



EMPLOYEE FEDERATION

of

North Harris Montgomery
Community College District

2700 W. W. Thorne • Suite A-217 • Houston, Texas 77073



THE ADVOCATE

FEBRUARY, 1993

Edited by Steve Davis

REFLECTIONS ON THE ELECTION

This year, for the first time, I ventured into the political arena. The closest I had ever come to politics in the past was when I ran for President of the Faculty Senate at North Harris College. The Senate President had resigned his uncompleted term, and the Senate was in danger of disbanding. Re-elected the next year, I served a total of three years.

Why did I decide to run for a seat on the District Board of Trustees? Some of my motivation came from the faculty. A group of faculty concerned about the increasing number of administrators, endangered summer salaries, and the threat of merit pay, asked me to run. Friends and clients outside the College urged me to put my talents to use. Additional impetus came from serving on the College Advisory Committee convened by Dr. Pickelman in November, 1992. Strong signals about tuition increases, tax increases, and a new bond issue came through loud and clear. With a \$38,000,000 budget (plus \$6,000,000 in dedicated revenue), I wondered why that amount was insufficient to reach the educational goals of the District.

Another factor was my deep involvement with the College. I came to the College in 1976 when the first campus opened. I had been intimately connected to the College as an administrator and as a faculty member until I retired in 1989. I have retained that tie by teaching taxes in community education courses. I have the ability and background to analyze state funding, property taxation, budgets, and educational issues. I felt I could well serve this institution that holds much of my heart and soul.

During my campaign, in a conversation with W.W. Thorne, he said to me, "Peg, are you ever going to learn a lesson!" How right he was. These are the political lessons I have learned:

1. Don't be modest about your qualifications. Aggressively laying out my qualifications to the public was very hard. Until about two weeks before the election, I was often too polite to loudly toot my own horn.

2. Campaigns are expensive. My election efforts cost \$2900; half of that came from my family, the balance from contributions from 48

"Education for Democracy — Democracy for Education"

faculty, staff, and friends. As of this date, I don't yet know the cost of my opponent's campaign. I do know that, as of 1-6-93, her contributions were three times as large as mine, with \$1000 from the Texas Real Estate Political Action Committee, and \$500 from George Mitchell.

3. Influential friends help a great deal. My opponent had the singular support of many of the District Board members. Elmer Beckendorf squired her around Tomball, and their picture was on the front page of the Tomball paper. Diana Taylor and Martin Basuldua gave her a reception at the Kingwood Plaza Hospital. Taylor, Basuldua, Stewart, and Robinson worked for her at the polls. No other candidate received this kind of broad-based support from the Board. The Paper, student newspaper at North Harris College, pictured my opponent on the front page of the last issue before the election. No one of the other four candidates was even mentioned.

4. Political deals often accompany even local school board elections. Three candidates filed for Position 1: the incumbent, Jay McIlvain; a prominent realtor from the Woodlands/Conroe area, Mary Matteson; and myself. The contest narrowed when, fifteen minutes before filing closed, McIlvain faxed in his withdrawal. Now, what was the point of this? Rumor has it that a seat had been promised Matteson, who had been very influential in bringing Conroe ISD into the District after several previous referenda had failed. Having three candidates on the ballot for Position 1, until the last minute, could keep other prospective candidates from filing for that position and splitting the vote.

5. We all deplore dirty tricks in politics, but we don't think they will happen to us. I also encountered a smear campaign. Members of the Humble Chamber of Commerce and Rotary Club told me that rumors were circulating that I was "a disgruntled ex-employee," and "had the wrong philosophy to move the College to where it needed to be." I have since learned that these are common epithets applied to any independent candidate. When it comes to making financial decisions in education, some misguided souls regard teachers as the enemy.

6. People really care about integrity and ethics when it comes to spending public funds. I found that I, also, had influential friends. Voters care about qualifications and character. Voters want candidates with nothing to gain financially. Voters want boards to represent a diverse community and a variety of viewpoints. A total of 95 volunteers worked for me. People I had never met volunteered to help, and did, after they heard me speak. As we read in the Texas Education Code, "The people in delegating authority, do not give their public servants the right to decide what is good for the people to know and what is not good for them to know. The people insist on remaining informed so that they may retain control over the instruments they have created." (Texas School Law Bulletin [Austin, Tx: Texas Education Agency, 1992], Art. 6252-17a, Sec. 1, p. 755.)

7. Start early and take charge of your own campaign. Being a political neophyte, I started too late and did not get my message out

to enough people. I now have a better idea of how to utilize all those willing volunteers and how to get more mileage out of my funds. To all my supporters, a hearty thank you. Although I lost, I came close and learned a lot. Watch for me two years from now. I'll be calling on you again.

Margaret C. Reap
Emeritus Instructor of Accounting
North Harris College

THE ALDINE CENTER

Years of neglect finally ended with a January 15, 1993 ribbon-cutting ceremony at the college's Aldine Center. A large part of the college's population lives in southern Aldine, an area underserved since the college's inception. A symbolic snip of the scissors opened the doors of higher education to those who perhaps need it most.

