

DEMOCRATIC REPORTER

A Newsletter for Bay Area New Democrats

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Rep. Al Green to Headline BAND Reception

U.S. Rep. Al Green will be the honoree at the Bay Area New Democrats Leadership Excellence Award Reception on Saturday, April 30.

In presenting what is hoped will be the first annual Leadership Excellence Award, the club will celebrate the Houston Congressman's accomplishments and his stands on the issues. Other invited guests at the reception are State Rep. Garnet Coleman and Houston City Controller Ronald Green.

This is a dress-up social event designed to raise energy and awareness of the challenges we face as well as raise funds for the club's



Rep. Al Green

2012 election season.

Doors open at 6 p.m. for the reception at the Hilton Hotel at Space Center Boulevard and NASA Parkway. Light hors d'oeuvres, including vegetarian selections, will be served, and a cash bar will be available.

Tickets purchased in advance are \$25, and they will be available for sale at the April 13 BAND meeting. At the door, tickets will be \$30.

BAND is seeking sponsors at the \$100, \$250 and \$500 level. Donors of \$100 will receive recognition in the event slide show, and donors of \$250 will receive two tickets to the event, recognition in the slide show and the privilege of displaying some literature at a table inside the room.

Sponsors who donate \$500 will, in addition to the other privileges, receive four event tickets and two minutes to address the guests at the podium.

Labor Union Leader to Discuss State of Bargaining Rights at April Meeting

Richard Shaw, secretary-treasurer of the Harris County AFL-CIO, will be the guest speaker at the next BAND meeting at 7 p.m. on Wednesday, April 13 at the Harris County Courthouse Bay Area Annex at 16603 Buccaneer. Shaw will discuss how budget cuts in Texas and nationwide are likely to affect public employee labor unions and their bargaining rights.

In addition, BAND will conduct elections for two-year terms to the club's board of directors. Tickets for the upcoming Leadership Excellence Award Reception on April 30 will be for sale.

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SDEC Members Parra and Davis Deliver News from the TDP

Joe Parra and Loretta Davis stopped by at the BAND meeting on Feb. 9 to bring the club up to date on what's happening with the Texas Democratic Party (TDP).

Parra and Davis are the State Democratic Executive Committee members who represent Democrats in Senate District 11, where most BAND members live. The SDEC members carry on the Democratic Party activities between state conventions, Davis said. They meet with other committee members about four times a year in Austin.

Parra, who lives in Brazoria County, said that state Democrats are pushing improved messaging right now. He suggested that BAND members visit the Texas Democratic Party website, txdemocrats.org to become a "party insider." There, Democrats can peruse several blogs and sign up to receive party talking points and training.

Davis said Democrats have realized they need to focus more on a common message. She cited the

Republicans' emphasis of the phrase "Obamacare" as an example of a common message.

Some representatives to the SDEC have been in the same position for decades, according to Davis, who lives in Galveston County. That's not the case in Senate District 11, which includes parts of Harris, Galveston and Brazoria Counties. Here, an informal agreement provides for rotation of elected representatives so that two of the three counties are represented for each term. Assuming the agreement continues, a male candidate for Harris County will be nominated in the next election, and BAND members especially should be looking for that candidate.

Davis suggested that if party members want to change things, the changes must start with party rules. She said new blood is needed in the party, and younger people especially would be helpful. Davis urged the club to seek out volunteers. The Texas Democratic Party has been gaining support through the Majority Builders fundraising campaign in spite of the economy and a decline in membership, she said.

Among the economic concerns for the party right now is the cost of a rental house for the party headquarters. The TDP is locked into a \$12,000-a-month rental contract and wants to get out, Parra said.

Looking toward the next state Democratic convention, Parra predicted that there would be challengers to TDP chair Boyd Richie, including previous challenger Michael Barnes. Since that discussion, Richie has said he will not run again. (Please see his letter on page 3.) Parra said that anyone who would like to serve on a party committee should notify him so that he can help make it happen.



State Democratic Executive Committee members Joe Parra and Loretta Davis said BAND should be looking for volunteers and new blood to serve the Democratic Party at the state level.

