



2012 Texas Democratic Party Platform

Preamble

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 privacy.

We believe in freedom

...from government interference in our private lives and personal decisions

...to exercise civil and human rights

...of religion and individual conscience.

We believe in responsibility

...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 our communities and public institutions

...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

...and 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 equal opportunity

...to receive a quality public education, from childhood through college

...to have access to affordable health care

...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

...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 person should be paid a living wage
...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.

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 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 compassionate policy that offers a safety net for those most vulnerable and in need
...and that family values 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
...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 and 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”.

EDUCATION

Texas Democrats strongly support the Texas Constitution’s recognition that a free, quality public education is “essential to the preservation of the liberties and rights of the people.” Texas Democrats believe a world class education system is a moral imperative and an economic necessity that requires parents, educators and community leaders to work together to provide our children the skills needed to compete and succeed in a global economy.

Texas Democrats believe all children should have access to an exemplary educational program that values and encourages critical thinking and creativity, not the “drill and kill” teach-to-the-test policy Republicans have forced on students and teachers. To fulfill this commitment, Texas Democrats must fight to improve student achievement, lower dropout rates, and attract and retain well-qualified teachers, and must redouble our efforts against those waging an ideological war to privatize and destroy public education.

Democrats also believe it is essential that all Texans have access to affordable, quality higher education and career education programs, with a renewed emphasis on the importance of a full four year college education, and particular attention to science, technology and engineering.

PUBLIC EDUCATION FUNDING

Texas Democrats believe:

- the state should establish a 100% equitable school finance system with sufficient state revenue to allow every district to offer an exemplary program;
- the state should equitably reduce reliance on "Robin Hood" recapture;
- state funding formulas should fully reflect all student and district cost differences and the impact of inflation and state mandates;
- Texas should maintain, extend and enforce the 22-1 class size limits and expand access to pre-kindergarten and kindergarten programs; and
- the federal government should fully fund all federal education mandates and should reform and fully fund the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

Republicans have shortchanged education funding every session they have controlled the Texas Legislature. After cutting billions from public education in 2003 and freezing per pupil funding while placing stringent limits on local ability to make up for the state's failures in 2006, Republicans reduced funding of public education for the first time since World War II in the recent legislative session. Most Texans support our public schools, yet Republicans not only failed to pay for the continued rapid growth in student population, they reduced funding in actual dollars. Their cuts totaled \$5.4 billion over two years, a reduction in funding of almost \$600 per student each year, while they left more than enough in the state "Rainy Day Fund"—which was created to prevent cutting services during an economic downturn—to avoid any such cuts.

Now they want to cut even more from education and also want to siphon off limited public education funds for inequitable, unaccountable voucher and privatization schemes. Texas Democrats believe these attempts to destroy our public schools must be stopped.

EXCELLENT SCHOOLS FOR EVERY STUDENT

To make public education our highest priority, we believe the state should:

- provide universal access to pre-kindergarten and kindergarten;
- provide free, accurate and updated instructional materials aligned to educationally appropriate, non-ideological state curriculum standards and tests;
- provide free computer and internet access, as well as digital instructional materials;
- provide early intervention programs to ensure every child performs at grade level in English Language Arts, Social Studies, Math, and Science;
- ensure that students with disabilities receive an appropriate education in the least restrictive environment, including access to the full range of services and supports called for in their individual education plans;
- provide appropriate career and technical education programs;
- 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;
- replace high-stakes tests, used to punish students and schools, with multiple measures that restore the original intent of the state assessment system: improving instruction to help students think critically, be creative and succeed;
- end inappropriate testing of students with disabilities whose individual education plans call for alternative assessments of their educational progress;

- enforce and extend class size limits to allow every student to receive necessary individualized attention;
- support Title IX protections for gender equity in public education institutions;
- ensure that every student has access to appropriate counseling services;
- 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 1-12;
- provide environmental education programs for children and adults;
- strengthen state oversight and academic and financial standards for charter schools, so that they are as open to public scrutiny and as accountable to taxpayers as traditional neighborhood schools;
- strengthen state oversight of homeschools;
- reject efforts to shift students into privately operated, for-profit, low-quality, and unaccountable “virtual schools” at taxpayers’ expense;
- oppose private school vouchers in all forms, including tax breaks for people or corporations;
- encourage meaningful and effective parental involvement in their child’s education; and
- adequately define and fund programs targeted to increase student proficiency in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM).
- stop the awarding of hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars for high-stakes testing.

TARGETED ASSISTANCE FOR AT-RISK STUDENTS

Solving the dropout crisis is a priority for Texas Democrats because it threatens the economic well-being of all Texans, and failure to solve the dropout crisis could write off economic progress for an entire generation. More than one-fourth of Texas high school students fail to graduate on time. For African American and Hispanic students, the dropout rate is more than one-third. Out of all 50 states, Texas has the highest percentage of adults who have not completed high school.

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;
- expanded access to early childhood education, targeting at-risk students;
- 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;
- comprehensive policies to reduce truancy; and;
- access to affordable programs for adults who have dropped out of the education process.

