

Rep race gets contentious as voting begins

BY JAMAAL E. O'NEAL

Six o'clock mornings have become the norm for Republican District 52 candidate Larry Gonzales.

A married father of two, graduate student, graphic designer and now candidate in one of the most contested races in the state, Mr. Gonzales lives and dies by his iPhone, which is practically glued to his ear.

"I'm up at 6 a.m. and got to bed at 2 a.m.," he said while checking his clipboard for the next neighborhood he planned to walk before receiving another phone call Thursday afternoon. "But you got to do what you've got to do to win this election."

As the April 13 Republican primary runoff election looms, Mr. Gonzales has kicked his campaign into full-gear by researching voter precincts in District 52, knocking on doors and rallying volunteers from Round Rock to Taylor.

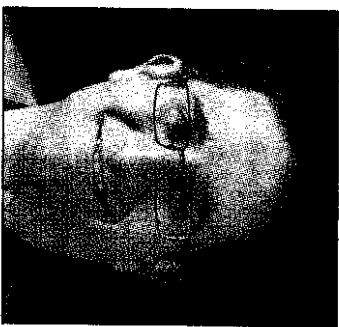
"I have the knowledge and temperament to know how to work effectively and get things done," the 40-year-old Round Rock resident said. "It's all about relationships."

With endorsements from former District 52 Republican candidate Stephen Casey and local and state political heavyweights like Texas Comptroller Susan Combs, Williamson County Precinct 1 Commissioner Lisa Birkinman and Taylor Mayor Pro-Tem Ella Jez, Mr. Gonzales is hoping his political connections and platform will reap voter dividends across the district later this month.

Family ties

Standing in a field during a 1990 University of Texas at Austin marching band practice, the freshman trumpet player never imagined he would meet the love of his life. "They told us from the start that some of

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Larry Gonzales (R)

Age: 40

Home town: Round Rock

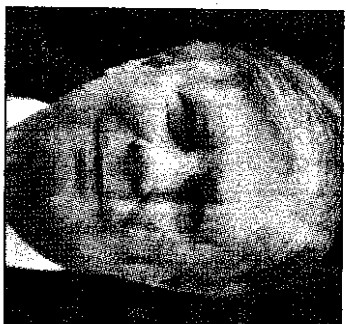
Family: Married to wife Marie for 15 years, father of two children: Leah and Alexander.

Occupation: Owner of Round Rock-based Lazarus Graphics

Years in elected public office: 0

March 2 Primary results: 37.51%, or 4,091 votes

Web site: www.larrygonzales.com



John Gordon (R)

Age: 64

Home town: Round Rock

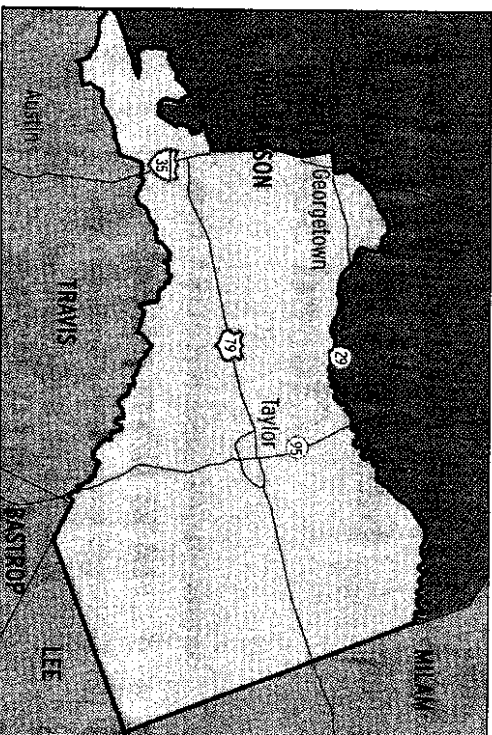
Family: Married to wife Ruth for 42 years, father of two sons: Eric and Jason, grandfather to four grandchildren with one on the way.

Occupation: Professional engineer

Years in elected public office: 0

March 2 Primary results: 40.84%, or 4,454 votes

Web site: www.johngordon52.com



BY JAMAAL E. O'NEAL

Republican District House 52 candidate John Gordon has his routine down for the next couple of weeks: make signs, check on signs, distribute signs and knock on as many doors from Round Rock to Taylor as possible.

