



Bellaire Democrats

Newsletter

February, 2007

General Meeting – Tuesday, February 13, 2007 – 7:00 to 8:00 p.m.
Tio Pepe's Spanish Restaurant – 5213 Cedar St., Bellaire – Come at 6:00 to eat if you can.

Speaker: Jay Crossley, Gulf Coast Institute
Topic: Access and Mobility: Considering the Environment in Transportation and Land Use

The Gulf Coast Institute is a non-profit organization dedicated to assuring a livable community in the Houston Gulf Coast Region with a strong and healthy economy, community, and environment. It promotes policies for growth that don't compromise the needs of future generations. It is a member of the Citizens' Environmental Coalition. The most recent edition of its magazine *Tomorrow* focuses on access and mobility in the Houston region.

Officers for 2005-2006

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Dear Bellaire Democrats,

Although a lot changed on November 7th, the Texas Legislature didn't shift much, and our U.S. Congressman and Senators remain the same. I hope you will keep in touch with these folks regularly using the contact information in this newsletter.

Please don't assume that because you voted for Ellen Cohen that she knows how you feel about the issues. Ellen needs to be able to tell her colleagues that her constituents have called and sent her letters, and she must represent their wishes when she votes.

A voucher bill has already been introduced in the Texas House and our own Senator, Kyle Janek, will probably introduce one in the Senate soon. I have already spoken to Janek expressing my opposition, and I urge you to contact Ellen Cohen and Janek to tell them where you stand on vouchers, health care for children, the death penalty, funding for parks, and whatever you care passionately about.

On Wednesday, February 7th, the pro-voucher side is planning a rally at the Capitol. Catholic schools in the Dallas area are closing for the day to encourage families to attend. The pro-voucher lobby will pay for bus loads of people from San Antonio as usual.

The Texas Coalition for Public Schools believes it will be more effective to rally the public school supporters later for a hearing. Instead, the Coalition plans to have a virtual lobby day on February 7th. I hope you will join the forty organizations of the Coalition by calling Ellen Cohen and Kyle Janek on February 7th. Although we want them to hear from you on the same day of the pro-voucher rally, contact them anytime if you miss the 7th.

Here are some points to stress about vouchers. Vouchers will drain money away from your neighborhood public schools. Vouchers are a budget buster. Texas can't afford to pay for private education as well as public education. Parents in HISD already have many choices in our magnet school programs. Parents and taxpayers want accountability. **Public schools are accountable, private schools are not.**

Please put Monday March 26th on you calendar and see if you can take off work that day. That's the Texas Freedom Network Lobby Day at the Capitol, and you can sign up on their web site: <http://www.tfn.org/subscribe/> Our friends at TFN do a great job of providing information and organizing the day. Wouldn't it be fun to have a carload of Bellaire Democrats invading the capitol?

On the national front, please contact our Congressman John Culberson, and Senators Kay Bailey Hutchison, and John Cornyn and ask them to repeal the Military Commissions Act that passed shortly before November 7th. The Military Commissions Act embodies many of the Bush-Cheney abuses that have shamed our country: extraordinary rendition, torture, indefinite imprisonment without charge or access to a lawyer, and illegal eavesdropping on our calls and emails. ("Extraordinary rendition" means the U.S. government can kidnap individuals, whisk them away to foreign countries to be held indefinitely in secret torture cells.) Hundreds of detainees have been held at Guantanamo Bay Naval Base for nearly five years with no access to courts, no meaningful contact with their families, and no prospect of a fair trial. (www.aclu.org)

Thanks for all that you do,

Nancy Lomax
President

Bellaire Democrats Nominating Committee

The Nominating Committee is actively seeking nominees for officers of the Bellaire Democrats for the two-year period beginning June 1, 2007. Club officers are: President, First Vice President, Second Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, and Parliamentarian. Duties and responsibilities of these positions are posted in the Bylaws at www.BellaireDemocrats.org.

To be eligible to serve as an officer, a nominee must have been a dues-paying member for at least three months prior to the election – currently scheduled for May 2007.

Members are urged to submit recommendations for individuals you feel would do a great job, or volunteer your own name for consideration. (Others submitted as nominees should be consulted first to ensure their availability.)

Please contact Lynn McBee at lynnmb@hal-pc.org or 713-665-0557 to submit a name for consideration.

Harris County Democratic Party – Countdown to 2008

The Harris County Democratic Party is gearing up for the 2008 elections. We are all invited to put on our jeans and boots and Two-Step into the Election Season on **Saturday, February 24, 2007**, with their first fundraiser of the year – the **Texas Two-Step Celebration**. For more details, contact HCDP or call or e-mail Nancy Lomax at 713-668-7075 or nlomax@houston.rr.com.