EFFECTIVE TEACHERS FOR EVERY STUDENT

The most important in-school factor in student success is having qualified teachers in our classrooms, but Republican state budget policy has forced mass layoffs of teachers and serious classroom overcrowding. Meanwhile, teachers in Texas continue to receive pay and benefits that are not competitive with private sector pay for occupations requiring comparable knowledge and skills. Republicans would respond by “dumbing down” standards for the teaching profession. Texas Democrats support policies that allow us to recruit and retain our best to teach, including:

- raise teacher and support staff pay to levels exceeding the national average;
- extend quality state funded health insurance to all education employees;

- 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 (a master teacher) for every novice teacher;
- base teacher pay and evaluations on multiple measures that give a full, rounded picture of student and teacher accomplishment, and oppose Republican plans to base evaluation primarily on high stakes standardized test results;
- provide retired teachers a cost-of-living increase to restore their pensions’ purchasing power, which has eroded more than 20 percent under Republican rule since the last increase in 2001;
- repeal the federal government pension offset and windfall elimination provisions that unfairly reduce Social Security benefits for educational retirees and other public employees; and
- provide tuition credits and financial assistance for college students who become certified public school teachers and teach for a specified period of time in public schools.

REFORM OF THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

The Republican extremists steering the State Board of Education have made a laughingstock of our state’s process for developing and implementing school curriculum standards that determine what our students learn. The damage they have done is no laughing matter. In rewriting the curriculum for social studies, English language arts, and science, they repeatedly have dismissed the sound advice of professional educators. Even a conservative think tank, the Fordham Institute, called their social studies curriculum a “politicized distortion of history”. These actions are unlikely to encourage a company to relocate and bring jobs to Texas. Meanwhile, they have tried to use the Permanent School Fund to promote pet causes such as charter schooling, while failing in their duty to carefully scrutinize charter-school applicants.

Texas Democrats will put the interests of our schoolchildren ahead of politics and ideology. We will realign curriculum with objective reality and the facts of history and science, 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. We believe fair consideration should be given to small businesses as part of the textbook adoption process.

Texas Democrats believe in listening to subject matter experts, not partisan extremists, in developing curriculum and requirements for textbook content.

MAKING OUR SCHOOLS SAFE FOR LEARNING

Texas Democrats believe students, teachers and other school personnel should be safe from acts of violence and must be protected from bullying. School campuses and functions must be weapon-free and drug-free. We support swift and fair enforcement of disciplinary standards. Teachers deserve support when they exercise their statutory right to remove a disruptive student from class as guaranteed in the Texas Education Code. We support the Dignity for All Students Act to guarantee safety for all students.

We also support implementation of systematic programs, such as school-wide positive behavior interventions and supports, to improve discipline management, which will prevent violence, disruption, bullying, and harassment, and will improve educational outcomes for all students.

Students referred to disciplinary alternative education programs should continue to receive strong academic instruction. When a student's misconduct is serious enough to warrant disciplinary placement, the state should make sure that the disciplinary setting - whether a school district's own disciplinary alternative program or a county's juvenile-justice alternative education program - offers a full array of

educational and social/behavioral services to help that student get back on track. School districts should be discouraged from indiscriminately placing students in disciplinary alternative education programs or issuing tickets for trivial misconduct. The Texas Education Agency should be charged with investigating any patterns of apparent discriminatory enforcement or non-enforcement of discipline standards.

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. Republican tuition policies threaten our ability to meet state “Closing the Gaps” goals essential to our economic future.

Republicans have cut funding for colleges and universities to less than they received in 2007, despite dramatic growth in the number of students. Worse still, they have also cut financial aid below 2007 levels and are funding no new TEXAS Grants for incoming students.

Republican “tuition deregulation”—insiduously named to imply an easing of burdens—has increased the financial burden and forced many students from middle income families to take on substantial debt to avoid being priced out of college. This policy has also placed our higher education institutions in the untenable position of either raising tuition or laying off public employees and reducing the quality of education.

To offer affordable access to higher education, we support:

- restoration of formula contact hour funding to the level prior to Republican cuts, adjusted for inflation and student growth;
- legislative rollback of tuition and fees to affordable levels to reflect the restored funding;
- federal income tax credits for college tuition;
- full funding of TEXAS Grants and reforming and reopening the mismanaged state Prepaid Tuition Program, to provide higher education to more Texans without excessive debt burden;
- 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 for college employees;
- institutions of higher education free of lethal weapons;
- higher education research funding to spur economic development, including sufficient funding to locate a Tier 1 research and teaching university in every region of the state;
- collaborative public/higher education partnerships from pre-K-16 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;
- 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.

Despite destructive Republican policies, colleges and universities throughout the state thus far have managed to maintain a reputation for academic excellence. A key element in quality higher education is academic freedom for the teaching faculty and a tenure system that protect faculty from losing their jobs without just cause. Texas Democrats:

- support academic freedom to attract and retain good faculty and promote innovation and excellence in higher education;
- oppose eroding the high standards already maintained at Texas colleges and universities by standardizing curriculum as if it were primary and secondary education; and
- support a system of tenure to protect faculty teaching within the scope of their discipline from being fired for any reason other than violation of the faculty member's contract.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Texas Democrats recognize and support the essential role of Texas community colleges, where almost 60% 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.

Republicans have drastically reduced funding for community colleges and that burden has been shifted onto students, their families and property taxpayers. Although community college enrollment has increased by 200,000 students since 2007 – a 35% increase – Republicans have not provided funding for that increase. In addition, they drastically reduced funding for community college employee benefits. The result is a 31.5% decrease in funding per enrolled student.

At a time when so many Texans need to expand their job skills to become or stay employed, this is destructive to our economy. To maintain community colleges' role in providing lifelong education, we endorse:

- full formula funding of the cost of instruction and of the growth in student enrollments;
- rolling back tuition and fees that have increased over 50% under Republican control;
- sufficient financial aid to cover 260,000 community college students who are eligible for grant assistance but receive none because state funding is inadequate;
- fully state-funded full time employee group health insurance and proportional health benefits for adjunct instructors;
- restoration of funding for employee retirement;
- funding for new campuses and program expansions, especially in critical need programs, sufficient to meet Closing the Gaps goals;
- sufficient financial aid to cover 260,000 community college students who are eligible for grant assistance but receive none because state funding is inadequate; and
- elimination of financial aid rules that penalize students who transfer to universities from community colleges.

