



Mayra Beltrán / Houston Chronicle

The highest profile race in Texas this year is the contest to replace Republican U.S. Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison. Republican Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst, Democrat Sean Hubbard, Republican Tom Leppert, Democrat Paul Sadler, Republican Craig James and Republican Ted Cruz are seeking to take her place in Washington, D.C.

ELECTIONS

The primacy of the primaries: Vote now or forever hold your peace

Because of the number of safe districts, primary ballots are the ones that count

By Mark P. Jones

Only one out of every 10 Texans of voting age is expected to participate in the first round of the Democratic and Republican primaries that conclude on Tuesday. This is unfortunate, because due to the prevalence of safe Democratic and Republican legislative seats throughout the state, an overwhelming majority of our elected representatives in Washington, D.C., and Austin are effectively chosen in their party's respective primary.

This year is no exception, with only one or two U.S. House seats, one Texas Senate seat, fewer than a dozen Texas House seats and no statewide races truly in play in the November general election. This, of course, does not mean there will not be a handful of surprises in the fall (lightning does strike, just not very often). Rather, it means that even today we can predict with a considerable degree of accuracy which party's candidate will prevail in more than 200 of the 218 races for seats in the U.S.

Congress and Texas Legislature on Nov. 6. By contrast, the May 29 primary features several competitive statewide races, nearly a dozen competitive U.S. House races, and more than three dozen competitive Texas House and Senate contests where the winner is either all but certain to be victorious in November, or at least has a realistic chance of victory.

If voters want to maximize their influence over who represents them at the national, state and county level, the time to act is now, not November. Particularly within many of the Republican primaries taking place throughout the state, voters are able to choose between candidates who possess distinct positions regarding

major public policy issues ranging from public education to transportation infrastructure to the broader role of the state and federal government in society.

The marquee race on Tuesday will be the Republican U.S. Senate

primary, where the principal candidates (Ted Cruz, David Dewhurst and Tom Leppert) provide voters with relatively clear-cut alternatives in terms of the type of U.S. senator who will represent them in D.C. next year. Whereas Dewhurst and Leppert generally fit the mold of the establishment conservatives who dominate the Republican Senate delegation in D.C., Cruz is expected to join the GOP's small faction of movement conservatives led by Sen. Jim DeMint, R-S.C. These candidates offer competing visions of the role the GOP U.S. Senate delegation should play in

the policymaking process, especially in the event President Barack Obama is re-elected. As no candidate is projected to win more than 50 percent of the vote on Tuesday, the first and second place finishers appear destined to face off again

on July 31. As a side note, anyone who participates in the Democratic primary this month is ineligible to vote in the Republican primary runoffs on July 31 (and vice versa).

While the prospect of the Democratic U.S. Senate candidate being

victorious in the fall is extremely remote, the primary process will determine who represents the public face of the Democratic Party in this high-profile race. The two leading candidates, former Texas House member Paul Sadler and Sean Hubbard, provide voters with two very distinct choices in regard to who will be the party's standard bearer in November. Sadler is the only one of the four Democratic candidates with the minimum gravitas one generally expects of a U.S. Senate candidate, while Hubbard compensates for his lack of experience with a considerable level of youthful enthusiasm.

Texans who want their voices to be heard by their elected officials should participate in the Tuesday primary or else significantly forgo their ability to determine who represents them when the victors of this year's general election assume office in January of 2013. While early voting has concluded, Texans will have one last chance to vote in either the Democratic or Republican primary on Tuesday.

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David Dewhurst



Ted Cruz



Tom Leppert

UNEMPLOYMENT

The value of blue collar work

By Scott Braddock

The economy has been top of mind for me following my recent experience with unemployment. After all the drama and support I received from all sides, there came the simple issue of what I will do to feed my family and keep a roof over our heads.

Trained as a journalist, I found myself unemployed with the skills needed to bring important issues to light. Why not figure out why we simultaneously have lots of unemployed people and lots of job openings? And when I say lots of job openings, I mean lots.

Companies that employ skilled laborers can't find enough people. There are 325,000 current job postings in the state and the Texas Workforce Commission reports there are four applicants for every opening. Commission Chairman Tom Pauken says the well-intentioned policy of putting every Texas child on the college track isn't working. "[It] flies in the face of real-

ity and human nature," Pauken says.

The man who may head up the Texas Senate Education Committee next year, Sen. Dan Patrick, agrees. Patrick, R-Houston, told the Texas Tribune, "Everyone should have the option to go to college. But not everyone should be tracked to go to a four-year university We need to value what I call blue collar work."

My grandfather was that kind of blue collar worker. He served honorably in Korea and Vietnam in the United States Air Force. When he returned to the states, he became a mechanic to provide for his family. His business card read "Art Downing, General Repairs."

Because he often worked on complex farm equipment, a good portion of his day could be spent learning exactly how something was put together before he could even start the back-breaking work of repairing it. He essentially trained himself so that he could

do the work.

My grandfather also taught me the art of helping people understand complex ideas. He'd sit and read the encyclopedia for fun. When I was an 8-year-old boy, he could always explain things to me in a way that I would understand.

Mike Rowe, the host of "Dirty Jobs" on Discovery Channel, told lawmakers on Capitol Hill about his grandfather and the "widening skills gap" in America. He told the Senate Commerce Science and Transportation Committee that we need a national public relations campaign that "reconnects the country with the most important part of our work force."

Hundreds of thousands of jobs go unfilled because college-educated people don't have the skills needed, he said.

"People are surprised that high unemployment can exist at the same time as a skilled labor shortage. But they shouldn't be," he said. "We talk about creating millions of shovel-ready jobs for

a society that doesn't really encourage people to pick up a shovel," Rowe said.

Driving into Houston recently, I heard a lively discussion on National Public Radio about whether too many kids are going to college.

Henry Bienen, president emeritus of Northwestern University, argued that college is a "consumption good." In other words, college has intrinsic value.

"It was Steve Jobs himself, the late Steve Jobs, who said when he came back after dropping out of Reed and sat in on courses, he took a calligraphy course. And that calligraphy course gave him a whole new world of thinking about design.

"Who knows what in the college experience will trigger for people think-



Dean Rohrer

ing about the world in a different way," Bienen said.

In that same program, political scientist and author Charles Murray made the case that the way Americans think about certain kinds of jobs is damaging.

"You want to hire a lawyer or a doctor, you can do that in a nano-second. You want to find good skilled labor? That's hard," Murray said. "We have a demand for a wide variety of skills that we aren't meeting because

guess what: That's demeaning."

Murray's point is well taken. Many do think skilled labor is demeaning.

When I was eight years old, if someone had told me that what my grandfather did for a living was demeaning, I'd have been startled, to say the least. After all, he was my hero.

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