They also are badly in need of office volunteers who can offer one-half day assistance each week. All are encouraged to become sustaining members of the HCDP. They will need our help to Turn Harris County Blue!

**Contact the Harris County Democratic Party:
www.hcdp.org or 713-802-0085.**

Democracy for America National Training Academy March 3 and 4, 2007 – 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Democracy for Houston will host a Democracy for America Training Academy on Saturday and Sunday, March 3 and 4. The sessions provide training for political campaigns, candidates, organizations, activists, and grassroots leaders. It will include presentations by political authors, lecturers, and organizers from across the U.S.

Democracy for America is a political action committee inspired by the presidential campaign of Howard Dean dedicated to supporting fiscally responsible, socially progressive candidates at all levels of government – and fighting far-right and special interest influences. Its goal is to rebuild the Democratic Party from the bottom up.

For more information, watch for the next Bellaire Democrats E-blast or contact Nancy Lomax at 713-668-7075 or nlomax@houston.rr.com.

INFORMATION

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](http://www.whitehouse.gov/contact/vice.president@whitehouse.gov)

United States Senators
Kay Bailey Hutchison (R)
202-224-5922
Houston: 713-653-3456 Fax: 713-209-3459
<http://www.hutchison.senate.gov>

John Cornyn (R)
Houston: 713-572-3337 Fax: 713-275-3777
<http://www.cornyn.senate.gov>

U. S. Congressman for Bellaire Area
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

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

Texas State Senator:
Kyle Janek - District 17 (R)
7777 SW Freeway, Ste. 102
Houston, Texas 77074
(713) 272-8929 Fax: (713) 272-8956
Austin Phone:
(800) 445-2635

Texas State House Representative:
Ellen Cohen– District 134 (D)
Rm. EXT E2.302
PO Box 2910
Austin, TX 78768
(512)463-0389
<http://www.house.state.tx.us>
3355 W. Alabama, Ste. 1250
Houston, TX 77098
(713)660-0899

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/>

The Progressive Forum – Spring 2007 Schedule of Speakers

All are at 7:30 p.m. at the Wortham Center. Tickets start at \$19 and may be obtained online through the link at www.progressiveforumhouston.org or by calling 832-251-0706. (Tickets at the door are \$5 more.)

Monday, February 19	Garrison Keillor – <i>Lake Wobegon Days</i>
Monday, March 19	Tim Flannery – Australian scientist and author of <i>The Weather Makers: How Man is Changing the Climate and What it Means for Life on Earth</i>
Thursday, April 12	Joe Klein – Senior <i>Time</i> magazine columnist – <i>Islam, Iraq, and the War on Terror</i>
Monday, May 21	Anna Deavere Smith – African American author, playwright, performing artist, and teacher.

(January 2007 from pg. 3)

The President's determination to increase presidential power continues unabated. A recent example is the purge of U. S. attorneys—those who are investigating and successfully prosecuting government officials on corruption charges. This unusual action indicates that the administration is worried about where corruption investigations might lead.

So---where does this leave us? Starting NOW, we must focus on the 2008 elections.

The American voters have broken the backbone of the Republican monopoly, and there is new hope for bipartisanship in our government. However, much work remains to be done to reverse the damage done to our country by the Republicans and the Bush administration. We can and must work to elect more Democrats at every level of government, including to that third House – at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

January 2007 - Where are we?

Election 2006 Results – We are all excited about the Democrats' takeover of the House and the Senate – not to mention the election of the first woman Speaker of the House! The House campaign-promised bills passed handily during the first 100 hours with bipartisan support. Accomplishments include:

- A stronger set of ethics policies, covering legislative gifts, travel, and limiting lobbyist largesse, etc.
- A \$2.10 increase to the federal minimum wage, the first increase in 10 years (passed 315-116).
- A requirement that the government negotiate with pharmaceutical companies over Medicare drug costs.
- Expanded federal funding for stem cell research. (Previously passed and vetoed by Bush.)
- A decrease in interest rate to be charged on higher education student loans.
- Requirement to enact bipartisan recommendations of the 9/11 Commission.
- Rollback of subsidies for energy companies and investment in renewable energy resources.

With the help of Bellaire Democrats, Ellen Cohen was elected to the Texas Legislature for our District 134, garnering 54.65% of the total vote in a district thought to be 60% Republican.

Texas Parent PAC, created to strengthen public education, endorsed seven Democratic and five Republican House candidates, all of whom won (one defeated longtime pro-voucher Education Committee Chair, Kent Grusendorf). Democrats gained six seats across Texas, which, together with the additional moderate Republicans, bodes well for such issues as public education. Democrats need only seven more seats to take back the State House of Representatives.

