

# State Representative Valinda Bolton

'Don't be afraid to risk something big for something good' is this campaign volunteer-turned-politician's personal mantra.

Story by Laura Bond Williams  
Photo Courtesy of Valinda Bolton

**O**N THIS PARTICULAR NOVEMBER MORNING, a coffee shop in Southwest Austin bustles like a commuter train station. Unassuming and casual, Valinda Bolton blends easily with the teeming suburban crowd of mothers, babies, office workers and entrepreneurs. Her teal warm-ups make her hazel eyes sparkle blue as she explains that her second stop that morning is Curves Fitness. The workout helps prepare her for a full work day that begins with a lunch meeting and extends until evening.

Earlier in the week she joked that, these days, conversations in her household center on scheduling. That's because she and her husband, Judge Andy Hathcock, are a two-race household in 2008. In December 2007, Bolton filed to run for re-election for the District 47 seat in the Texas House of Representatives. Judge Hathcock is running to replace retiring Judge W. Jeanne Meurer in the 98<sup>th</sup> District Court of Travis County. Bolton's opposition had not filed as of press time, but she knows that a real competitor lies ahead.

Perhaps the good news is that the District Court race heats up for the primary in the spring, while the House race is decided in the general election next fall. So that's some relief for the busy couple and their 13-year-old son. "One of us will always be available to make sure we have milk and juice in the fridge," she says smiling, "and that the dog gets fed."

## Million Dollar Race

Spanning the southwestern wedge of Travis County, Texas House District 47 begins at the Blanco and Burnet county lines to the west, follows the southern shore of Lake Travis toward Austin, and borders Hays County to the south and Onion Creek to the east. It includes three of the wealthiest ZIP codes in Central Texas and some of the region's toniest communities including Barton Creek and Lakeway. The predominantly urban/suburban district was an open seat in the 2006 election and attracted a field of 11 candidates including five Republicans, four Democrats and two Libertarians. When the dust settled and Bolton was declared winner over Republican Bill Welch, the District 47 seat was widely known as the most expensive one in the Texas House.

A long-time campaign volunteer, Bolton said she had put "run for office" on her list of life's "wouldn't-it-be-great" things to do, but her 2005 decision to run for the District 47 seat was not an "ah-ha" moment. It was, rather, a "dawning realization." She



Valinda Bolton moved to Austin in 2000 and married her high school sweetheart, Andy Hathcock, in 2001. They share a love of public service. This year Rep. Bolton (D) runs for re-election in District 47, while Judge Hathcock is running for the 98th District Court.

and her husband spent several weeks talking with friends in politics, former elected officials and others about her possible candidacy. She kept waiting for a roadblock; she only found support, which ultimately made all the difference.

"When you're trying to recruit or convince women to run for office, the personal ask is so much more powerful," she says. "I think it's because we tend to never think we're ready. We don't know enough, aren't experienced enough, haven't read enough, done enough. We don't readily transfer the skills we have acquired into making a leap."

Supporters saw her 20-year-career working for organizations on domestic violence and sexual assault issues as a real strength. Her last job as training director for the National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence sent her around the

See VALINDA BOLTON on page 58



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# Keys to Leadership

1. "When you hear yourself saying, 'Somebody should do something, (or) say something,'" odds are, that somebody is you. You have to find your voice even though it shakes; you have to get up even though your knees are knocking. It's hard."

2. "Just because you can, doesn't mean that you should...There's all sorts of nonsense we could perpetrate; that doesn't mean we should."

VALINDA BOLTON from page 57

country to train professionals who work with both victims and perpetrators. Bree Buchanan, executive director of Annie's List, a political action committee that provides early campaign funds for Democratic women candidates, said that Bolton's broad experience working with everyone from police officers and prosecutors to social workers, doctors and judges surely prepared her for the variety of attitudes encountered under the Texas Capitol's dome.

## Left-Handed Redhead from Houston

Bolton was born in 1959 in Houston. Her Texas lineage on her mother's side traces back to Republic of Texas President and U.S. Senator Sam Houston. Early on she realized that she "thought

differently" from her more conservative parents. She says her father claimed he knew that he was in for a ride when five-year-old Valinda tore up the family's Goldwater yard sign during the 1964 presidential election. She recalls that her reasoning was not particularly political, but rather in line with her age at the time. After all, how could her parents not support the Texan, LBJ?

As she matured, she flummoxed her parents as the young feminist in the household, the young, non-traditional daughter. She credits her parents for honoring her beliefs. "They didn't ever try to squelch it," she says.

Bolton grew up attending South Main Baptist Church in Houston and is now a member of the First Baptist Church of Austin. She credits her Baptist faith for one of her most strongly held convictions, the separation of church and state.

One of her toughest votes during the 2007 Texas Legislative session occurred when a motion came

before the house to add "under God" to the Texas pledge of allegiance. On the morning of the vote, she woke up, went to her computer and typed out what she wanted to say on the floor of the House.

"It was so clear to me. I talked about Roger Williams [founder of one of America's first Baptist churches in the 17<sup>th</sup> century], and my faith growing up. It would be really easy to just vote for it and not be seen as voting against God," she says. "I was confident enough in my faith to vote 'no' and know that it was the right thing to do." The measure passed with only 13 votes against.

With a session under her belt and a campaign ahead, what advice does Bolton have to share with women entering leadership roles? Her post-session reflection included wisdom from one of her favorite benedictions: "Don't be afraid to risk something big for something good." ★

### MORE INFO

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