

# DEMOCRATIC REPORTER

A Newsletter for Bay Area New Democrats

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## Ask the Republicans Where the Jobs Are

In an effort to politically embarrass President Obama, Republican politicians are all asking, "Where are the jobs?"

Here is the history of job creation in America for the past 20 years. The Clinton presidency witnessed a period of economic prosperity that created 22 million new jobs. Revenues during Clinton's administration were sufficient to balance the federal budget and even provide a surplus that exceeded \$400 billion.

George W. Bush came to the presidency in 2001. His administration got America into two major wars. Instead of raising taxes to pay for them, he advanced his Republican trickle-down philosophy and provided large tax cuts to the nation's wealthiest people. The nation lost eight million jobs and the deficit doubled, increasing by \$5.8 trillion -- proving that in the real world, despite radical Republican predictions, tax cuts for the rich kill jobs and balloon the deficit.

In 2008 the nation, looking for change, elected Democrat Barack Obama President, along with a

Democratic House of Representatives and Senate. Obama inherited a devastated economy, a record deficit and two unfunded wars.

The House elected Nancy Pelosi as its Speaker. Under her leadership, the House soon passed numerous job-creating bills. Although the Senate had a Democratic majority, the Democrats lacked the 60 votes necessary to overcome

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*Happy 50th birthday, Mr. President!*

### Chronicle's Science Writer to Be Guest Speaker at August BAND Meeting

Eric Berger, the *Houston Chronicle* science writer, will discuss hurricane season, climate change and the space program at the next monthly meeting of Bay Area New Democrats.

The meeting takes place at 7 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 10 at the Harris County Courthouse Bay Area Annex at 16603 Buccaneer, across the parking lot from Freeman Library.

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Republican filibusters.

Republican Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, announced early in the session that “The single most important thing we want to achieve is for President Obama to be a one-term President.” Under his leadership, Senate Republicans killed most of the Democratic job legislation.

President Obama successfully passed legislation that provided loans to save the American automobile industry, thus saving tens of thousands of jobs nationwide. (Those loans are being repaid.) In addition, he succeeded in creating another two million jobs.

In 2010, the Republican candidates campaigned nationwide promising jobs for unemployed Americans. With this issue, they took a majority in the House of Representatives and elected a Republican Speaker. Although elected on the promise of creating jobs, the Republican House of Representatives made no effort to create them.

That’s what has happened to the jobs in

America. The Republicans created unemployment in the Bush administration and have effectively stunted job growth in the current administration.

With Republican control of the House of Representatives and their ability to filibuster and kill any Senate legislation, there will be no new job creation in our near future. After all Republicans’ “highest priority” is to defeat President Obama by blaming the nation’s unemployment on him. They want to maintain high unemployment levels and they are confident they can pull the wool over the voters’ eyes.

At the state level, radical Republicans followed the model of protecting tax cuts for the rich while cutting our schools, colleges, and local services.

Congress is in recess and the 82nd Legislature has ended. Our representatives are back home in their districts. Texas citizens ought be calling the local offices of U.S. Reps. Ron Paul and Pete Olsen as well as State Sen. Mike Jackson and State Reps. John Davis and Larry Taylor with a simple question: “Where are the jobs?”

## Radio Talk Show Host Confronts Intellectual Dishonesty

Geoff Berg makes it his business to confront Republicans with their intellectual dishonesty.

Berg, an attorney who hosts a progressive talk show 3-4 p.m. on Fridays on KPFT-FM (90.1 Houston), spoke at the June BAND meeting about whatever was on attendees’ minds and his.

At the meeting, the recent state legislative session and the new law on abortion were fresh on Berg’s mind. State Sen. Dan Patrick, who once reported on sports at a local news station, introduced the bill. Berg has met Patrick and said he’s the “nicest guy you’ll ever meet” and then added that he is “out of his mind.”

The latest abortion legislation adds insult to injury. In 2003, the legislature passed a bill that requires women to read a right-wing pamphlet called “A Woman’s Right to Know” before undergoing an abortion. That law and the new law restrict a woman’s constitutional rights, Berg said.

The new law requires that a woman have an

ultrasound at least 24 hours prior to an abortion. If she chooses not to look at the sonogram screen, the doctor must describe what he or she sees, and, if there is already a heartbeat, the doctor must play it audibly for the pregnant woman.

Most pro-choice advocates view the procedure as coercive, meant to dissuade a woman from having the abortion. Patrick claimed the law was to inform women, but Berg maintained that the law essentially said women are stupid and not informed

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enough to make their own decisions.

