

Texas Democratic Party 2018-2020 Platform

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Note: Grammatical and technical corrections will be made to this document in a timely manner.

PREAMBLE

Texas Democrats believe government exists to achieve together what we cannot achieve as individuals and that government must serve all people. A representative democracy is only truly representative if every single citizen is guaranteed the inalienable right to vote in fair and open elections.

EQUALITY & FREEDOM

Texas Democrats believe in equal opportunities and freedom for all human beings – no matter a person’s race, disability, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic, or immigration status.

SMART GOVERNMENT

Texas Democrats believe in a fair criminal justice system serving all people; that robust public and higher education opportunities are critical for our future; and that our economy must benefit all Texans.

A HEALTHY TEXAS

Texas Democrats believe healthcare is a right; women's rights are human rights; we owe future generations a clean and healthy planet; and a strong social safety net creates opportunity for all Americans.

Principles of the Texas Democratic Party

Texas Democrats believe democratic government exists to achieve as a community, state, and nation what we cannot achieve as individuals; and that it must serve all its citizens.

We believe every Texan has inalienable rights that even a majority may not take away:

- the right to vote;
- the right to fair and open participation and representation in the democratic process;
- the right to health care; and
- the right to privacy.

We believe in freedom:

- from government interference in our private lives and personal decisions;
- from discrimination based on race, ethnicity, national origin, disability, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, or any other improper grounds;
- to exercise civil and human rights; and
- of religion and individual conscience.

We believe in responsibility, and:

- that religion and individual conscience can never serve to excuse hatred and discrimination;
- that people are responsible for their actions;
- that we, who have benefited so greatly from our state and country, have a responsibility to support and give back to all our communities and public institutions; and
- that corporations are not people and should not be used to shield individuals from the responsibilities of their actions.

We believe in equal rights:

- guaranteed in Section 3 of the Texas Bill of Rights;
- equality under the law guaranteed in Section 3a of the Texas Bill of Rights; and
- that no state may deny any person equal protection of the laws or due process under the law as guaranteed in the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

We believe in a harassment free environment, and that we must strive to:

- dismantle sexism in our own behaviors and the behavior of those around us;
- not tolerate, condone, or ignore sexual harassment of any kind from anyone;
- take action to prevent sexual harassment and create an inclusive and welcoming environment for all Democratic candidates, democratic elected officials, staff, consultants, volunteers, and interns;
- take all reports of sexual harassment seriously;
- ensure that all Democratic candidates, Democratic elected officials, staff, volunteers, consultants, and interns are aware of how sexual harassment should be reported and investigated; and
- educate ourselves and others about sexual harassment.

We believe in equal opportunity:

- to receive a quality public education, from childhood through college;
- to find a good job with dignity;
- to buy or rent a good home in a safe community;
- to breathe clean air and drink clean water; and
- to have our voices heard and not be drowned out by the power of unlimited money to influence or buy elections and legislation.

We believe a growing economy should benefit all Texans:

- that the people who work in a business are as important as those who invest in it;
- that every worker should be paid a living wage of at least \$15 an hour;
- that good business offers a fair deal for customers;
- that regulation of unfair practices and rates is necessary;
- that the burden of taxes should be fairly distributed;
- that government policy should not favor corporations that seek offshore tax shelters, exploit workers, or pollute our environment; and
- all people, including those with disabilities.

We believe that our lives, homes, communities, and country are made secure:

- by appropriately staffed, trained, and equipped military, law enforcement, and emergency services;
- by retirement and pension security;
- by responsible gun ownership;
- by encouraging job security where it is possible and providing appropriate assistance and re-training when it is not;
- by the preservation of our precious natural resources and quality of life;
- by ensuring that families have easy access to good food with clear understanding of the food quality and source so they may make informed decisions on their family's health and well-being;
- by compassionate policy that offers a safety net for those most vulnerable and in need; and
- by family values that are promoted through policies that value all our families.

We believe in America:

- made stronger by the men and women who put their lives on the line when it is necessary to engage our military to secure our nation; and
- made more secure by competent diplomatic leadership that uses the moral, ethical, and economic assets of a powerful, free nation to avoid unnecessary military conflict.

We believe in Texas:

- made stronger by the individual strengths of our diverse population;
- blessed with opportunities provided by agriculture, "old" and "new" energy sources, renowned medical or research institutions and high tech industries; and
- we believe in the need for an honest, ethical state government that serves the public interest, not the special financial interests of those who "pay to play."

CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

Texas Democrats believe that our criminal justice system should be transformed and focused on barriers to justice, root causes of crime, and alternatives to imprisonment. We must address the institutional and implicit biases that lead people of color and low-income people to be prosecuted more harshly than whites arrested for the same crimes, as well as laws and practices that are unfair and failing. We also support restorative justice, proposals to reduce mass incarceration, and justice for the most vulnerable in our society – particularly people with mental illness and intellectual or developmental disabilities, immigrants, veterans, and the LGBTQ community. As Democrats, we cannot accept a criminal justice system that is ineffective at reducing violence, preventing recidivism, or addressing the root causes of crime. Texas Democrats are committed to accountability and crime reduction as the necessary response to Texas’ expanding prison industrial complex. We support programs that provide training of law enforcement, legal professionals, and victim service professionals to address barriers to justice for impacted individuals. In lieu of incarceration, Texas Democrats support practical solutions of diversion, rehabilitation, and the use of screenings to correctly identify disabilities and that provide fiscal benefits to our state and our communities.

Bail Reform

The Texas criminal justice system discriminates against the poor and people of color. Studies have revealed irrefutable evidence of racial and ethnic disparities throughout the criminal justice system, beginning with the initial contact with a law enforcement officer and arrest, proceeding through charging and bail and culminating with sentencing and appeal. Systemic racism and discrimination in the criminal justice system leads to disproportionate differences in rates of arrest, detention, conviction, and length of prison sentence.

Counties throughout the state maintain pretrial justice systems that process arrested persons in an assembly-line manner. Money, or the lack thereof, determines whether these pretrial detainees will be released or held in custody. County jails are overcrowded and poorly funded. People who cannot afford to be released on money bail languish in deplorable conditions for months on end while their case proceeds slowly through the court system. This often causes defendants who maintain their innocence to seek plea agreements and to plead guilty simply to be released from jail so they can return to their families and employment.

On any given day, thousands of people who are charged with misdemeanors and nonviolent crimes are housed in the nation’s jail system who have not been convicted of a crime, and are in jail for no reason other than they cannot afford the money bail they required to be released pending disposition of their cases. These people are disproportionately poor and people of color, and pose no public safety risk to the community.

Across the country, criminal justice reformers are moving to reform the pre-trial release system and replace money bail with a system that relies on risk assessment tools. As of 2017, twenty-nine cities and states have adopted computerized risk-assessment bail systems that determines an individual’s flight and safety risk scores, primarily based on a defendant’s age, criminal history, and nature of the charged offense. A risk-assessment bail system allows judges to release low or medium risk defendants on their own personal recognizance by adding conditions specifically calculated to ensure the defendant will appear in court.

The State of Texas should join the states, counties, and municipalities across the nation that have soundly rejected the excruciatingly unfair money bail system and replace it with risk-assessment bail systems. A risk assessment bail system would save Texas taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars in pretrial detention costs, and would remove corruption from the pretrial criminal justice system caused by a money bail system.

The bail system in Texas must change. Justice should not be measured by wealth and privilege. Fairness, due process, and equal protection should be the overriding goals of the criminal justice system. The Texas Democratic Party believes that all people must be afforded the same access to justice regardless of socio-economic status, race, religion, country of origin, or sexual orientation.

The Texas Democratic Party Supports amending Texas Constitution Art. 1 § 11, § 13 and Texas Code of Criminal 17.01 and 17.02 to create a pre-trial release system that:

- presumes release on personal recognizance for people charged with non-violent offenses who have little or no criminal history;
- requires immediate release of low-risk defendants under the least restrictive conditions necessary to guarantee appearance at court proceedings;
- requires judges to use an automated, pretrial risk assessment system designed to release low-risk, non-violent detainees on personal recognizance bond as soon as possible;
- requires judges and magistrates to make detention decisions within 48 hours after arrest; and
- requires judges and magistrates to determine “clear and convincing evidence” of risk when they deny bail.

The Texas Democratic Party supports:

- enacting legislation that requires people suspected of minor, non-violent misdemeanors be issued summons to appear in court rather than placed under arrest;
- enacting legislation requiring counsel at all initial pre-trial release hearings in which a person will not be immediately released on personal recognizance;
- legislation requiring staffed pretrial release service programs tasked with preparing initial entry risk assessments for hearing officers, prosecutors, and defense counsel;
- enacting legislation requiring all pretrial release hearings be held in public, open courts with a meaningful opportunity for defense counsel to present information supporting pretrial release under the least onerous conditions;
- enacting legislation that will require pretrial release on personal recognizance pending trial under the least restrictive conditions necessary;
- therapeutic jurisprudence approaches to criminal and juvenile justice, including the utilization of treatment programs and deferring adjudication to avoid permanently criminalizing or incarcerating individuals; and
- the establishment of diversification courts, commonly referred to as “drug courts” and “veterans courts” whose jurisdiction includes veterans, juveniles and nonviolent drug offenders.

Re-entry

Texas Democrats support programs that decrease recidivism by providing ex-offenders with a pathway back to productive participation in society. Texas Democrats support reducing recidivism by:

- restoring funding that Republicans have cut from the state prison system’s Windham School District and from programs for inmates to take higher education courses, and expanding access to those courses;
- increasing access to rehabilitation and re-entry programs, with a special emphasis on reducing drug use among people released from prison, including the reversal of policies that deny student loans and grants to those who have completed sentences for drug felonies; and
- allowing appropriate partnerships with faith-based programs that address re-entry preparation.

Texas Democrats support policies that:

- provide sensitive treatment for the victims of crime, and stronger emphasis on compensation to crime victims by the criminals themselves;
- reform probation to more closely supervise probationers in their communities and provide alternate means of punishing them, such as local jail time, house arrest, additional counseling, and self-help programs, without sending them to a state prison or imposing excessive registration requirements which prevent re-entry;
- significantly reduce the number of people re-incarcerated for technical violations of parole or probation, such as missing an appointment with a supervisory officer;
- staff the Parole Division to achieve the 60:1 ratio of parolees to parole officers; and
- enforce existing laws that reinstate an ex-offender's right to vote once they have paid their debt to society. We support expunging the criminal records of defendants successfully completing deferred adjudication supervision in nonviolent misdemeanors and felonies.

Mass Incarceration

Texas has the 5th highest incarceration rate in the United States. Though the U.S. accounts for only about 4 percent of the world's total population, we have about 22 percent of its prison population. Texas spends more than \$60 million each year to incarcerate drug users, not traffickers and the net result is a 63% re-arrest rate. Revocations from probation are also a leading cause of mass incarceration and continue to contribute to significant number of new intakes.

Our criminal justice system is failing Texans and as a result, our law enforcement is forced to jail individuals who would be better served with substance abuse or mental health treatment.

Though drug offenses are the major driver of the incarceration rate for federal prison populations, most inmates in state prisons are there for violent crimes. Simply stated, the most significant driver of incarceration overall is the length of sentences in state prisons. So-called "three strikes" laws, mandatory minimums, "truth in sentencing" laws, and other changes in recent decades have increased the average time actually served for a crime. Texas Democrats support:

- reducing the number of people entering jails and prisons by eliminating the extreme laws and policies that drive extraordinarily long prison terms;
- streamlining our parole and probation systems so that the small number of individuals who pose little or no risk can be safely allowed to reenter their communities;
- allowing judges to use discretion to reduce sentences where the specifics of the situation justify it;
- ending the practice of sending poor people to jail or prison for inability to pay fines and court costs;
- revising sentencing guidelines to eliminate mandatory minimums for all non-violent offenders;
- repealing "three strikes" legislation and "truth in sentencing" legislation that limits eligibility for parole. Texas currently requires that at least 50% of a sentence be served before eligibility;
- eliminating prosecutorial abuse, where the emphasis should be on justice rather than on conviction rates;
- expanding evidence-based opportunities for release that promote safety and success for those returning to their communities;
- eliminating incarceration as a penalty for low-level, non-violent offenses, especially when these offenses are the result of mental illness, drug addiction, or first-time offenses;
- ending the practice of arresting individuals for offenses that call for a citation;
- treating drug use as a public health challenge rather than as a crime;

- reducing possession of small amounts of controlled substances, per the prescribed schedules in the Controlled Substances Act, to a misdemeanor, even when it is a repeat offense;
- accessible, affordable, community-based outpatient care and insurance for mental health treatment;
- incentive programs to expand psychiatric residency programs and increase the availability of trauma-informed mental health services for the poor and veterans;
- redirecting mentally ill offenders from the criminal justice system to treatment programs when the risk to public safety is low;
- using the savings on prison and jail costs to fund mental health services, drug treatment programs and rehabilitation programs; and
- ending the practice in Texas of using jails as the largest providers of mental health services, as the practice is inhuman, ineffective, and expensive.

School to Prison Pipeline

Texas Democrats are dedicated to reforming the methods by which discipline is imposed in the public school system. We adamantly oppose all policies that lead our children from the steps of the schoolhouse directly to the halls of the juvenile criminal justice system. The school-to-prison pipeline is a concept that describes how “zero tolerance” educational policies dictate severe consequences for minor infractions. Texas Democrats support

- an increased budget for counseling services to assist student at all of our Texas school districts;
- including comprehensive training of school district, administration, staff and law enforcement (school resource officers), including training for Children’s Crisis Intervention Training (CCIT), trauma-informed care (TIC) and restorative justice (also known as restorative discipline);
- creating more recovery-oriented educational supports, such as School-Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support (SWPBIS) and classroom-based Social and Emotional Learning (SEL);
- using positive behavioral interventions and support on a school-wide basis;
- discontinuing the use of extreme measures such as restraint and seclusion, as well as any measures that cause the physical, emotional, or psychological pain of students, with or without disabilities, for any reason;
- reducing the use of punitive discipline, up to and including police arrests, as manifest in the “school-to-prison pipeline,” in which students—disproportionately African American—are alienated from academic pursuits and become increasingly subject to the criminal justice system;
- expanding the use of proactive, trauma-informed, equity-driven approaches that lead to more positive behavioral outcomes, including but not limited to Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Social Emotional Learning (SEL);
- repealing traditional, exclusionary approaches to discipline, such as expulsion and suspension, which disproportionately affect racial and ethnic minority students, as well as special education students;
- repealing the use of any measures that cause the physical, emotional, or psychological pain of students, with or without disabilities, for any reason, such as the use of extreme measures, such as restraint and seclusion.