"We've been working hard to get to this level," said Mr. Gordon, who unsuccessfully ran for county commissioner in 1998 and for District 52 state representative in 1994 and 2008. "But now we're in a runoff and we know who voted the first time and are trying to get them back to the polls."

It might be a political tactic that could mean victory for John Gordon, considering his 3 percent edge over political newcomer Larry Gonzales during the March 2 Republican primary.

"Nothing comes easy," Mr. Gordon said Friday morning. "I'm hitting up Hutto, Round Rock and Taylor with mailers and going door to door. I don't think it's going to be hard to get people to the polls a second time around."

Ties to the region

Born in the old Georgetown Hospital on April 3, 1946, Mr. Gordon said his family's roots run deep in the area he has called home for more than 30 years.

A fifth generation Texan and avid trumpet player, Mr. Gordon has always touted his Williamson County ties in his political campaign.

"My father and grandfather went to Southwestern University," Mr. Gordon said. "This is my home."

Mr. Gordon said his parents brought him up to be a man of God and to always do the right thing. He also said that serving his country is one of the most honorable respon-

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GONZALES

A political insider with a wish to serve

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us would meet our future spouse in the band," he said, surrounded by the Longhorn paraphernalia in his home office. "I did, and it was love at first sight."

Marie Bowman, a former 1980 Round Rock High School Dragon who is now the special education department chairwoman at McNeil High School, and Mr. Gonzales wed shortly after graduating from college in 1983. They later welcomed two children — Leah and Alexander — into the world.

Mr. Gonzales said starting a family and watching his children grow has been one of the most rewarding experiences in his life.

"I love my family and my wife and I are teaching them the morals and lessons we were taught as children," Mr. Gonzales said, while pointing out his children's artwork smattered around the house.

Born in Houston, and later moving into the Houston suburb of Alvin, Mr. Gonzales said he is the grandson of a farmer and welder, and the son of a NASA aerospace engineer. "I had a good childhood," he said. "I had good parents, a strong family background and support to graduate from high school and move on in life."

He said while his grandfather, Lazarus Gonzales, only had a third-grade education, he was an intelligent man who encouraged Mr. Gonzales' father to study aerospace engineering at the University of Texas. "That's where I get it from," Mr. Gonzales said. "When we grew up, for me and all my cousins, it got instilled early to go to school... trust me — those

Life Aspirations

lessons struck."

While Mr. Gonzales hits the street in search of potential voters before the important primary runoff election, the idea of swiveling around in a big brown legislator's chair for the next 20 years is not exactly the career path he has in mind.

"You know, no one has ever asked me that question before," Mr. Gonzales said. "One day I'd like to be a college professor, where I can teach future generations about public policy and government... hopefully by then I'll have some experience in that arena."

Formally serving as a legislative liaison for Texas State University, and having helped shape policies for then-Lieutenant Governor Rick Perry in 1999 and former Attorney General John Cornyn in 2003, the political dreamer hopes

his knowledge and his political connections will earn him a new title as the area's next state representative.

"I am six hours shy of getting my master's degree in public administration at Texas State... I've had to put that on hold because of the election," Mr. Gonzales said. "I'm very serious about representing the conservative values of this district, and hope the people have enough faith in me to place me in Austin."

Setting the record straight

It's pretty safe to say things have been less than cordial with fellow Republican District 52 candidate John Gordon.

A self-proclaimed father of the Williamson County Republican Party, Mr. Gordon, 64, has peppered District 52 mailboxes and injected the airwaves with questions about Mr. Gonzales' campaign contributions and community

service to the district.

"What 'Larry' doesn't want you to know," reads the headline of one of Mr. Gordon's mailers, which shows a picture of Mr. Gonzales attached to marionette strings. "He took \$90,000 from a Houston bulider... who stands to gain the most here; it's not the citizens of [House District] 52!"

Picking up the mailer, Mr. Gonzales laughed.

"It looks like I'm in Michael Jackson's *Thriller*," he said while laughing with campaign managers Chris Sanchez and Phil Fountain in the kitchen of his home. "You gotta love the way this campaign is going."

However, the information written on the mailer is no laughing matter to those working on his campaign.

Mr. Gonzales said while he did receive \$90,000 in campaign contributions from Houston developer Bob Perry

and his wife Doylene, there are no political favors to be exchanged as Mr. Gordon's filer suggests.

"My relationship with the Perry's goes back to my work to fight tort reform," Mr. Gonzales said. "I'm very passionate about stopping frivolous lawsuits that cost taxpayers money."

