

 <p>vol. 11 no.7 Clear Creek Assoc. of Retired Teachers, Editorial Board: Ginny Darling, & Vee & Frank Stansfield, Chair, James Bailey</p>	 <p>Feb. 11, 2014</p>
---	--

Early Primary Voting Begins Feb. 18 for the March 4 Primaries

Voting by mail remains an option for 2014 Primaries and there's 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. Do it this week; your completed ballot must be in the County Clerk's office by Friday, February 21. Here are the respective addresses:

<p>Stan Stanart, Harris County Clerk, Attn: Elections Division P.O. Box 1148, Houston, TX 77251-1148</p>	<p>Dwight D. Sullivan County Clerk P.O. Box 17253 Galveston, TX 77552-7253</p>
--	--

Early voting will begin on February 18, 2014 and continues through February 28, 2014. Primary election day is Tuesday, March 4.

In Harris County you may early vote at any of the 39 locations which for most CCART members it will be Freeman Branch Library 16616 Diana Lane, in Bacliff it's the Community Center 4503 11th Street and in Dickinson it's the Community Center at 2714 Highway 3.

Voter ID [required for early & election-day voting]
Only a driver's license, passport, hand gun license, military ID or citizenship papers are acceptable. For those voters concerned about variations with their picture ID, election officials will review the ID and if a name is "substantially similar" to the one on their list of registered voters, you will still be able to vote, but you will also have to submit an affidavit stating that you are the same person on the list of registered voters. If you don't have a government issued ID facilities are planned to provide an ID on Wednesday October 16th at the Bacliff Community Center and in Dickinson at the Hwy 3 Community Center. For Harris County, IDs can be obtained at the DPS office in Webster, 111 Tristar Dr. 281-486-8242. This office will be open exclusively for voter ID On Saturdays 10 am – 2pm through March 1.

If you have a documented disability, you may apply at your county voter registrar for a permanent exemption from the photo ID requirement. If approved, you will not need a photo ID to vote.

TRTA "Good Voter Health" Series Highlights the most Urgent Political Needs of Texas Retired Teachers

The barrage began on January 20th with "Are you Registered to Vote?" In the five days that followed TRTA Director Tim Lee explained how retired educators could maximize political influence starting with "exercising your voter muscle."

#1: VOTE in the Primary election. This is Texas, essentially a ONE-PARTY STATE and "few voters turn out for these spring races.... **TRTA is here to tell its members that voting in the primary election is more than just important, it is vital!** Early voting for the primary elections begins on February 18, 2014 and continues through February 28, 2014. Primary election day is Tuesday, March 4."

Day 2: The Importance of the Primary
"Our members need to know that the vast majority of elections in Texas are determined in the primaries. In legislative races, the November general election does not matter that much! **Your power as a voter is amplified in primary elections simply because so many other people choose not to vote.**"
During this second day tutorial a serious values clarification strategy was considered: **a cross-over vote.** Remember in a one-party Republican state like Texas: whoever wins in the Spring Republican Primary will likely win in November. Meticulously analyze the Republican candidate's positions and if there is one that will likely support teacher retirees issues (*defined benefits, TRS-Care*) it might pay in the long run for a Democrat to vote in the Republican Primary. As Tim put it: "If you are in this situation but you do not want another influential interest group to take away your power in the November general election, consider voting in the OPPOSITE party primary and choosing a candidate you believe may be friendlier to TRTA issues."
"....TRTA does not endorse candidates for political office, but has a reputation for working across party lines to establish strong relationships with legislators for the good of TRS and its 300,000+ retirees. ..."

It is up to us to do our due diligence and ask candidates the tough questions about TRS!

Because your retirement benefits affect your livelihood, you owe it to yourself to find out the answers to the following questions from ALL candidates in your area:

1. Do you support a defined benefit plan for all current and future TRS retirees?
2. Do you support providing reasonable, affordable healthcare for TRS retirees?
3. What will you do as my legislator to ensure that the TRS pension fund and TRS–Care health insurance program are preserved and improved?