Juvenile Justice

Juveniles are presumed to be less culpable for their crimes than adults and therefore have a constitutional right to be treated differently. Current neuroscience tells us that a child’s brain continues to develop into the mid-twenties. Prison-style incarceration does young offenders more harm than good. The use of tasers and pepper spray at Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD) facilities, recent scandals related to sexual assault by staff on youth, and issues of understaffing require that we start to

finally close our largest most dangerous facilities and finish the process of moving youth closer to home. Community-based juvenile justice prevention and intervention programs can ultimately reduce adult crime, Texas' high incarceration rate, and the need for prison construction. Texas Democrats support:

- ensuring that the primary goal of juvenile justice is to rehabilitate youth – not to create a feeder system for privatized for-profit, adult prison facilities;
- raising the age of criminal prosecution from 17 to 18 years of age; and
- further reducing the incarceration of youth in large state facilities to ensure that youth are housed in smaller, better staffed, child-focused, family-centered facilities closer to home, with the ultimate goal of eliminating the warehousing state facilities all together.

Policing and Building Community Partnerships

Texas Democrats believe that our law enforcement agencies should embrace and reflect the diversity within their ranks and the communities that they serve. The most vital element connecting law enforcement and the people they protect and serve is trust. Unfortunately, poor relations between community members and law enforcement officers have created feelings of distrust, anger, and fear. For far too long, a disproportionate number of citizens have been subjected to violations and injustice suffered at the hands of those sworn to serve and protect. Over the last few years, the advent of social media has revealed numerous tragic events as they unfolded in real time, exposing the rest of America to what persons of color have experienced far too often.

Law enforcement must engage the communities they serve, and establish relationships with their citizens based on mutual respect and trust. The mantra “to serve and protect” must be applied equally to all communities, and we applaud police departments who have moved from a “warrior” to a “guardian” ethos in training and policies.

Democrats believe in a community-policing based on best practices that support communities rather than outmoded “broken windows” theories of justice that lead to the over incarceration of adults and youths, and destroying families. Texas Democrats support restoring trust between police and our communities by:

- creating a statewide comprehensive education and training program for Peace Officers on civil rights, racial sensitivity, implicit bias, and cultural diversity;
- establishing policies and procedures, with the cooperation of police officers and the community, to create guidelines for dealing with implicit bias and cultural diversity;
- instituting appropriate disciplinary actions for officers who violate these departmental policies;
- implementing community policing strategies where the officers and the community work as partners;
- recruiting police officers from the community to create a more diverse law enforcement agency and work on retention and advancement of the officers;
- providing training to officers throughout the state and in jails on responding to persons with mental and developmental disabilities, and support local initiatives to move mental health first response to teams made up of health care, EMS, and social workers where the goal is assessment and treatment and jail is not the final destination;
- preventing officers, who have been terminated for violating civil rights and using unwarranted and excessive force, from moving to another police department within the state;
- requiring officers to get written or recorded consent prior to conducting a search during traffic stops and require them to inform people of their right to decline to give such consent;
- expanding statewide use of force reporting to include all incidents resulting in injury to either an officer or a civilian;
- establishing de-escalation as a norm in both policy and training for all departments; and

- supporting peace officers with the bests equipment, technology, and training to balance their dual role to serve and protect;
- rejecting further militarization of our state and local police forces and the continued receipt of restored, surplus military-grade weaponry provided under the Pentagon's 1033 program;
- creating independent crime labs so that scientists evaluating evidence are impartial and the conviction of innocent people is reduced;
- ending racial profiling in searches and traffic stops and allowing racial profiling data to be used as evidence in lawsuits alleging racial profiling;
- ensuring that any use of firearms or Tasers is carried out only when necessary to prevent loss of life or serious bodily injury;
- ensuring civil asset forfeiture only upon a criminal conviction;
- requiring independent or special prosecutors to investigate police officer involved actions that result in fatalities among citizens; and
- supporting independent police oversight and review programs at every government level.

Eliminating Private Prisons

Texas leads the nation with the most people incarcerated in its 35 private prisons operated by five private companies. The goal of a private prison is not to effect individual rehabilitation or any other widely-recognized way to prevent recidivism. The objective of a private prison is to house inmates and to make a profit. In contrast, state-operated corrections facilities understand that 95 percent of prison inmates eventually return to society. Part of a state operated institution's mandate is to expend the effort and resources necessary to facilitate a successful reentry back into the community for their discharged inmates. Private prisons make profit off a confined inmate, not a discharged one. These profit-driven corporations benefit when released inmates fail in society. Their recidivism generates more profit for shareholders. By treating prisons as profit centers, for-profit prisons are incentivized by mass incarceration and aggressively lobby law-makers for more inmates. In 2016, the U.S. Department of Justice discontinued its use of private prisons to house federal inmates. The decision to eliminate the use of private prisons came after the Justice Department's Office of Inspector General issued a scathing report that found private prisons to be both less safe and less effective than government run facilities, all without offering significant savings on cost. Texas Democrats support:

- ensuring the primary purpose of incarceration should be rehabilitation, reasonable punishment and public safety;
- ending the business model of incarcerating individuals for long periods of time for profit, which is unacceptable and immoral;
- amending the Texas Constitution to require state and local governments to directly operate and perform all core services at prisons, jails, and detention facilities within the State of Texas, and expressly prohibit the use of private prisons, jails, and detention facilities within the State of Texas;
- supporting legislation that bars state and local governments from contracting with private prisons, jails, and detention facilities; and
- denying corporate status, licenses, permits, and tax incentives to companies that operate private prisons, jails and detention facilities.

Criminalizing Intentional Prosecutorial Misconduct

Texas Democrats believe that the primary duty of prosecuting attorneys, including any special prosecutors, not to convict, but to see that justice is done. Prosecutorial misconduct is a blight on the fundamental notions of fairness, transparency and due-process that must be demanded of the criminal trial process. For the criminal justice system to regain trust and respect among those communities it serves, it must rededicate its mission to ensure that the interests of justice are served.

In 2012, The Innocence Project researched the cases of prosecutorial misconduct heard by Texas appellate courts. The research revealed 91 criminal cases between 2004 and 2008 in which prosecutorial misconduct was confirmed, yet not one resulted in any disciplinary action against the prosecutors involved.

Attempts to pass legislation in Texas that would prevent prosecutorial misconduct have failed. This stems from prosecutors' almost absolute immunity from state civil suits and federal civil rights claims that occurred from actions taken in a prosecutor's official duties. In addition, disciplinary actions from district attorney's offices and the State Bar of Texas remain rare.

The State of Texas should follow what California lawmakers did in 2016 and make it a felony crime for prosecutors to intentionally withhold exculpatory evidence. Prosecutors who violate this law are subject to 3 years in prison. The new law addressed intentional prosecutorial misconduct with both criminal sanctions and enhanced ethical requirements. Texas Democrats support:

- requiring prosecutors disclose all material and evidence that the prosecutor knows, or reasonably should have known, that would cast doubt on a prosecution witness's testimony;
- holding prosecutors accountable for disclosing evidence discovered by law enforcement and ensuring that all such evidence is disclosed by law enforcement to prosecutors;
- holding prosecutors accountable for disclosing evidence discovered by any non-lawyer personnel or agents (such as investigators) in the prosecution's office;
- encouraging prosecutors to follow the highest ethical standards that ensure the release of the innocent; and
- criminalizing intentional prosecutorial misconduct to further improve both the quality and integrity of the Texas criminal justice system.

DEMOCRACY

Our democracy is under attack from foreign interests, as is well documented by American intelligence agencies. This is a critical time for Texas to stand in support of the best technology to secure our voting systems and to stand against foreign interference to propagate false media stories.

Voting Rights & Fair Elections

We must adopt policies to eliminate the barriers to voting and encourage full participation in elections. Texas Democrats support:

- repealing the highly restrictive and discriminatory Texas photo voter ID law;
- automatic voter registration upon age 17 years and 9 months for all persons who meet Texas voter registration requirements;
- legislation allowing 17 year olds who turn 18 on or by Election Day to have access to a ballot in any primary prior to that election;
- same day voter registration;
- online voter registration;
- accessible polling locations and accommodations to enable accessible voting for Texans with disabilities;
- polling places in senior centers;
- complete adherence to the federal "Motor Voter" laws mandating simultaneous voter registration, whether at the Department of Public Safety in person or online;

- strengthening current requirements for curbside voting;
- legislation to allow for 'curbside' voting at senior centers to assist senior voters who are most susceptible to vote tampering;
- having Election Day be recognized as a holiday;
- statewide implementation of countywide vote centers;
- ensuring voting systems have not only paper backup, but also have an auditable paper trail processes in place;
- voter outreach and education efforts, especially for youth, people with disabilities, communities of color, and other underserved communities;
- existing voter protection policies under the federal Voting Rights Act and the Texas Voting Rights Act, and restoration of the federal preclearance policies in the Voting Rights Act that were overturned by the Supreme Court;
- protecting extended early voting periods;
- instituting vote by mail for all elections – federal, state and local;
- public ownership of all election processes, software and equipment;
- the creation of a nonpartisan redistricting commission to end racial and political gerrymandering in our redistricting process;
- robust auditing procedures that include absentee ballots;
- a constitutional amendment to eliminate the electoral college and award the presidency to the winner of the nationwide popular vote, and failing that, we urge all states to join the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact, so that candidates must campaign everywhere and not just in swing states;
- a return to paper ballots because they are more secure, much less expensive, and are the only method that can provide a truly auditable vote count;
- we support reforming campaign laws that ensure that if there is a runoff in a primary election that it may be held on the same day as the next municipal election; and
- the report and recommendations of the Unity Reform Commission to the Democratic National Committee as a carefully considered and eloquent prescription for strengthening democracy for all American citizens in general elections and Democratic Party nominations.

Campaign Finance Reform

Texas Democrats believe money should not determine who wins and loses elections. Campaign spending limits and keeping corporate money out of politics are essential to a healthy, responsive democratic system that can be trusted by voters. Texas Democrats support:

- overturning, by constitutional amendment if necessary, the decision in *Citizens United v. Federal Elections Commission* that allows corporations to give unlimited amounts of money to political campaigns, clarifying that corporations are not persons and constitutional rights are for natural persons only, and ending the doctrine that money is speech;
- legislation to move towards public campaign and election financing;
- full disclosure of funding sources for political advertisements, including the largest major funders of all political television, radio, print, slate mailer, and online advertising for ballot measures, independent expenditures, and issue advocacy;
- reinstatement of the federal Public Service and Equal Time requirements, so that companies given monopoly use of public television and radio frequencies cannot limit access to candidates that cannot afford the high costs of advertising;
- requiring elected officials throughout the state, including local or county officials, to file a personal financial statement to allow for more transparency; and
- requiring every candidate for the President of the United States to disclose their complete federal tax return and, upon election, place private holdings in a blind trust for divestment.

Ethics in Government

In a healthy democracy, officeholders must adhere to the highest ethical standards and be accountable to taxpayers by avoiding real or perceived conflicts of interest. No elected official is above the law. We believe that:

- state employees should be free to do their job free of political considerations and partisan oversight with only the public good in mind;
- Texas officials should not be exploiting public funds to pay for personal or political activities;
- we should end the double-dipping of retirement for elected officials;
- the abuse of personal leave policies and bonuses by state officials should be eliminated; and
- too often, political considerations outweigh sound policy, violating ethical standards in contracting and the use of public funds.

GOOD JOBS BUILD STRONG COMMUNITIES

Texans want to work in order to support their families and invest in their future. They need jobs that provide good wages, benefits and safe working conditions.

- Texas Democrats oppose all forms of forced or coerced labor, such as human trafficking. We also support the payment of a living wage. For example, we support requiring a minimum wage that is at least \$15-an-hour and that is indexed to inflation.
- Texas Democrats support a ban on sub-minimum wage i.e. Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) 14 (c). No hard-working Texan should be paid poverty-level wages that require him or her to rely on public benefits to make ends meet.
- We support unions and the value they bring to the American worker and state economy.
- We support the right of employees to negotiate collectively with their employer. We oppose union-busting proposals, such as so-called “right-to-work” laws and prohibitions on payroll deduction of union dues.
- We support the payment of prevailing wages for public projects.
- We support equal pay for equal work.
- We support paid sick leave for all Texas workers.
- We support equal access for women of all ages to training, jobs and promotions, and the right to sue for equal pay, capital, equity and contracts.
- We support the expansion of workplace rights such as flex time, compensatory time, and paid family leave in all employment contracts, and workplace time for child nursing.
- We support the funding and expansion of pre-apprenticeship programs in order to prepare workers for high-skill building trades.
- We support policies that strengthen existing protections and create meaningful consequences for employers who commit wage theft.
- We support an immediate study, followed by policy proposals, to address the effect of new technologies, such as automation, robotics and artificial intelligence, on jobs and the economy.
- We support the protection of workers’ retirement pensions and savings. All working Texans should have access to a decent retirement.
- We support capital and government investment in modernizing our infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, utilities, internet services, schools, ports, parks and public buildings.
- We support free and fair trade deals that support our economy and workers, and oppose deals that outsource American jobs to lower wage countries. We support a re-negotiated NAFTA that protects workers’ rights and raises wages and labor standards for workers in the United

States and Mexico. Trade policy must protect worker health and safety, combat child and slave labor, environmental degradation, and other practices that turn global trade into a race to the bottom.

- Democrats support modernizing the TABC's 3 tier system because Texas's craft breweries create jobs, encourage tourism, grow the economy, revitalize communities and add incremental tax revenues. Democrats support legislation allowing craft breweries to enjoy the same rights as their competitors in every state that allow them to sell and market their products directly from their breweries to consumers for take-home consumption, and ensure fairness in distribution across the state.
- Every American should have a right to a job; therefore, federally funded jobs paying at least a living wage with health insurance and other typical benefits on projects selected by the states and local governments must be available in or near every community.
- The civil rights of labor organizers, campaign workers, and those working to improve workers' rights should be protected. Violations of those rights should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

EDUCATION

Texas Democrats believe a world class education system is a moral imperative and an economic necessity. Every child should be provided the opportunity to succeed - not just a select few. Achieving student success requires an unwavering state commitment to provide every Texas child the opportunity to receive a quality education from pre-K through college or career programs. The changing demographics of the Texas student population pose new challenges that must be met to keep the Texas economy strong and our communities prosperous. Owing to inadequate investment in public education, minority and economically disadvantaged Texas students continue to suffer from a persistent achievement gap. Every child should have access to an educational program that values highly skilled teachers and encourages critical thinking and creativity, without the harmful impact of high-stakes standardized testing. Texas Democrats support the full, meaningful inclusion of Texas students with disabilities as a fundamental right.

