ELECTION DATES TO REMEMBER

Saturday, May 5th, 2018 - (Election Day) Local Races

Saturday, May 22nd, 2018 - (Election Day) Primary Runoffs

Early voting for the May 22nd runoffs begins on May 14th and ends on May 18th.
Spotlight on: Voter Registration

by Courtney A. Szigetvari, Editor-in-Chief

On April 28th, I sat down for an interview with Bruce Elfant, the legendary Travis County Tax Assessor-Collector and Voter Registrar. Mr. Elfant is known throughout the Travis County community as an outstanding advocate for voter registration and education. In 2016, him and his team were able to get 92.6% of eligible voters in Travis County registered; they currently maintain about a 90% rate in the county to-date, and are hoping to get 93% of eligible voters registered by the end of 2018. It is due to Mr. Elfant and his team’s efforts that Travis County has the highest county-wide voter turnout rate in the state of Texas. Even though Travis County is a model area for voter turnout, the United States as a whole still ranks 100th in the world for voter participation; we need to do better. Texas-based social workers can personally activate their community’s voters by becoming a volunteer deputy registrar (VDR). VDRs are responsible for getting out the vote in the counties they have been signed up in by county voter registrars (such as Mr. Elfant). VDRs attend voter registration drives, organize block walks in their respective areas, and gather information on unregistered voters to drive up turnout. As a VDR, you can register people to vote in two ways: by signing them up personally with a county-oriented voter registration card, or by giving them a mail-in form.

At our meeting, Mr. Elfant spelled out how a social worker could become a VDR. The requirements for the position are as follows:
One must:

- Be a United States citizen
- Be at least 18-years-old
- Attend an hour long training session (Texas requires that election offices provide at least one per month)

Mr. Elfant also stated that he will go anywhere in Travis County that provide him with 15 trainees or more, which is handy if you live in the area and would like to become a VDR with some of your fellow social workers (or friends who are not). The VDR training is good for two years.

**Why should social workers become VDRs?**

In the NASW Code of Ethics (2017), it is stated under the Social and Political Action section that “Social workers should act to expand choice and opportunity for all people, with special regard for vulnerable, disadvantaged, oppressed, and exploited people and groups.” Thus, it can be said it is up to us to promote the opinions of the communities we serve through voter advocacy efforts such as actively registering our clients. In fact, Mr. Elfant stated that his particular office takes “…it seriously because it is a constitutional responsibility.”

An example of a population that social workers could help register are those who are incarcerated. According to Mr. Elfant, “80 to 90% of people in jails can vote” and “the people who need [social work] services most vote the least. We need to figure out how to change that dynamic.” These are the perspectives we want to come to the forefront as people who work with underrepresented populations.

**The Future of Voter Registration in Texas**

Mr. Elfant and I wrapped up our talk by speaking about voter suppression. He stated that while it is bad, the voter turnout in this country is worse — 30 to 40% of people who are eligible to vote decided to note show up in 2016. Moreover, a city council race a few years ago was decided by only 7% of eligible voters in Austin. As social workers, we can uplift the idea that voting can make a difference, as long as also acknowledge why people may not vote and meet them where they are at (i.e. if politicians have not done their jobs to truly represent people of certain backgrounds or cultural identities).

In order to increase voter turnout, Mr. Elfant suggested that we could switch up voting years for certain candidates or issues so that more people will show up every time and not only for presidential elections or the midterms (when large amounts of congressional seats are voted on at the halfway mark between the former). The Travis County Voter Registrar’s office also makes a point to speak with the youth in the area to get them involved in civic engagement so they will be ready to participate in elections when they are ready.

Even though a large amount of advocacy efforts have come to the forefront of social work and justice since November 2016, Mr. Elfant still does not know if this is a moment or a movement. Social workers can take part in ensuring voting advocacy is a movement by showing up for our communities in positions such as VDRs to meet the ethical considerations of our profession.
Texas Legislative Update

by Adam Benden, LMSW

- **On May 1st at 10:00 A.M.**, the Texas House of Representatives Committee on Corrections heard public testimony on identifying best practices for how social workers can assist in reducing recidivism and improve outcomes across the criminal justice system. Each speaker was given three minutes to speak to a particular item under consideration by the committee. The taped broadcast can be watched here: http://www.house.state.tx.us/video-audio/committee-broadcasts/

- **On May 22nd at 10:00 A.M.**, the Senate Committee on Veteran Affairs & Border Security will be hearing public testimony on the current effectiveness of and ways to improve veterans' health and mental service access and delivery in Texas. This hearing will cover the VA Choice Program’s potential expiration, continuation, or expansion in the future. The committee will also be receiving testimony on the overall impact of services offered by the United States Department of Veteran Affairs and Veteran Benefits Administration. The hearing will take place at the Texas State Capitol in Austin in Room 2E.20 (the Betty King Committee Room). More information can be found here: https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/85R/schedules/pdf/C6502018052210001.PDF

- **On May 25th** the Sunset Commission will take up the issue of the Behavioral Health Council and the Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners. The meeting information has not been posted yet, but more info can be found on the Sunset Commission’s website, found here: https://www.sunset.texas.gov/meetings

Stay tuned for more details on upcoming hearings!
Student Voices

Why do you think it is important for social work students to vote?

