

Hottest Texas House Primary Battles for 2010 Feature Several Incumbents and Open Seats

By Mike Hailey
Capitol Inside Editor

Dallas attorney Eric Johnson is a first-time Texas House candidate who's approaching his campaign like a full-fledged bid for statewide office with ongoing announcements about record fundraising, volunteer organization, endorsements and the professional team of advisers he's hired for his debut political race.

In the event that State Rep. Terri Hodge is cleared on bribery charges in connection with a city hall corruption scandal and eligible to run as a result for another House term, Johnson is doing everything he can now to make the incumbent think twice about a re-election bid with the campaign he's mounting for the seat she holds.

That's why the battle for the Democratic nomination for the House District 101 post if Hodge is qualified to run and not scared away by Johnson is shaping up at this point to be one of the top 10 primary races for the Legislature's lower chamber to watch when Texas voters cast ballots in March in round one of the 2010 elections. And Hodge so far has said nothing about stepping down on her own will if she's exonerated in the pending criminal case.

Like the potential Democratic showdown in Hodge's district that stretches through central Dallas from the city limits on the west and east sides, three other first round fights on the initial *Capitol Inside Texas* House Races to Watch list in 2010 feature incumbents who've drawn primary foes in campaigns for re-election.

The list of current House members who appear to be on track for contested primary battles in March races to watch includes Republican State Reps. Leo Berman of Tyler and Delwin Jones of Lubbock along with Democratic State Rep. Tara Rios Ybarra of South Padre Island. Across the rotunda, the Republican and Democratic primary fights for seats that State Senator Steve Ogden of Bryan and Eliot Shapleigh of El Paso are giving up respectively without re-election bids will be worth the price of front row tickets as well as the two hottest first round contests on the Senate battleground next year.

The Democratic primary showdown that's developed between Rios Ybarra and Kingsville restaurant franchise owner J.M. Lozano is currently the top ranked race to watch in round one of the competition for House seats next year in light of revelations about the first-term lawmaker's relationship with her largest campaign contributor and subsequent divorce cases that it's spawned. Rios Ybarra won the HD 43 seat in 2008 after knocking off then-incumbent Juan Escobar in the Democratic primary. The HD 43 race is particularly intriguing as a battle between the island residents at the south end of the district and their northern counterparts at the same time it pits tort reform advocates who backed Rios Ybarra last year against their trial lawyer rivals.

Berman, who entered the lower chamber 10 years ago, had indicated that he planned to run for governor in 2010 when former Tyler Mayor Joey Seeber entered the race for HD 6. While Seeber said at the time that he planned to seek the House seat regardless of whether the incumbent ran again for it or continued the statewide quest, there's been speculation that Seeber might postpone his HD 6 campaign until Berman decides to step down on his own.

Jones - a moderate lawmaker who's served in the House as a Republican since 1989 after a previous nine-year stint in the lower chamber as a Democrat - faces a GOP primary challenger who appears to have the potential to be a more formidable foe than the opponents on both sides of the aisle who the incumbent has easily defeated in recent elections. Jones' primary opponent - Lubbock attorney Zach Brady - has a resume that features experience as a former aide to State Senator Robert Duncan along with early endorsements from the Texas Cattle Feeders Association and the Texas Cotton Ginners

Association. While Jones will be viewed as the favorite to win the GOP nomination in his re-election bid until proven otherwise, the endorsements should give Brady a boost in a House district where agriculture is one of the most important industries.

The primary contests for the seats that Rios Ybarra, Hodge, Berman and Jones are defending as incumbents in 2010 are ranked 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th respectively on the first races to watch list for next year's elections.

Three of the hottest primary races to watch on the state House battlefield in the early stages of the unfolding competition are for seats that incumbents aren't seeking again in the Rio Grande Valley, the Central Texas suburbs north of Austin and a suburban area northeast of Houston. The state House members who aren't running for re-election in those particular districts are Republican State Reps. Dan Gattis of Georgetown and Joe Crabb of Atascocita along with Democratic State Rep. Kino Flores of Palmview.

Four Republicans are competing for the HD 20 seat that Gattis is giving up so he can run for an opening in the Texas Senate instead. Four Republicans also are competing to replace Crabb in the HD 127 from which he's stepping down when his term ends after next year's elections. Two Democrats - the son of a former state representative and the candidate who Flores beat in one of the most hotly contested House primary battles in 2008 - are dueling for the vacancy that the incumbent is creating in HD 36 so he concentrate on a fight against criminal charges stemming from disclosure-related allegations in indictments that were issued this summer by a Travis County grand jury.

The first round battles for the seats that Gattis, Crabb and Flores are giving up are ranked 5th, 6th and 7th respectively on the initial House primary races to watch list for 2010.

Three of the initial primary races to watch are for the opposing parties' nominations in battles for House seats that incumbents plan to defend next year including one in another Williamson County suburb north of Austin and two in suburban districts on both sides of Dallas. Four Republicans are competing for the right to challenge freshman State Rep. Diana Maldonado of Round Rock in HD 52 while four GOP candidates have lined up to do battle for the HD 101 seat that first-term State Rep. Robert Miklos of Mesquite is seeking again in 2010. Miklos and Maldonado are both Democrats. The GOP primary battles for the seats that the incumbents are seeking again in HD 101 and HD 52 are rated 8th and 9th respectively on the first races to watch list for next year's March primary election.