To prevent further erosion of community colleges' ability to serve their communities, Texas Democrats oppose:

- shifting the basis of formula funding away from actual costs; and
- "incentive" programs that would discriminate against colleges and programs serving disadvantaged and non-traditional students or against non-degree skill-building and retraining programs.

DIVERSITY

Texas Democrats support innovative approaches to ensure diversity in every Texas institution of higher education. We condemn intolerance on Texas campuses and encourage universities to develop and

offer culturally diverse curricula, student activities, and student recruitment policies that promote understanding, respect and acceptance.

GOOD JOBS, REBUILDING FROM AN ECONOMIC CRISIS

Hard-working Texans need good jobs to support their families and invest in their future. Faced with the national economic crisis that resulted from the failure of the previous Republican administration in Washington to regulate financial markets, Republicans have done nothing but try to obstruct recovery and reform programs of President Obama. Democrats continue to fight to rebuild the economy and create jobs by:

- restoring a sound banking system that was recklessly deregulated by Republican Senator Phil Gramm.
- making a decent home, health care, and college affordable again for the middle class;
- stopping public-sector layoffs that undercut economic recovery;
- maintaining fundamental income supports provided by Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid;
- investing in job-creating infrastructure—in sectors from education to energy to transportation to information technology; and
- bringing back to America manufacturing jobs that have been outsourced by multinational corporations

Democrats continue to rebuild the economy, create jobs, and grow the middle class by promoting entrepreneurship and consumer confidence through a market system that is checked and balanced by government to prevent financial abuses and excesses. By contrast, many Texas Republican politicians support a version of the free market system in which the highest-paid CEO's make thousands of times more than their employees, even when there is evidence of gross corporate mismanagement.

To Strengthen Small Business, we believe state policy should foster the independent initiative of small businesses. The Republican "margins tax," which is effectively a small business income tax, burdens small businesses unfairly at the very time the Republican economic crisis has left many struggling to survive. We believe the tax policies of the current Republican regime in Austin that unfairly favor big business at the expense of small businesses must be reversed.

The Information-Based Economy provides Texans an opportunity to prosper, and Democrats believe developing information technology should be a state priority. Democrats support educational opportunities to provide more Texans the skills needed to pursue careers in information technology and emerging technology development.

The Transition of the Energy Sector toward safe and sustainable power production creates another huge opportunity for economic growth. Democrats believe the state can build on an already-strong energy industrial base to accelerate this trend and create many new jobs.

Unemployment Benefits could have been made available to more Texas workers, but Republican Governor Rick Perry vowed to veto any expansion of benefits funded with half a billion federal stimulus dollars, despite the relief it offered to businesses in the form of lower unemployment insurance taxes. In a time of economic crisis, Perry turned down funds that would have helped hard-working Texans who lost their jobs, and his political gambit has forced thousands of small businesses to pay higher taxes.

We believe eligibility for unemployment compensation must be extended so individuals laid off by the recession who are honestly seeking work do not lose their homes, their health care, or their dignity because they cannot find jobs. The economy gets a needed boost as well when the unemployed spend those benefits.

To Improve Wages and Working Conditions, we believe the minimum wage must be raised, enforced, and applied meaningfully across-the-board to restore lost purchasing power for all workers. It must be indexed to keep it from eroding again. Employees should be paid a living wage with provisions for decent health care and retirement benefits. We also believe:

- that laid off workers must be provided effective retraining;
- state leaders should be held accountable for how well they prepare young people to enter the workforce;
- the guarantee of overtime pay, which is constantly under Republican assault, must be preserved;
- local wage standards in government contracts must be protected;
- workers have a right to a safe workplace, free from injury and exposure to harmful materials, and meaningful sanctions must apply to employers who knowingly or negligently expose workers to injury or death;
- workers and employers both benefit from a workers' compensation system that provides affordable coverage for employers, meaningful compensation to injured workers, the right of workers to choose their own doctor, incentives for employers to retain injured employees, and due consideration for the rights of workers within the legal system;
- all employees, public and private, must have the right to organize, collect dues, designate their income voluntarily to organizations and agencies of their choosing, and negotiate collectively with their employers through representatives of their choice;
- the so-called Texas "right-to-work" law – which does not protect the right to work – must be repealed;
- hiring of replacement workers for employees who are on strike should be banned;
- labor-law reforms, including the protection of labor organizing as a civil right, should be enacted in order to allow workers to choose a union that can negotiate an employment contract that establishes wages, benefits and working conditions;
- the right of unions to engage in political activity must not be infringed;
- workers should be free from discriminatory employment practices and the Employment Non-Discrimination Act should become law;
- no person should be fired, lose seniority, be demoted, or suffer other reprisal for refusing to work when a violation of OSHA regulations places his or her health, life, or limb at risk; and
- state and federal law should provide real protection to whistleblowers who expose wrongdoing and unsafe practices.

To Make Government/Business Relationships Serve the Common Good, we believe companies receiving government economic development subsidies must deliver the jobs they promise. We also believe:

- competitive performance and accountability in state government are vital, but we oppose privatization schemes that simply reduce wages and benefits for workers in order to reward private companies with a profit at the expense of taxpayers;
- the Legislature should ban the improper use of "no-bid contracts;"

- "non-compete" contracts that place the financial interests of private toll road operators over the interests of the public should be prohibited;
- the U.S. space program, including both manned and unmanned flight and the revitalized International Space Station, serves as a catalyst for investment in scientific research that is essential to both national security and success in the global economy, and it should be supported and continued;
- regulation of banks, utilities, and insurance carriers must be improved and antitrust laws must be aggressively enforced;
- specific regulation of the banking and mortgage industry must be enacted to protect the public from the kind of excesses experienced in the sub-prime mortgage crisis, and emergency action must be taken to prevent those trapped by this crisis from losing their homes; and
- an outright ban should be enacted on abusive insurance practices and scams.