Jennifer Campbell, MSSW Candidate ’19, The University of Texas at Austin — Steve Hicks School of Social Work

Social work students are uniquely poised to deliver critical support to public policies at all levels that align with social work values. As students, we have access to large bodies of research, innovative clinical knowledge, and experts in the form of school faculty and staff. We know what is working on the micro level, and we know which programs and policies will facilitate effective service delivery. We also have the training in client and cause advocacy necessary to make legislative calls and visits, either by ourselves or alongside service recipients. Every day, we observe the power of single voices united in a common cause. With this marvelous orientation, social work students are perfectly prepared to vote consistently and strategically, and to educate their peers around crucial voting issues.

Such issues can vary according to each community’s needs, but they always begin with the inherent dignity, worth, agency of every community member. Federal programs like Medicare are sustained through votes. Local practices, such as fair chance hiring for people with criminal backgrounds, are made possible by elected officials. Candidates who value people over profits are always in need of emphatic support.

Article 6.04 of the NASW Code of Ethics requires all social workers to participate in political action. Social work degrees prepare students to practice social work at all levels of service, from individuals to countries. On a personal level, social workers are a resilient group: we must be, in the face of slow, incremental change that characterizes so much of what we do. Voting is an extension of social work practice. Voting directly influences the resources available to our communities. Social work students, and social work professionals, are ethically bound to vote and vote often!
I believe it’s important for student social workers to vote because it is one of the best tools for enacting systemic social change. According to the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics, “the primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty (preamble).” If we are serious about enhancing human well-being and helping all people meet their basic needs, we need to elect representatives who share these values and goals and will advocate for policies that can help achieve them.

In addition, it is not enough that we just vote and elect representatives who share these values but we must also work with legislators to develop the policies that can help eliminate poverty and all forms of oppression. For example, social workers can advocate for social and economic policies such as more public and affordable housing, establishing a universal health care system, raising the minimum wage to a living wage, and making higher education more affordable or tuition free.

Lastly, our Code of Ethics also states more explicitly that “social workers should engage in social and political action that seeks to ensure that all people have equal access to the resources, employment, services, and opportunities they require to meet their basic human needs and to develop fully (6.04).” It is clear that social workers should play an active role in our democracy to help meet the basic needs of all people. Voting is an important tool to help elect representatives who will advocate for these goals, but we should also participate in the formation of these policies.
Race to Watch: Beto O’Rourke versus Ted Cruz for United States Senate

by Courtney A. Szigetvari, Editor-in-Chief

Each month, we will be publishing a comparison between two frontrunners for various electoral races taking place at the federal, state, and local levels that we believe are important to Texas social workers. It is up to you to decide who embodies the spirit of social work between the two.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Issues</th>
<th>Beto O’Rourke</th>
<th>Ted Cruz</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civil Rights</td>
<td>Wants to end the government’s failed War on Drugs that has a devastating effect on communities of color; will find ways to have people who commit nonviolent offenses to be held accountable outside of the prison system; will improve access to mental health services for those who commit crimes to cut recidivism rates</td>
<td>Voted “no” on reauthorizing the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA); does not believe in equal pay for equal work</td>
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<td>Education</td>
<td>Does not believe public tax dollars should be given to private schools; wants to protect public school teachers’ retirement funds</td>
<td>Thinks we should abolish the United States Department of Education; believes in school choice</td>
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<td>The Economy</td>
<td>Wants to promote regulations that will protect consumers and encourage competition; supports antitrust regulations that will break up monopolies</td>
<td>Believes in free markets, individual fiscal responsibility, and liberty</td>
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<td>Healthcare</td>
<td>Believes in achieving universal healthcare coverage, whether it be a single-payer or dual system</td>
<td>Wants to repeal the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare)</td>
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<td>Immigration</td>
<td>Wants to pass the DREAM Act and close private immigration detention centers; aims to reform immigration laws to legalize the status of millions of immigrants in our country</td>
<td>Wants to further secure the border and only celebrate legal immigration to the United States; believes that the Obama Administration’s policies have encouraged criminals to illegally come here (President Obama’s administration deported over 2.5 million immigrants while he was in office)</td>
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<td>LGBTQIA Issues</td>
<td>Supports the Equality Act, which would provide LGBTQIA individuals with the same safeguards other protected groups have nationwide</td>
<td>Believes the Supreme Court’s gay marriage ruling undermines the Constitution; thinks that the title of marriage should be limited to the union of heterosexual couples</td>
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<td>Reproductive Justice</td>
<td>Is pro-choice and believes in protecting Title X</td>
<td>Is pro-life and promotes the defunding of organizations that provide comprehensive reproductive health care programs that include abortion</td>
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<td>Veterans’ Affairs</td>
<td>Wants to improve mental and physical health care access for Veterans; wants to make sure no Veteran experiences homelessness</td>
<td>Secured $244 million to rebuild Texas’ military complex; addressed the long waits times for Veterans seeking care at the South Texas Veterans Health Care System</td>
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Calendar of Activism