Mr. Gonzales also called Mr. Gordon's carpebagger accusations "laughable."

"Are you kidding me," he said. "I've lived here for 14 years. Is he saying that the people who moved to this county four and five years ago don't matter because they didn't live here as long as my challenger? I've been a good resident of this community and have participated in a number of activities all over this district, and in the long run, that's what matters to me."

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GORDON

An activist with tenacious approach

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sublities a citizen has to his or her country.

"My grandfather was a corporal in World War I and my father, Weldon Gordon, was a B-17 pilot in World War II," he said. "I respect their service, and felt compelled to serve my country in a similar way."

After moving away from Central Texas in the 1950s to Houston, Mr. Gordon graduated from Charles H. Milby High School in May 1964 and attended Rice University; however, Mr. Gordon withdrew from the prestigious university to enroll in the Army in 1966.

"One thing about me is I'm a fighter," Mr. Gordon said after filing for the District 52 race in January. "I don't cut and run, and I don't hide from

a challenge."

Mr. Gordon's military career eventually landed him back at Fort Hood, near Round Rock, where his newlywed wife, Ruth, would later buy their first home in the Egger Acres addition. He would later finish his course work as an electrical engineer at the University of Texas at Austin, in 1973.

The couple welcomed two sons — Eric and Jason — into their lives; now the couple has four grandchildren with one on the way.

"They are my motivation," Mr. Gordon said, smiling when thinking about his grandchildren. "They are the reason I do this. I want them to live in a community that is safe and not void of Christian values."

'The little guy'

Referring to it as a call of action to help the "little guy," Mr. Gordon has had his fair share of rounds in the political boxing ring.

"I've always wanted to help

people," Mr. Gordon said Friday. "I've always wanted to be there for those who have been trampled on by big government because it's wrong for them to do that."

In 1981, Mr. Gordon said he filed the first petition action against the City of Austin for what he claimed were excessive electric rates being charged to consumers outside the city limits. That included a large number of Round Rock ISD facilities and residents in the Pond Springs and Anderson Mill area.

Mr. Gordon said he served at no expense as a representative of RRISD in the Public Utility Committee hearing, which resulted in a small rollback in rates.

Mr. Gordon also led the effort to push the alignment for Texas Highway 130 farther east toward Hutto.

"Look at Hutto now," Mr. Gordon said. "That side of the county which would have taken years to develop, is booming and it's all because regular folks persuaded them

to move that road to the east."

Mr. Gordon said being a problem solver addressing major regional issues has become important to him as a resident of Williamson County.

"I look at things differently," Mr. Gordon said. "The people deserve a voice. I'm not worried about whether some county or state official who lives outside the district endorses me or not... these people know what I've done and what I can do."

Past accusations

As Mr. Gordon presses forward with his campaign, it's not without some challenges from Mr. Gonzales and other members within his party.

Some are calling Mr. Gordon hot tempered and unqualified to represent one of the fastest-growing areas in the nation.

During a recent radio advertisement, Mr. Gonzales charges that Mr. Gordon is nothing more than a Republican troublemaker, who has used the courts as his

playground to launch vicious attacks on former candidates and to challenge meager traffic violations before a grand jury.

"Don't let him in your house... the state House," Mr. Gonzales' radio advertisement said.

Court documents support many of the advertisement's claims, including an incident in 1983 where Mr. Gordon was arrested for trying to remove a City of Austin parking boot from his truck.

Mr. Gordon said many of the issues brought to light about his past excursions in court and with the law have been settled, which is also supported by court documents.

"Austin did not have the right to write parking pickets starting in 1983 when the Capitol construction started after the fire," Mr. Gordon said, referring to ongoing work at the state Capitol after the February 1983 fire that nearly destroyed the structure. "Austin admitted

The money trail

Take a glance at the latest February 22 campaign finance reports filed with the Texas Ethics Commission for contributions raised and spent between January 22 and February 20.

The next round of campaign report filings for state elections is April 5, one week before the official primary runoff election.

Texas House District 52

■ John Gordon, 64, of Round Rock
Amount raised: \$26,565
Expenditures: \$47,956.46
■ Larry Gonzales, 40, of Round Rock
Amount raised: \$83,266.31
Expenditures: \$65,895.46

wrongdoing for putting a boot on my truck and writing many citations during that period... every time I run, this incident becomes an issue."

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