

Accountability First PAC wins Two; Loses One

In the March Legelog there was a story from the Dallas Morning News that indicated that a political action committee (PAC) called the **Accountability First PAC** was spending a lot of money to support candidates who would “sign a pledge promising strict adherence to spending limits and opposition to tax increases.”

There were three north Texas incumbent state legislators on the hit list of this PAC and all three faced Tea Party opponents who received serious monetary support from the Accountability First PAC. **The three on the hit list were Diane Patrick, R-Arlington; Bennett Ratliff, R-Coppell; and Angie Chen Button, R-Garland. Two lost and one won their Republican nomination.**

How did these three moderate Republicans do in the March Republican Primary?

Dianne Patrick – lost by 1400 votes

Bennett Ratliff – lost by 92 votes

Angie Chen Button – won by 700 votes

In March only 13.3% of the voters turned out; in the last second primary in 2012 only 5% voted.

As I indicated in March, that negative pledge could have a very damaging effect on state money that supports programs such as TRS-Care. As Tim Lee put it, **“We all want efficiencies in government, but does signing this pledge restrict potential legislators from considering options that may be needed to address our health care crisis? In order for the \$1 billion TRS-Care shortfall to be addressed and for our retirees to maintain their vital health care program, our Legislature will have to consider increased spending as an option. A legislator who may have a closed door policy when it comes to discussing putting more money into a program that 250,000 retirees and their dependents rely upon may be unwilling to work with TRTA to resolve this crisis....”**

There are almost 80,000 TRTA members. We have it within our power to influence elections if we just get out and vote!

Some Voting Guidelines

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 today; your completed ballot must be in the County Clerk’s office by Friday, May16. Here are the respective 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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Sample ballots are available at voteharris.org or at “Galveston County Clerks’s Office” as well.

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.

Critical Election – May 27 Run-Off Primaries with Early Voting May 19 through May 23

We will get to choose who will be on the ballot in November beginning next week. Remember: If you voted Republican in March you should vote only in the Republican Run-off; if you voted Democratic you can only vote in the Democratic Run-off. Those who did not vote in March may vote in either party primary run-off. Statewide for the Democrats there’s only two races. One for U.S. Senator with David Alameel and Kesha Rogers and for Agriculture Commissioner and it’s between **Kinky Friedman and Jim Hogan.**

But for Republicans there are four major contests:

Lieutenant Governor:

Incumbent David Dewhurst and Sen. Dan Patrick

Attorney General:

Rep. Dan Branch and Sen Ken Paxton

Agriculture Commissioner :

Tommy Merritt and Sid Miller

Railroad Commission Place 2:

Wayne Christian and Ryan Sitton.

But the most important contest for most CCARTers will be between **Sheryl Berg and Dennis Paul** in District 129 (John Davis's seat for the last several years). Their websites:

Sheryl Berg [SherylBergforTexas.com]

Dennis Paul [dennispaul.com]

Both candidates have tailor-made a campaign statement for CCART as follows:

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....

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.

**ATPE Questions Dist. 129
Candidates on TRS Issues**

teachthevote.org/races/2014

"Teach the Vote" from the Association of Texas Professional Educators (ATPE) website offers some interesting candidate responses to important questions about education and TRS. Teach the Vote can be found going to teachthevote.org/races/2014. All state legislative candidates were asked the same eight questions. **I have re-formatted the candidate's answers so that both Sheryl Berg's and Dennis Paul's responses are side by side.**

1. Is there a need to increase funding to meet the needs of our student population? If so, how would you recommend securing more revenue for public education?

Berg: Increased funding is not the solution to the problems facing educational professionals, their parents and the community on whole with the needs of our student population. Increased local control is more important. Increased competition is more important. Increased teacher control of the classroom is more important. All of these three are doable without increasing funding.

Paul: I do not think we need more funding just more appropriate spending at the local level. The state could also cut out many requirements it has for the school district by reducing many restrictions and requirements for special teachers or special

programs and let the local school boards decide those options.

2. Regardless of the level of funding, do you believe that Texas public education dollars are being spent in an appropriate manner, or should the funds be reallocated and spent in different ways?

Berg: My experience with my local district, primarily Clear Creek ISD, is that it is being very efficiently and appropriately spent. It is a fast-growing suburban district that is a gap district. The relative allocation for teachers' salaries, transportation and other personnel is being well-allocated.

Paul: I think there are areas of wasteful spending at the local level and probably at the state level on oversight of the schools. The state should also eliminate any unfunded mandates it puts out to the schools as well. Let's have local control of the schools and let local officials run their districts.

3. Would you vote to spend public tax dollars on a voucher, tax credit or scholarship that allows students to attend non-public schools in grades K–12? Why or why not?

Berg: Despite the history in Texas education revealing that tax dollars were directed to both public and private schools, the funding system has changed to funding public schools only. I would vote for public tax dollars to go toward an expansion of public charter schools as a local option for parents who seek an alternative to their local public school. This type of school choice is important as it gives parents greater control over their children's education.

Paul: I would definitely be interested in studying a voucher program for Texas' schools. I would not like to see too many government strings attached to any school taking the vouchers so that the school can operate the way it wants to operate so that would be the highest priority with the program.

