



Bellaire Democrats Newsletter

September, 2007

General Meeting on Tuesday, September 11, 2007 - 7:00 pm to 8:00 pm
Location: Hunan's Restaurant - 3835 Bellaire Blvd. (in the same center as I. W. Marks)
Come at 6:00 to eat if you can.

Speaker: Lt. Gary Scheibe, Mayor of Houston's Office of Public Safety and Homeland Security

Lt. Schreibe will give an overview of what his office does, including disaster relief and bioterrorism, and what roles his office plays, as well as how they interact with other agencies, including the Bellaire and Southwest Houston areas. Curious? Come and find out how Homeland Security affects you!

Officers for 2007-2009

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ELECTIONS COMING THIS NOVEMBER

We have elections coming this Fall, including those for Bellaire and Houston City Councils, plus an HISD Bond proposal and state Constitutional amendments.

The HISD proposal is the third of three bond proposals, with the first two proposals passing easily. The proposal calls for 22 new schools, renovation of 128 schools and renovation and expansion of five others, and \$90 million to improve safety and security at every school. The program also would spend \$29 million to build new science labs in middle and high schools, and dedicate funds for facilities for three new early college high schools.

The proposed new bond program would call for voters to agree to a 3-cent increase in the property tax rate, phased in over two years, or about \$39 a year for the average homeowner once the tax increase is fully phased in. HISD currently has the lowest tax rate of any school district in Harris County.

Our next newsletter will provide details on the proposed Constitutional amendments and the City Council races. Listed below are the important election dates for 2007-2008.

For Tuesday, November 6, 2007 - General Election

First Day to Apply for Ballot by Mail - September 7, 2007
Last Day to Register to Vote - October 9, 2007
First Day of Early Voting - October 22, 2007
Last Day to Apply for Ballot by Mail** - October 30, 2007
Last Day of Early Voting - November 2, 2007
General Vote - Tuesday, November 6, 2007

Tuesday, March 4, 2008 - Primary Election

April 8, 2008 - Primary Runoff Election Date

May 10, 2008 - Uniform Election Date

Tuesday, November 4, 2008 - Uniform Election Date

**NOTE: requests for ballots by mail must be received by the due date (not just postmarked); be certain to request a Ballot by Mail early.

Schedule of General Meetings of the Bellaire Democrats for 2007 - 2008

Tuesday, September 11, 2007	Tuesday, February 12, 2008
Tuesday, October 9, 2007	Tuesday, March 11, 2008
Tuesday, November 13, 2007	Tuesday, April 8, 2008
Tuesday, January 8, 2008	Tuesday, May 13, 2008

GARAGE SALE TO BE HELD ON SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2007

Location: 4709 Maple St., Bellaire

Start saving your castoffs! Items should be clean and in working condition: clothing, toys, household and decorative items, furniture, electrical and technical items, jewelry, tools, kitchen stuff, and holiday items.

Volunteers are needed to help with the setup. Please contact Pat Durio, 713-667-5508, or Nancy Lomax, 713-668-7075, to volunteer, or sign up at the General Meeting. This is one of our main fundraisers, so please lend a hand.

JOHNSON-RAYBURN-RICHARDS DINNER

Saturday, October 20, 2007

Congressmember Rahm Emanuel will be the featured guest at the 2007 Johnson-Rayburn-Richards Dinner, slated for Saturday evening, October 20, 2007, at the JW Marriott Hotel on Westheimer. The theme for this year's event (renamed to include Ann Richards) will be Democrats Waltz Across Texas, as we celebrate the sweep of Democratic victories in Dallas, Travis, and El Paso Counties and prepare to do the same thing here in Harris County. Tickets start at \$125.

For more information, call the Harris County Democratic Party headquarters at 713-802-0085, or go online to www.hcdp.org/johnsonrayburn2007.html.