Berg contrasted the abortion legislation with another ongoing controversy. For the last 15 years, the Republican Texas Supreme Court has sided with large corporations 75 to 92 percent of the time, he said. Most notably, the court has upheld mandatory arbitration provisions in contracts that ultimately keep consumers, often with legitimate beefs, out of the court.

If the consumers did bother to read a really long contract, they might have thought that the requirement that any dispute would go to arbitration and not to court would be a less adversarial, neutral way to settle an argument. What they might not know is that the corporations work with arbitrators who almost always side with the corporation. The process is not neutral at all, according to Berg.

In most situations, however, the consumers do not really read the contract. Picture a closing on a house or other large purchase, in which the clerk repeatedly places documents in front of the purchaser with instructions to “just sign here.”

The state Supreme Court has said that the consumer is presumed to have read and waived his rights to a jury trial because he signed the thick document. Berg said Republicans are willing to limit your right when it serves them -- and to presume you are intelligent enough to recognize that a mandatory arbitration clause is not in your best interest. Yet, they presume a woman did not read anything about abortion or understand it before deciding to schedule the procedure. This is intellectual dishonesty, said Berg. Following Dan Patrick’s line of logic, the Republicans should introduce legislation requiring that arbitration provisions in a contract be read aloud and explained to a consumer, and that they also be told an anecdote about a consumer for whom the arbitration provision meant the difference between life and death.

Berg said a driving theme on his program is the alleged persecution of the right. For example, during the health care reform debate, conservatives put out the message that “your health care is under attack.” At other times, they have said that gay marriage invalidates the traditional marriages of heterosexual couples or that Democrats are “taking away our country.” They make the arguments personal, even if, for example, a gay couple marrying has no real effect on their own marriages.

The talk show host marveled at polls of whites who say they think they are more oppressed than minorities. Berg’s proposed solution is to confront their “nonfactual nonsense.”

Speaking soon after the Rep. Anthony Weiner scandal broke, Berg noted that when the news is bad for Democrats, we are more likely to admit it, while Republicans don’t. Republicans would have



*BAND president C.J. Farley introduced radio talk show host Geoff Berg, who spoke at the June meeting.*

insisted that Weiner did nothing wrong if he were one of their own. “Liberals do talk the hard way, constrained by quaint things like facts,” he said.

When a BAND member asked Berg about running for Harris County Democratic Party chair, Berg said that he was not interested. Besides his talk show, which can also be heard on the 89.5 frequency in Galveston or streaming live on kpft.org, Berg writes a blog for the *Houston Chronicle*. If he held office, he could not poke fun at conservatives in both formats, he said.

One of his frequent targets is Gov. Rick Perry, whom he called “chancellor” in his blog. Berg said Perry brags about the “Texas economic miracle” and attributes the miracle to the state’s business-friendly policies. While Texas corporations can do just about anything they want, Berg said, unemployment numbers are the same as they are in Democratic New York.

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Charles Kuffner, author of the “Off the Kuff” blog, spoke to BAND members at the July meeting about redistricting.

Political advertising is paid for by Bay Area New Democrats.

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Voter identification is another area in which progressives need to confront conservatives’ misuse of the facts. Berg said that when people ask what is wrong with being asked to show identification in order to vote, we should point out that voting, unlike check writing, is a constitutional right.

Republicans’ intent is to discourage voting by the poor and minorities, groups most unlikely to have a driver’s license -- and most likely to vote Democratic. The kind of voter fraud allegedly curtailed with the new requirement is voter impersonation. Berg pointed out that the only voter impersonation fraud case in Texas occurred in 1996.

Berg said that independent voters are the ones Democrats need to identify and help them to see the foolishness of some assertions by Republicans. He lamented the many “limited information” voters who are not unintelligent, but are just not paying attention. It’s our job to bring the important information to their attention and characterize conservative positions accurately, he said.

## Let’s Make Redistricting Work for Us with Good Recruiting

Regardless of what the Justice Department rules on the Republican-drawn redistricting maps in Texas, Democrats should recruit and donate to people we think could win.

That’s the conclusion of blogger Charles Kuffner, who writes *Off the Kuff*, Texas’ longest running progressive blog. Kuffner spoke about redistricting at the July BAND meeting.

Republicans are predictably drawing redistricting lines to benefit themselves, and legal challenges have already begun, but Kuffner said, “Don’t worry about what the Justice Department might do.”