Public Education Funding

The Texas Constitution guarantees the right to a suitable free public education for all Texas children. Texas Democrats condemn the unanimous decision by Texas Supreme Court justices and the Governor who declared "victory" when the Court refused to enforce that constitutional guarantee. Last year, the Republican legislative majority followed up on the 2011 public school funding cuts by slashing another \$2 billion in state aid for the current biennium, despite significant increases in the number of students.

Hidden in those numbers is an even worse story. Because funding for charter schools will be significantly higher for this biennium, state aid for traditional property-tax supported independent school districts will be reduced by \$3.5 billion. State aid per student for children in our local schools will decrease by nearly \$650 per student from the 2015-2016 school year to the upcoming 2018-2019 school year, according to Texas Education Agency estimates.

That decrease of over \$15,000 for a classroom of 25 students is being made up for by increases in local property taxes and cuts in education programs forced on our local school districts by the Republicans' failure to fund our children's education. As a result of the Republican war on public schools, the state share of funding for traditional property-tax-supported school districts, which was 45% in the 2010-11 school year, will drop to just over 31% this coming year.

Democrats are committed to correcting the deficiencies in funding Texas public education, ensuring that the needs of all students are a legislative budget and policy priority. Texas Democrats believe:

- the state should establish a 100% equitable school finance system with sufficient state revenue to provide every child the opportunity to learn in an exemplary program;
- the state should equitably reduce reliance on "Robin Hood" recapture;
- the state funding formulas should fully reflect all student and district cost differences and the impact of inflation and state mandates;
- the state should not require school districts to remove control of schools funded by local property tax dollars from school boards elected by taxpayers and turn them over to private charter operators, unaccountable to the voters, as a condition for receiving more adequate funding; and
- the federal government should fully fund all federal education mandates and should fully fund the Every Student Succeeds Act.

Preservation of the Texas Public Education System

Texas Democrats support the Constitution's "duty of the legislature" to provide suitable support for a system of "free public schools" and prohibition on using public school funds for the support of "any sectarian school." Texas Democrats:

- oppose the misnamed "school choice" schemes of using public tax money for the support of private and sectarian schools;
- believe "school choice" is a deceptive marketing frame that purports to advocate something that already exists - school choice - but whose true purpose is to divert public school funds to vouchers or tax credit systems supporting private and sectarian schools;
- understand that adoption of any vouchers or tax credit scheme would unavoidably financially and academically damage public schools in Texas. Moreover, the use of vouchers would cause students with disabilities to forfeit their right to free appropriate public education and to some or all of the special education and related services that public schools are legally obligated to provide under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA);
- should strengthen state oversight of homeschooling; and
- reject efforts to provide state funds for and shift students into for-profit, low-quality, unaccountable "virtual schools" at taxpayers' expense.

A Moratorium on Charter Schools

Charter schools in Texas have proliferated under lax state oversight, little accountability and great cost to taxpayers. Ongoing problems of fiscal mismanagement, self-dealing, increased segregation of students and the inefficiency of publicly funding a parallel system of schools require a time out to examine these problems and their impact on students and the state budget. Therefore, we support:

- a moratorium on new charter schools and on the expansion of existing charter school networks and a thorough study of charter school impact on students and taxpayers;
- strengthening state oversight and academic and financial standard for charter schools to provide the same level of transparency and accountability required of neighborhood schools;
- requiring charter schools that receive public funds have elected boards that meet in public;
- requiring that property purchased by charter schools with public funds be declared to be public property; and
- prohibiting publicly-funded charter schools from contracting with for-profit management companies.

Pre-K and Early Childhood Education

Early childhood education is essential to help students from all backgrounds begin to cultivate the skills that will last the rest of their lives. We believe:

- every eligible Texas child must have access to high-quality, full-day Pre-K and kindergarten;
- the Texas Education Agency should establish appropriate quality standards for Pre-K programs to ensure that students are receiving the highest quality instruction;
- schools and teachers must be equipped with resources and effective techniques to ensure that every child performs at grade level in reading, social studies, math, and science by third grade;
- the state support should be provided for family literacy programs that enable parents to assist their children; and
- resources must be provided to reverse the loss of teachers' aides due to the state funding cuts.

Every Student Should Have a Highly Qualified Teacher

Half of new teachers leave the profession within five years, leaving many students to be taught by teachers who are not certified to teach the subjects they are teaching. Early career educators are driven from the profession by low teacher pay, the constraints placed on them by high-stakes testing, and inadequate funding that forces teachers to spend hundreds of dollars from their own pockets for their classrooms. Democrats believe we must work to attract the best teachers and keep them in our classroom. We believe we should:

- bring Texas teacher pay in line with the national average;
- increase the state contribution to health insurance for educational employees, which has remained stagnant for 14 years while premium costs have eaten away at take home pay for teachers and other school employees;
- guarantee early acceptance to college and a teaching job to high school students in the top 20% of their class who commit to a teaching career upon certification;
- enhance the Teach for Texas Loan Repayment Program by tying loan forgiveness to years of teaching service, opening the program to all fields of study and allowing current teachers to go back to school to get additional certification in critical needs fields;
- restore funding for the Educational Aide Exemption to help teachers' aides go back to school to get certified as full-time teachers;
- prepare high school students for careers in teaching by creating an educational endorsement pathway specific to teaching readiness;
- restore, respect and safeguard the rights and benefits of education employees;
- guarantee that every class has a teacher certified to teach that subject;
- recruit and train teachers who reflect the state's diversity;
- provide a mentor or master teacher for every novice teacher;
- oppose test-based performance pay;
- respect support personnel by providing them due process employment rights and a salary schedule; and
- repeal legislation and reject further efforts to arm teachers.

Quality Classroom Learning Environment

Crowded classrooms and an overreliance on high-stakes standardized tests stifle creativity and leave little time for genuine teaching and learning. Smaller class sizes improve student performance, but class size waivers are all too common. Teachers have sued TEA over plans to increase the testing stakes by imposing a statewide test-based "Value Added Measure" as a teacher evaluation metric, despite research that demonstrates such measures are not valid. Parents have sued TEA over numerous flaws in the

STAAR test. There is a better way to create an excellent classroom learning environment to help students think critically and succeed. Therefore, Texas Democrats support:

- extending appropriate class size limits to all grades and enforcing those limits and striving for smaller class sizes;
- replacing high-stakes tests, that effectively punish students, teachers and schools, with multiple measures designed to diagnose student needs and improve instruction;
- a prohibition on awarding taxpayer dollars to corporations to develop high-stakes tests;
- rejecting efforts to impose a corporate-designed test-based “Value Added” teacher evaluation system and support basing teacher evaluation on multiple measures designed by practicing educators;
- ending inappropriate testing of students with disabilities whose individual education plans call for alternative assessments of their educational progress;
- providing free, accurate and updated instructional materials aligned with educationally appropriate, non-ideological state curriculum standards and tests, including ethnic studies and environmental education programs;
- ensuring that schools, classrooms, programs, and appropriate transportation are physically and programmatically accessible to all students;
- providing all students with disabilities inclusive and integrated academic and vocational instruction, evidence-informed supports, and full access to the general curriculum, extracurricular activities, and related services;
- equipping classrooms with free computers, high-speed internet access and digital instructional materials; and
- adequately defining and funding programs targeted to increase student proficiency in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM).

Community Schools: A Proven, Sustainable Way to Improve Schools

Parental and community involvement in neighborhood schools has long been the hallmark of successful public schools. The community school model, engaging parents, educators and community in designing and implementing school improvement plans, offers a proven blueprint for restoring excellence in public education. This model provides real local control and accountability that detached, corporate-run schools simply cannot match. Texas should:

- require every school to meet high standards and repeal “home rule” and “innovation” statutes that allow standards to be reduced and serve as a pathway to privatization;
- require school districts wishing to partner with a charter operator to be limited to only those open enrollment charters with a proven record in the state of Texas holding a Subchapter D charter from the Texas Education Agency;
- repeal A-F school ratings, which serve only to stigmatize schools and undermine struggling communities while doing nothing to improve children’s education;
- oppose the creation of a statewide so-called “achievement” or “recovery” school district that would grant control of a neighborhood school to Austin-based bureaucrats who could contract with private operators to run neighborhood schools without local accountability; and
- utilize existing statutes and encourage expansion of neighborhood charter schools that are run by parents and teachers who establish curriculum and policy within state standards.

Opportunity for Every Child

Many children who enter school with unique needs have extraordinary potential, if we simply address their needs and provide them an opportunity to succeed. Texas should:

- reject efforts to destroy bilingual education;
- promote multi-language instruction, beginning in elementary school, to make all students fluent in English and at least one other language;
- support Title IX protections for gender equity in public education institutions;
- serve the individualized needs of each student with appropriate identification based exclusively on the objective assessment of each student's strengths and needs by qualified professionals of all students who have disabilities that require special education services or services provided under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act;
- prohibit arbitrary limits on the numbers of students requiring special education services;
- support child nutrition acts that provide for free school breakfasts, lunches, and after school snacks, as well as summer breakfast and lunch programs for all public school children;
- ensure that every student has access to appropriate academic counseling services, as well as psychological and social services provided by competent and licensed professionals;
- provide and appropriately fund high-quality career and technical education programs;
- provide arts and music education in all schools;
- ensure that every school has a fully funded and staffed library, fully equipped with both print and electronic media, that is regularly open and accessible to students and faculty;
- provide universally accessible after-school programs for grades pre-K-12; and
- develop peer-reviewed curriculum for mandatory ethnic studies classes, such as Indigenous, Mexican-American, and African-American studies.

To make the promise of educational opportunity a reality for students at risk of dropping out or failing academically, we believe the state should support:

- school-community collaboration that brings educational and social services together under one roof to help at-risk students and their families;
- statewide equitable dual-credit and early-college programs that draw at-risk students into college and career paths while still in high school;
- equitable distribution of highly qualified teachers, to change practices that too often match the most at-risk students with the least experienced and least prepared teachers;
- focused efforts to close the academic achievement gap through the equitable distribution of high qualified teachers, eliminating disproportionate administration of disciplines impacting African-American and Latino students, and advocating culturally relevant learning and wraparound services to meet students' social, emotional, and health needs;
- comprehensive age-appropriate sex education programs with a contraception component, to reduce dropout rates due to unintended pregnancy; and
- access to affordable programs for adults who have dropped out of the education process.

Preserving the Defined Benefit Pension for Retired Teachers

Most retired teachers worked for years with inadequate pay and have no Social Security. Texas Democrats support:

- protecting the TRS defined benefit pension system against attempts to turn it into a risky 401-k plan that could put most retirees' pensions at risk;
- providing a regular COLA for every retired teacher;
- repealing the federal government pension offset and windfall elimination provisions that unfairly reduce Social Security benefits for Texas educational employees; and
- improving the TRS-Care health insurance program for retired educators.

SBOE Reform

All too often, extremists on the State Board of Education have made a laughingstock of our state's process by approving curriculum standards and textbooks that violate the integrity and reliability of mainstream science and social studies. Texas Democrats believe the State Board of Education should:

- develop curriculum standards and textbook requirements based on peer-reviewed research and written by subject matter experts, not the opinions of partisan extremists;
- adopt instructional materials that preserve and teach the methods and content of professional science and social studies experts without censorship or illegitimate editing;
- insist on the exercise of sober fiduciary responsibility for the Permanent School Fund;
- expose and prohibit conflicts of interest; and
- insist on due diligence in the screening of charter applicants and quickly rescind the charter school applicants and quickly rescinding the charters of schools that violate Texas public school education statutes.

Making Schools Safe and Bully-Free

Students, teachers and school personnel should be safe from acts of violence and must be protected from bullying, including cyber-bullying. We support fair enforcement of disciplinary standards, early interventions and mediation which support the success of every child regardless of their disability, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or current socio-economic circumstances.

- School campuses and functions must be drug-free and weapon-free, other than weapons carried by trained and licensed peace officers.
- Teachers deserve support when they exercise their statutory right to remove a disruptive student from class as guaranteed in the Texas Education Code.
- There must be full compliance with Title IX protections for transgender students and provide safe and welcoming schools for all students regardless gender identity.
- Schools should teach non-violent conflict resolutions to students.
- Implementation of systematic programs should be utilized to identify instances of bullying and implement school-wide positive behavior interventions and supports, to prevent violence, disruption, bullying, and harassment.
- Eliminate disparities in discipline based on race, ethnicity, national origin, disability, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression or any other improper grounds.

In light of Texas current discriminatory suspension and expulsion rates, Texas Democrats have taken the lead in passing legislation to eliminate disparities in discipline based on race, ethnicity, national origin, disability, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, or any other improper grounds. The Texas Education Agency should be directed to investigate and correct any patterns of apparent discriminatory enforcement or non-enforcement of discipline standards, including standards for out-of-school suspension.

HIGHER EDUCATION

Texas Democrats believe all Texans should have the opportunity and be encouraged to pursue affordable higher education at public universities, community colleges, and technical schools. Today, too many students are saddled with a mountain of debt when they graduate from college, and Republicans have made damaging cuts to formula funding, deregulated tuition and restricted financial aid, policies that threaten our ability to meet state "60x30TX" goals essential to our economic future. We believe the opportunity of higher education to be a right of all those that may seek it, regardless of race, gender, sexual preference, socioeconomic, or immigration status. We support policies that provide opportunity, free from debt, and a vision for tuition-free higher education system for college students, including:

- restoration of formula contact hour funding, adjusted for inflation and student growth;
- rollback of tuition and fees to affordable levels to reflect the restored funding;
- federal income tax credits for college tuition, fees and books;
- increased funding of TEXAS Grants and reforming the mismanaged state Prepaid Tuition Program, to provide higher education to more Texans without excessive debt burden;
- full state funding of the costs to colleges and universities of the Hazelwood Act;
- programs to develop alternative repayment plans for students struggling under significant debt burden by capping monthly payments and/or refinance existing loans to a lower rate tied to the current prime rate;
- legislation to reduce the inordinately high costs of college textbooks, technical manuals and other instructional materials;
- an increase in the maximum allowable financial aid set-asides;
- adequate compensation, security, professional status, and benefits for all faculty and fair market wages – at least a living wage level – for college employees;
- higher education research funding to spur economic development and locate a Tier 1 public research and teaching university in every region of the state;
- collaborative public/higher education partnerships from pre-K to completion of bachelor’s degree to enhance learning and teacher preparation;
- enhanced, equitable funding for Prairie View A&M and Texas Southern University and for higher education in South Texas and all border communities;
- strict regulation of for-profit proprietary colleges and universities, and removal of their eligibility for public financial aid;
- efforts to place a voting student regent on the appointed governing board of each state-supported four-year institution of higher education; and
- the continuation of the Texas DREAM Act and passage of the federal DREAM Act; and
- the fundamental principles of academic freedom, equality of opportunity, and human dignity.