Irresponsible Wall Street speculators should be held accountable for wrongful conduct that has contributed to a financial crisis that damaged the State of Texas and its citizens, and Texas Democrats believe Texas taxpayers are entitled to a share of any resulting court-awarded compensation for economic harm.

To rebuild our American infrastructure, Texas Democrats support a requirement that public funds and contracts be awarded to American companies that use American workers who have a vested interest in the security and prosperity of our nation. For a generation, America has neglected its public infrastructure: roads, bridges, railroads, ports, water and sewer systems, schools, parks and libraries. We support a federal initiative to foster a sustained increase in public capital investment. We must not only increase funding to maintain aging infrastructure, but also to build new and more reliable public works.

To keep jobs here at home, state government should “Buy Texas” and “Buy American” by making it a priority to award contracts and purchase products from Texas and American companies. For too long, Republicans in state government have awarded contracts to foreign companies, including a Spanish toll road operator and an offshore call center that grossly mismanaged CHIP enrollment. Texas Democrats believe it is “good business” for state government to contract with Texas and American companies to the extent possible.

To address the high cost of food and energy, we call on the Federal Trade Commission, the Securities and Exchange Commission and the Justice Department to investigate speculative manipulation of the food, fuel and metals markets. We call on the federal government to reconstruct price-stabilizing food stockpiles, especially in parts of the world where commodity price speculation has led to famine.

To foster fair global trade, we must end "cheap labor Republican" policies that out-source jobs and encourage offshore tax shelters. Trade policy must combat child and slave labor, sweatshops, environmental degradation and other practices that turn global trade into a race to the bottom. We recognize the value of trade with our neighbor Mexico and the world. A reformed trade policy should "level up" wages and working conditions by ensuring that foreign workers share in their country's economic gains and become customers for American goods.

State Fiscal Policy

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 engage in an honest debate and evaluation of the challenges facing Texans today and in the future.

The budget policies adopted by Governor Perry and the Republican majority have intentionally created a “structural deficit” that exceeds \$10 billion for each two year budget cycle, the result of a 2006 Perry “margins tax” on business that has fallen over \$5 billion a year short of replacing local school property tax cuts.

For the past decade, the burden of out-of-balance Republican state fiscal policy has fallen squarely on the backs of hard working Texans.

- Public education was slashed \$5.4 billion in the current state budget, and as a result, 30,000 public school employees - including 13,000 teachers - have already lost their jobs while more students are crammed into crowded classrooms.
- Women’s health programs were slashed, leaving millions of women without basic preventive care and screening services.
- College students and their parents have been hit with tuition that has doubled, and this year, no Texas Grants were issued to incoming freshmen.
- Traffic congestion is taking a toll and the Republican state water plan has consisted of little more than praying for rain.
- Homeowners were promised property tax relief, but Republican property “tax relief” primarily rewarded multi-national companies and favored industries with big tax breaks at the expense of homeowners and small businesses. Additionally, drastic state budget cuts in education, health care and other areas has shifted the tax burden to local government, often requiring cities, counties and school boards to cut services or increase local property taxes or regressive sales taxes.

The need for government services such as higher education and health care goes up in an economic downturn, precisely the time when government revenues fall. Democratic Texas legislators created the Economic Stabilization Fund—known popularly as the “Rainy Day Fund”—to prevent any cuts in needed services, particularly in education. Yet despite having nearly \$10 billion in that fund, the Republicans controlling our state government refused to use any of that fund to avoid drastic cuts to education, health care, and other vital needs during the last legislative session, and Governor Perry is once again threatening to veto any use of the fund in the coming session. We believe the fund should be used for its intended purpose to avoid unnecessary cuts in essential state services.

Debt, diversions and deception in the budget process have also cost Texans dearly. Texans pay over \$500 million in fees on electric bills that are dedicated to assisting elderly, disabled and low-income families without heat and air conditioning, but that money has been diverted to cover the budget shortfall, along with billions in park fees, hunting and fishing licenses, environmental permits, and 911 telephone fees.

Texas can do better. 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 Democrats support policies to restore responsible state fiscal policy, including:

- Involve Texas elected and economic leaders in an effort to reform state fiscal policy and develop a reliable revenue source that grows with the economy to provide essential state services for a growing population;

- We oppose Republican policy that provides tax breaks to the wealthy at the expense of the vast majority of working Americans; we affirm our support for a progressive tax system based on the principle that all taxpayers should pay based on their ability to pay;
- Enact a constitutional amendment to prevent extending the sales tax to food and medicine and oppose efforts to impose a national sales tax;
- Reform the Republican “margins tax” policy to provide fairness to all economic sectors, especially small businesses;
- Structure property tax relief to benefit all homeowners fairly, and extend the benefits of property tax relief to renters when landlords receive the full benefit of those reductions;
- Secure all available federal funds to alleviate the budget deficit and provide economic benefits and job opportunities here in Texas instead of rejecting those funds and allowing our tax dollars to be spent in other states;
- Require proposed revenue policy to be clearly established in a transparent process and determined by open, public debate and votes cast by elected representatives;
- Require state government to spend taxes and fees for the specific purposes for which they were collected;
- Adopt strict guidelines to require that procurement contracts with private entities and programs that provide tax-funded incentives to business must target, when possible, small businesses, and prohibit such awards for companies that export jobs or utilize tax loopholes to avoid state or federal taxes; and
- Require an independent audit of the Governor’s Texas Enterprise Fund and enact and enforce regulations to prevent the continued use of the 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.

