



**Bruce Elfant, Travis County Tax Assessor-Collector and Voter Registrar**

# News Release

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**For Immediate Release**

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## **Tax Office launches Great Travis County Voter Registration Challenge with Text Request on 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of landmark Voting Rights Act**

Austin, TX – Voter registration applications are now available by Text Request, a new service that allows eligible voters to ask for an application by texting the key word “Register” to IVOTE or 48683 on their cellphones.

The Text Request tool was introduced at a news conference Thursday where Bruce Elfant, the Travis County tax assessor-collector and voter registrar, announced his office plans to register 90 percent of the county’s eligible voters by the 2016 presidential election. The news conference was at the LBJ Presidential Library as part of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration of the landmark Voting Rights Act that was signed into law by President Lyndon Baines Johnson on Aug. 6, 1965.

“I don’t think President Johnson could have ever imagined that the law he signed to end discrimination at the polls would one day result in typing into a phone to request a voter registration application,” Elfant said. “We hope Text Request will encourage more people, especially our youth, to register to vote.”

When the tax office receives a text request, a message is sent to the prospective voter to provide a home address to which a postage-paid voter registration application will be sent. Text Request is believed to be the first texting service for mail-in voter registration applications in the nation.

“Unfortunately, we didn’t succeed in getting online voter registration this past legislative session so we are really pleased to have Text Request,” Elfant said. Younger voters are looking for voter registration that’s easy, convenient and uses the technology they have grown up with, he added.

Former state Sen. Joe Christie spent two years developing Text Request and is providing the service free to Travis County. “I chose Travis County to be the first to test the service because Austin has the largest percentage of millennials – 27 percent – in the nation and the goal is to use the technology they know to register those 20- to 34-year-olds so they will become engaged in the election process,” Christie said.

“This age group is used to instant access to information,” he added. “They all have cellphones, they communicate by texting and over 97 percent of their text messages are read.

“That makes texting the most effective way to get them registered and then get them to vote,” Christie said.

It's not just young people who are failing to register and vote. A study by the University of Texas' Annette Straus Institute for Civic Life shows the Lone Star State ranks 42<sup>nd</sup> among states for voter registration and last in the nation in voter turnout.

What makes those numbers so riveting is that struggle a half-century ago when African-Americans endured violence against them, poll taxes and literacy tests but rose up under the leadership of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. to risk their lives for the opportunity to be treated as equal at the ballot box. The courage and political savvy of a southerner, President Johnson, successfully pushed forward voting rights, providing the opportunity for every U.S. citizen regardless of ethnicity to have a voice in the election of their local and national political leaders.

"It is sad to see that today so many Americans have chosen to silent their voice," Elfant said. "Our hope is to convince everyone in Travis County from any party or no party to speak up and be heard – register and vote."

For Elfant to help resurrect that sense of civic duty and reach his 90 percent target, the county will have to register about 720,000 voters. Currently, there are more than 642,000 registered voters. A voter registration counter is on the homepage of the tax office website, [www.TravisCountyTax.org](http://www.TravisCountyTax.org).

Each person's vote carries the same weight in the ballot box and Elfant recalled the person who spoke on this best was President Johnson during his remarks before signing the Voting Rights Act into law.

"So, let me now say...You must register. You must vote. You must learn, so your choice advances your interest and the interest of our beloved nation," President Johnson said. "Your future, and your children's future, depend upon it."



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**\*\* Electronic press kit available in the Media section at [www.TravisCountyTax.org](http://www.TravisCountyTax.org) \*\***

The **Travis County Tax Office** annually collects more than \$3 billion in local property taxes for 117 local government entities and \$4 million in fines and fees for Justice of the Peace and County Courts at Law. The office registers and titles almost 1 million vehicles, registers over 600,000 voters, and supports elections for 201 local government entities. The Tax Office operates five locations in Travis County and many services are available online.