



March 4 Primary Mail-Voting is On!

Voting by mail has begun for the 2014 Primary elections; no voter ID required for this method. Both Harris and Galveston Counties are ready to get your application. Go to voteharris.org; click on "voting by mail" or, if you live in Galveston County, google "Galveston County Clerk's Office;" click on "Elections Division" to print out a copy of the application. Don't wait long; your completed ballot must be in the County Clerk's office by Friday, February 21. Here are the appropriate addresses:

Stan Stanart, Harris County Clerk, Attn: Elections Division P.O. Box 1148, Houston, TX 77251-1148	Dwight D. Sullivan County Clerk P.O. Box 17253 Galveston, TX 77552-7253
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Race for Governor offers Choices

For Democrats: - two candidates:

State Sen. Wendy Davis of Fort Worth is a very popular and well-funded advocate for women's issues and ... and the presumed nominee for most Democrats.

Reynaldo "Ray" Madrigal of Corpus Christi is a 40-year activist in Democratic battles in behalf of Latino education and veterans issues. When asked why run, his reply: "Perry's been acting stingy with education and stingy with health care. I want to do something about that."

For Republicans: - four candidates:

Attorney General Greg Abbott has a "superior name identification and huge war chest." Some analysts say he represents a fifth term for Gov. Perry. He is the presumed nominee for most Republicans.

Lisa Fritsch of Austin, but raised in Tyler, is a former Univision broadcaster. Political pundits say that as a black woman she adds diversity to the GOP. Her issues: more school choice, reorienting the Texas Enterprise Fund to smaller businesses and "a guest worker program."

Miriam Martinez of Edinburg, says she is pro-life,

pro-education, pro-immigration reform and ensuring that half the people she appoints to state boards and commissions would be women. She supports easing restrictions on medical marijuana and decriminalizing possession of small amounts.

SECEDE Kilgore, who officially changed his name to SECEDE Kilgore, says, "Texas Secession! All other issues can be dealt with afterwards." He promises "only to work toward secession" and to be in office for less than 100 days. [*Houston Chronicle*, 1-6-14]

Dist. 129 lures 7 Republicans

Seven Republicans are seeking John Davis' old position as representative for District 129. Each has a website that is filled information. However, for the quick seven-line profile given in the December Legelog go to ccartnews.com.

Sheryl Berg [SherylBergforTexas.com]

Brent Perry [brentperryfortexas.com]

Jeff Larson [texansforjeff.com]

Briscoe Cain [briscoecain.com]

Chuck Maricle . . [chuckmaricle.com]

Dennis Paul [dennispaul.com]

Mary Huls [maryhuls.com]

For the Dist. 129: One Democrat.

John Gay of Pasadena is the only **Democrat** and has no website as yet. Balotpedia.org states his biography as follows: "Gay earned his B.S. in Industrial Distribution from Texas A&M University in 1998. He is currently employed as a school district administrator. Gay formerly ran unsuccessfully for the U.S. House in 2010."

No Opposition in Primary for SD 11, & Districts 24 & 29 Incumbents

Sen. Larry Taylor (SD11), **Rep. Greg Bonnen** (Dist.24) representing Friendswood, League City, Kemah and Dickinson and **Rep. Ed Thompson** (Dist.29) representing the Pearland/Alvin area have drawn no opposition in either the Democratic or Republican parties. For all practical purposes we may consider our state senator and both of our representatives elected for the 84th session of the Texas Legislature.

Two Republicans contend in Primary for District 23

For the Bacliff/Texas City area there is some competition to become the Republican nominee in the General Election next November. For a seven-line description of each candidate go to ccartnews.com or, for serious voters, go to candidate's websites.

Wayne Faircloth [votefaircloth.com]

Bob Senter [bobsenter.com]

Democrat **Susan Criss**, a 15-year District Judge of the 212 Court in Galveston, is running unopposed. Judge Criss is the daughter of Galveston County Democratic Party Chairman Lloyd Criss, who served six terms as a state representative. She has no website as yet.

Open CD36 attracts 12 Republicans

For CCART Republicans who live south of Ellington, east of Highway 3 with the exception of a narrow strip from Bay Area Boulevard to Pineloch east to Diana, welcome to the political realm of Congressional District 36. Your incumbent, Steve Stockman, who was surprisingly elected in 2012 has with equal amazement switched to a run in the U.S. Senate race. That sudden exodus kindled a menagerie of candidates ready for your scrutiny:

Doug Centilli – Kevin Brady's chief of staff,
no website as yet

Kim Morrell - Seabrook city councilman,
Website: morrellforcongress.com

Brian Babin – a dentist and Woodville mayor,
no website as yet

Jim Engstrand - El Lago Army reservist,
Website: engstrandforcongress.com

John Manlove – former mayor of Pasadena,
no website as yet

Pat Kasprzak Crosby teacher
Website: patkasprzakforcongress.com

Ben Streusand – investment banker, chairman of
Americans for Prosperity, no website as yet