The 10th ranked primary race to watch next year features a pair of Democrats who are competing for their party's nomination for a HD 105 seat that Republican State Rep. Linda Harper-Brown is seeking again after winning re-election by a 20-vote margin in a battle with a Democratic opponent last year.

Two more Republican primary races involving incumbents and former primary challengers have the potential to move on to the top 10 races to watch list for 2010 if they materialize with former House member Corbin Van Arsdale and ex-gubernatorial aide Jon Cole seriously considering rematch bids against State Rep. Allen Fletcher of Houston and Jerry Madden of Plano. Another incumbent who could encounter primary opposition in a bid for re-election next year is Republican State Rep. Fred Brown, who's facing a first round challenge from Buddy Winn, the Brazos County tax assessor-collector for 30 years before retiring in 2007.

The House races to watch list will be updated and revised as needed between now and the March 2 primary election. The filing deadline for next year's elections is January 4.

PRIMARY RACES TO WATCH IN 2010 - TEXAS HOUSE

1

House District 43 - Democrats

Democrat Tara Rios Ybarra Plans to Seek Re-Election

Tara Rios Ybarra

South Padre Island Democrat
Dentist

Experience: Texas House 2009-
Present, Ex-City Council Member

J.M. Lozano

Kingsville Democrat
Restaurant Franchise Owner

Experience: Former Congressional
Aide

2

House District 100 - Democrats

Democrat Terri Hodge Plans to Seek Re-Election

Terri Hodge

Dallas Democrat
Retired Southwestern Bell Employee

Experience: Texas House 1997-
Present

Eric Johnson

Dallas Democrat
Attorney

Experience: Former Texas House
Aide, Harvard Graduate

3

House District 146 - Democrats

Democrat Al Edwards Plans to Seek Re-Election

Al Edwards

Houston Democrat
Businessman

Experience: Texas House 1979-
2007, Texas House 2009-Present

Billy Briscoe

Houston Democrat
Attorney

Experience: Former State House Aide,
Ex-Statewide Campaign Staffer

4

House District 83 - Republicans

Republican Delwin Jones Plans to Seek Re-Election

Delwin Jones

Lubbock Republican
Businessman

Experience: Texas House 1964-1973
(Democrat), 1989-Present

Zach Brady

Lubbock Republican
Attorney

Experience: Former State Senate
Aide

5

House District 20 - Republicans

Republican Dan Gattis Plans to Run for Texas Senate

Milton Rister

Georgetown Republican
Consultant

Experience: Ex-Texas Legislative
Council Director, Ex-Legislative Aide

Charles Schwertner

Georgetown Republican
Surgeon

Experience: First-Time Candidate for
Legislature

Stephen Thomas
Cedar Park Republican
Texas Facilities Commission Director
Experience: Former City Council Member

Jarrod Weaver
Georgetown Republican
Real Estate Broker
Experience: First-Time Candidate for Legislature

6 House District 127 - Republicans
Republican Joe Crabb Not Running for Re-Election

Martin Basaldua
Kingwood Republican
Physician
Experience: Ex-Texas House and Senate Candidate

Susan Curling
Humble Republican
Physician
Experience: Former Congressional Aide

Dan Huberty
Humble Republican
Energy Company Executive
Experience: Humble School Board President

Addie Wiseman
Kingwood Republican
Real Estate
Experience: Ex-Houston City Council Member

7 House District 36 - Democrats
Democrat Kino Flores Not Running for Re-Election

Sergio Muñoz Jr.
Palmview Democrat
Attorney
Experience: Municipal Judge, Son of Former State Representative

Sandra Rodriguez
Mission Democrat
School Counselor
Experience: Ex-School Board Member, Ex-Texas House Candidate

8 House District 101 - Republicans
Democrat Robert Miklos Plans to Seek Re-Election

Cindy Burkett
Mesquite Republican
Restaurant Company Executive
Experience: Former State Senate Aide

Thomas Latham
Sunnyvale Republican
Retired Police Officer
Experience: Texas House 2007-2009, Ex-City Council Member

Greg Noschese
Mesquite Republican
Attorney
Experience: Ex-Mayor Pro Tem, Ex-City Council Member

Jim Phaup
Sunnyvale Republican
Automotive Parts Company Executive
Experience: Ex-Mayor, Ex-School Board Member

9 House District 52 - Republicans
Democrat Diana Maldonado Plans to Seek Re-Election

Stephen Casey

Round Rock Republican
Attorney

Experience: First-Time Candidate for
Legislature

Larry D. Gonzales

Round Rock Republican
Businessman

Experience: Ex-Legislative Aide,
Direct Mail Consultant

John Gordon

Round Rock Republican
Engineer

Experience: Ex-GOP County Chair, Ex-
SREC Member, Ex-Legislative Aide

Ralph Pina

Round Rock Republican
Small Business Owner

Experience: Former Congressional
Aide

10**House District 105 - Democrats**

Republican Linda Harper-Brown Plans to Seek Re-Election

Loretta Haldenwang

Irving Democrat
Chamber of Commerce Executive

Experience: Former Texas House
Aide

Kim Limberg

Irving Democrat
TxDOT Engineer

Experience: Ex-Precinct Judge, Ex-
Gubernatorial Campaign Aide