Democrats support these changes because taxpayers deserve responsible management of hard earned tax dollars to help Texans secure a prosperous future.

HEALTH CARE FOR ALL

Texas Democrats believe health care is a right, not a privilege reserved for those able to pay for it. Texas Democrats oppose efforts by Republican politicians to repeal health insurance reform and return America to the disastrous system that has failed small businesses, working families and drained state and family budgets. Every family deserves health care they can count on and a system that ensures stability, security, and access to care.

Texas Democrats realize important work remains to correctly implement health care changes at the state level. Democrats oppose efforts by Republicans to go back to a system that allowed insurance companies to discriminate against Americans with illnesses, shove them off their plans and place lifetime limits on health care, preventing them from getting care when they needed it most. Democrats support effective implementation of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act at the state level to protect Americans’ new, hard-fought health care rights.

Texas Democrats oppose Republican attempts to repeal the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

The previous health care system failed the American people, most especially Texans. Texas has the highest rate of uninsured among all 50 states, with over 1.4 million Texas children without insurance. Even those fortunate enough to have good insurance spend too much for it. The result: Americans pay

more for health care than citizens of any other industrialized country. Fewer Texans are receiving health insurance through their employers, and those who do have employer-provided health plans are paying higher out-of-pocket expenses for health care.

The Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act will have a positive impact on our state, greatly improving Texans' existing health insurance policies and bringing millions of uninsured Texas citizens into coverage. It reflects a change in the way we approach healthcare - shifting from a focus on treatment and disease and toward preventive approaches that ensure the health and long and productive life of all Americans.

Texas Democrats challenge the Legislature to mandate the Texas Department of State Health Service and Attorney General to require tax-exempt, private, not-for-profit hospitals and health care delivery organizations that are charged to monitor for charity care to earn their tax-exempt status by providing their community with free health screening clinics. They should be required, under the auspices of that charity care, to organize local health care providers and promote and offer at minimum one annual, county-wide, temporary free screening clinic. Given that at present 25% of Texas citizens are provided no healthcare, we call for these free clinics to be offered in counties in which 15% of residents are documented as having no health insurance or eligibility for either Medicare or Medicaid.

In order to address critical health care needs, Texas Democrats:

- support guaranteed access to affordable, comprehensive single-payer health care for all United States citizens and legal residents, in other words, Medicare for all;
- support creation of an insurance marketplace where small business owners can receive the same buying power that big businesses have while receiving tax credits to make employee coverage more affordable and dependable;
- support the creation of an efficient and robust Texas based health insurance exchange where Texans can access affordable, quality health insurance plans;
- support creation of a Texas universal health care plan as permitted under the Affordable Care Act to insure that every Texas resident has health insurance that covers medical, vision and dental care, full reproductive health services, preventive services, prescription drugs and mental health counseling and treatment;
- believe the state must realize all opportunities to maximize federal and state dollars available to fund health care costs, including enforcement of existing charity care requirements;
- oppose discrimination based on preexisting conditions and believe Texans with chronic illnesses should have access to coverage at an affordable price through the high risk pool with full coverage for all prescription medications during the interim period before the preexisting condition ban passed by Democrats takes effect; and
- believe medical decisions regarding treatment options should be made by physicians in consultation with patients, not by an insurance company or government lay people.
- support protecting Texans from the dangers of secondhand smoke exposure in workplaces including bars and restaurants. All employees should be protected from exposure to secondhand smoke in the workplace.

PROTECTING MEDICAID

Medicaid plays an essential role in the health of millions of Texans, and Texas Democrats oppose misguided attempts by Republicans to dismantle and disrupt the delivery of services to needy Texans. We support working to eliminate any gap of Medicaid coverage that can occur when an individual

transitions from community-based Medicaid to long term care Medicaid. We support full restoration of the Medicaid cuts, with funding allocations for population and caseload growth, and re-establishing local and state partnerships to maximize funds for Medicaid programs that assure coverage to low-income Texans. We support an effective and sound expansion of the infrastructure needed to deliver coverage to all newly eligible recipients under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act living at or near the federal poverty level.

PREVENTION

Texas Democrats support the underlying philosophy of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act: 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 co-payments for preventive services, as well as plans to expand community health centers and the number of primary care physicians and health care practitioners. Democrats support efforts in Texas to increase the number of primary care physicians and nurses, as well efforts to encourage healthy living.

IMPROVING MEDICARE

The Republican Medicare prescription drug program proved to be a tragic and confusing failure for the elderly, individuals with disabilities, and pharmacists who faced a maze of poorly designed regulations, bureaucracy and red tape. Republicans literally allowed big pharmaceutical and insurance companies to write the law for their advantage - with little or no regard for its practical impact on individuals and taxpayers. Democrats support the Medicare reforms passed by the Democratic Congress that close the costly prescription drug "donut hole" that burdened seniors.