.....BAND Board of Directors	
President	C.J. Farley
Vice President	Bob Tomlinson
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Director	Yasir Zulficar
Director	Ila Montalvo Roel
Director,	newsletter editor Vicki M. Cherewaty

Richie Announces Decision Not to Run Again

Texas Democratic Party chair Boyd Richie announced on April 9 that he will not seek the position for a fourth term. What follows is the statement he released.

“Every day, as both state and national Republicans wage war on working families, the vital nature of our mission becomes more obvious.

Knowing how important our work is - it is a very real and special privilege to be Chair of the Texas Democratic Party. I've enjoyed wonderful experiences, met scores of remarkable people, and I've learned a lot.

As a three-time candidate for Party Chair, one of the things I've learned is that there is always a little friction between running for the position and doing the job. And frankly, we don't have time for that.

Betty and I have reached the difficult but honest conclusion that, at this point in time, our Party needs a Chair who is not encumbered by also being a candidate.

Therefore, I have two announcements today. First, I will not seek re-election. Second, and perhaps more importantly, I will dedicate the next 14 months to working with you to build the strongest, most prepared Texas Democratic Party possible

Now more than ever, Democrats must unite, because a Republican political agenda that threatens to shut down government, schools and nursing homes is one that has turned its back on the people.

I have faith that our Party will meet that challenge. We have work to do. Given what's at stake, we can afford to do no less.”

Texans Day of Outrage Draws Small Crowd at City Hall

“Where is the outrage?” That question from State Sen. John Whitmire provided the inspiration for an organized rally on the steps of Houston City Hall on March 15.

There, a group of activists protested Gov. Rick Perry's despicable emergency legislation and slashing of our state budget over the next two years at the Texans Day of Outrage. Area Democrats Phillip McNutt, Kevin Hoffman, Turner Wright and others were instrumental in planning and executing the rally.

About 1,000 people were in attendance, including several BAND members. The rally speakers included local talk show host Geoff Berg, as well as Dale Wortham, president of the Houston area AFL-CIO, and Gayle Fallon, president of the Houston Federation of Teachers.

Former Harris County Commissioner Sylvia Garcia gave a tremendous speech about the



The crowd at the Texans Day of Outrage started the rally with a benediction.

disconnection between Gov. Rick Perry's priorities and the typical Texas family. Democrats at the rally carried signs with positive messages such as “Good jobs strengthen our economy.”

A small counter-protest by Tea Party activists was organized but belligerent. The Tea Partiers had printed bumper stickers and signs with such slogans as “Exactly what part of we have no money do you not understand?” and “Governor Walker is

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Texans Day of Outrage, continued from page 3
 a hero.”

One arrest at the rally occurred when a Tea Party representative positioned himself directly in front of the stage and tried to force his way up on to the stage with a video camera. This man assaulted Dale Wortham before being handcuffed and led away by Houston police.

The Tea Party protesters also attempted to storm the front area of the stage and had to be stopped by a human wall of Democrats until the mounted officers of the Houston Police Department could intervene.

The Democrats at the rally were very peaceful, and all conflict stemmed from the Tea Party presence and their aggressive actions.

C.J. Farley, BAND president



Houston police attempted to keep Tea Party members from disrupting the Texans Day of Outrage rally in downtown Houston.

County Democrats at Work on Developing the Message

Like many Democrats around the country, the Harris County Democratic Party (HCDP) leaders are realizing that we have a “messaging” problem.

A Democratic Congress passed a landmark health care reform bill in 2010 and then lost many of the Democratic legislators who helped get it passed in last fall’s election.

Why? Many believe it’s because Democrats failed to get the word out about how the new law could truly improve people’s lives. At the same time, Republicans managed to turn the coined word “Obamacare” -- one that says our President cares -- into a negative-sounding name for the new law!

In an effort to develop a unified voice for Democrats, HCDP conducted focus groups about messaging at the HCDP headquarters on March 26. BAND sent four members to participate; Doug Peterson and Cheri Germain attended an early group, and Mohammed Nasrullah and Vicki Cherewaty followed in the next group.

Each group of about six or seven Democrats from a variety of backgrounds participated in a two-hour survey and discussion. The idea was to ascertain how Democrats perceive certain phrases, pictures and position statements. The facilitator

began by asking what should be the responsibilities of city or county governments. Answers ranged from “infrastructure” to “security” and various services.

