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# HURRICANE IKE

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## CAMPAIGN 2008

# Hurricane may alter political landscape, too

■ With Galveston voters scattered, state Senate seats are up for grabs

By CLAY ROBISON  
AUSTIN BUREAU

AUSTIN — Hurricane Ike not only devastated Galveston Island, it also may have blown away Democrats' chances to pick up a seat or two in the Texas Senate.

Or maybe not, depending on who you talk to.

The island, whose residents tend to vote Democratic, is divided between two state Senate districts, both of which are contested in the Nov. 4 election.

The storm scattered thousands of Galveston voters, and nobody knows whether they will be able to return home before Election Day. They can vote from afar by mail, but will they? Or will they be too busy trying to reassemble their lives?

"I do think it (Ike) has the potential of altering the political landscape," said Kelly Fero, a consultant for former Galveston City Councilman Joe Jaworski, a Democrat seeking to unseat state Sen. Mike Jackson, R-La Porte, in District 11.

"It's the Democratic part of the Jackson district, and it's gone," Fero said.

### Suspending campaigning

Another part of Galveston Island is in Senate District 17, where four Republicans and two Democrats, including Chris Bell, a former Houston city councilman and congressman, are running in a special election to succeed Republican Kyle Janek, who resigned this year.

All the candidates have suspended active campaigning in the immediate aftermath of the hurricane. Jackson and Jaworski are both dealing with flood damage to their homes.

District 11 also includes parts of Harris and Brazoria counties, but Fero said the Galveston portion is important to Jaworski's chances to unseat the Republican incumbent.

Jackson, who doesn't plan to resume campaigning for a while, said he felt good about his chances, even before Ike.

"You don't take anything for granted. But the advantage, I think, was mine," he said.

The senator, however, noted that Galveston was a relatively small part of the district and that many voters in the more-Republican areas on the main-

### VOTING BY MAIL

Senate districts 11 and 17 are contested in the Nov. 4 election.

■ The deadline for applying for a mail-in ballot is Oct. 28.

■ Early voting will begin on Oct. 20.

land suffered flooding damage to their homes and also may be missing on Election Day.

"If you look at it, there's a bunch of people who may not be here, from La Porte to Shoreacres and on down to Kemah," he said.

### Helping the displaced

Randall Dillard, spokesman for Secretary of State Hope Andrade, said displaced voters will be accommodated.

"It's too early for us to start speculating," said Dillard, suggesting satellite polling places could be set up or displaced residents could vote by mail.

The GOP-leaning District 17 includes part of the island, plus parts of Harris, Brazoria, Chambers, Fort Bend and Jefferson counties.

### Bell had been leading

Bell, who used to represent part of Galveston in Congress, is much better known than any of his opponents — Democrat Stephanie Simmons and Republicans Austen Furse, Joan Huffman, Grant Harpold and Ken Sherman — and has been leading in early polls.

Bell spokesman Jason Stanford said only about 5 percent of likely voters in the district were expected from Galveston.

More important, he said, are Bell's name identification and the fact that his opponents, with campaigning suspended, will be unable to become better known.

Allen Blakemore, a consultant for Furse, said it was too early to predict how the hurricane will affect turnout.

But he said the storm interrupted what would have been a key week for campaigning.

Democratic consultant Dan McClung said he didn't know if flooding on the mainland had forced more Democrats or Republicans to evacuate.

"But I just always presume that the Republicans have the higher ground because it's the most expensive," he said.

Austin Bureau staffer Janet Elliott contributed to this report.

clay.robison@chron.com