Robin Riley – former mayor of Seabrook,
Website: robinrileyforcongress.com

Dave Norman, Webster insurance agent,
Website: davenormanforcongress.com

Charles Meyer - Lumberton attorney,
Website: meyerforcongress.com

Phil Fitzgerald - ex-Liberty County Judge,
no website as yet

John Amdur - Nassau Bay City Councilman,
no website as yet

Democrats have only one candidate in CD36:

Michael Cole – a pro-choice Orange teacher
Website: michaelcole.us

Only Democrats Contesting in CD14

Randy Weber, [randyweber.org] **incumbent Congressman for CD14**, has no opponent in the Republican Primary but the Democrats have three candidates:

Buck Willis - a Galveston professor
Website: buckforcongress.org

Donald G. Brown - a Vidor mortgage broker
Website: donbrown4tx14.org

Gagan Panjhzari – no information as yet

2014: a Political Year

Tim Lee, Inside Line, 12-23-13

While we will be extremely focused on TRS-Care; we will also be watching the progress of ideas through Congress that could impact TRS benefits. This includes mandatory Social Security for states like Texas (where not all employees are coordinated with the federal program), as well as progress on repealing or modifying the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP). These federal issues and others may keep TRTA very active with our federal legislative agenda in 2014.

TRTA members have been very effective this year during and after the legislative session by reaching out to legislators. **As the new year approaches, we should be ready to educate, advocate for our important benefits, and VOTE.**

While you may think your vote in a primary is not important or may believe your friendly legislator does not need your support in a primary election, please know that EVERY TRTA MEMBER SHOULD VOTE IN THE UPCOMING PRIMARIES. Your power is in your vote! We MUST know where the candidates stand and send people who are dedicated to preserving our benefits to Austin.

TRS Fund: Best in its History

W/ 119 Billion

Tim Lee, Inside Line, 12-23-13

Both the Teacher Retirement System of Texas (TRS) and the Employees Retirement System of Texas (ERS) recently reported on their actuarial condition. TRTA members worked to pass vital legislation this past session to protect the long-term solvency of the

TRS pension trust fund. The Actuarial Soundness Bill (SB 1458) made our pension fund actuarially sound, provided a benefit increase to 2/3 of all current retirees, and put us on a path to provide benefit increases for retirees in the future. **In fact, TRTA believes these enhancements have made TRS Texas one of the best funded public retirement plans in the country (especially amongst other funds that are not coordinated with the Social Security program).**

TRS also has more money in the trust fund than any other time in its history: over \$119 billion protecting the retirement security of 1.3 million Texans who have or are working in our great public schools!

Shortly after TRS reported on its actuarial condition, we learned that ERS is not as fortunate. While ERS also had landmark legislation passed to improve its actuarial condition, the ERS fund does not have a “funding” period and does not meet the statutory definition of actuarial soundness.

We raise this point simply to point out that TRS Texas ended the legislative session and the state fiscal year in better shape than many pension detractors said was even possible, and is one of the best public pension plans in Texas. We know that there are still many challenges ahead of us and that changing market conditions could create a circumstance that makes the fund not “actuarially sound.” Today, though, if you are an education employee or retiree in the TRS Texas pension fund, you are in one of the best funded, most secure retirement systems in the state!

TRTA Logically defends TRS Defined Benefits as Exemplary

based on Tim Lee, *Inside Line*, 12-23-13

In the current politisphere “our TRS fund and its defined benefit traditional retirement plan will remain under attack by the ideologues and political powers that simply hate public pension funds. News about pension funds that are struggling due to bad decisions made by political leaders in other states or cities will influence opinions about pension plans here in Texas. Most of the time, these “comparisons” do not hold up to scrutiny; but those who are anti-public pensions will not care about the facts—they simply want to incite distrust of the plans and dismantle them altogether.

These struggles may grow even more challenging as other state or municipal funds make more drastic changes to their plans and influence decision makers here. We must remain vigilant and prevent those attacks from impacting our TRS Texas pension benefit plan. One of our members wrote to us asking a great question about media coverage and public perception of state retirement funds:

“Bill King of the Houston Chronicle keeps writing articles saying that public pensions should be stopped. Some might be bad but not TRS. From a quick reading of one of King's articles I saw no reason to stop TRS and it appeared to me that maybe he is hoping that the mutual fund companies can get their hands into the money of TRS.

I mentioned this to a friend in Houston who is a retired realtor and he is for King and said that the State of Texas has to help with funding TRS when they run out of money. I emailed TRS and they said that had never happened. The State does put some matching funds in at the beginning but I consider that their part in helping to support education for the Texas citizens.