Community Colleges

Texas Democrats recognize and support the essential role of Texas community colleges, where the vast majority of Texas’ post-secondary students are enrolled. By combining affordability, high quality and responsiveness to community needs, these institutions provide an education to those who would be otherwise excluded.

State funding for community colleges has been drastically reduced and that burden has been shifted onto students, their families and property taxpayers. In addition, state funding for community college employee benefits has been cut, adding that burden onto tuition and local property taxes. The resulting reduction in per student state funding has been exacerbated by cutting formula funding for community colleges by an additional 10% to fund a “performance funding” scheme. To maintain community colleges’ role in providing job skills and lifelong education, we endorse:

- providing tuition-free community college and public technical colleges to Texas residents;
- full formula funding of the cost of instruction and the growth in student enrollments;
- requiring that any “incentive” funding be on top of formula funding rather than funded at the expense of the actual cost of operations;
- sufficient financial aid to cover the many eligible community college students for whom aid is not currently available;
- fully state-funded full-time employee group health insurance and proportional health benefits for part-time instructors and restoration of funding for employee retirement;
- equitable opportunity for dual credit across the state;

- funding for new campuses and program expansions;
- funding for accessible technology and adaptive communication for students with disabilities;
- funding for community colleges to assist local school districts in development of programs for the new career and technology endorsements and applied mathematics curriculum;
- requiring establishment of rules to ensure full transferability of community college credit hours to four-year institutions;
- sufficient funding for Adult Basic Education to fully cover the demand for services; and
- elimination of financial aid rules that penalize students who transfer to universities from community colleges.

Diversity and Safety

Texas Democrats support innovative approaches to ensure diversity and safety in every Texas institution of higher education. We strongly support:

- maintaining the “Top 10% Rule” established by Democrats that guarantees access to our universities for the best students from all communities and regions of Texas;
- encouraging universities to offer culturally competent and culturally diverse curricula, student activities, and student recruitment policies that promote understanding, respect and acceptance;
- strict enforcement of policies that prohibit discrimination or harassment in any Texas institution of higher education against any person on the basis of race, sex, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, age, marital status, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, citizenship or military status;
- repealing campus carry policies for public university and community college campuses; and
- comprehensive programs to combat the campus sexual assault crisis.

HEALTHCARE FOR ALL

The Texas Democratic Party asserts that healthcare is a human right, not a privilege for the few. Texas Democrats recognize that the health and well-being of Texas residents cannot be based on decisions made by non-healthcare professionals whose primary concern is the financial well-being of a corporation rather than the well-being of an individual.

Universal Healthcare

Texas Democrats support an affordable, high-quality, universal health care that would provide privately-delivered, publicly-funded healthcare for all residents of Texas. In order to address comprehensive healthcare and guarantee that all Texas residents will have access to quality healthcare Texas Democrats support the passage of legislation [The Healthy Texas Act of 2019] that provides guaranteed access to affordable universal comprehensive healthcare through a system that would cover:

- medical, dental, hearing, and vision care treatment including primary and preventive care;
- prescription drugs;
- surgical care;
- gender-conforming surgery;
- emergency services;
- hospitalization;
- outpatient services;
- mental health and substance abuse counseling;

- treatment and reproductive health services that respect a woman's right to choose;
- physical therapy and rehabilitation;
- latest assistive technology including Complex Rehab Technology (CRT);
- chiropractic care;
- home health care; and
- long-term care.

Effectively crafted legislation would:

- replace insurance premiums, deductibles and co-pay with progressive stable financing;
- allow patients to choose their providers;
- continue the long-term care benefits of Medicaid while expanding those benefits with an emphasis on community and home-based care giving;
- eliminate co-pays for Medicare Part B;
- lower prescription drug costs;
- include funding for community-based and telemedicine health services;
- expand the advances made by the Affordable Care Act; and
- eliminate exclusion from coverage for pre-existing conditions.

Prevention

The underlying philosophy of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act is to move our country forward to a preventive based system where a priority is placed on the health and wellness of all Americans. Democrats support the legislation's elimination of copayments for preventive services, as well as plans to expand community health centers and the number of primary care physicians and healthcare practitioners. Texas Democrats support promoting vaccinations and immunizations, increasing K-12 education about nutrition and healthy living, and expanding opportunities for physical activity in schools.

Protecting and Improving Medicaid

Texas Democrats join a long list of Texas business associations and local governments in support of a Texas Solution for Medicaid expansion. We believe that accepting the billions of federal dollars for the state's Medicaid program can provide coverage to those working Texans that fall between the cracks and are denied or cannot afford private coverage. It would keep those working Texans out of the emergency room where they often cannot afford to pay their bills and would stop those costs from being passed on to Texans through higher insurance premiums and property taxes.

In order to protect and improve Medicaid, Texas Democrats advocate restoring Texas Medicaid to a fee-for-service model and reject privatization of Medicaid via managed care that denies, delays or restricts access to healthcare services. We further:

- reject attempts by Republican officials to cut, cap, or block grant existing Medicaid services;
- support increasing reimbursement rates for physicians;
- believe cuts to Medicaid reimbursement rates for children's therapy services like physical therapy, speech therapy, and occupational therapy limit our ability to provide care to children who need it most;
- oppose discrimination based on pre-existing conditions and believe that Texans with disabilities and chronic illnesses should have access to coverage at an affordable price;
- believe that insurance companies should not be allowed to violate the protections of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act by finding ways to deny coverage;
- support working with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to transition away

from the 1115 waiver towards real long-term funding solutions;

- require all nursing care facilities do accept Medicaid to prevent the eviction of nursing residents after Medicaid qualification spenddown;
- authorize the secretary of Health and Human Services to negotiate drug prices on behalf of Medicare and Medicaid patients, and authorize the state to negotiate drug prices on behalf of Medicaid patients;
- support for EMPOWER Care Act which allows certain Texans who are eligible for Medicaid and living in nursing facilities to transition to a least restrictive community-based setting of their choice, and receive services and supports;
- support the enforcement of the U.S. Supreme Court Olmstead decision and call for the closure or consolidation of State Supported Living Centers (SSLC) to allow people with disabilities the civil right to choose where to live;
- support the inclusion of a “Single Payer Option” as an addition to the plans currently offered under the state exchange systems;
- support changes to the Affordable Care Act in relation to the “Cadillac Tax” language to be a credit as opposed to a deduction, which would provide for tax relief as opposed to a floating type deduction;
- support the rights of workers to be able to collectively bargain for good dependable healthcare for its members, members’ families and retirees;
- support the inclusion of severe penalties on corporations and businesses who would manipulate costs on healthcare contributions could being used as financial revenue stream; and
- oppose any work requirements for Medicaid eligibility.

Improving Medicare

Texas Democrats support the security for seniors that the Medicare programs has delivered for decades. Democrats support the Medicare provisions in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act that provide improved quality of care, increase services to rural areas, crack down on waste and abuse and ensure more money goes to benefits and not insurance providers. We reject the backdoor privatization of Medicare. Democrats support the Medicare reforms enacted by Democrats in Congress to close the costly prescription drug “donut hole” that burdened seniors.

Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Services

Texas Democrats support the parity for mental health coverage and treatment for alcoholism and substance use disorder. We support the coverage allowed for by the Affordable Care Act for mental health and substance use disorder services and encourage Texas to accept the federal Medicaid dollars so as to deliver coverage to those Texans living in the coverage gap care that has so far been denied coverage by Republican leaders. Texas Democrats:

- support a robust continuum of care that offers choices in community-based supports that meet the range of needs that individuals with mental health needs present with, including peer operated services, community drop in centers, psychosocial rehabilitation, and access to a range of vocational supports such as supported employment and supported housing;
- support ways to eliminate stigma surrounding mental illness, alcoholism, and substance use disorder;
- support education awareness and health services to further suicide prevention;
- support increasing access to mental health and substance use disorder services by increasing the number of treatment facilities while ensuring their financial viability;
- support increasing psychiatric and psychological follow-up care session times beyond what Medicare currently allows;
- support federal government initiatives increasing Medicaid funding for substance use disorder

treatment--both medication assisted and counseling--which allow individuals to have access to outpatient treatment and allows intensive outpatient treatment to become more cost effective;

- encourage more “reality-based” substance abuse education at all school levels;
- encourage courts to allow outpatient treatment including counseling and medication management as the first option for drug offenders when appropriate, an option which is less costly than incarceration;
- support community-based mental health services for children and adults;
- support funding for needle exchange programs in at risk communities;
- support qualitative evaluation of all treatment modalities, interventions, agency and individual providers so that proven, efficacious treatments - administered by the most qualified providers - are utilized to improve significantly the lives of service recipients; and
- support sufficient private non-profit, state and federal funding for evaluation research and provider training to rank Texas number 1 in mental and behavioral health and substance use disorder services in the nation.

Education and Services to Prevent and Treat Communicable Infections

Texas Democrats support increased education initiatives and services to address prevention and treatment of communicable diseases, such as Viral Hepatitis, HIV/AIDS, Sexually Transmitted Diseases, and Tuberculosis. Effective treatment and therapy for all communicable diseases improves the quality of life and encourages a return to the workforce. Texas Democrats:

- support coordination with federal officials toward a goal of expanding the Ryan White CARE Act and the Act’s attendant and complementary programs, such as AIDS Drug Assistance Program and Housing Opportunities for Persons With HIV/AIDS;
- support the elimination of the outdated ban on non-celibate gay men donating blood and apply a uniform, non-discrimination policy;
- support former President Barack Obama’s national HIV/AIDS strategy to expand access to mental health and substance use disorder services;
- oppose cuts to support restoration of HIV service funding;
- oppose Congressional reductions to discretionary funding for such programs in any future budget.

Eliminating Health Disparities

Health studies have long indicated disease and mortality does not uniformly impact everyone in our state. Millions of Blacks, Latinos, Asians, Pacific Islanders, Indigenous Peoples, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ persons, living in America should not be disadvantaged by income, gender, region, immigration status, and discrimination. Texas Democrats:

- support efforts and programs focused on educating the community through early detection, highlighting the benefits of an active lifestyle and a healthy diet, and routine medical checkups to increase the likelihood of early detection;
- support legislation and efforts to combat the state’s maternal mortality crisis;
- support efforts to ensure women are educated and have proper access to the best medicines, state-of-the-art prevention and treatment and detection techniques;
- oppose any politicization of providers of reproductive health services and closures to further limit health care access to women; and
- support research, policy, and legislation to eliminate health disparities among racial, ethnic, geographic, socioeconomic, disability status, and other groups in order to enable all Texans to live longer healthier, and more productive lives.

Choice and Family Planning

Texas Democrats believe in the fundamental American values of freedom, privacy and personal responsibility. We believe in the right to make sound, responsible personal healthcare choices for ourselves and our families. Texas Democrats:

- trust Texans to make personal and responsible decisions about whether and when to bear children, in consultation with their families, physicians, personal consciences, and/or their faith;
- believe parents have the right to raise their children in safe and sustainable communities free from individual and state violence;
- oppose TRAP (targeted regulation of abortion providers) legislation, which create dangerous restrictions on Texans' access to abortion care;
- support using sound, mainstream medical science and evidence-based data to guide reproductive health care policies;
- support targeted efforts to reduce high rates of teen pregnancy and repeat teen pregnancy in Texas, including the provision of evidence-based, accurate and effective, comprehensive age-appropriate sex education programs with an abstinence and contraception component and information about communication, consent and healthy relationships; and support the rights of adolescents to access and provide their own consent to contraception and other reproductive health care;
- recognize the product of a joined egg and sperm has no independent status, standing, entitlements or rights that would in any way usurp or supersede the rights of the mother or woman which are paramount;
- support individuals' rights to acquire all forms of contraception, including long-acting reversible contraception, abortion care, or other reproductive services through their health insurance provider without additional premiums;
- support resources for pregnant and parenting teens while encouraging them to continue their education and career development;
- support family planning funding for pregnancy prevention and preventive health care by all qualified providers in regulated, licensed medical facilities, including Planned Parenthood;
- remove funding for crisis pregnancy centers (CPCs) whose misrepresentations and arguably fraudulent customer acquisition and service practices draw unsuspecting young women through their doors;
- fund research and counseling for postpartum depression;
- support access to affordable prenatal care, including pregnancy insurance and prenatal vitamins;
- support access to contraception, including long-acting reversible contraception, in the immediate postpartum period;
- support access to accurate information about reproductive health, adoption and related resources; and
- support affordable, quality childcare.

CANNABIS REFORM

Cannabis legalization reform can improve public safety, boost the economy, reduce mass imprisonment and stigmas to our citizens, and generate revenue for the state budget. Cannabis prosecutions has disproportionately affected our youth, people of color and the poor. America's prison population is now the largest in the world. A criminal record can destroy a young life forever. Texas Democrats support:

- Texas legislation to legalize possession and use of cannabis and its derivatives and to regulate its use, production and sale as is successfully done in Colorado, Washington and other States;

- Due to the increased impact of the enforcement of the prohibition of cannabis, ensure grants and priority of licenses shall be created to ensure economic empowerment for cannabis businesses, their patients, and the communities most affected by the war on drugs;
- The immediate legalization of medical cannabis use, and ensure coverage for medical cannabis through universal health care options;
- Support federal legislation to remove cannabis as a Schedule 1 Controlled Substance and to remove all criminal penalties for use and possession of cannabis;
- Appropriate employment and benefit protections for users of cannabis;
- In the interim, urge the President and the Congress to support legislation that the Federal Government will not interfere nor attempt to enforce federal cannabis laws in states that have legalized cannabis;
- The immediate release of individuals incarcerated for possession of cannabis and expungement of criminal records of persons convicted or receiving Deferred Adjudication for misdemeanor cannabis offenses; and
- In the interim in Texas, urge use of pre-trial diversion programs for all cannabis offenses.