We are currently collecting submissions for our beta Calendar of Activism that we will be publishing in our June edition! If you know of a relevant social work/voter-oriented event in Texas that you would like to share to be included, please e-mail our editor-in-chief, Courtney A. Szigetvari, at caszigetvari@gmail.com. In the meantime, please check out the following events in our state:

**CENTRAL TEXAS**

May 8th, 2018
The Texas Tribune’s Summer Salon: A New Wave of Activism
Hotel Ella
1900 Rio Grande Street
Austin, Texas 78705
5:30 P.M. - 7:30 P.M. CDT
More information can be found here: [https://www.eventbrite.com/e/texas-tribune-summer-salon-a-new-wave-of-activism-registration-45200140838?aff=efbeventtix](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/texas-tribune-summer-salon-a-new-wave-of-activism-registration-45200140838?aff=efbeventtix)

May 20th, 2018
Travis County Democratic Party Ice Cream Social
VFW Post 856
406 East Alpine Road
Austin, Texas 78704
1:00 P.M. - 4:00 P.M. CDT
More information can be found here: [http://www.traviscountydemocrats.org/the-travis-county-ice-cream-social/](http://www.traviscountydemocrats.org/the-travis-county-ice-cream-social/)

**EAST TEXAS**

May 15th, 2018
Deputy Voter Registration Training
Elections Administration Office
300 W. William Joel Bryan
Bryan, Texas 77803
5:45 P.M. - 7:45 P.M. CDT
More information can be found here: [https://sites.google.com/brazosdems.org/bcdp/](https://sites.google.com/brazosdems.org/bcdp/)

May 23rd, 2018
U.S. Representative Bill Flores Virtual Town Hall
“The broadcast will be made available through Flores' website and Facebook page. The call-in number for both town halls will be (877) 229-8943. with access code 111954.”
7:00 P.M. - 8:00 P.M. CDT
More information can be found here: [https://sites.google.com/brazosdems.org/bcdp/](https://sites.google.com/brazosdems.org/bcdp/)
HOUSTON
May 16th, 2018
Candidate 101: Greater Houston
Harris County Democratic Party Headquarters
1445 N Loop West, Suite 110, Houston, Texas 77008
More information can be found here: https://act.myngp.com/Forms/1591039963968833280

May 17th, 2018
Voter Registrar Training
Eleanor K. Freed Montrose Library
4100 Montrose Boulevard
Houston, Texas 77006
6:00 P.M. CDT
More information can be found here: https://www.facebook.com/events/593275904355305/

NORTH TEXAS
May 19th, 2018
Volunteer Deputy Registrar Class
2377 N. Stemmons Frwy, Room 627
Dallas, Texas 75207
11:00 A.M. CDT
More information can be found here: https://www.dallascountyvotes.org/event/volunteer-deputy-registrar-class-13/>

May 24th, 2018
#ComeTogetherForChange with Rep. Beto O’Rourke, Judge Clay Jenkins, and local candidates
Mudhen
900 S Harwood Street
Dallas, Texas 75201
6:30 P.M. - 8:30 P.M. CDT

WEST TEXAS
May 29th, 2018
Volunteer Deputy Registrar Training
Esperanza Acosta Moreno Library
12480 Pebble Hills Boulevard
El Paso, Texas 79938
1:00 P.M. MDT
As a courtesy, NASW/Texas is updating non-member social workers on this initiative. To the 5,300+ members of NASW/Texas, we thank you for your support. To those who are not yet members we need you to continue this important work, please join at www.socialworkers.org or call 800-742-4089.

We are looking for volunteer contributors for The Social Work Vote! If you are interested in writing for any of the above columns, please email the editor-in-chief, Courtney A. Szigetvari, at caszigetvari@gmail.com with a short writing sample (one page or less) and a paragraph on why you would like to write for us.

Resources:
NASW/Texas’ Political Action Committee (PAC) (TPACE)
NASW/Texas Job Boards