Next, the group members were given a series of phrases and were asked to say whether they were associated with Democrats, Republicans or neither. Among the phrases were those some might call trite, such as “American dream.” Focus group members felt that there were many phrases that Republicans had co-opted and claimed as their own, when often the origin of the phrase was party-neutral.

The same effect occurred when the group facilitator showed them pictures and asked the participants again to identify whether they were Democratic, Republican or neutral. The pictures included iconic symbols like the American flag emblazoned with the words “in God we trust,” as well as photos of people in business attire and in hard hats.

Finally, focus group participants critiqued about four position statements, each appearing as a paragraph and mounted on what looked like a cue card. The facilitator said that none were short enough to wind up on a bumper sticker or a billboard,

messaging, continued on page 5



BAND board member Ila Montalvo Roel had more questions for Greg Wythe, a political consultant and blogger, after his discussion on redistricting at the March meeting.

Political advertising is paid for by Bay Area New Democrats.

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but arriving at some kind of statement would help the party develop campaign materials.

It appeared that about half of the statements on the cue cards contained language that traditional Democrats would use, while the other half attempted to incorporate the phrases that participants had previously agreed had somehow come to be associated with Republicans, such as “fiscal responsibility” or “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” The group voted on their top two favorites and then informally attempted to merge the traditional Democratic language while reclaiming those phrases that Republicans have adopted.

The facilitator did not provide a time frame, but he indicated that the focus group’s input would be taken into account in coming up with something that looks like a mission statement. Focus group participants look forward to seeing the end product.

Blogger Greg Wythe Previews Redistricting Stats

Democrats should show up for redistricting meetings to make their voices heard.

“We need to get on public record,” said blogger Greg Wythe, who spoke at the March BAND meeting about 2011 redistricting issues. Democrats aren’t the ones drawing the redistricting lines in Texas after the 2010 census, said Wythe, but their input could be crucial.

Wythe, a political consultant who lives in southwest Houston and works with the Asian-American Justice Center, also writes a blog called gregsopinion.com. He has spoken to the Houston City Council and local government groups about the redistricting now in discussion at the local, state and Congressional levels.

On his way to the Clear Lake area meeting, Wythe first noted the outward signs of demographic change he spotted -- in the form of ethnically diverse restaurants. Kingwood, which shares a Houston City Council district with Clear Lake, is not so diverse, according to Wythe.

Ever since Houston annexed the northeast-

area development in late 1996, the City Council member in District E has always been a resident of Kingwood. Current District E Council member Mike Sullivan, a Republican, believes the two neighborhoods, although they are not close together, should remain in the same district because of similar, conservative-leaning demographics.

Proposals for new districts presented since Wythe’s presentation still place Clear Lake and Kingwood in the same district, and two new districts are planned for the city.

At the meeting, Wythe presented color-coded demographic maps based on the 2000 and 2010 census records. Then he “backed out” the numbers for residents who were younger than 18 or were not U.S. citizens, and thus, not potential voters.

In Clear Lake in 2010, 60 percent of voting age citizens were Anglo, 7 percent were African-American, 19 percent were Hispanic and 13 percent were Asian. Kingwood was less diverse, with more than 80

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redistricting, continued from page 5

percent Anglo voting-age citizens and only 10 percent Hispanics eligible to vote. Other ethnic groups made up a very small percentage of the Kingwood population.

In Harris County, the ethnic breakdown for voting age citizens is: Anglo, 49.7 percent; Hispanic, 22.5 percent; African-American, 22.5 percent; Asian, 4.9 percent; and other, 1.08 percent, Blythe said.

Among county residents younger than 18, Hispanics comprise 51.3 percent, compared to Anglos at 23.0. Because of these numbers, a future Democratic majority in the county looks possible

to consultants like Wythe. Hispanics who vote are usually Democrats, but many Hispanics so far have not actively participated in elections. "There's still a lot of hard work that's got to go into making that a political reality," Wythe said.