GUN VIOLENCE PREVENTION

The Texas Democratic Party supports the 2nd Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. We also recognize the immediate need for a balanced approach between upholding and respecting our fundamental constitutional rights and protecting the rights of Texans from those seeking to cause harm. Gun violence has reached epidemic proportions in our State and in our country, as evidenced by the Sutherland Springs and Santa Fe High School shootings and by the high number of deaths by suicide where a firearm is involved. We believe in a comprehensive approach recognizing gun violence as both a criminal justice and public health issue.

In the *Heller v. DC* case, conservative Justice Antonin Scalia wrote in his decision for the majority that the government has the right to regulate & make laws to prevent certain weapons. “We think that the limitation is fairly supported by the historical tradition of prohibiting the carrying of ‘dangerous or unusual’ weapons,” Justice Scalia wrote.

We strongly support:

- Strengthening and reforming current laws that require passing a background check prior to the purchase of a firearm by requiring a sufficient waiting period to provide adequate time for law enforcement officials to conduct a mandatory, background check;
- Closing loopholes that allow guns to be sold or traded without passing a mandatory and thorough background check;
- Strengthening the national background check system to incorporate all necessary records, including criminal, domestic violence, and mental health records, for both dealers and purchasers;
- Enacting legislation to require all individuals charged with domestic violence, human trafficking, sexual assault, domestic or foreign terrorism, stalking or any violent felony to temporarily surrender all weapons and ammunition in their possession to law enforcement pending adjudication of their case(s);
- Enacting legislation empowering law enforcement officials to confiscate all firearms and ammunition in the household or in the possession of a suspect arrested for domestic violence, human trafficking, sexual assault, domestic or foreign terrorism, stalking or any violent felony pending adjudication of their case(s);

- Enacting legislation requiring magistrates to make it a condition of any bond being granted that any individual charged with domestic violence, human trafficking, sexual assault, domestic or foreign terrorism, stalking or any violent felony be prohibited from possessing by either owning, borrowing or using a firearm during the pendency of their case(s);
- Enacting sensible gun laws to curtail the availability of weapons with extended ammunition magazines, including rapid-fire, magazine-fed, military-style assault weapons;
- Enacting legislation prohibiting the manufacture, sale, or possession of bump stocks, binary trigger systems and trigger cranks that increase the rate of fire;
- Repealing laws that allow the open carry of handguns and assault rifles;
- Outlawing the personal possession of use of body armor and armor piercing bullets;
- Gun free zones;
- Improving training and licensing requirements for all Texans wishing to carry a firearm;
- No Congressional prohibition which limits the CDC research on gun violence;
- Allowing families to anonymously request pre-emptive, judicial action restricting the possession or purchase of firearms for loved ones in crisis threatening harm to themselves or others;
- Repealing federal legislation granting immunity from civil liability to manufacturers and marketers of firearms;
- Encourage the research, development and marketing of weapons utilizing “smart gun” technologies;
- Establishing a statewide firearms education and public safety campaign – with an emphasis on safely securing guns in the home and denying unsupervised access to minors;
- Appropriately enforce criminal penalties for individuals who negligently fail to control access to firearms in homes where minors and others are present;
- Requiring manufacturers to develop and sell childproof handguns;
- The accepted standard of care allowing physicians and mental health professionals to discuss the presence and safe storage of guns with all patients and parental guardians;
- Fully funding the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives so that it may conduct more frequent inspections of FFL dealers; and
- Allocating a portion of funds collected from state License to Carry Fees toward programs dedicated to the physical and emotional rehabilitation of gun violence victims and their families

SEXUAL ASSAULT AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Texas Democrats believe violence and abuse affects Texans of all demographics and effective programs must be established at the individual, family and community levels to combat this scourge on our society. We understand that interpersonal violence and abuse – including child abuse, sexual assault, human trafficking, and family and domestic violence – are crimes that affect all genders, races, ethnicities, and classes. Violence and abuse often involve cyclical, generational patterns which affect the safety and well-being of all Texans. These issues cannot be adequately addressed without simultaneously improving access to housing, protections for workers and students, access to affordable medical and mental health care, and criminal and civil justice responses. Texas Democrats’ believe that we must do everything in our power to end these crimes, they will continue to damage not only the social fabric of this generation but of future generations. We support:

- Strong enforcement of Texas laws to hold offenders accountable and increase the likelihood that victims will come forward to report these crimes;
- Early prevention efforts focused on youth to decrease the incidence of sexual and domestic violence prior to victimization or perpetration;

- Requiring school districts to include evidence-based programs in schools (such as the Expect Respect program) to promote social emotional learning, safe and healthy relationships, and age appropriate sex education as a part of their curriculum – this should include fully implementing Section 37.0831 of the Education code that was established by HB 121 with a focus on dating violence awareness and prevention education for teachers, students, parents and the whole school community;
- A strong statewide initiative to reduce child abuse and neglect through investment in effective early prevention and positive parenting programs;
- Training programs for law enforcement, prosecutorial, judicial, healthcare, mental health and education professionals to promote increased understanding of and improved response to the crimes of domestic violence, sexual assault, sexual harassment, child abuse, and human trafficking; these programs must emphasize the importance of starting interactions by believing victims;
- Ensuring swift and just responses to sexual harassment, with acknowledgment that sexual harassment occurs not only in the workplace, but also in schools, on the street, and in the community at large;
- Sexual harassment policies adopted by the Texas House & the Texas Senate, with significant penalties for elected officials, including censure or expulsion;
- Increased funding for family violence shelters and non-residential programs, including increased funding for counseling services and expanded housing options including supportive housing for survivors of violence and abuse and their families;
- Ensuring state managed resources are directed to historically marginalized or vulnerable communities – immigrants, LGBTQ, disability, elderly, etc.;
- Providing resources to support service providers in incorporating best practices that address the intersections of Racial/Economic Justice with domestic violence and sexual assault;
- Requiring every defendant charged with a domestic violence crime placed on either a probation, deferred adjudication, or deferred prosecution program be ordered to complete a Battering Intervention & Prevention Program (BIPP);
- Requiring Battering Intervention & Prevention Programs (BIPPs) be established in every county in Texas (including on-line options for counties with populations under 50,000) and ensuring that all state-funded BIPPs adhere to minimum standards of practice and trainings developed by allied partners in the domestic violence field;
- Ensuring every county and district attorney’s office in the state, upon the victim’s qualification and request, must file a protective order on behalf of victims and represent the victims before the court;
- Ensuring resources to support state agencies to upload bond conditions and protective orders into TCIC;
- Establishing Domestic Violence High Risk teams in all counties to systematically reduce the likelihood of fatality;
- Ensuring the CPS system is responsive and sensitive to needs of families affected by domestic violence;
- Expanding existing support services and funding currently targeted at sex trafficking of minors to include adult survivors of trafficking;
- Allowing every survivor of sexual assault access to comprehensive sexual assault examination and treatment provided by either a certified Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) or a licensed physician and increasing access to the same;
- Ensuring all costs of the sexual assault examination and treatment including medications are covered through the Crime Victims Compensation Fund and do not become the financial responsibility of the victim, regardless of whether the victim chooses to report to law enforcement;

- Covering all costs for the performance of strangulation exams and domestic violence medical forensic exams through the Crime Victims Compensation Fund; and
- Enacting legislation criminalizing the act of touching, for the purpose of sexual gratification, another person's breast, anus, or any part of their genitals, even though clothing, without the effective consent of that person.

DEATH PENALTY

Death penalty exonerations have revealed deep flaws in the Texas criminal justice system. Despite 13 death row exonerations in Texas in the last 11 years, the death chamber and its machinery are still fully operational in Texas. Evidence, including scientific evidence, extensive studies by Innocence Project, major newspapers, and university research, strongly suggests that Texas has already executed innocent defendants including Carlos DeLuna, Ruben Cantu, and Cameron Todd Willingham. We must take every step to ensure there is never another innocent person executed. Texas Democrats support and urge:

- The passage of legislation that would abolish the death penalty and replace it with the punishment of life in prison without parole;
- Strong opposition to the expansion of death penalty laws at the state and federal levels;
- The election of district attorneys who prioritize justice over convictions and duly exercise their discretion with regard to charging and sentencing options; and
- The Texas Legislature to impose a moratorium on capital punishment in order to conduct an unbiased and objective study of the entire process, from arrest, conviction/sentencing, appeals at all state levels, and the execution process itself is shown to be reliable and without such grievous failures as have been evident in the recent past.

ENERGY & THE ENVIRONMENT

Texas Democrats recognize that climate change is a real and serious threat that is causing drought, crop failure, heat waves, more extreme hurricanes, torrential storms, and extreme climate events. Recent events have shown how these extreme climate disruptions are ravaging our economy and environment, and it is time for Texas to become a leader in combating climate change. We recognize that Texas has some of the dirtiest coal plants in the nation, and our residents are at great risk from the health effects of carbon pollution and climate disruption. We also recognize that drought, crop failure, famine and disease caused by climate disruption can lead to political instability and violence throughout the world. To mitigate these risks, we recommend statewide and national clean energy and transportation policies that will spur economic development and reduce carbon emissions in Texas and the nation through the use of renewable energy and energy efficiency.

Texas has long been a world energy leader, and Texas can continue that dynamic leadership in a transition to diverse, clean, abundant energy as we tap our wealth of alternative energy sources – solar, wind and geothermal resources, and work to increase energy efficiency. We support:

- the EPA's historic carbon pollution reduction initiative, the Clean Power Plan, and the proposed rules to cut carbon dioxide emissions from existing power plants by 30% (below 2005 levels) by 2030, and the EPA's Regional Haze Rule and Methane Rule, all of which the current administration is seeking to roll back;

- rejoining the Paris Climate Accord;
- institution of a revenue neutral fee on the CO2 content of fossil fuels, with the revenue returned to households on a per capita basis, and a broader adjustment to protect American jobs;
- development of technical and academic programs and research in renewable energy, green building technologies and energy storage at state post-secondary institutions;
- public education programs that promote methods and benefits of energy conservation;
- requiring all electric utilities to offer homeowners and business owners fair value for on-site solar and wind energy, either through a net-metering or value of solar agreement;
- energy efficiency standards and green building policies;
- financial incentives for the manufacturing of American-made equipment for alternative energy production, for the development of energy storage technologies and for both homeowners and landlords to invest in conservation and energy efficiency;
- actions that cut fossil fuel emissions, choosing instead to embrace a cleaner, cheaper, more reliable and more desirable future with renewables, injecting billions into the economy, empowering people to make independent energy choices, spurring innovation and building demand for low-carbon consumer products;
- the investigation and resolution of the deleterious effects of fracking, including the increased incidence of earthquakes from the disposal of liquids into injection wells;
- a transportation policy that encourages the development of affordable, fuel efficient vehicles that can run on electricity and alternative fuels and wider use of public transportation; and
- continuation of the Texas Emissions Reduction Plan (TERP) to offer incentives to cleaner vehicles and infrastructure, including electric vehicles, and of the Low Income Vehicle Repair and Replacement (LIRAP) Program, which are key to developing new technologies and to cleaning our dirty skies.

A Moratorium on Fracking

Science has shown that large quantities of methane are released in fracking operations, and that such releases are much more powerful in heating our climate than carbon emissions. Therefore, an aggressive phasing out and the end to the ecologically destructive extraction method known as hydraulic fracturing, commonly known as “fracking” in the state of Texas and throughout the world is necessary. Texas Democrats support:

- a moratorium on new fracking wells;
- the retraining of workers from an industry that is damaging to the environment to an industry that is beneficial to our environment;
- set a goal of shutting down existing fracking wells by 2026;
- set a goal of ending the practice of injecting wastewater by 2023;
- incentivizing the cleaning of water that is used in fracking;
- incentivizing the use of recycled water;
- the rights of local governments and voters to regulate oil and gas operations within their communities, including the right to establish setbacks and bans on hydraulic fracturing near residences, businesses, schools and hospitals;
- the establishment of industry standards for industrial water users who pollute community water sources to provide restitution for community efforts to clean water impacted by relevant operations; and
- strengthening and enforcing regulations to significantly and rapidly reduce methane emissions from oil + gas operations.

Clean and Available Water

Texas Democrats understand that global climate change has accelerated and that Texas water resources are being impacted by this development, a situation which calls for enhanced water conservation, management and protection. Clean Water from publicly managed resources is critical to our future and our health. Access to clean drinking water is a human right. Therefore, we support:

- access by all Texans to clean and dependable water supplies;
- implementation of aggressive water conservation and reuse practices;
- a well-funded state water education campaign to inform Texans of the sources of their water and how to conserve and protect it;
- development and implementation of effective drought response plans by water suppliers;
- protection of Texas bays, estuaries, in-stream flows, and wetlands;
- enhanced authority and resources to groundwater conservation districts coupled with well-funded research on groundwater resources and the hydrologic connections between groundwater and surface water;
- expanded testing of fish and shellfish for mercury, radionuclides, and other contaminants and public notification of health risks from water pollution;
- a comprehensive effort to reduce and manage flooding that emphasizes floodplain management, advance planning, and low-impact development; and
- actions to prevent depletion and exploitation of water resources, including banning the use of non-brackish water for fracking, prohibiting speculative water marketing, and acquiring open space to protect aquifers and watersheds.