Kuffner, who was a math major and enjoys crunching the numbers, has examined the proposed new district maps and said they don’t do us any favors.

For starters, the Republicans have argued that they drew districts that are “Hispanic” districts. As Kuffner pointed out, the percentage of Latinos who are voting age is about half of the total Latinos.

The numbers of Hispanics counted in the

census include many non-citizens, citizens who are too young to vote and voting age citizens who just don’t participate in the process. While that inflated number of Hispanics helped Texas earn more Congressional districts in the first place, counting those who are non-citizens or too young to vote distorts redistricting maps, according to Kuffner.

In 2010, a lousy year for Democrats, the Democrats with the fewest votes in Harris County still received more votes than the top vote getter in the county in 2006, which was a pretty good year for Democrats.

Since 2008, Democrats outnumber Republicans in Harris County, and with the increase in the Hispanic population, some think the trend will continue. Yet, “nothing is inevitable,” Kuffner said, because the trend might not hold if fewer Hispanics immigrate to Texas.

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*Kuffner, continued from page 4*

For that reason, voter registration is particularly important for future elections, Kuffner said. He predicted that the requirement for voter identification will have an effect on the elections and that the King Street Patriots, a Tea Party group, will challenge lots of registrations.

“The best defense is a good offense,” said Kuffner. Those of us who are voter registrars should make sure we dot all the i’s and cross all the t’s, he said.

Kuffner reviewed some of the proposed Congressional district maps for BAND members. He said the most egregious proposals were in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, where the population is about 50 percent minority, yet the maps as drawn are likely to result in only one Hispanic representative for Tarrant County.

Closer to home, Ron Paul’s current district, 14, is now an open seat. Kuffner was concerned about Craig Eiland’s district, drawn so that it won’t be Democratic much longer. Kuffner would like Eiland to run for another office, yet, as soon as he goes, Democrats will likely cede the district to the Republicans.

Kuffner hoped Nick Lampson would run in a new district in Jefferson County, which is in the area Lampson originally represented in Congress before Tom DeLay’s redistricting changed it.

Rep. Gene Green, a non-Hispanic who continues to be re-elected in a largely Hispanic district, appears to have been given a pass by Republicans, Kuffner said. Green ran ahead of all the Democrats in his district, including Sheriff Adrian Garcia, who was the top vote getter in Harris County. Republicans have targeted other Democrats’ districts, but left Green’s largely intact.

As of the July meeting, Kuffner said there were 14 lawsuits challenging the new district maps. He said every map would be reviewed by the Justice Department, but the department was more likely to examine Congressional districts and would not spend much time looking at lower level maps in cities or states.



*Blogger Charles Kuffner said Democratic voter registrars should be sure to dot all the i’s and cross all the t’s, especially when registering voters for the 2012 election.*

## Rep. Farrar to Speak at August 18 BAAD Women Meeting

State Rep. Jessica Farrar will be the featured speaker at the August Bay Area Association of Democratic (BAAD) Women meeting.

Farrar, currently serving in her ninth term as state representative of District 148, will provide a legislative report on the 2011 sessions at the meeting on Thursday, Aug. 18 at the Bay Area Community Center in Clear Lake Park (across the street from the lake), 5002 NASA Parkway in Seabrook.

Social hour begins at 6:30 p.m., followed by the meeting at 7 p.m.

First elected to the Texas House in 1994, Farrar is the longest serving Hispanic member from Harris County in the Texas House of Representatives. She currently serves as the vice-chair of the House Committee on Environmental Regulation and is a member of the House Committee of Border and Intergovernmental Affairs.

In addition, Rep. Farrar serves as leader of the House Democratic Caucus and is the founder and vice-chair of the Women’s Health Caucus.

## Mayor's Sustainability Office Helping Houston Look Greener

When you see Houston Mayor Annise Parker on the local news, the story is likely to be about controversial issues like red-light cameras, the drainage fee or the building of a new Walmart.

Meanwhile, the mayor's sustainability office is working quietly behind the scenes making Houston a better and greener place to live. Laura Spanjian, the sustainability director for the city, spoke to the June meeting of the Galveston Bay Area Sierra Club and highlighted the efforts to improve energy efficiency and attitudes.

Many of the initiatives undertaken by the city are to reduce greenhouse emissions. More than half of the programs aim at reducing energy use in Houston buildings, and the rest seek to reduce transportation emissions, Spanjian said.