Democrats support Medicare provisions in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act that provide free preventive care and increased services to rural areas while cracking down on waste and abuse and ensuring more money goes to benefits and not insurance providers.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH INSURANCE

Texas Democrats proposed, fought for, and passed the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) that provided health coverage to over 500,000 Texas children in working families until the Republicans gained control of the Legislature in 2003. Although CHIP is a compassionate program that is also sound fiscal policy, an alternative to welfare and a bargain for taxpayers, Republican budget cuts slashed the number of children receiving CHIP benefits by more than 213,000 before Democrats increased their numbers in the State House and forced partial restoration of CHIP coverage in 2007. In the meantime, Texas lost over a billion dollars in federal funds to states that covered more of their children while Texas, under the Republicans, passed laws and developed policies that make CHIP enrollment more difficult. In addition to erecting barriers to enrollment, virtually all outreach programs were dismantled, and the failure in processing CHIP applications by the massive private-sector outsourcing contract with Bermuda-based Accenture resulted in many children losing CHIP coverage, with tragic consequences for some Texas families.

Democrats support full utilization of all federal funds that have been set aside specifically to improve the health of Texas children, and we oppose the redistribution of those funds to other states. Unless all punitive Republican policies are reversed and private contractors are held accountable, many Texas children who qualify for CHIP coverage will go uninsured and the federal dollars reserved for Texas

children will continue to be spent in other states. We support full restoration of the original CHIP program and policies, reinstatement of the simplified application process, aggressive outreach to enroll all eligible children, and a 12 month period of continuous health coverage. We further support congressional Democrats' expansion of the federal SCHIP program to allow greater opportunity for states to provide health coverage for children and a maintenance of effort provision to protect the program from cuts by Republicans in the Legislature.

MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE SERVICES

Democrats support efforts to eliminate the stigma surrounding mental illness and drug dependent individuals. Recognizing that untreated mental illness and substance abuse are widespread, Democrats support ways to increase access to mental health and substance abuse services by increasing the number of facilities offering such care while assuring their financial viability and maximizing utilization of the state's public mental health system. Full mental health parity in the private market would help eliminate stigma about mental illness and substance abuse, and make it more likely that individuals would seek treatment and proper maintenance of their mental health.

We support Medicare policies for psychiatric care that increase session times in place of inadequate follow-up sessions currently allowed. We also support recent initiatives by the Federal Government to increase Medicaid funding for substance abuse treatment (medication assisted treatment and counseling) which will allow more individuals to have access to outpatient treatment where appropriate to help increase the likelihood that an individual will become a productive member of society while in treatment. Such intensive outpatient treatment would also be more cost effective. More "reality-based" substance abuse education at the primary school level should be encouraged. The Court system must be encouraged to allow treatment as the first option for drug offenders when appropriate, rather than incarceration that may often lead to a pattern of criminal behavior. Outpatient treatment that includes counseling and medication management, if needed, would also be a less costly alternative than incarceration. We support community-based mental health services for children and adults. One family member receiving mental health treatment will have a positive effect on the entire family and then society as a whole.

EDUCATION AND SERVICES TO PREVENT AND TREAT COMMUNICABLE INFECTIONS

Texas Democrats support increased education initiatives and services to address the massive increases in cases of Hepatitis C. Services for HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases should also be maintained along with increased access to treatment and therapy that improves quality of life and encourages return to the workforce. Funding for treatment and therapy through Community Health Centers should be encouraged. City and County health officials should be encouraged to provide adequate budgets for the operation of programs proven to prevent communicable infections.

CONVERSION THERAPY

The American Psychiatric Association does not support so-called "conversion therapy" as an effective or evidence-based therapy. Texas Democrats strongly oppose the use of any public funding for this demonstrably harmful practice. We further call on the Texas Medical Board, the Texas State Board of Examiners of Psychologists, and the Texas Department of State Health Services to fully investigate and to sanction any practitioner who claims to be successfully using conversion therapy.

ELIMINATING HEALTH DISPARITIES

Millions of African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, American Indians and Americans disadvantaged by income, gender and region continue to live sicker and die younger than others. Cultural and language barriers remain a particular problem for immigrant communities. We support the elimination of health care disparities by increasing research and training for medical professionals, breaking down language barriers, and ensuring health care access for all Americans. We support efforts to encourage more minority students to enter the sciences. We support efforts to ensure that women have access to the best medicines, state-of-the-art prevention and detection techniques, as well as nutrition and exercise programs. We support improved access to essential medical services by making more primary care, emergency and other underserved physician services available and more equitably distributed.

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 the women of Texas to make personal and responsible decisions about when and whether to bear children, in consultation with their family, their physician, personal conscience or their God, rather than having these personal decisions made by politicians;
- support prevention measures which have proven effective at reducing unintended pregnancies, and which would reduce the rate of abortion when made affordable, accessible, and available as effective long-term programs. These programs include family planning and birth control, including emergency contraception free from judgment or pressure;
- support using sound, mainstream medical science to guide reproductive health care policies;
- support targeted efforts to reduce Texas' high teen pregnancy rates, including the provision of evidence-based, accurate and effective, comprehensive age-appropriate sex education programs with an abstinence and contraception component, to reduce the rate of abortion;
- recognize that the product of a joined egg and sperm has no independent status, standing, entitlements or rights that would usurp or supersede in any way the rights, status, standing and decisions of the mother or woman which are paramount;
- support the right of a woman to acquire contraception or other reproductive services through her health insurance provider; this may not be impinged or abridged by an employer for any reason nor can be terminated or subjected to any form of harassment or retaliation by her employer related to any health care choices;
- 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 in regulated, licensed medical facilities, rather than biased and non-medical activities;
- support women's access to affordable pre-natal care, including pregnancy insurance and pre-natal vitamins to support healthy pregnancies;
- believe in the responsibility of Texas women to make their own personal choices when and whether to be administered cervical cancer vaccinations;
- support paid maternity and/or paternity leave to support healthy families;
- support women's access to accurate information about adoption and related resources;
- support affordable, quality child-care to support and keep healthy families intact;
- promote policies that value Texas families and their children throughout their lives; and

- support policies for women that promote keeping families healthy and intact through preventive gynecological health care that is crucial to the health of women in caring for their families.