Day 3: You have chosen the Candidate; now help with the nomination process.

At this point Tim suggests the following activities:

1. Volunteer to work for a candidate
2. Call the campaign and ask for a yard sign
3. Give permission for the campaign to put large campaign sign on your highly visible, highly trafficked property
4. Allow the campaign to use your name as endorsing your candidate
5. Sign up for campaign emails and pass them on to friends and colleagues
6. “Friend” your candidate on Facebook, and encourage others to do the same
7. E-mail and telephone your friends and family and encourage them to support your candidate (make it a goal to speak to at least 10 people every day about voting for your candidate)
8. Volunteer to walk your neighborhood to distribute campaign material for your candidate
9. If you are able, contribute money to help pay for campaign expenses
10. Ask the campaign if they have personal endorsement post cards you can use to mail to your friends and family. (Most campaigns are happy to pay for the postage if you will address and sign the cards to send out). Your personal endorsement makes a strong statement to your friends and family, and helps them feel confident about voting for the person you recommend

11. Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper about why you support your candidate of choice

Day 4: Helping Others Get Involved in the Political Process

Your vote WILL make a difference! Vote in the primaries, and VOTE EARLY! Early voting begins February 18 and continues through February 28. TRTA is asking you to contact your fellow retirees, neighbors, friends and family and ask them to join you in voting during the primary elections! It is especially important to pay attention to Texas Senate and Texas House races. The ladies and gentlemen elected to these positions will be your Senators and Representatives in the Texas Legislature. They will make the decisions that impact your Teacher Retirement System of Texas (TRS) pension fund and TRS-Care health insurance program.

The Local Unit Connection

Another great asset to being a member of a local unit is the ability to organize at a grassroots level to support and vote for the candidate(s) of your choice. Organize a car pool to take voters to the polls! Consider how to make voting fun for your members and develop a group voting event with your local unit!

TRTA State President Maridell Fryar shared an idea recently about what her unit in Midland plans to do. During the unit’s regularly scheduled February meeting, the unit is hosting a morning coffee and tea party, and then caravanning to a nearby polling location. They are also sending press releases to their local media outlets about their “primary party,” letting their community know that retired teachers get out and VOTE!

Who Should I Vote For?

TRTA does not endorse candidates for political office. However, we encourage our members to talk to each other and ask the following: Who are you voting for and why?

Consider other ways you can get involved in the political process and support your candidate of choice. Call your candidate’s campaign office and see how you can help! If your candidate wins, they will absolutely remember your help when the legislature convenes!!

Share information with your fellow retirees about what you have learned from your candidates. Do they support sustaining the TRS defined benefit plan?

Day 5: Focus on Key Races: Open Seats in the Texas Legislature.

“This also means that the candidates NEED INFORMATION about TRS! Whoever wins the open seat likely will have a steep learning curve, and it is up to us to educate them on the issues that matter most to us!” [At this point Tim listed all of the candidates throughout the state running in open seats] CCART has two of those contests with which to deal.

House Legislative District 129 (the area north of Clear Creek from the Bay to the eastern border of Friendswood) has an open seat in the 2014 election and half of our CCART members live in that district. The other is District 23 (Bacliff/Texas City). Every CCART member can vote, most can educate a candidate and least some can possibly help that candidate get the nomination. In the vetting process ask each candidate you encounter just three questions:

1. Do you support a defined benefit plan for all current and future TRS retirees?
2. Do you support providing reasonable, affordable healthcare for TRS retirees?
3. What will you do as my legislator to ensure that the TRS pension fund and TRS–Care health insurance program are preserved and improved?