80th Texas Legislature now in session – Despite a struggle for leadership in reaction to his strong-arm tactics, Tom Craddick was re-elected Speaker of the House. Issues facing the Legislature include:

- Spending, including the projected \$14 billion surplus (one-half unspent from last session) – which is needed to cover the property tax cuts, restore human service cuts, and fund education.
- Correcting inequities in the new business tax (gross margins tax), part of recent school finance bills.
- Restoring earlier cuts to Children's Health Insurance Program and other social services. Texas has 1.4 million uninsured children, the highest percentage in the U.S., more than half of whom are eligible for CHIP or Medicaid.
- Public education – Texas students are increasing by 75-80,000 per year, 80% of which are low-income, mostly from non-English speaking families. Texas teachers are resigning. Many favor replacing the TAKS test.
- Higher education – Average tuition and fees increased 95.5% between 1999 and 2006.
- Immigration – Several harsh, even cruel, bills have been proposed.
- Women's health and reproductive rights – Some bills expand services; some limit them.
- Environment – Parks funding, water conservation, opposition to coal power plants, etc. Texas has the worst carbon emissions levels in U. S.

The situation in Iraq is grave and deteriorating, per the Iraq Study Group report.

American deaths in Iraq as of January 31 stand at 3,080. The UN estimates Iraq deaths by violent acts at 34,000 minimum (other estimates are higher) in 2006, almost 100 per day.

Costs of Iraq and Afghanistan wars - Congress has committed \$360 billion directly to the war efforts. Direct costs (salaries, equipment, contractors, rebuilding costs, etc.) are totaling almost \$8 billion per month in Iraq. For both wars, the Pentagon estimates it will spend about \$9.7 billion per month during the 2007 fiscal year. However, war costs that include indirect costs (hardware replacement, veterans' health care and disability payments, lost productivity and economic stimulus, etc.) exceed \$1 trillion, with some economists estimating \$2 trillion.

National debt stands at \$8.68 trillion compared to \$5.67 trillion in September 2000. Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke recently reported that the federal debt, together with rising budget deficits, the nation's huge trade deficit, and the increasing costs of Social Security and Medicare, pose **serious threats to the U. S. economy** and require "early and meaningful action." He also observed that "tax cuts don't pay for themselves."

The inequity between American workers and the very rich continues to grow. Unless Bush's tax cuts are discontinued, over the approved 10-year period the richest 1% of Americans will receive tax cuts totaling \$477 billion or \$342,000. By 2010, 52% of the total tax reduction will go to Americans with incomes averaging \$1.5 million.

Wages and salaries account for the lowest share of GDP ever recorded. Over the past five years, U.S. jobs have lagged 7 million behind population growth - while corporate profits are at the highest level in two generations.

Over the next four years, the federal government will provide some \$30 billion in tax cuts to the very rich, while a \$14 billion shortfall in government financing of the State Children's Health Insurance Program will require cutting 1.5 million children from the program. Per a New York Times editorial: **"Depriving children of adequate health care while giving the rich tax benefits that were intended for average Americans is flat out wrong."**

The integrity of our election system becomes more critical as more states move to electronic voting. In a heavily Democratic county in Florida, a wealthy Republican was declared winner of a Congressional seat by 369 votes – while 18,000 voters (almost 20%) didn't register a choice in that race. The Democratic candidate has sued for a revote, two federal advisory groups have recommended voter-verified paper records, and legislation to require such records will soon be introduced. And now the Governor of Florida has requested a state-wide return to paper ballots!

(See January 2007 pg. 2)

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 \$5.00 to \$25 per person or family - just send what you can!

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

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 _____

Democratic Precinct Chairs for Bellaire			
Precinct 128	Lynn McBee	713-665-0557	lynmb@hal-pc.org
Precinct 182	Patrick Durio	713-667-5508	patrick.durio@durio.cpa.pro
Precinct 214	Catherine O'Hara	713-758-4588	cohara@velaw.com
Precinct 215	Guyleene Ebersole	713-665-6470	guyleben@sbcglobal.net
Precinct 268	Fred Cook	713-660-9116	hfcook@wglaw.net

Texas' toll-road friendly transportation policy, adopted by the Legislature four years ago, as well as the complex and expensive Trans-Texas Corridor, are important issues that are poorly understood by many Texans. They include proposals to create more toll roads in Texas, convert publicly funded Texas highways into toll roads, and contract with foreign companies to construct and manage toll roads. We intend to shed some light on these issues in future newsletters. In the meantime, go to the following websites for information: www.SAtollparty.com, www.corridorwatch.org, www.tfrc.gov/pubrds/06mar/06.htm, and www.texastollparty.com.

No STAR? How about joining or renewing soon? Thanks!
 A STAR on your address label shows current membership.
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