Environmental Protection, Regulation and Enforcement

The purpose of government is to promote the common good and the protection of all, not the exploitation of resources for the profit of a handful of individuals and corporations. To that end, environmental protection, regulation, and enforcement is essential to preserve the health of our people, the quality of life, and to secure long-term economic growth. It is vital that the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) protect the health and welfare of Texans through environmental stewardship. We support:

- Texans' right to know if hazardous chemicals and materials are being stored in their communities;
- Implementation of the Chemical Safety Rule, which the current federal Administration has attempted to roll back, even as we see the impacts that failure to require such a rule can have during events like Hurricane Harvey;
- For major hazard facilities, the implementation of risk assessment and mitigation requirements that take natural hazards into account;
- the State of Texas fully enforcing environmental laws instead of ceding its responsibility to protect Texans' health;
- TCEQ and the EPA making human health and quality of life paramount when deciding whether or not to grant either an air or wastewater permit;
- retiring the oldest, heavy-polluting, coal burning Texas power plants that are so outdated that pollution controls are not an economically viable option;
- ending the destruction of our forests, water, and other natural resources by coal strip mining;
- the enforcement of the Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act for all industries;
- strengthening the violation penalties so that it does not pay to pollute;
- EPA's rule to reduce emissions of toxic air pollutants from power plants, specifically mercury and air toxics standards (MATS) for power plants that will reduce emissions from new and existing coal- and oil-fired electric utility steam generating units;
- requiring TCEQ to protect the health of Texans by enforcing the Clean Air Act and analyzing

- cumulative pollution impacts on downwind communities before making permitting decisions;
- the rights of all citizens to participate in the permitting process and contested hearing in order to protect their property, health and the environment, including reversing recent efforts by the Texas Legislature to make it more difficult for citizens to participate in contested case hearings;
- the enactment of laws and regulations to protect low-income communities and communities of color from environmental racism and environmental injustice;
- halting the plan to import high-level radioactive waste for consolidated storage or disposal in Texas due to risks of water contamination, security concerns and transportation accidents, and we oppose transport of high-level radioactive waste on our highways or railways;
- requiring green completions of wells by requiring excess gases to be captured; stricter limits on flaring, a sustainable yield permit for water withdrawals and recycling or appropriate disposal of tainted water; and a prohibition of known carcinogenic or toxic chemicals used in this process;
- efforts to protect our cities, towns and communities from the dangers presented by the dramatic increase in shipments of highly flammable oil and gas products by train; and
- the appointment of new TCEQ commissioners who will enforce state and federal laws that protect our air, water, and land from those who pollute for profit.

The Texas Railroad Commission has been tasked with overseeing the operation of Texas' natural gas wells. However, they have become little more than a rubber stamp for businesses that damage air and water supplies in the name of profit. We support the Sunset Commission's recommendations to improve the functionality of this agency as it relates to transparency, conflict of interests, ethics and changing the name of the agency to better reflect its role and jurisdiction.

We believe that:

- the members of the Railroad Commission should use their regulatory power as a means of protecting the health, welfare and property of Texans, rather than using it as a political tool;
- statutory jurisdiction should require the Railroad Commission to use scientific, peer-reviewed research to consider quality of life factors and seismic activity when evaluating drilling and disposal permits;
- the Railroad Commission should adopt newer, stricter rules on injection wells to prevent earthquakes and provide more safety for underground water supplies and nearby communities;
- the impact of methane emissions on climate should be recognized and controlled;
- political contributions to Railroad Commissioners from the oil and gas industry should be banned;
- penalties levied by the Railroad Commission should be significant enough to deter energy production practices that cause pollution;
- the Legislature should review the ethics and rule of conduct of the Railroad Commission's elected offices as it relates to its recusal policy and revise as necessary to ensure the commissioners' awareness of, and compliance with, these requirements;
- legislative action should be taken to require the Railroad Commission to implement a transparent process to confirm that entities declaring common carrier status for pipelines are actually operating as common carriers and not as private entities. Such legislation should also establish a process for landowners to contest a determination by the Railroad Commission that an applicant is a common carrier;
- legislative action should be taken to direct the Railroad Commission to ask for expanded authority over intrastate pipelines to inspect, monitor and review pipeline safety and maintenance to assist the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration in its federal regulatory responsibilities; and
- legislative action should be taken to require the Railroad Commission to establish a searchable, downloadable web database so the public can access information about inspections, enforcement and compliance with environmental rules and regulations.

The preservation of recreational and open spaces is essential to a healthy Texas. We support:

- increased funding for the upkeep, maintenance, and acquisition of state park land and for the protection of state park land in the event of natural disasters such as the recent drought-caused wildfires;
- rewarding those who voluntarily protect endangered species on their lands through Safe Harbor Agreements and similar measures;
- encouraging the large-scale planting of native trees and drought hearty species to absorb greenhouse gases, improve wildlife habitat, and promote beautification; and
- strong enforcement of laws that provide full public access and restoration of public lands, parks, beaches, and waters. We affirm the Texas Open Beaches Act and the Texas Constitution's guarantee of public access to beaches. We oppose any actions that endanger this right.

Recycling & Waste Reduction

Reducing the use of natural resources is the best option, followed by reuse and then recycling. Texas Democrats support:

- programs that encourage the reduction of use of unnecessary single use plastics;
- retailer take-back programs for electronics that will keep e-waste out of the waste stream that does not merely ship the problem to other countries; and
- financial and other incentives for communities to provide residential recycling.

We oppose any attempts by the Texas Legislature to stifle efforts of municipalities to regulate litter and pollution through city ordinances and regulations that ban bottles, bags, Styrofoam, or other wasteful packaging. Municipalities should be allowed to address waste reduction locally without state interference and allowed to enact ordinances to combat the problem that may be more restrictive than state laws if it is of the will of the local community.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

Texas Democrats believe responsible, accountable and progressive state budget policy is necessary to restore trust between taxpayers and elected officials in Austin. Earning that trust requires leaders who will talk straight about the challenges facing Texans today and in the future – unlike Republican politicians who have created short-term and long-term budget problems and then have blocked solutions.

These Republican budget policies intentionally created a long-term “structural deficit” by cutting school property taxes while not providing the substitute revenue they promised from business taxes. At the same time, they have refused to use the Texas Economic Stabilization Fund, popularly called the “Rainy Day” Fund, for its intended purpose – ensuring continuation of appropriate services during economic downturns. They have even failed to use it to recover from our recent truly rainy days and other natural disasters. The price for these irresponsible state fiscal policies has fallen squarely on the backs of hardworking Texans for more than a decade.

Drastic state budget cuts in education, healthcare and other areas have shifted the tax burden to local governments, often requiring cities, counties and school boards to cut services or increase local property taxes or regressive sales taxes. As Texas Democrats, we support:

- Reversing the \$5.4 billion in cuts to public education that were made in 2011 and the additional

\$1.7 billion cut made in the recent legislative session, which have caused many public school employees, including teachers, to lose their jobs while more students were crammed into crowded classrooms;

- Restoring funding for proven services in the women’s health programs, where cuts left millions of women without basic preventive care and screening services;
- Adopting the Medicaid expansion provided under the Affordable Care Act so that billions of our federal tax dollars will come back to Texas, improving the health of our citizens, saving our rural hospitals from closure and reducing the property tax burden that currently pays for indigent care;
- Supporting college students and their parents, who have been hit with tuition rates that have doubled at the same time Republicans made significant cuts in state financial aid;
- Forward-looking traffic and mobility solutions that address traffic congestion;
- Long-term funding solutions for the state water plan;
- Ending debt, diversions, and deception in the state budget process;
- Fully funding our state park systems to ensure all Texans can have access to the natural beauty of our great state;
- An update for state emergency services, including 911 systems that allow communities to manage crisis situations that can arise from floods, hurricanes, and tornadoes; and
- Appropriate assistance to Texans and Texas communities attempting to recover from Hurricane Harvey and other natural disasters.

State government must invest wisely and efficiently to meet the needs of our rapidly growing population and develop the human resources that are the key to our economic future. Texas must reform state fiscal policy and develop reliable revenue sources that grow with the economy to provide essential state services for a growing population. Texas Democrats support policies to restore responsible state fiscal policy, including:

- a progressive tax system based on the principle that all taxpayers should pay based on their ability to pay;
- the end to Republican policy that provides tax breaks to the wealthy at the expense of the vast majority of working Americans;
- enacting a constitutional amendment to prevent extending the sales tax to food and Medicine, while opposing Republican efforts to impose a sales tax to replace local property taxes with a tremendous increase in state sales taxes;
- reforming the business “margins tax” policy to provide fairness to all economic sectors, especially small businesses;
- eliminating tax loopholes and unproductive special breaks, such as Chapter 313 agreements, to simplify the tax system and provide revenue for essential services;
- the federal government discouraging economic incentive policies that pit one community against another;
- reforming the property tax appraisal system to guarantee uniform appraisals and eliminate the loopholes that allow business, mineral and commercial properties to be taxed at far below market value, which shifts the burden onto homeowners;
- structured property tax relief to benefit all homeowners fairly and prevent families from being taxed out of their homes when land values rise inordinately, and extend the benefits of property tax relief to renters when landlords receive the full benefit of those reductions;
- requiring proposed revenue policy to be clearly established in a transparent process and determined by open, public debate and votes cast by elected representatives;
- stabilizing trauma center funding by repealing the Driver Responsibility Program fees, which many Texans cannot afford and never pay, and replacing the funding other budgetary means;
- requiring state government to spend taxes and fees for the reason they were collected;

- adopting strict guidelines requiring that procurement contracts and taxpayer-funded incentives to businesses must target, when possible, small businesses, including minority-, women-, veteran-owned businesses, and prohibit such awards to companies that export jobs or utilize tax loopholes to avoid state or federal taxes; and
- enacting and enforcing regulations to prevent the continued use of the Texas Enterprise Fund as a corporate slush fund that rewards businesses owned by political cronies and contributors, despite their failure to meet hiring targets and other program requirements.

Privatization of Government Services

Under Republicans, Texas has entered into a series of questionable contracts with private companies that have reduced and harmed state services. Therefore, we support:

- state agencies hiring state workers at adequate levels to ensure timely and accurate delivery of state services;
- regular audits of state contracts to ensure services are delivered properly and on time;
- enforcement of fines for corporations and entities receiving contracts that fail to deliver on services outlined in state contracts;
- legislation that would close contractor and trade secret loopholes in the Texas Public Information Act, while providing due process protections for private companies wishing to keep trade secrets private; and
- ending and banning any agreements with any contractor that has relocated outside the United States to evade taxes.

FAMILY SECURITY

Texas Democrats support initiatives to ensure the security of our families. Every parent should be able to provide housing, nutrition, clothing and health care for his or her family. Families have a right to strong and healthy communities, including the right to produce, process, access, distribute, and eat healthy food and to understand the sources, quality, and nutritional value of their food regardless of race, class, gender, ethnicity, citizenship, ability, religion, or community.

Care for Children and Families in Need

Many Texas state agencies – including the Department of Family Protective Services, Health and Human Services Commission, and Department of Child Protective Services – play a direct role in ensuring Texans’ health, safety, and security. Abuse within the CPS system, failed managed care contracts overseen by HHSC, and questionable practices by DFPS are all the direct result of a Republican-led state government that have prioritized profits over people. Texas Democrats support:

- Greater oversight of private and state facilities and institutions that serve children and vulnerable adults;
- An end to privatization of the Department of Family Protective Services;
- Sufficiently funding CPS to reduce caseloads, ensure compliance with federal guidelines for caseworker/client meetings and adequately compensate experienced caseworkers to reduce turnover;
- Child protective programs that provide safe, secure environments for children and ensure there is no discrimination in the foster care system;
- Adoption of children by loving qualified parents regardless of marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, and the rights of families created by those adoptions;

- A stronger managed care system that ensures medically fragile Texans have access to the complete care they need, as well as the option to be served through Medicaid; and
- Allow a state inspector general to review complaints from parents and families regarding the quality of care from managed-care companies, with the goal of improving patient outcomes.

Long-term Services and Support

Texas Democrats believe that elderly and disabled Texans of all ages should have access to long-term services and supports that promote independent living in the most integrated setting possible. We believe the state must comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Therefore, we support:

- transitioning the long-term care system to focus on home and community based services (HCBS) where funding for services "follows the person";
- providing elderly and disabled Texans with choices about where they want to live and receive support services, and protecting individual homesteads from repossession when recovering the cost of long-term care;
- coordination of accessible, affordable, integrated housing and other support services;
- establishing a registry of direct service and providers and developing a training and certification program that interfaces with similar initiatives; and
- access to non-medical services to contain cost and allow greater individual control;
- appropriate Medicaid reimbursement rates for long-term care.

Social Security

Texas Democrats believe that we must maintain the promise of Social Security and keep the system strong and certain for all working Americans. Therefore we support:

- That all Americans who have paid (or whose family members have paid) into the system should receive the benefits those payments should entitle them to regardless of other systems they may benefit from;
- A more level playing field that requires raising or removing the income caps, since the vast majority of earners pay into the system from the first to last dollar earned;
- Using CPI-E for calculating cost-of-living adjustments (COLA) for the elderly;
- Maintaining of smaller town Social Security offices; and
- Maintaining Social Security as a program of the federal government.

Retirement Security

Millions of workers have invested in public or private pensions to secure their retirement. We believe it is a legitimate role of government to protect the position of stakeholders in these pension systems. Therefore we support;

- legal protections for participants in any retirement system for the full amount to which they are entitled;
- automatically freezing funds of companies filing for bankruptcy or encountering legal problems to keep funding for the pension plan in place;
- putting in place time limits to allow the expedient transfer of pensioners' funds to the pensioner within the confines of IRS regulations;
- state Retirement Systems be preserved as defined benefit systems consistent with the Texas Constitution; and
- federal employees retiring under Federal Employee Retirement System be treated the same as Civil Service retirees for purposes of sick-leave credit.

Access to Affordable Property Insurance

Democrats believe that Texans must have access to insurance protecting our homes and businesses at an affordable rate. Therefore we support:

- strict enforcement of policies requiring companies to justify rates or roll them back;
- providing the Insurance Commissioner the authority to deny or approve rates;
- eliminating unfair underwriting practices such as redlining, the use of credit scoring and other discriminatory practices;
- outreach and education efforts to homeowners on the proper home insurance necessary to protect against major disasters, including floods and hurricanes; and
- greater consumer representation on the Insurance Commission.

Utility Regulation

Democrats understand that Texans must have affordable utilities and deregulation has failed to drive down rates and has produced an always confusing and often times misleading marketplace. Therefore we support requiring the Public Utility Commission to construct policies that force all providers to display all products using the same language terminology and industry measurements, including cancellation policies, and to describe those products so that they might be easily understood and compared.

Housing

Texas Democrats believe quality, affordable housing strengthens families and revitalizes communities. As the population of Texas continues to grow, the importance of housing policy extends beyond the critical value of shelter. Chronic homelessness is on the rise. Quality, affordable housing improves school performance, diminishes health problems for both children and adults, and decreases psychological stress – among other benefits. We support:

- increasing investment of public funds to expand the supply of housing that is affordable and accessible to lowest income households;
- establishing housing stability as the primary purpose of low-income housing policy, which views allowing Texans to live in the neighborhood of their choice as foundational to good health, employment, educational achievement, and child well-being;
- continuing and improving programs that promote concrete resources to advance the dream of homeownership for all Texans;
- legislation such as property tax circuit-breakers, that prevent people from being taxed out of their homes; and
- ensuring the housing needs of our most vulnerable Texans, including persons with disabilities, persons experiencing homelessness, persons living with HIV/AIDS, seniors, youth, children, and families, is a priority in all housing policy decisions.