STEM CELL RESEARCH

Stem cell research should not be held hostage to politics that limit the potential for conquering many debilitating and deadly illnesses. Texas has world-class research facilities that cannot attract world-class talent and funding until we take stem cell research out of political debates and put it into the labs where research could lead to life-saving therapies. Texas Democrats strongly and unconditionally support research into stem cell therapies and state funding for research into stem cell therapies at our state's public universities. Curing disease is the right thing to do, and stem cell lines should be expanded without increasing or encouraging any high risk procedures.

SECURITY FOR OUR FAMILIES

Just as we support responsible efforts to provide secure our country from those who would do us harm, Texas Democrats support initiatives to ensure the security of our families. More than one-third of working families in Texas are defined as "low income," and nearly half of Texas children live in these households. Every parent should be able to provide housing, nutrition, clothing, and health care for his or her family. No child should go hungry or without health care. We believe government should make sure appropriate supports are in place and accessible to families in need. Reducing hunger and poverty is a priority of Texas Democrats.

Texas Democrats strongly believe that we must work to protect our elderly, disabled adults and children from abuse and exploitation and take strong and aggressive steps to combat all crimes against these vulnerable citizens of our state.

Privatization of Social Services

Under Republican rule, Texas entered into an \$899 million health and human services contract with a Bermuda-based private contractor, Accenture. This privatization experiment disrupted the lives of vulnerable residents while padding the pockets of private contractors at taxpayer expense, dismantling the state social services infrastructure and failing miserably to save tax dollars or provide services more efficiently.

Low-income children, as well as elderly and disabled Texans, are going without proper nutrition because of delays in processing of food stamp applications due to the lack of a sufficient number of eligibility workers. Low-to-moderate income children and families continue to experience difficulty accessing or maintaining health coverage through the CHIP or Medicaid programs since the system was privatized. Texas Democrats support hiring state workers at adequate levels to ensure timely and accurate processing of applications rather than wasting money on private contracts. We believe privatization of social services has proven to be a poor use of tax dollars, with little or no accountability to voters and taxpayers.

Child Protection and Foster Care

We support a Children's Bill of Rights. Texas children who have been removed from their homes due to alleged abuse or neglect and placed in the state foster care system should not be subjected to abuse or another privatization experiment.

Rick Perry and his appointees have allowed gross mismanagement in State Supported Living Centers and residential treatment centers that has resulted in children and vulnerable adults experiencing abuse while in state care. We support greater oversight of facilities and institutions serving children and vulnerable adults.

We oppose discrimination in the state foster care system. We support child protection programs that provide safe, secure environments for our children. We support funding Child Protective Services to reduce caseloads and to ensure compliance with federal requirements for caseworker meetings with clients. Texas Democrats oppose the privatization of the child protection system, including intake services.

Adoption

We support 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.

Child Support and Child Care that Strengthens Texas Families

The economic security of many Texas families depends on strong child support enforcement coupled with available and affordable quality child care that is good for parents, good for children and vital for the Texas economy. Texas Democrats believe sufficient child support enforcement field staff is needed to ensure the timely and reliable collection and distribution of child support payments. We support policies to ensure that child support payments go to custodial parents rather than to private collection agencies. We believe parental counseling, mediation, job training and job placement should promote the beneficial involvement and support of both parents whenever possible and appropriate. Texas families should not have to choose between the jobs they need and the children they love.

Texas Democrats support child care initiatives that encourage both private and non-profit providers to expand the availability of quality child care services by using tax credits, investment grants, and pooling of local resources to maximize federal funding opportunities. Texas Democrats also believe expanded after school care ensures the safety of children and that early childhood education develops the strong educational foundation needed for future achievement.

We further support adequate funding by counties for Child Welfare and Family Service Boards and Committees.

Long Term Services and Supports

Texas Democrats believe 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. A robust continuum of long-term services and supports includes state supported living centers, home and community-based services, in-home health care, adult daycare, and hospice care. We believe the state must comply with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and strongly oppose the Republican claim to “sovereign immunity” from the ADA. We support:

- transitioning the long-term care system to focus on home and community-based services (HCBS);
- creating a national HCBS program where funding for services “follows the person”;
- fully funding all HCBS programs and ending all waiting lists for community services;
- protecting individual homesteads from repossession when recovering the costs of long-term care;

- providing elderly and disabled Texans with choices about where they want to live and receive support services;
- coordination of accessible, affordable, integrated housing and other support services including personal assistance and caregiver services, homemaker assistance, respite care, home-delivered meals, and transportation,
- establishing registry of direct service and providers and developing a training and certification program that interfaces with other similar initiatives;
- access to non-medical services to contain cost and allow greater individual control;
- providing a living wage and health care benefits for all direct care workers.

Social Security

Texas Democrats believe we must keep the promise of Social Security strong and certain for those who have worked and contributed to the system. Social Security should continue to be the foundation of income security for working Americans. Social Security is an insurance program placed in the trust of the federal government and is not a public welfare cost of government. We believe all Americans should have access to the Social Security system, including public employees. Private savings accounts and other pension programs should be additions to the guaranteed Social Security benefit, not a substitute for any portion of it.

We oppose privatization of the Social Security program as fiscally irresponsible, and consider the use of our tax dollars as capital to invest in the stock market as a threat to the income security of working Americans. We oppose Republican federal budget plans to spend down and undermine the Social Security Trust Fund, including proposals to carve out private savings accounts, which would drain trillions of dollars from the Social Security system. We also oppose the closing of small town Social Security offices, which would force many beneficiaries to travel as far as 200 to 250 miles for a face to face meeting.

