment and average earnings—are now the majority in Texas. The percentage of Hispanics is increasing rapidly. Today, of 4.4 million Texas students, 43.8% are Hispanic; 64% of pre-K students are Hispanic. If current trends continue, Texans without high school diplomas will increase from 18% to 30% by 2040.
- In spite of these needs, when the Legislators adjourned this month, they left a surplus of \$1.8 billion sitting in the state treasury.
- More than 300 Texas school districts sued the State for financial remedy, and last year won their case. The State appealed to the Texas Supreme Court. A hearing was held July 6; a ruling is expected this fall.
- Current leaders in Austin are counting on the Supreme Court, (all Republicans, many appointed by Governor Perry), to save them from having to make any decisions or major changes to school financing.

Within the next few months, we'll all know what the Texas Supreme Court says. **These data suggest that it really doesn't matter: Texas needs leaders and lawmakers who care about our children and our future.**

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**The Texas Freedom Network rated legislators in the 79<sup>th</sup> session on their votes on the following (\*education) issues:**

- Privatizing public schools\*
- Eliminating quality education standards\*
- Banning gays and lesbians from being foster parents
- Private school vouchers\*
- Requiring abstinence programs to report their effectiveness
- Restoring CHIP funding
- A constitutional ban on gay marriage and civil unions
- Replacing private school vouchers with a public choice program\*

**Martha Wong, Representative for Bellaire's District 134, voted wrong on 7 of these 8 values – 13%.**

*(To view the full Legislative scorecard and for more information, see [www.tfn.org](http://www.tfn.org) .)*

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## The True Cost of Bush's War

"The human cost of the more than 2,000 American military personnel killed and 14,500 wounded so far in Iraq and Afghanistan is all too apparent. But the financial toll is still largely hidden from public view and, like the suffering of those who have lost loved ones, will persist long after the fighting is over. "

"...if the American military presence in the region lasts another five years, the total outlay for the war could stretch to more than \$1.3 trillion, or \$11,300 for every household in the United States."

*The Trillion-Dollar War*, By Linda Bilmes, New York Times Op Ed Contributor, August 20, 2005. For the full article search on the New York Times website: [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com) or [www.truthout.com](http://www.truthout.com).

### State of the U. S. Economy

Fiscal Year	Surplus (+) Deficit(-)
2005 (Bush)	- \$314 billion (est)
2000 (Clinton)	+ \$236 billion

### Growth of U. S. National Debt

Est. FY 2005	\$8. trillion +
Debt as of 9/30/00	\$5.67 trillion
Balance of Trade	- \$195 billion

### Cost of Iraq/Afghanistan Wars

American Deaths in Iraq as of 8/26/05	1867
American Deaths in Afghanistan as of 8/26/05	231
American Troops Wounded in Iraq/Afghanistan	14,120
Military and Reconstruction Costs through FY 05	\$ 300+ billion

### Ellen Cohen – Democratic Candidate for State Representative District 134

Ellen Cohen, President and CEO of Houston Area Women's Center since 1990, has declared her candidacy for State Representative of District 134, in which Bellaire is located. In addition to her 15 years' service leading the Houston Area Women's Center, Ms. Cohen has served on dozens of Houston area boards and committees and received numerous service awards.

The position is currently held by Republican Martha Wong (see information regarding Rep. Wong's voting record elsewhere in this newsletter).

We welcome Ms. Cohen to the race and have enthusiastically thrown the support of the Bellaire Democrats behind her. As the campaign progresses, there will be further information in this newsletter about her campaign and how you can help.

### What others are doing to address Texas' educational challenges

Carolyn Boyle, until recently the coordinator of the Coalition for Public Schools, has resigned that position to form a new, nonpartisan political action committee, the Texas Parent PAC. The PAC--[www.txparentpac.com](http://www.txparentpac.com)--is raising funds to support selected legislative candidates of any party who are committed to strengthening Texas public schools and providing better school funding.

### Support the Texas and the Harris County Democratic Party

All levels of the Democratic Party need the financial support of each of us to change the direction of our country and our state.

The major annual fundraiser for the **Harris County Democrats** is the **Johnson-Rayburn Dinner on September 30, 2005**. The speaker for this year's event is Colorado Senator Ken Salazar. The dinner is a great event, with a silent auction and lots of opportunities to visit with dedicated Democrats.