IMMIGRATION

Texas Democrats recognize that the United States is a vibrant nation of immigrants. We value those who come from different countries and cultures. Immigrants add prosperity and resilience to this great country. They hold professional jobs, own businesses, build our homes, and work in several other industries. We believe in fostering better bilateral relationships with all nations including our southern neighbor whom we share an extensive border with. Importantly, viewing immigrants through a lens of fear and prejudice only hurts our nation and Texas. Our government's failure to enact meaningful, long-

term immigration reform has left us with the broken system we have today. Through a more fair and equitable immigration system our county is strong. We therefore:

- strongly oppose the Trump Administration’s policy abusing children by of separating children from their parents at the southern border and denounce housing children in tent cities;
- strongly oppose “tender age” shelters for infants and small children;
- strongly oppose the Trump Administration so called “zero tolerance” approach to immigration;
- strongly oppose the Trump Administration’s policy to no longer recognize asylum claims or Temporary Protected Status for refugees fleeing forced gang recruitment and violence perpetrated by gangs and refugees fleeing domestic violence;
- support securing and protecting our border, while treating asylum seekers humanely;
- strongly oppose any type of bans based on religious affiliation or country of origin;
- strongly oppose efforts to build a border wall of any size and the unrealistic claim, and possibly abandoned claim, that a foreign country will pay for a border wall;
- strongly oppose Section 287g programs of the Immigration and Nationality Act which allow memorandums of understanding between ICE and local law enforcement agencies to act as federal immigration officials;
- strongly oppose the immigration detention facility bed mandate that creates perverse incentives to increase deportations for private profit;
- strongly oppose and call for the shutdown to all family detention centers;
- strongly oppose efforts to grant child care licenses to family detention centers;
- strongly oppose efforts to limit and interfere with established federal, state, and faith-based refugee programs;
- denounce all xenophobic, racist, vigilante, and bigoted efforts which scapegoat immigrants including any efforts in which dog whistle words are used;
- strongly oppose Senate Bill 4(the “Show Me Your Papers” law) and call on the Texas Legislature to repeal Senate Bill 4;
- strongly oppose any efforts by DPS to share information and statistics of the legal status of any person stopped for a traffic offense;
- strongly oppose efforts by cities and local law enforcement agencies to enforce federal immigration laws prohibited by preemption;
- support comprehensive immigration reform, including an attainable path to citizenship;
- support the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (“DACA”), its expansion, and Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (“DAPA”) programs and denounce the Republican and Trump Administration efforts to end DACA;
- support the passage of a clean DREAM Act;
- support the expansion of visa availability in order to expedite family reunification and lessen visa wait times;
- support the 14th Amendment provision of the U.S. Constitution which makes all persons born in this country citizens of this country;
- support expanding the Affordable Care Act to cover undocumented immigrants;
- call on Congress to clarify that the Childhood Status Protection Act allows pending visa applicants to retain their place for visas if they aged out;
- support providing equal housing opportunities to all immigrants and denounce all xenophobic or racist conduct that denies equal housing to immigrants;
- support the lawful and humane treatment of immigrants by all law enforcement and correction officers;
- support strict enforcement and appropriate punishment against those who exploit undocumented workers rather than targeting the workers themselves;
- support providing everyone, especially children, individual legal representation in front of

immigration judges;

- support reducing the current backlogs in U.S. Immigration Court by adding sufficient judges and providing individual legal assistance to those who come before the court;
- support law enforcement agencies disseminating information and assisting immigrants who are victims of crimes or human trafficking and may be eligible for U and T visas and including efforts to reduce turnaround time for certification requests;
- support the abolishment of re-entry bans for nonviolent legal permanent resident applicants and increase the approvals of hardship waivers;
- support increasing U Visa availability;
- support allowing all Texas residents to obtain a driver's licenses regardless of immigration status;
- support counties and Sheriffs who end the voluntary cooperation with ICE;
- support efforts which prevent law enforcement or others from inquiring about immigration status for malicious purposes;
- support the current in-state tuition statute which allows undocumented students to obtain a higher education and denounce all repeal efforts; and
- support the fair and just treatment of all people in immigration proceedings regardless of race, gender, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, or other characteristics.

TRANSPORTATION

Like most Texas road-users, Democrats support fully funding transportation projects to alleviate congestion and improve the safety of our roadways. No funding source should be eliminated and each community should decide which projects are the most important to that community. The positive growth of population and business in Texas has had a negative effect on our traffic congestion - raising concerns about air quality, traffic safety and lost productivity from commute wait times. Texas Democrats support:

- investing state dollars in mass transportation projects with public support and the potential for matching federal funds and incentives for increased usage of mass transportation;
- transportation projects to encourage building safe sidewalks, curb cutouts for accessibility to people with disabilities, and bicycle lanes;
- reviewing creative programs like telecommuting and buses on shoulders of major highways to encourage mobility;
- improving para-transportation services to meet the needs of Texans with disabilities;
- preventing infrastructure built with public funds from being used as private entities;
- allowing optional toll-managed lanes, private/public partnerships and other creative means of financing to complete large transportation projects with a minimal impact on the state budget, the taxpayers, businesses along the project and residents who access those roads;
- legislation to demand transparency in how toll roads are financed and how funds are managed; and
- the development of a state rail plan for increased participation in intra-state rail projects that do not harm the environment or infringe upon property rights.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Texas Democrats believe government has a responsibility to protect the people from dangerous products and fraudulent, unfair and discriminatory business practices. Therefore we support:

- repealing laws and regulations that restrict redress for buyers of new homes that discover shoddy work after the purchase is completed;
- protection of consumers' private data and accountability for companies that manage it;
- stricter laws targeting unscrupulous telemarketing, internet marketing and price fixing;
- the rights of communities to provide public utilities at their discretion including "wi-fi" internet access;
- the enforcement function and authority of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureaus;
- repealing the cap on mass tort liability to allow for appropriate damages tempered by the current legal process;
- allowing class certification related to credible product liability and personal injury claims; and
- the elimination of predatory lending practices particularly payday loans and sell/lease back transactions.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The Texas Democratic Party recognizes Texas women are strong, independent and powerful. Texas is the proud home of pioneering women who have blazed new trails in business, entrepreneurship, culture, and politics. The Texas Democratic Party seeks to address persistent inequalities that make women's economic, physical and legal well-being subject to circumstance, prejudice, sexism and antiquated views of women's role in society.

The Texas Democratic Party demonstrates its commitment to Texas women through women's leadership at all levels of party activity and by working for policies, laws and elected officials that share our commitment to women's full, equal, and essential role in Texas' future success. As the Party that truly values Texas women and their families, the Texas Democratic Party will:

- support and affirm equal rights for all women, and oppose any attempts to limit those rights;
- address disparities in health care, criminal justice, and education experienced by women of color and transgender women;
- support affirmative action, the rights accorded to women in Title IX, the U.N. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the U.S. Constitution;
- preserve confidential, unrestricted access to affordable, high quality, culturally sensitive health care services, including the full range of reproductive services, contraception and abortion, without requiring guardian, judicial, parental, or spousal consent;
- opposes any and all attempts to overturn Roe v. Wade;
- promote health insurance and medical coverage of the full range of mental health services, including Planned Parenthood, and treatment for women, including early screening and intervention for postpartum depression;
- increase parenting and job skills for women through available, comprehensive education and training for women who were formerly incarcerated;
- strive to get more women elected to better reflect and represent the population of women in Texas;

- promote the engagement of young women in our political process in order to develop a pipeline for new leadership with diversity of experience within the Texas Democratic Party; and
- support the right of a woman to report hostile and abusive work environments without retribution.

LGBTQ RIGHTS

Texas Democrats support and welcome all people, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. We recognize that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) Americans continue to encounter discrimination and must be treated as fully equal in all areas of life. We therefore support:

- the immediate passage of the Equality Act by Congress;
- the right of all people to use facilities and participate in all aspects of life in a manner that is consistent with their gender identity or expression, irrespective of the gender they were assigned at birth;
- the classification of discrimination against transgender individuals as discrimination on the basis of gender;
- streamlined processes for transgender individuals to obtain legal documents consistent with their gender identity, including state IDs, regardless of surgical status;
- the inclusion of gender confirmation surgery in Medicaid; and fully inclusive transgender healthcare coverage in employer-based insurance;
- municipal, state, and federal nondiscrimination laws which protect LGBTQ individuals in all aspects of their lives including housing, employment, adoption, education, commerce, healthcare and public accommodation;
- a ban on so-called “reparative” therapy and recognize its practice as abuse;
- the use of best practices in the delivery of services to all Texans regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity by social, healthcare, and public service professionals;
- the factual inclusion of the LGBTQ movement and individuals in history and social studies classes in public education;
- the right of all students to learn in a bullying and harassment-free environment;
- programs to combat suicide and homelessness among LGBTQ youth;
- programs to provide inclusive and comprehensive housing and healthcare for LGBTQ seniors; and
- the Constitutional protections afforded to all people in the United States which guarantee the full and equal treatment of the laws.

Furthermore, we oppose:

- efforts to defy the U.S Supreme Court decisions which guaranteed marriage equality and the full benefits of marriage to all couples; and
- the use of hate speech, disguised as free speech and religion, that fosters and promotes bigotry and violence against LGBTQ citizens.

DISABILITY RIGHTS

Texas Democrats believe in the right of every Texan to lead a productive life, enjoy liberty, and to pursue happiness. Texas Democrats want all Texans with disabilities, including veterans, to ensure their right to live independently in the community in the most integrated setting of their choice. Disability

rights are civil rights and no person should face discrimination based on disability status.

Texas Democrats believe that this is not only a civil right, but is also part of the economic vitality and interest of Texas. This requires increased access and availability of affordable, home and community-based long term services and supports.

We support necessary changes to preserve and enforce all state and federal disability rights laws, particularly the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Olmstead decision. Olmstead, the U.S. Supreme Court ruling based on the ADA that affirms that people with disabilities have a qualified right to receive state funded supports and services in the community rather than institutions. Due to lack of enforcement, supportive legislative policy, and sufficient accessible, affordable housing, thousands of Texans with disabilities, ready to transition to a home and community-based setting, are stopped from relocating because they cannot get access to vouchers or to accessible, affordable, and integrated housing options.

Access to affordable accessible public and private transportation is essential to the employment, safety, health and well-being of Texans with disabilities. Due to age and/or changes in health status many people with disabilities do not drive or have surrendered their licenses. In addition, Texans with disabilities are not always involved in transportation planning and budgeting of transportation, with the focus being on roads vs. mass transit, tolls vs. no tolls. Paratransit and taxi vouchers are often the only forms of transportation for Texans with disabilities. Voters with disabilities are denied the right to vote in person due to the onerous photo ID requirement.

Texas Democrats support:

- Reversing the priority of Medicaid funding from state supported living centers (SSLCs, institutions for the developmentally disabled) to home and community-based services;
- Reducing the decade long waitlists for home and community based services by increasing the number of subsidized housing vouchers and ensuring sufficient available, accessible, and affordable housing for 1.8 million Texans with disabilities;
- Paying caregivers a \$15/hour minimum base wage, essential to maintaining independence;
- Removing the roadblock to voting by eliminating the photo ID requirement;
- Enforcing the Americans with Disabilities Act requirements for public and private organizations;
- Ensuring that students with disabilities receive an appropriate early childhood, secondary, and postsecondary education in the least restrictive environments, including access to the full range of services and supports called for in their individual education plans at all learning institutions;
- Supporting the Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities, its expansion and ongoing mission to deliver quality support to all Texans with disabilities; and
- Resisting burdensome work requirements to receive SNAP benefits as it relates to people living with disabilities.

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Texas Democrats believe that our veterans should be given the benefits they have earned and they have been promised, honored for their service, and accepted back into society with open arms. Providing education benefits to veterans for their service enables them to be the next generation of leaders, business owners, and highly skilled workers. Historically, empowering returning veterans to obtain education, at any level, has benefited America as a whole, and ushered in eras of prosperity. Texas Democrats wish to see this continue, and will do so by:

- Preventing the privatization of the veterans administration, and instead fund it more fully;
- Supporting and maintaining dedicated women’s health care services and clinics, including OB/GYN doctors, to ensure women veterans have access to the care they need, as well as women’s clinics to ensure increased access to care through VA services;
- Supporting the VA to combat opioid abuse;
- Supporting and maintaining the Post 9/11 GI Bill for those who separated before 1 Jan. 2013 (Chapter 33) in its entirety;
- Supporting the new GI Bill which eliminates the 15-year time limit to use their GI Bill;
- Supporting the full funding of the VA MISSION Act, to ensure the 33,000 unfilled positions at the VA are properly staffed;
- Enabling the direct translation of military job training – such as EMT, vocational. Communications, and helmets-to-hardhats – be recognized by the states and federal programs;
- Working to ensure successful transition into civilian employment, including increased funding for companies that employ veterans, trade school programs, and mental health care that includes mindfulness meditation amongst other performance enhancing practices;
- Supporting the full state funding of the Hazelwood Act entitlements, and allow the transfer of those entitlements to dependents, and study allowing non-Texas enlistees to use those entitlements;
- Supporting and encouraging school cooperation with veterans struggling with physical disabilities and PTSD and provide reasonable accommodations;
- Encouraging every school, public and private, to participate in the Yellow Ribbon Program;
- Allowing for the transfer of remaining Chapter 31 and Chapter 33 entitlements to dependents, regardless of time in service; and
- Allowing Basic Allowance for housing (BAH) to be collected in both Chapter 31 and Chapter 33 programs.

Veterans put both their bodies and their minds on the line when they answered their call to service. Many return home with physical wounds, and many more return home with wounds invisible to their fellow citizens. Texas Democrats know that the death of even one veteran on the home front, be it self-inflicted or by lack of access to healthcare, is a tragedy to the entire nation, and having veterans live on the street is shameful. Texas Democrats wish to remedy this by:

- Extending the Operation Enduring Freedom/ Operations Iraqi Freedom coordinator program to all separated service members, regardless if they served in a conflict;
- Increasing the Combat Related Special Compensation entitlement payments; and
- Extending Tricare Standard /Extra / Prime health insurance eligibility to all service members who served in any conflict or hazardous duty area.

RURAL TEXAS AND AGRICULTURE

Texas Democrats understand the obstacles faced in rural Texas, and we are committed to providing our rural communities with the tools necessary to maintain their quality of life and create enhanced opportunities for future generations of rural Texans. All areas of Texas need access to natural and economic resources to grow and thrive, yet rural communities’ assets are under increased pressure from forces beyond their control. We support rural communities in their efforts to protect the materials necessary for their economic livelihood.