Remember, if the district where you live is predominately Republican, you may vote in the Republican Primary and still vote as a Democrat in November. Likewise, if you live in a predominately Democratic district, you may vote in the Democratic Primary and still vote as a Republican in November. (If you do not want your Voter Registration Card stamped with a party label, simply present your Texas Driver’s License or a valid government photo ID). Please know that if you vote in a Primary Election for one party and a run-off election for that position occurs, you can vote only in the run-off of the SAME PARTY for which you voted in the Primary. However, you may vote for any candidate you wish in the General Election.

For Dist. 129: it’s 7 Republicans

Each has an informative website. However, for the quick seven-line profile given in the December Legelog go to ccartnews.com.

Sheryl Berg [SherylBergforTexas.com]

Dennis Paul [dennispaul.com]

Brent Perry [brentperryfortexas.com]

Jeff Larson [texansforjeff.com]

Briscoe Cain [briscoecain.com]

Chuck Maricle . . [chuckmaricle.com]

Mary Huls [maryhuls.com]

For Dist. 129: One Democrat.

John Gay is the only Democrat. He has no website but Balotpedia.org indicates that he earned his B.S. in Industrial Distribution from Texas A&M University in 1998 and that he is currently employed as a school district administrator.

Sheryl Berg and Dennis Paul Respond

Of the candidates in the March Republican Primary **Sheryl Berg and Dennis Paul** are the only ones that have come by to visit at one or more of our CCART meetings. I have received emails from both candidate as follows:

From Sheryl Berg:

I stand proudly with the members of CCART in the goals relating to pensions and affordable healthcare. I fully support the defined-benefit plan as the soundest and most reliable way to provide member pensions. I understand that the longevity of pooled investments protects individual enrollees from market volatility. I also support reasonable and affordable healthcare -- TRS Care -- for all TRS retirees. This will be possible only if future Legislatures make its long-term viability a priority. I supported passage of Senate Bill 1458 from the most recent Legislative Session as it established new sources of revenue and increased contributions to the pension fund, all the while reaching actuarial soundness--hence the name, "TRS Actuarial Soundness Bill". I understand that the TRS data points out actuarial soundness will be reached if the state's contribution to the pension trust fund is 8.62%. Future legislatures need to address increasing the state's contribution to achieve sound funding, and as a candidate I commit myself to working toward this goal.

From Dennis Paul:

I promise that I will support the current defined benefit plan for all current personnel in the TRS system. This is not negotiable! I am supportive of SB 1458 that was passed in the last legislative session. As far as going forward in the future we are open to working with TRTA and the TRS in developing a workable plan that will meet TRTA's and any future TRTA member's needs.

At that point, TRTA would have a solid foundation for which it could demand that the legislature maintain this program in perpetuity. I favor a health plan that meets the needs of our public servants. It is difficult to say where Health Care will end up in today's environment. I would support a plan that would be equitable to both the membership of the ERS and TRS systems.

As stated earlier, I will be supportive of working to maintain the plan for all current TRS members. As your representative I would want to work with you and your group to come up with solutions to all of the issues concerning your membership.

.... The TRS Care program is at a critical state.... I need you and the TRTA to work with me in identifying what solutions will work for your members....

No Opposition in Primary for SD11, & 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.

Two Republicans fight for District 23

For the Bacliff/Texas City area there is 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**, [votesusancriss.com] 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. Her website can be found at votesusancriss.com.

12 Republicans clash for Open CD36

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, you are a participant in the political jungle in Congressional District 36. I have received an email from Jim Engstrand indicating that he favors repeal of WEP/GPO. Concerned members might want to email him for more information.

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

Email: engstrandjim@yahoo.com

DougCentilli – [centilliforcongress.com] Kevin Brady's chief of staff,

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

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

John Manlove – former mayor of Pasadena,
Website: johnmanloveforcongress.com

Pat Kasprzak Crosby teacher
Website: patkasprzakforcongress.com

Ben Streusand – investment banker, chair of Americans for Prosperity,
Website: benstreusand.com

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,
johnamdur.com

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 Panjhazari – no website yet
facebook.com/GaganPForCongress