Wythe predicted that various plans for other districts in Harris County, the Texas legislature, the State Board of Education and the U.S. Congress will be announced in May. Final decisions are likely by June. Changes in districts could affect Democratic Party members at the precinct level as well, Wythe said.

The Poor Don't Deserve Stereotyping by the Republicans

Family members said President Ronald Reagan was a generous man. Despite a difficult relationship with his father, his son Ron Reagan Jr. said, "If I can even approach the level of kindness and consideration he showed people, I'd be proud. Kindness is a very underrated virtue. And he was an extremely kind man."

Reagan's reported kindness makes his use of demonization as a political weapon paradoxical. More than anyone, Reagan was responsible for introducing the term "welfare queen" to our political lexicon.

During his 1976 Presidential campaign, he invoked a Cadillac-driving woman saying, "She has 80 names, 30 addresses, 12 Social Security cards and is collecting veteran's benefits on four non-existing deceased husbands. And she is collecting Social Security on her cards. She's got Medicaid, getting food stamps, and she is collecting welfare under each of her names. Her tax-free cash income is over \$150,000."

Reagan never identified this woman. Most likely it was based on a contemporary newspaper report of a Chicago woman, Linda Taylor, who was convicted of using four aliases and of cheating the government out of \$8,000. If this was Reagan's welfare queen, he embellished nearly every detail.

Reagan, a master storyteller, didn't seek to illustrate fraud or encourage vigilance. Instead, he created an exemplar, standing for people in

general and women in particular who receive public assistance. It was a cruel stereotype painted with a deliberately broad brush.

This political tactic continues. As recently as Feb. 27, Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour, a Republican Presidential contender, argued for an increase in Medicaid co-pays saying, "We have people pull up at the pharmacy window in a BMW and say they can't afford their co-payment."

Gov. Barbour offered nothing to substantiate his assertion. However, it is significant that he used the word "people," suggesting that it was common and not "someone," indicating a specific case.

The use of stereotypes to make a political point is not limited to politicians. In the *Galveston Daily News*, a local resident commenting on a column wrote, "When a working person pays \$10,000 in taxes a year and only gets back \$600, while a single mother who only pops out babies, never worked a day in their lives, and sucks the welfare system dry gets \$4000, this shows clearly where priorities are at."

We, meaning all of us, know better. With unemployment above 9 percent and underemployment approaching 20 percent, we all know someone who has lost a job. These are former co-workers, our neighbors and our friends. We know how they are struggling to put food on the table and keep a roof overhead. We see them at the libraries

stereotypes of the poor, continued on page 7

stereotypes of the poor, continued from page 6
and coffee shops sending resumes over the Internet, because their home connection is gone. We see them jump when their phone rings hoping for a job but expecting a bill collector. Maybe they still have a nice car; they need it to get to interviews.

We know the truth about the working poor. We see them every day mowing our lawns, cleaning



Deana Schmidt, left, and Debra Goode, spoke at the new Galveston Bay Area Club meeting in March. Schmidt, a geography professor at the University of Houston-Clear Lake, is starting an environmental book club, and the first book selection will be "Energy Metropolis." Goode, along with other Pinebrook residents, has cleared thousands of tallow trees and restored native vegetation in an undeveloped tract in her neighborhood.

our offices and selling papers on street corners. We know their cars, or the buses and bikes they ride to work.

We all know single mothers. They are our sisters, our daughters, our granddaughters and our nieces, or the daughters of friends. They work beside us. They deliver our morning coffee and check out our purchases. We know their stories about unexpected pregnancies, lost love and marriages that went horribly wrong. Some of them are little more than children themselves, now with a woman's responsibility.

None of these women "pops out babies." These are courageous women who chose to give birth and care for a new life. We see them doing the best they can, and we know they need help.

We know the truth about the poverty around us. We know every system has someone trying to take advantage. Vigilance is necessary. We also know that the cheats are the exceptions and the people we see daily need the limited assistance available.

While kindness and generosity should be spread across the political spectrum, stereotypes about the poor should not be. Some choose to view our day-to-day contacts as exceptional and anonymous generalizations as typical. It is an enigma.

Perhaps it is difficult to appreciate just how lucky we are. Perhaps it is frightening to accept the truth of the proverb, "There, but for the grace of God, go I."