On hand were a number of citizens from the surrounding communities, as well as officials from Aldine ISD and NHMCCD. Speakers included Congressman Gene Green, State Representative Sylvester Turner, and State Representative Kevin Bailey. I was pleased to hear Kevin, first president of our union, point out that the Aldine Center is a dream come true for the Employee Federation, which has advocated such a facility for years.

Such a facility never came to fruition under the previous administration. Credit is due the current administration, under the leadership of Dr. Pickelman, for having the wisdom to move forward.

Significant acknowledgement for the Center's opening is due NHMCCD board member Randy Bates. I attend all the board meetings and have watched Randy skillfully press for movement in developing the Center. His diligence may well be the most important force in convincing the administration and board that the time to act had come.

As part of my teaching assignment, I am serving as Faculty Coordinator at the Center, basically doing the job of a program coordinator on the campuses. Since December, I have been assisting the Center's director, Dr. Rosario Martinez, to help make sure that the doors opened in January. Rosario has worked many long hours to ensure a quality program at the Center.

Everyone's efforts paid off with 58 enrollments this first semester and the employment of 6 adjunct faculty. Enrollment will grow as word gets around the neighborhood and we expand to new areas of southern Aldine. Anyone who doubts the legitimacy of the Center should have been working with us to register students. Since this was our first semester, registration was extended a few days beyond regular registration. It was during this extended period that we picked up most of our students. To encourage enrollment, the College offered \$4,000 in scholarship money to provide for tuition and books for qualifying students. Dr. Martinez, Clarence Johnson, our site supervisor at the Center, and I developed a list of six qualifiers for scholarships. These

requirements focused on hardship and financial need. Meeting any one of six would make a student eligible. We talked to several students who met all six. It was an enormous pleasure to see these students excited about this opportunity to better themselves. Every student that I interviewed concluded our visit by standing, politely shaking my hand, and saying, "Thanks for your help. I'm really glad the college is here." So am I.

Alan Hall

OLD BUSINESS

(Editor's note--The following submission was received in December. Since by that time a tough semester and the presidential election had rendered the editor hors de combat, that month's Advocate never got done and this notice was temporarily forgotten. We print it now, despite the dated seasonal allusions.)

Christmas is a time to remember the past and to give thanks for the many blessings that we enjoy. It is also a time to acknowledge those who have in some way benefitted their fellow man. In such a spirit, I would like to express my thanks to Dr. Pickelman and the Board for passing on to us in an equitable manner the state salary increase in the form of a Christmas bonus. (I have never received a Christmas bonus in my twenty-two years in academe.) I would also like to acknowledge our Employee Federation President, Alan Hall, for raising the issue of the state salary increase back in the Summer 1992 Advocate. With leaders such as Dr. Pickelman and Alan Hall, we can all hope that the new era of cooperation and mutual respect will grow and prosper in the coming year.

Bob Miller
Instructor of English
North Harris College

The following news item was forwarded by Ron Theiss, Instructor of Welding at North Harris College. In light of ongoing developments at the District Office, we publish it for the delight of our readers.

NEW ELEMENT DISCOVERED--SPECIAL PROPERTIES

BAFFLE SCIENTIFIC WORLD

The heaviest element known to science was recently discovered by physicists. The element, tentatively named Administratium, has no protons or electrons, and thus has an atomic number of 0. However, it does have one neutron, 125 assistant neutrons, 75 vice-neutrons, and 111 assistant vice-neutrons. This gives it an atomic mass of 312. These 312 particles are held together by a force that involves the continuous exchange of meson-like particles called morons.

Since it has no electrons, Administratium is inert. However, it can be detected chemically as it impedes every reaction it comes in contact with. According to the discoverers, a minute amount of Administratium

causes one reaction to take over four days to complete when it would have normally occurred in less than one second. Administratium has a normal half life of approximately three years, at which time it does not actually decay, but instead undergoes a reorganization in which assistant neutrons, vice-neutrons, and assistant vice-neutrons exchange places. Some studies have shown that the atomic mass actually increases with each reorganization.

Research at other laboratories indicates that Administratium occurs naturally in the atmosphere. It tends to concentrate at certain points such as government agencies, large corporations, and universities. It can usually be found at the newest, best-appointed and best-maintained buildings.

Scientists point out that Administratium is known to be toxic at any level of concentration, and can easily destroy any productive reaction where it is allowed to accumulate. Attempts are being made to determine how Administratium can be controlled to prevent irreversible damage, but results are not promising.