If you would like to reserve your place at a table sponsored by the Bellaire Democrats, contact Patrick Durio at [patrick.durio@durio.pro](mailto:patrick.durio@durio.pro) or call him at (713) 667-5508. The price of each ticket to the event is \$125.

If you cannot attend, but would like to support the Harris County Democrats with your time and/or money, go to <http://www.hcdp.org> or call them at 713-739-7785.

The **Texas Democrats** have scraped the bottom of the money barrel to successfully defeat destructive bills before the Texas Legislature such as the Republican attempt to require more ID and proof of residency to vote in Texas.

The good news is that National Party Chairman Howard Dean has committed four field workers to the Texas Democrats.

We encourage you to contribute to the **Texas Democrats** by going to <http://www.txdemocrats.org/contribute> .

### **Thanks to Volunteers for the July 4<sup>th</sup> Festival and Parade**

Enthusiastic Bellaire Democrats volunteers marched in the annual parade, decorated a booth and sold tickets, put patriotic "tattoos" on children, and demonstrated "Care packages" to send to U.S. military in Iraq and Iraqi children.

Our thanks to volunteers: Pat Durio, Danny Durio, Lee Norris, Linda Norris, Fred Cook, Lynn McBee, Katie O'Harra, Rich Levy, Tom Levy, Alex Schroller, Gary Schroller, Elaine Schroller, Keith Guillory and son, Carolyn Mata and grandson, Prem Dewan, Gay Dewan.

### **Election Results**

The election of officers for the Bellaire Democrats was held at the General Meeting on June 7, 2005. The current officers were elected to a second term. Jamie Allen was elected to the office of Parliamentarian. To assist in "growing" future leadership, the role of "Interns" was proposed and agreed upon, with the following volunteers for interns: Marilyn Wilder - President Intern, Alexia Sidney - Vice President Intern, Elaine Riquelmy - 1st VP Intern, and Carolyn Mata - 2nd VP Intern

Thanks to everyone who came out for our Picnic in the Park. It proved to be a lively and enjoyable evening!

### **Memorial for Helen Fisher**

A task force made up of Lynn McBee, Jamie Allen, and Anson Barnes was formed to recommend an appropriate memorial for one of the founders of the Bellaire Democrats, Helen Fisher, who died recently after a long illness. The task force will present their recommendation at the September 13 General Meeting.

### **Campaign for a National Majority**

Several Bellaire Democrats attended the Houston Area Kickoff Party for this new organization dedicated to supporting Democratic candidates for State Executive offices who show promise for progressively higher offices—history has shown that governors consistently make the best presidential candidates.

We encourage support of efforts such as Campaign for a National Majority and suggest that Bellaire Democrats visit <http://www.nationalmajority.org> to learn more about this organization and make contributions.

### **We Need Your E-mail Address!!**

The Bellaire Democrats are trying to move our communications into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century -- and we're discovering we don't have current correct e-mail addresses for many of you.

If you received a monthly e-mail from the Bellaire Democrats dated August 23<sup>rd</sup> – then you are up to date. If you didn't – and you'd like to hear from us electronically – please e-mail Pat Durio at [patrick.durio@durio.pro](mailto:patrick.durio@durio.pro) with your correct e-mail.

Many of you who receive this newsletter may not be current members. If that's the case, we'd especially love to receive your e-mail address in a membership form with dues! Just use the form above and mail it to Jane McNeel at 5112 Locust St., Bellaire, TX 77401

### **Proposed Change in Dues and By-Laws**

To clarify and simplify membership dues for the Bellaire Democrats – and to make membership available to all – the change in membership dues indicated below is proposed.

In compliance with the by-laws, the proposed change is printed below and will be read at the September 13 meeting and voted on at the next general meeting.

#### **BY-LAWS**

A. Membership dues for the Bellaire Democrats shall be \$15.00 per person a suggested amount of \$5.00 - \$25.00 per household per year (based on 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.

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

## 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):

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|---|--|
| ? Telephone committee                     | ? Intern for future leadership position in Bellaire Democrats    |
| ? Publicity                               | ? Democratic candidate campaigns                                 |
| ? Special events                          | ? Technical support: website/listserv                            |
| ? Program committee                       | ? I 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**

### *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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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)

#### **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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Channel 8: Public Broadcasting System  
(PBS) particularly NOW with Bill Moyers  
(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)