Rusty Cates

Sensible Texas Bottle Bill Proposed to Bring Jobs to Texas

While the Texas legislature has been wasting much of its time on so-called "emergency" actions, the sensible Texas Bottle Bill has been making its way through the legislative process.

State Sen. Rodney Ellis introduced Senate Bill 1119, and Rep. Garnet Coleman introduced House Bill 2114 on March 3. The bills, which would require retailers to charge a deposit of a dime per recyclable beverage container, have been assigned to the Environmental Regulations Committee in the House

and the Finance Committee in the Senate.

Patsy Gillham of Plastic Pollution Texas is among the group of environmental activists seeking passage of the Texas Bottle Bill, and she spoke recently at a meeting of the newly organized Galveston Bay Area Sierra Club.

Gillham began by showing a video of Houston's Buffalo Bayou littered with beverage containers made of aluminum, glass and plastic. (The

bottle bill, continued on page 8

bottle bill, continued from page 7

Buffalo Bayou Partnership is among the backers of the bill.)

While the effect of litter is easy to see, its effect on wildlife is not as obvious. Litter dumped into storm drains and waterways travels to the Gulf of Mexico. A plastic water bottle lodged in the pelvic bones of a brown pelican skeleton on the North Jetty on Bolivar in Galveston County is one isolated but representative example of the damage beverage containers can do when left in the environment.

The goal of the Texas Bottle Bill is not only to reduce litter in waterways, on roads and on public lands, but to reduce Texans' carbon footprint by supplying materials for recycling and replacing the practice of using virgin material to produce new products.

In spite of solid environmental reasons for the Texas Bottle Bill, Plastic Pollution Texas is calling attention to the bill's potential for job creation around the state to appeal to the Republican-controlled legislature, Gillham noted. Jobs would be created at redemption centers and at expanding recycling centers, where more materials to be recycled would become available.

With the bill, consumers would get the deposit back when they turned in the bottle or can at redemption centers. The deposit and refund system would combine financial incentives for entrepreneurs, non-profits and schools to open those redemption centers, but retailers could also participate if they choose.

Critics of the bill have called the required deposit on containers a tax. Gillham pointed out that consumers receive a refund when they return the beverage containers, so they are not paying a tax. As in the old days when purchasers of glass soft drink bottles had to pay a deposit, consumers return to those retail outlets to shop again anyway, so they are rarely making a special trip for just the refund.

Another criticism aimed at the bill is that many consumers already have access to curbside recycling. The bill's promoters say that curbside recycling is still not available in at least half of American homes, and consumers who use the products away from home

are unlikely to bring them back home for recycling at the curb.

If the bill passes, Texas would join 11 other states with similar programs. Another 10 states have deposit/refund legislation pending. In Hawaii, where such a bill passed in 2005, the argument that people would stop buying alcohol if they had to pay a deposit did not hold up. Gillham said Hawaiians are still purchasing alcohol at the same rate as prior to 2005.

Of course, there will always be customers who don't get around to obtaining their refunds. That deposit money would be used to fund the program, Gillham said. In states with their own version of the Bottle Bill, a new kind of business has begun to appear. Gillham showed video of what she called reverse vending machines. Customers can dump entire bags of aluminum, plastic and glass bottles into the machine to obtain their deposit refunds.

The House committee is expected to schedule a hearing on the bill some time in April. Please help the bill make it past the Committee on Environmental Regulations by contacting a committee member, preferably by letter.

To address a House member, send your letter to:

The Honorable (representative's name and title)
House Committee on Environmental Regulations
(must be the heading)
Member of the House
P. O. Box 2910
Austin, 78768-2910

Chair: Rep. Wayne Smith (Baytown)

Vice chair: Rep. Jessica Farrar (Houston)

Committee members:

Rep. Jose Aliseda (Beeville)

Rep. Lon Burnam (Fort Worth)

Rep. Warren Chisum (Pampa)

Rep. Kelly Hancock (North Richland)

Rep. Ken Legler (Pasadena)

Rep. Lanham Lyne (Wichita Falls)

Rep. Ron Reynolds (Missouri City)

For more information on the bill itself, please see www.texasbottlebill.com.