THE CLOTHES LINE

In judging the worth of a teacher, that instructor's dress and appearance should be the least important factor. Over the years I've taught at NHMCCD, utmost personal freedom has been allowed in these areas. Without any specific guidelines as to what actually constitutes professional appearance, I think our instructors have nonetheless managed to stay within acceptable boundaries. That kind of latitude must be preserved. This after all, is a high-quality academic institution where critical thinking and the value of diversity is cherished. NHMCCD is not a corporate or military environment where all are required to march in lockstep.

Some of our finest teachers dress very casually. Those of us who regularly wear coat and tie in class do so on the basis of personal preference. Different strokes for different folks as Sly Stone summed it up in another era. Let's make sure we keep it that way.

The Editor

JOIN THE AFT!

All faculty and staff can enjoy the benefits of association with other employees committed to making NHMCCD an excellent place to work and teach--and the benefits of strong legal and professional liability protection should you ever need them. If you agree with the stances we take on educational and workplace issues, then it's time for you to join the union. Monthly dues rates are \$19.85 for fulltime faculty, \$12.70 for fulltime staff and adjunct faculty, and \$9.60 for part-time staff. Discuss membership with Alan Hall, District President (443-5544, 353-8634); Marilyn Kron, District Staff President; or any other member (Tony Foster, Thelma Jones, Bob Locander, Mel McFadden, Greg Mitchell, Patricia Plunk, Allen Vogt, Steve Davis) of the Federation executive committee.

The Private Life of a Teacher

Please contact me when you can," the note read. "My home number is..."

The note was signed by the dean of the Evening and Weekend College, for whom I was teaching three courses.

Periodically, I'd receive notes in my school mailbox, but all of the previous ones had messages on them; the message was the note. This time, something was different.

I'd just received my teacher evaluation from last semester's students, scoring at 3.78, between Satisfactory and Very Good. It wasn't the Excellent 5.0 rating, but it was surely acceptable. That couldn't be the reason for the ominous note.

I taught a composition class. Every day, we discussed controversial issues—abortion, gun control, music censorship, capital punishment, animal rights, euthanasia. But I knew there was only one topic that was *really* controversial, only one topic that might get me fired: gay rights. Homosexuality brought the most emotional responses from my students. Even the subject of abortion never led to flared tempers or loud outbursts.

"Oh, my God! What's that?" one of my students had asked a few years ago, pointing in horror to the bulletin board, which had an announcement for a potluck dinner the campus gay organization was sponsoring.

"I hate gays," said another student, who'd played football in high school. "I hate gays, and I'll tell them straight to their face. I hate gays."

That was halfway through my first semester as a part-time instructor, so I felt insecure not only about my teaching ability but also about my position on the faculty. It didn't seem right, though, to let those comments go unchallenged.

"Thank you," I said to the football player. "I'm gay."

The student's eyes widened. "That's OK! That's OK!" he said quickly. "You're still a good teacher."

"What the hell does my being gay have to do with my teaching?"

Apparently, in the eyes of my dean, there was a connection.

I'd taught a total of twenty-six classes since I'd begun at the college. I now felt reasonably competent as an instructor. But what I didn't feel was secure.

I didn't choose the final-exam topics for my composition courses. The department assigned them. One topic was whether or



not students who'd gone through college on an ROTC scholarship should have to repay the scholarship after it was learned they were gay.

Many of my students wrote papers viciously attacking gays, even though they knew I was gay and knew I would be grading the essays as their final exam. I felt intimidated. "If I fail this paper," I thought, "the student will go to the administration, claiming I'm being prejudiced, and I'll get in trouble."

But if the department could choose this topic for the final exam, it must be appropriate for me to raise the issue in class. So why did the dean want to see me? I had not discussed a gay issue *per se* in any of my classes this semester, but while discussing the reliability of the media in a composition class, I shared three stories: two about nongay subjects and one about the coverage of a recent Gay Pride parade, which showed men in dresses or heavy leather.

"Now I was there," I told my class, "and out of 3,000 people. I didn't see *any* in dresses or leather. If they were there, they were certainly very much in the minority, which is not at all the impression given by the media."

I hadn't actually told this class that I was

gay, though most of the students assumed that I was. As always happened whenever I said anything even remotely gay, I questioned the appropriateness of my remarks. I hated being made invisible by society, but had I overstepped any boundaries? I didn't think so, but was the dean going to say that I was a poor role model for the students? Was I going to be fired for damaging the reputation of the school?

But then I began to get angry. Why should I have to watch every single word so carefully? Other professors talked of their spouses in class, just chitchatting. Why did I have to be petrified of doing so even if the topic under discussion made such mention appropriate? Why did it matter what was beneath the underwear on the person I loved most?

I did go to see the dean. A student had complained about me, she said. I tried to keep a blank face. It appeared, she went on awkwardly, that I had given one student two Ds in a row, and he felt I was grading too harshly. Could I take a little extra time to help him understand what I expected? "Certainly," I answered.

I waited to sigh until I was out of her office. I was OK for now, but I couldn't relax. What about next semester? I wondered. Or next week? ■

Johnny Townsend is a teacher in Louisiana.