Rick Perry's Great Tax Shift

In 2003 Perry quietly began to remove the Texas inheritance tax on the rich (in line with Bush's inheritance tax cut), eliminating approximately \$300 million state revenue annually. At the same time he "deregulated" state university tuition rates. University rates are now set by a board of non-elected regents. Tuition and fees have risen by 47% at UT Austin and 49% at TAMU, with comparable increases at other state supported universities. In 2006 the decline in inheritance tax revenue was about equal the increase in statewide student tuition.

In 2005 we saw a property tax cut enacted, with the greatest savings going to the wealthiest taxpayers and paid by increases in business taxes, cigarette taxes, and some miscellaneous taxes. However, only half the cost of the property tax cut was accounted for, with a revenue shortfall of \$8.1 billion predicted for 2008.

Now, in 2007, we have another Perry plan to shift taxes. In June Perry cut over \$153 million in funding for Texas community colleges. The cost to attend community colleges, which offer affordable education for many students unable to afford the now very expensive state universities, will inevitably increase. More and more people of low and moderate incomes will be denied an opportunity to acquire a decent education (Source: State Sen. Elliot Shapleigh)

Now For Some Good News From the 80th Regular Legislative Session

State Rep. Warren Chisum (R) stayed busy, trying, and failing, to get legislation that would:

- Require all Texas public high schools to teach Bible classes (Failed)
- Undermine the teaching of evolution in public schools (Failed)
- Restrict access by public school students to sex education (Failed)

In another victory for Texans, the House voted (129 to 8) to bar public funding for private school vouchers.

On the downside: a bill sponsored by Rep. Howard (R) of Sugar Land was passed promoting prayer and other religious activities in public schools.

The Progressive Forum – Fall 2007 Schedule 7:30 p.m. at the Wortham Center.

Tickets may be obtained by calling 832-251-0706 or online through the link at www.progressiveforumhouston.org.

Monday, Sept. 17 - Gloria Steinem: The Progression of Feminism: Where Are We Going?

Wednesday, Oct. 24 - Dr. James Hansen: Climate Change: The Latest Science

Rick Noriega for U. S. Senate

On July 16, 2007, Rick Noriega formed an exploratory committee to seek the Democratic nomination for the U.S. Senate seat currently held by John Cornyn. For more information or to volunteer in his campaign, go to www.RickNoriega.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

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/>

Get to Know Some of Our Democratic Candidates

Barbara Ann Radnofsky, who is looking at a 2010 race for state Attorney General, is pleased to announce that she will host the following events for Democratic candidates:

Thursday, September 6 at 6:30 p.m., come meet **Joe Jaworski**, candidate for State Senate District 11. If you would like to learn more about Joe's campaign, visit his website at www.jaworski.com.

Thursday, September 27 at 6:30 p.m., meet **Judge Susan Criss**, candidate for Texas Supreme Court, in Houston. To learn more about Judge Susan Criss please visit her website at www.judgecriss.com.

Wednesday, October 17 at 6:30 p.m. you are invited to a reception for **Sherrie Matula**, candidate for Texas House District 129. Please visit Sherrie's website at www.sherriematula.com.

Tuesday, October 30 at 6:30 p.m. you are invited to a reception for **Virginia McDavid**, candidate for Texas House District 138.

On Thursday, November 8 at 6:00 p.m., Barbara Ann would like to invite you to join her for a reception in Houston for long-time police **Chief C.O. Bradford**, candidate for Harris County District Attorney.

To learn more about these events, please Rsvp to Katie Floyd at 713-858-9391 or email katie.floyd@radnofsky.com.

* * *

Tuesday, October 2 at 6:30 p.m., you are invited to a reception for **Larry Joe Doherty**, candidate for Congress, Texas District 10. For more information or to Rsvp, contact Heidi, Matt or Brit at Lone Star Strategies (713) 978-7701 or by fax (713) 978-7716.

NOTE: We will be happy to publish notices from Democratic candidates. Please send information to mcneelj@yahoo.com.