Do you have any thoughts or information you can send me on this?”

TRTA Response:

This is a great question and one that many of our members have probably heard before or thought of themselves. The information our member received from TRS is correct: the state of Texas makes a yearly contribution to the TRS pension fund. Active employees that will benefit from TRS when they retire also make contributions to TRS. These contributions are used by TRS to make investments and generate more money, which goes directly into the pension fund.

The state contribution is presently 6.4% (of active employee payroll), and will increase to 6.8% in 2014. The active employee contribution is presently 6.4%. This means that 6.4% of an active teacher's paycheck goes directly into their retirement fund. This will increase gradually over time to 7.7%, starting with a small increase in 2015 to 6.7%.

In all, the contributions from both the state and the active members equate to approximately 40% of the value of the TRS pension fund. The other 60% is generated by investment earnings. TRS is the fiduciary of these funds, meaning its employees are responsible for making both long and short-term investment decisions that will protect and grow the fund's value.

Just yesterday, TRS reported a total fund value of \$119.7 billion! This means that 60% of that value, or

\$71.82 billion, was generated by investment earnings alone!

The Texas Legislature has a constitutional responsibility to provide for a retirement plan for our public education employees. Unlike some other states, Texas has never skipped a “payment” to TRS, meaning they have always made a contribution to the pension fund that is between 6% and 10% of active employee payroll. 6% is the statutory minimum, while 10% is the statutory maximum that the state may contribute.

Without a doubt, contributions from the state provide a stable source of revenue for TRS, as do active employee contributions. After the passage of Senate Bill 1458 in 2013, another revenue stream for TRS will go into effect. In 2015, school districts that do not contribute to Social Security will provide a 1.5% (of payroll) contribution to the pension fund. These sources of revenue, combined with the expert ability of the TRS investment team, ensure that your pension fund will be healthy for many years to come.

Today, TRS is considered “actuarially sound.” The state of Texas’ definition of “actuarially sound” is that a fund should be able to pay for all of its liabilities within a 31 year period. If you think of this like a mortgage, this would translate into TRS being able to pay the entire pension for every current and future retiree already vested in the system within a 31 year period. TRS could accomplish this goal within a 28 year period based on its present value and revenue sources.

TRS is not in danger of running out of money and has a strong financial plan for the future. Even when TRS lost billions of dollars during the market crashes in 2008 and 2009, the state did not have to rescue the fund. Market fluctuations do occur and will again in the future, but it is the smart investment decisions made by TRS that enable the fund to ride the waves and recover. TRS reached a funding level of \$68 billion in February 2009, and has since gained back more than \$51 billion.

Our members also know that TRS is the only form of retirement security guaranteed to our public education retirees in Texas. This is because 95% of school employees in Texas do not pay into Social Security. The TRS fund is more stable than the federal Social Security (SS) program, and provides nearly three times as much in benefits to TRS retirees as SS does to SS participants. The cost to pay into TRS or Social Security is the same for public education employees and Texas taxpayers, but the

benefits and retirement security provided by TRS are far greater.

It is to the benefit not only of our retirees but also the state of Texas that TRS remains strong. TRS retirees stimulate the economy by spending their benefits in Texas. Retirement benefits generated \$694 million in state revenues and \$272 million in local government revenues in 2012. TRS benefits also provided for almost 92,000 jobs across Texas in 2012.

While naysayers such as King will continue to be critical of pension funds, not all pension funds are alike. TRS Texas is the sixth largest pension fund in the nation and one of the strongest in the world. The success of a pension fund depends on a variety of factors, and TRS Texas uses a balanced and educated approach to managing the retirement security of hundreds of thousands of retirees.

TRS-Care on a Collision Course with Budget Cutters

Tim Lee, Inside Line, 12-23-13

TRTA is also preparing for serious challenges with TRS-Care. If you are a TRS retiree or you will be, and you participate or plan to participate in this retiree health insurance program, we need your help. The health care plan will have a serious funding shortfall in the coming legislative session. TRTA will spend an entire year meeting with legislators, retired TRS members, active school employees, media representatives, and anyone else who may have an interest in addressing this upcoming crisis. We know the crisis is coming. We have 2014 to rally every TRS retiree and future retiree together to help maintain this vital health care coverage.

Contact Your Legislators

Sen. Larry Taylor - 512-463-0111
League City 281-332-0003

Rep. John Davis - 512-463-0734
NASA area 281-333-1350
Dist. 129 area north of Clear Creek

Rep. Greg Bonnen - 512-463-0729
League City 281-338-0924
Dist. 24 - area south of Clear Creek

Rep. Ed Thompson - 512-463-0707
Dist. 29 – area of Pearland/Alvin

Rep. Craig Eiland - 512-463- 0502
Texas City (800) 345-2630
Dist. 23 – Bacliff/Texas City