4. Do you believe the Teacher Retirement System (TRS) should be maintained as a traditional defined benefit pension plan for all future, current and retired educators, or would you vote to convert TRS to a defined contribution plan that is more like a 401(k), in which future benefits are not guaranteed? Why?

Berg: As one who has paid into the TRS as a Speech-Language Pathologist, I am committed to maintaining this public pension program as a traditional defined benefit program. Teachers who paid into it for their careers, expecting to be a defined pension, have the right to expect it to remain so.

Paul: I definitely would not change anything to an existing employee of a school district that is participating in or had participated in this retirement plan. Obligations to them are guaranteed and must be upheld. If future teachers wish to get out of it and want to participate in a defined contribution plan they should be allowed to.

5. Local decisions on whether to continue a teacher's employment and how much to pay each teacher are often based on evaluations. To what extent, if any, should a teacher's evaluation be based on his students' scores on state standardized tests? If you believe student test scores should factor into a teacher's evaluation, how would you recommend evaluating teachers in grades or subjects for which there are no state standardized tests?

Berg: A teacher's evaluation should not be based upon his or her students' state standardized test scores. This faulty system has led teachers to teach to the test, taking away valuable time from teaching other, equally important topics within the curriculum. Rather, teachers ought to have an important say in the development of their curriculum. Further, standardized testing as it exists today should be eliminated altogether and replaced with locally developed testing pertinent to the needs of the local school district.

Paul: I think evaluations should be left up to the local school administration and school board. The district administration and school board should then be held accountable to the voters in their district so if they have teachers not performing they should be able to remove them and get better teachers in there. Advancement and job security should be results based and not on seniority.

6. Would you vote to maintain a hard cap on the number of students per class, or should school administrators be given more flexibility to increase class sizes? (Currently, the law imposes a cap of 22:1 in grades K–4 but allows

schools to obtain a waiver, a step many of them routinely take.)

Berg: Numerous studies are replete with data indicating that student success is not tied to the number of students in the classroom. I would not vote to maintain a hard cap on the number of students per class but would support giving local school administrators the flexibility to increase class size.

Paul: I would be OK with granting some flexibility.

7. If a public school in your district failed to meet state accountability standards for two or more consecutive years, would you support allowing a private entity to take over the management of that school, essentially converting it to a charter school?

Berg: I support public charter school constitutions where public schools have been shown to consistently fail to educate its children. I favor strengthening parent trigger laws for the constitution of such public charter schools so that parents do not have to endure as many as 6 years of a school's failure in order to reconstitute as a public charter school.

Paul: This is a local problem and should be handled in a local manner by that district's school board. If the school is so bad it should be absorbed into another school and if the district as a whole cannot operate acceptably it should be dissolved and incorporated into another school district.

8. Do you believe charter schools in Texas have been largely successful? Should their presence be expanded? Why or why not?

Berg: Public charter schools have increased the option of choices to parents making the very important choice of where to send their children. Increased options are good in that they increase competition and competition is not a negative thing. The benefits of competition for students is that they have more choices. The benefits of competition for teachers is that salaries go up. This is a win-win situation for education when supply is not restricted.

Paul: I do not think they have been that successful and should be watched and monitored to evaluate their progress.

Republicans Brian Babin and Ben Struesand contest for CD36

Adapted from *The Texas Tribune*, 4-30-14

The race to replace U.S. Rep. Steve Stockman in Congressional District 36 is a battle of geographical allegiance between supporters of the two Republican candidates: **Brian Babin** of southeast Texas and **Ben Struesand** of suburban Houston....

The top two vote-getters [of the March Primary] were Babin, a dentist and former mayor of Woodville, and Struesand, a former mortgage broker favored by some Tea Party groups. Babin led with 33 percent of the vote followed by Struesand, who received 23 percent....

CD-36 stretches from southeast Houston to the rural East Texas counties of Newton, Jasper, Tyler, Polk, Orange and Hardin. "This district really has two separate faces," said Mark Jones, a political science professor at Rice University in Houston. "In many ways, they're equally conservative. This is just more of a Houston vs. East Texas fight."

Babin said those rural counties have different needs from people in Houston, and that his opponent would be out of touch with those concerns. Struesand dismissed Babin's argument. "It's not about geography; it's about the values you have," he said. "And I'm going to go up there to fight for the values of East Texas." Plus, he added, "I don't see what qualifies Brian Babin to represent anybody in the Houston area." The conservative candidates hold the same positions on most key [Republican] issues....

Issues aside, the two conservatives have notably different styles. While Babin is soft spoken, Struesand offers fiery rhetoric. "Texans want to send someone to Washington who will be willing to irritate a few people and break some china," Struesand said. "I won't be just another piece of furniture."

....Struesand also has the monetary advantage: He raised almost double what Babin did, though 92 percent of it was self-financed. As of March 31, Struesand had spent \$658,775 on his campaign, compared with Babin's \$202,887. Babin suggests that money isn't a substitute for elected experience. He has served in Woodville for 35 years, as the mayor, a city councilman and a school board member. Struesand has no elected experience, though he was the chairman of the conservative advocacy group Americans for Prosperity and served on the Interstate Oil and Gas Compact Commission under Gov. Rick Perry.