Right now, 80 municipal buildings are undergoing retro-fits to accomplish that goal, she said. Spanjian's office and the Houston Independent School District are coordinating the same retro-fit efforts in HISD school buildings.

In existing Houston homes, the sustainability office has initiated programs to make them more

energy-efficient as well. The Five-Star program gives builders incentive money to build energy-efficient new homes, Spanjian said.

Houston is the number one municipal purchaser of renewable energy. Here, renewable energy takes the form of wind energy. While sunshine is abundantly available, it's harder to put solar energy in place in Houston, where, unlike San Antonio and Austin, we do not have public utility companies run by the city.

The City of Houston is in partnership with the University of Houston for a green buildings program. The city and the university have acquired old shipping containers that are distributed citywide to provide back-up power off the grid in case of power failures. At least one container is in Clear Lake.

Spanjian said city initiatives are encouraging owners of non-municipal buildings with the "green office challenge." The idea is to improve the behavior of tenants and to encourage energy efficiency. Building owners who manage to find 15 percent energy savings will be reimbursed for 20 percent of their program costs.

There is great momentum in the area for these kinds of programs, Spanjian said. Houston is sixth in the country for LEAD (Leader in Environmental Education and Design)-certified buildings.

The sustainability office is also working with Metro to put three new rail lines in Houston so that the lines are where the working people are. We have a "car culture," Spanjian said, but her office hopes to encourage people to drive more efficient or electric cars.

NRG is spending \$10 million to put charging stations around Houston, with the goal that charging electric cars will be as convenient as filling a car up at the gas station. Another program, Eco-Totality, aims to put free charging stations at the homes of electric car purchasers. Spanjian's office hopes to coordinate regionally so that there are plenty of charging stations en route between Houston and San Antonio or Austin.

*sustainability director, continued on page 7*



*David Robinson, a candidate for Houston City Council at-large position 2, stopped by to introduce himself to BAND members in July. An opponent in the same race, Bo Fraga, was also at the meeting.*

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The sustainability office is working on a green infrastructure program too. In May, the office oversaw the millionth tree planting in the city. Houston has several “adopt” programs for groups to beautify ditches and esplanades, and a regular farmers’ market is now in front of City Hall.

The city still has a number of “food deserts,” or neighborhoods without access to fresh produce -- and too much access to unhealthy food at fast food restaurants. The city’s sustainability office and HEB are cooperating to put more supermarkets in low-income areas.

Spanjian’s office has applied for a grant for a mobile food truck. The Seed to Plate initiative will aim to teach nutrition and how to cook with produce, Spanjian said.

In addition, the city sustainability office is leasing surplus city property in low-income neighborhoods to non-profit organizations like Urban Harvest so that they can create gardens for fresh produce.

Spanjian said recycling is an area where the

City of Houston needs improvement. Because the city does not bill for garbage collection, there is no fund to subsidize recycling. So far, about one-third of Houston residents have single-stream recycling, another third have dual-stream recycling and the remaining third have no recycling services available at the curb.

The sustainability office is working with private sector apartments and businesses to get them to commit to recycling. Recycling saves the city money spent on landfill space, she said.

The current drought may have one benefit for the city, Spanjian said. The mayor implemented stage-one water conservation plans earlier in the summer, and the longer our drought continues, the more we will be forced to take more measures.

Most of the programs in the sustainability office, for now, are incentives, because the City of Houston does not yet want to mandate changes. In three to four years, Spanjian hopes for a culture change that will enable city lawmakers to “codify” green measures, instead of relying on the good fortune of having a progressive mayor.



*BAND members Yasir Zulfiqar, Mohammed Nasrullah and Bob Tomlinson were already thinking about the 2012 election season last spring before the BAND Leadership Excellence Award reception.*

## Drought’s Effect to Be Discussed at Next Local Sierra Club Meeting

“Oyster guru” Dr. Sammy Ray of Texas A&M University in Galveston will talk about the effect of the drought on oysters, the general health of Galveston Bay and fisheries in general at the next meeting of the Galveston Bay Area Sierra Club.

Social time begins at 6:30 p.m., followed by the meeting at 7 p.m. Wednesday, Aug. 17. The meeting takes place at the Bay Area Community Center, Clear Lake Park, 5002 NASA Parkway, in Seabrook.

Dr. Ray, age 93, officially retired in 1990 as head of TAMUG’s marine sciences department, but he remains active as an adviser and coordinator of student programs and several community outreach programs. He was awarded a lifetime honorary membership in the National Shellfisheries Association.