Water is a necessity for private individuals, agricultural businesses, and emergency management in rural

areas. In the face of climate change, ongoing droughts, and threatened aquifers, we support:

- Preparation of a substantive plan to mediate the threat of mega droughts that is plausible and environmentally sensible;
- Establishment of programs for industry, agriculture and individuals to limit non-essential water use in times of extended drought;
- Preservation of our environment from damages resulting from well development;
- Protection of groundwater recharge areas and enhancement of groundwater recharge;
- Actions to ensure that rural areas will have the water resources they need to sustain their people and their economies;
- Construction of desalination plants using renewable energy, employing state-of-the-art salt water concentrate disposal, such as reverse osmosis, and operated by well-trained staff;
- Promotion of rainwater collection and graywater systems to use water more efficiently;
- Control of storm water runoff in order to slow erosion and keep water systems healthy;
- Encouragement and facilitation of recycling of water used for fracking; and
- Efforts to address flooding issues in rural as well as urban areas.

Texas Democrats understand that the backbone of our food supply is and should be local, family owned farms. There can be a healthy balance between ensuring a nutritious, affordable, and reliable food supply for consumers, safe working conditions for farmers and farmworkers, protecting our environment and using modern, conventional production techniques to ensure good crop yields, healthy livestock and economically sustainable farms. There must be a concerted effort by the Texas Department of Agriculture to support the local family farmer, reduce reliance on synthetic pesticides and fertilizers. In order to do so, Texas Democrats will work to:

- decrease the cost and administrative burdens associated with USDA Organic Certification;
- engage conventional agribusinesses in finding alternatives to the use of petrochemicals and synthetic pesticides on produce, especially those that are most susceptible to absorption (strawberries, tomatoes, etc.);
- pass a farm bill that provides accessible safety-net programs for small and diversified farmers and imposes reasonable limits on subsidies to corporate mega-farms;
- support the legalization of hemp for agricultural purposes;
- establish consistent policy with respect to support for land conservation easements to allow rural landowners to access private foundations and government matching funds for preservation of open space and family holdings;
- work with the Texas Parks and Wildlife and USDA to manage the wild hog population, and provide small scale farmers with support to establish site-appropriate management plans;
- in coordination with the Texas Department of Agriculture, establish effective global and local marketing programs using updated technology to promote and sell products;
- create a cost-share program to supplement farmers' expenses related to compliance with the Food Safety Modernization Act and GLOBAL.A.P. Certification;
- pass legislation to improve certification, monitoring, and compliant responsiveness for fuel pumps and market scales;
- support USDA efforts to toughen meat industry antitrust laws to protect the small scale independent farmer from marketplace inequality;
- strengthen and support OSHA health & safety regulations in the industrial meat-packing industry;
- protect family farms from predatory lending, and allow a greater ability for the individual to refinance farm related business debt;
- establish agricultural property tax valuation guidelines that accommodate small-scale and

- diversified farm operations and encourage farm ownership among first time farmers;
- establish protections that safeguard farmers from inadvertent use of patented and or proprietary seeds;
- expand programs that incentivize consumers to use WIC and SNAP benefits at farmers markets;
- uphold the restriction on the sale of horses to Mexico for the purpose of consumption and ban the round-up of wild horses for slaughter;
- establish evidence-based regulation of pesticide to limit the negative impact on non-target species and the environment in general, including a ban on neonicotinoids, a pesticide chemical linked to massive honeybee die-offs.

Access to quality healthcare in rural Texas is critical; many areas in rural Texas are underserved or have their current service threatened because of the failure of Republican leadership to either expand Medicaid under the ACA or provide alternative funding mechanisms and/or stronger incentives to protect rural health care delivery. In order to remedy this:

- move to construct level 2 trauma centers and hospitals, with women’s health facilities, in underserved areas with supporting populations;
- create programs to incentivize physicians, nurses, nurse practitioner, and EMT’s to work and stay in underserved areas;
- give grants in aid and zero interest loans to rural counties to construct public clinics and hospitals;
- encourage installation of video teleconference systems in public hospitals to allow specialists in higher level hospitals to quickly communicate to outlying facilities or to remote patients; and
- expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act guidelines, in order to alleviate the pressure to close additional rural hospitals.

Education in Texas is an important priority in rural areas. Lack of jobs and economic opportunities have forced many talented young people to leave rural communities. To remedy this, Texas Democrats support policies that would:

- incentivize teachers to work in underserved communities;
- partner high schools with local business and community colleges to allow students to receive dual credits and industry certifications from apprenticeships in vocational trade programs;
- oppose the Republican call for the consolidation of rural school districts;
- support community based schools over large, centralized school districts in rural areas;
- utilizing remote learning and distance education to facilitate learning in rural areas, within the public school system;
- provide free vaccinations for low-income families; and
- maintain the Top 10% rule that levels the opportunity playing field for rural kids.

The protection of private property is a cornerstone of freedom and liberty and is central to the Texas Constitution. The use of eminent domain for “private” gain by corporations, foreign and domestic, is a practice that our nation’s founders did not envision, would not have stood for, and neither will the Texas Democratic Party. Texas Democrats understand that obtaining private property through the condemnation process should be allowed only in cases where necessary and for a clear and rightful “public” purpose. In regard to eminent domain:

- condemnation should be used only where necessary, and only for needed projects such as transportation and utilities that serve a clear public interest;
- those facing condemnation must be afforded a clear and transparent process to defend and

negotiate a fair and equitable outcome;

- proposed interstate pipelines that cross Texas borders should not be allowed to be segmented to avoid meaningful environmental review to protect our land, water and natural resources; and
- amend the Texas Constitution and relevant laws to eliminate giving private entities the blanket governmental authority to exercise the powers of eminent domain in condemnation of private property; all entities seeking eminent domain authority should be required, before any eminent domain is exercised, to prove that they are deserving of condemnation authority and prove that their project serves the public good.

Texas Democrats know that internet access is essential to support economic development in rural Texas including healthcare, education, and agriculture. As many as 1 in 3 adult Texans don't have access to broadband internet service, and most of them live in rural areas. Texas Democrats also know that public private partnership between federal, state, and cooperatively owned utilities can bridge the digital divide between rural Texans and their urban counterparts. Consider that in 1935 only 11 percent of U.S. farms had access to electricity. To electrify the countryside, President Franklin D. Roosevelt established the Rural Electrification Administration, which led to the formation of electric co-ops. By 1946, more than 50 percent of American farms had electricity. Texas electric cooperatives can bring internet access to rural Texans in the twenty-first century just like they brought electricity to the last century. To support the expansion of internet service in rural Texas, Texas Democrats support policies that:

- incentivize Texas electric cooperatives to deploy broadband technologies which can make the electric grid smarter while also providing rural Texans with high speed internet access;
- remove barriers for electric cooperatives to utilize existing easements for the deployment and provision of broadband service;
- remove undue financial burdens that hinder electrification efforts;
- give grants in aid and zero interest loans to electric cooperatives that deploy broadband technologies;
- remove archaic telephone rules and regulations to protect the incumbent telecommunications providers who have refused to upgrade broadband technologies, while also implementing a new communications policy that supports broadband networks owned and operated by electric cooperatives. We do not support the removal of telecommunication companies from any list including but not limited to the "last right of refusal."

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Texas Democrats believe that religious freedom is a fundamental right for all Americans as provided by the Texas and U.S. Constitutions. We recognize the importance of religion and prayer in the lives of Texans and support our Constitution's guarantee of every individual's right to practice his or her own beliefs without imposing them on others. We support the U.S. Constitutional provision that no religious test shall be required as a qualification for public office. We believe:

- that, just as personal faith and values guide and inspire us to further the well-being of our community, we must never use the power of government at any level to promote one religion or denomination over others or to impose our personal religious observances;
- government must not inhibit the free exercise of religion, but religion can never be used as an excuse to discriminate against or harm others;
- government must not use public resources to support purely religious positions or activities;
- entangling government with religion is dangerous to both government and religion;
- America is the most religiously observant country in the West because our founders wisely

provided for separation of church and state, which allows religion to flourish in freedom and respects those who have no religious faith; and

- the religious test for public office in the Texas Constitution must be removed.

Democrats hold political views motivated by deeply held personal beliefs. No political party and no extremist group hold a lock on religious or ethical beliefs and values. We believe that religion should not be invoked to supersede the rights of others. These rights include:

- nondiscrimination laws including those protecting LGBTQ Texans;
- nondiscrimination for individuals in service or public accommodations in the private sector;
- workplace laws regarding wages and compensation;
- laws protecting children's welfare;
- laws ensuring access to healthcare, particularly for women and families; and
- provision of goods and services by government directly or through grants and contracts.

FOREIGN POLICY

Texas Democrats believe peace, prosperity, and national security are assured by maintaining a strong national defense, promoting democracy, and advancing development abroad. Diplomacy through our State Department should be prioritized, and military action should be used only as a last resort and authorized only as allowed by our Constitution. We support consistent diplomacy and development efforts abroad in coordination with our allies. We believe the most important element in our military is the individual service member, and it is absolutely critical that we keep faith with those who serve and defend us. We strongly oppose the Trump administration's attempts to drive out skilled diplomats and replace them with partisan, ideologically-driven political appointees.

National Security and Development

Texas Democrats believe that the security of our nation is best achieved through: legitimate conduct, strong international leadership, sustained international engagement, nurturing proven alliances, and the maintenance of robust military capabilities. We recognize that we harm our relationships around the globe when we do not honor our treaty obligations. Therefore we believe America must:

- prioritize working with allies whose values promote freedom and justice;
- address the sources of security risks that stem from state weakness, poverty, corruption, and social breakdown abroad;
- maintain and improve the capacity of our military and diplomatic organizations to meet the threats from non-state groups and those nations that provide them support and protection;
- work closely with allies and lead international efforts to prevent the further spread of nuclear arms and to eliminate weapons of mass destruction;
- work with Central American neighbors to end cartels, gang violence, and the infiltration of gangs in the operation of foreign governments;
- obtain assistance from countries in the Middle East to help stabilize the region;
- encourage Iraq to ensure security within its borders by renouncing sectarian violence and promoting a responsive and inclusive democracy that ensures minority rights and equitable access to resources;
- oppose the regime-sponsored violence occurring in Syria by expanding assistance to vetted opposition groups -- particularly our Kurdish allies, expanding humanitarian aid, leading efforts to facilitate a negotiated political solution within Syria, leveraging alliances in the region to

constrict the flow of resources to radical groups, and leading regional efforts to counter Russian dominance and prevent the establishment of Iranian bases in Syria;

- support verified efforts to denuclearize North Korea as a prerequisite for lifting sanctions;
- continue to support development of Afghanistan's civil and economic infrastructure through sustained support for economic development, governance capacity, and corruption reduction;
- minimize civilian casualties to the maximum extent possible consistent with the safety of our troops serving in foreign nations;
- withdraw U.S. troop support from Afghanistan as rapidly as possible, consistent with their safety and in a manner that does not destabilize the region or place more lives in danger;
- maintain our long-standing policy that a true, mutually respectful peace with safe and secure borders for two states dedicated to peace and democracy – a Jewish homeland in Israel and a Palestinian homeland – can only result from direct negotiations between willing and responsible partners;
- work to ensure that new governments and societies become true democracies that promote responsive governance, ethnic and religious minority rights, individual freedoms, and economic opportunity;
- support the passage of the Global Respect Act, the International Human Rights Defense Act, and implementation of the World Bank's Environmental and Social Framework;
- work with our allies to facilitate safe haven for the millions of refugees fleeing conflict and persecution, to welcome these vulnerable people in the United States when properly vetted, and to assist in their eventual safe return home;
- withdraw support for foreign or domestic agencies and programs that promote hatred and intolerance;
- develop a new strategic approach to fragile states that prioritizes prevention, aligns policies across U.S. agencies, and leverages the full range of U.S. diplomacy, defense, development, and democratic engagement tools;
- make every reasonable effort to utilize our military, economic, diplomatic, and technological capabilities to assist victims of natural disasters worldwide;
- implement nationally standardized information security policies to more effectively protect our communications networks and critical national infrastructure from all foreign or domestic cyber security and piracy threats, and work to enforce the adoption of those policies unilaterally across all public and private sector agencies;
- identify and prevent all sources of foreign meddling in our elections and those of our allies and, in particular, continue to strongly sanction Russia until it ceases its attacks on democracy;
- assist the economic development of our allies, particularly neighbors, where high unemployment creates immigration pressures;
- restore U.S. leadership in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, promoting clean energy, and mitigating the effects of global climate change;
- adopt policies that advance our national security by freeing us from dependence on the resource of any nation or region, including foreign oil;
- work with the African Union and the UN to bring stability to the continent by defeating terrorist organizations such as Boko Haram, Al Shabab, and other Central African terror groups;
- encourage universities and colleges to participate in foreign exchange programs and conduct joint research projects with foreign institutions;
- remove legal barriers that prevent highly skilled foreign nationals, educated in U.S. universities, from continuing to work and live in the United States;
- support the continued ban on the use of all methods of torture, including waterboarding, indefinite detention of persons without charges or legal representation, and other policies that violate or conflict with the values embodied by the Bill of Rights and the U.S. Constitution;
- support the immediate closure of the Guantanamo Bay detention facility and set up a special

court to hear the cases for detainees;

- establish legal oversight over all privatized military security forces, because military security contractors operating without government oversight have put America at risk;
- focus on practical, nonviolent solutions to the problems of domestic and international conflict where possible;
- support the mission and efforts of the United States Peace Corps;
- oppose privatization and support funding of an air traffic control system that is fully equipped and staffed by public employees; and
- strengthen port security, including inspection of currently unchecked containers.

Trade Policy

Texas Democrats know that the economic and employment conditions of American workers depend on trade that is both free and fair. Therefore, American trade policies must:

- encourage the sale of domestic products and services in foreign markets and oppose foreign practices that restrict access to markets for American businesses;
- support the strengthening of labor and human rights protections and stronger health, environmental, and consumer safety standards in any trade agreements to prevent U.S. job losses, sweatshop conditions and human rights abuses in developing countries, and environmental degradation;
- protect American companies from intellectual property theft, especially from state sponsored companies, and file lawsuits through the World Trade Organization when theft occurs;
- protest through the World Trade Organization when countries artificially manipulate their currency to foster trade imbalances;
- and oppose arbitrary tariffs that harm our allies.