Chipping Away at Our Constitution and the Bush Administration's Grab for Executive Power

FISA, the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act of 1978, is a U.S. Federal law prescribing procedures for the physical and electronic surveillance and collection of "foreign intelligence information" between or among "foreign powers". FISA resulted from investigations by Senate Committees into the legality of domestic intelligence activities after certain activities had been revealed by the Watergate affair. In 1967 the Supreme Court stated "Few threats to liberty exist which are greater than those posed by the use of eavesdropping devices." (*Berger v New York*)

FISA became an issue in December, 2005, following a New York Times article regarding a program of warrantless domestic wiretapping ordered by the Bush administration and carried out by the National Security Agency. The Bush administration asserts that the wiretapping is legal on the grounds that FISA is an unconstitutional infringement of **executive power**. In August, 2006, a Federal judge ruled that the U.S. government's domestic eavesdropping program is unconstitutional and ordered it ended immediately. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales said the Bush Administration disagrees with the ruling and has appealed.

Note the phrase "executive power" in the prior paragraph. The Bush Administration's decision to ignore FISA is only one of many examples of their relentless quest to acquire more and more power in the executive branch of our government, legally or illegally.

Signing statements are another tool used by the Bush Administration to undermine the checks and balances of our democracy. A signing statement is issued by the president as he signs a bill into law. It describes his interpretation of the bill, and it sometimes declares that one or more of the laws created by the bill are unconstitutional and thus need not be enforced or obeyed as written.

In October of 2006, the non partisan Congressional Research Service presented a report to Congress that stated in no uncertain terms that the Bush administration is using signing statements as a means to slowly condition Congress into accepting the White House's broad conception of presidential power, to assert that President Bush has the power to disobey newly enacted laws, which includes a presidential right to ignore laws he believes are unconstitutional.

Bush has used signing statements to challenge more than 800 laws that place limits or requirements on the executive branch, including a torture ban and oversight provisions in the USA Patriot Act, saying they intrude on his constitutional powers. By contrast, all previous presidents challenged a combined total of about 600 laws. In July 2006, an American Bar Association "Blue Ribbon Task Force" found that these presidential assertions of constitutional authority "undermine the rule of law and our constitutional system of separation of powers."

Following are some quotes from Al Gore's speech in January of 2006 regarding our Constitution and executive power:

"It is this same disrespect for America's Constitution which has now brought our republic to the brink of a dangerous breach in the fabric of the Constitution. And the disrespect embodied in these apparent mass violations of the law is part of a larger pattern of seeming indifference to the Constitution that is deeply troubling to millions of Americans in both political parties.

For example, the President has also declared that he has a heretofore unrecognized inherent power to seize and imprison any American citizen that he alone determines to be a threat to our nation, and that, notwithstanding his American citizenship, the person imprisoned has no right to talk with a lawyer - even to argue that the President or his appointees have made a mistake and imprisoned the wrong person.

The President claims that he can imprison American citizens indefinitely for the rest of their lives without an arrest warrant, without notifying them about what charges have been filed against them, and without informing their families that they have been imprisoned.

At the same time, the Executive Branch has claimed a previously unrecognized authority to mistreat prisoners in its custody in ways that plainly constitute torture in a pattern that has now been documented in U.S. facilities located in several countries around the world.

This shameful exercise of power overturns a set of principles that our nation has observed since General Washington first enunciated them during our Revolutionary War and has been observed by every president since then - until now. These practices violate the Geneva Conventions and the International Convention Against Torture, not to mention our own laws against torture.

Can it be true that any president really has such powers under our Constitution? If the answer is "yes" then under the theory by which these acts are committed, are there any acts that can on their face be prohibited? If the President has the inherent authority to eavesdrop, imprison citizens on his own declaration, kidnap and torture, then what can't he do?"
(Find the entire speech at www.truthout.org)

Vice-President Gore's question addresses a most important reality in all this - the Bush Administration is getting away with their expansion of executive power. With all the assertions of unconstitutionality, illegality, high crimes and misdemeanors, nothing has changed. In spite of the concerns of many Democrats, Congress passed a FISA "modernization" bill before they left the Capital on their August recess. The bill gives Bush expanded eavesdropping authority for six months, effectively rubberstamping the NSA's warrantless surveillance of U.S. citizens - after a Federal judge found the practice unconstitutional!

So where can we, the people, turn for help? Does anyone truly represent our interests? Partisan politics and a Republican majority allowed Bush to subvert the Constitution. With impeachment off the table, according to Democratic Congressional leaders, with our civil liberties threatened from every direction, with the politicization of our Justice Department and the rule of law no longer honored, with the majority in the Supreme Court showing deference to the ultra-conservative right, with an illegal invasion and war driven by lies and subterfuge, when "fear" rules supreme and intimidation rules over truth (does anyone believe that Cheney had nothing to do with the intelligence reports leading up to the Iraq invasion?), when anyone who questions the Bush administration has their patriotism questioned in turn - who is looking out for us?

After the debacle of the Bush Administration, Democratic candidates have an even greater chance to win office at every level of government. One thing is certain: we need statesmen and women, not just politicians. We must demand strong Democratic leaders, verify their integrity and their dedication to the Constitution, and build a robust, solid Democratic majority. We have the opportunity to examine every Democratic candidate at every level, and to get their responses on record. Then we must hold them to their promises while we regain our Constitutional rights.

Please join or renew your membership in Bellaire Democrats for the fiscal year June 1, 2007 through May 31, 2008. If you prefer to receive communications, but not be a member, you can do that as well. Our membership and communications lists are not sold or distributed to anyone. Generally, we suggest individual memberships at \$5 to \$15 per year, depending on your ability to pay. If members wish to share a single mailing to a household, we suggest \$5 to \$25 per household (again, depending on your ability to pay). We also need and request donations from both members and others of whatever amount you can afford...\$50, \$100, \$1,000.

Individual Membership \$ _____
 Household Membership \$ _____
 Donation \$ _____

Name _____ Precinct _____

Address/Zip Code _____

Telephone: (h) _____ (w) _____ E-mail: _____

Communications Preference: E-Mail U.S. Mail Both

(We encourage "E-mail", since it helps reduce both financial and environmental costs.)

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

Interests and volunteer opportunities (optional):

- Telephone committee
- Newsletter committee
- Special events
- Program committee
- Technical support: Website/Listserve
- Democratic candidate campaigns
- I cannot come to meetings, but can assist from home.
- Other interests, skills: _____

Please send your check to:

Bellaire Democrats, c/o Linda Norris, 5117 Grand Lake St, Bellaire, TX 77401-4923



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

Democratic Precinct Chairs for Bellaire			
Precinct 128	Lynn McBee	713-665-0557	lynnmb@hal-pc.org
Precinct 182	Patrick Durio	713-667-5508	patrick.durio@durio.pro
Precinct 214	Catherine O'Harra	713-758-4588	coharra@velaw.com
Precinct 215	Nancy Masterson	713-667-2469	nmasterson1@com cast.net
Precinct 268	Fred Cook	713-660-9116	hfcook@wglaw.net

As of August 21, 2007, 3689 Americans have died in Iraq, 28,308 Americans have been wounded, and the war has cost the U.S. over \$451 billion. 424 Americans have died in Afghanistan.

The National Debt has risen to \$9 trillion, from \$5.7 trillion in 2000, with over \$2 trillion debt held by foreign interests. The cause for this huge increase in debt: primarily tax cuts and military spending.

"I place economy among the first and most important republican virtues, and public debt as the greatest of the dangers to be feared. To preserve our independence, we must not let our rulers load us with perpetual debt." *Thomas Jefferson*

Help Wanted: Volunteers for the Newsletter Committee

We publish four newsletters each fiscal year. Volunteers are needed to help with preparation of articles and notices, relying on research plus materials contributed by Club members. Volunteers are also needed to help with printing, labeling, and mailing. Experience is not necessary, just a willingness to devote some time to the job every few months. If you're interested, please contact Jane McNeel, 713-664-3316 or mcneelj@yahoo.com.