Retirement Security

Millions of workers have invested in public or private pensions to secure their retirement income. We believe a lifetime of honest work should be rewarded with adequate retirement income. We support measures to make corporate governance accountable to all stakeholders in the private pension system. We support providing strong and effective legal protections to secure the investments of workers in public or private pensions. We believe:

- a participant in a pension or retirement program should have legal protection for the full amount to which they are entitled if such accounts or corporate pensions lose their funding or are dismantled due to financial improprieties, insolvency or reorganization;
- companies filing for bankruptcy or encountering legal problems should have funds automatically frozen or set aside to fund the pension plan in place;
- time limits must be in place to allow the expedient transfer of pensioners' funds to a new account or directly to the pensioner within the confines of IRS tax regulations;
- state Retirement Systems should be preserved as defined benefit systems, as established in the Texas Constitution; and
- federal employees who retired under the FERS system should be treated the same, for purposes of sick-leave credit, as federal Civil Service retirees.

Access to Affordable Insurance with Effective Regulation and Oversight

Texas Democrats support the strict enforcement of policies requiring insurance companies to roll back their rates to provide Texas homeowners, renters and drivers fair and affordable insurance. Governor

Perry and his fellow Republicans have done nothing to reduce insurance costs that place an excessive financial burden on both individuals and businesses. Texans continue to pay some of the highest homeowner insurance rates in the nation, despite the fact that the American insurance industry makes billions in profits every year. We support providing the Insurance Commissioner the authority to deny or approve rates.

Democrats support measures to reduce and eliminate unfair underwriting and rate setting practices, such as the use of credit scoring, redlining and other discriminatory practices. We support the enforcement of penalties when such practices are used. Texans must have access to affordable insurance to protect our homes and businesses from flood and windstorm damage. We also support more thorough oversight and regulation of homeowner's insurance through greater consumer representation in the form of an official advisory committee or requirements that the Insurance Commission include consumer representatives.

Utility Regulation

Texans have seen their utility bills become some of the highest in the nation since the passage of a deregulation scheme that has failed to provide competition to drive down rates as promised. Texas Democrats support responsible regulation of utilities to provide a level playing field for regulated industry, through reasonable policy to prevent predatory pricing. Texans should not be expected to become experts on all the factors that determine energy costs in order to pay lower, reasonable prices for utility services.

Consumer Protection

Texas Democrats believe government has a responsibility to protect the people from dangerous products and fraudulent, unfair and discriminatory business practices. In the information age, vigorous efforts are necessary to protect the privacy of everything from financial records to DNA. Consumers should have a high degree of certainty and an understanding of their rights and protections under laws that are strongly and uniformly enforced. Texas Democrats believe we must protect Texans from:

- laws and regulations that restrict redress for buyers of new homes who discover shoddy work after the purchase is completed;
- unscrupulous telemarketing, internet marketing and price fixing;
- services or individuals that prey on individuals, especially children, the poor, the elderly and persons with disabilities, including insurance fraud and nursing home abuse targeted at seniors;
- financial exploitation—especially of our elderly and disabled;
- insurance companies, HMOs and drug companies that deny Texans coverage they need;
- unethical and/or illegal business practices by multinational corporations;
- laws and regulations that restrict the ability of communities to provide public utilities at their discretion, including “wi-fi” internet access;
- laws and regulation that would deny Texans free, non-discriminatory access to the internet.
- any interference with licensed public safety communication frequencies;
- identity theft, notary impersonation, “phishing” viruses and other forms of computer fraud;
- manipulation of the market caused by unscrupulous speculators; and
- predatory lending practices, such as unscrupulous payday loans and sale/lease back transactions.

Housing

Texas Democrats believe all Texans have a right to housing that is safe, affordable, accessible, integrated, and available without discrimination. Such availability to housing, whether rented or owned,

is essential to a strong sense of community, self-respect, and dignity. Texas Democrats are committed to making the dream of home ownership and clean, safe rental housing a reality for more Texas families by:

- encouraging federal, state and local agencies to work together to increase access to housing opportunities, housing rehabilitation programs, financial education, and down payment assistance that fits the needs of both rural and urban Texans;
- eliminating all discrimination in the financing and insuring of homes, including lending practices that prey on the uneducated, the poor, the elderly, and colonia residents;
- establishing a state program to assist local nonprofit organizations develop and administer individual development account programs for low income individuals;
- increasing the availability of low-cost financing and other incentives to promote the development of new affordable rental housing that meets or exceeds state and federal requirements on accessibility for persons with disabilities; and
- increasing the number of Section 8 housing vouchers and the availability of low cost financing for new and affordable rental housing; and
- increasing programs and financial assistance for local communities relocating citizens who reside in the 100-year flood plain.

The collapse of the sub-prime mortgage market and the housing finance system was a man-made disaster that has profoundly affected Texas and the nation. This crisis is a direct consequence of an ideology of greed that allowed for lax regulation, abusive, predatory lending practices and the failure of those responsible for the banks and securities markets. To respond to this crisis, we must:

- protect and preserve neighborhoods by helping families stay in their homes;
- enact measures to allow for the refinancing of owner-occupied primary residences, but not second homes, high-end mansions, or speculative real estate investments; and
- provide rental assistance for those who must move.

Homelessness

Developing effective solutions to the problems related to homelessness requires a strong commitment to public-private partnerships and coordinated state, federal, and local efforts. In addition to the acute problem of homelessness among the mentally ill and their families, runaways, veterans and other populations, the impact of Republican economic policy has left many families just one rent check or mortgage payment away from homelessness. Texas Democrats are committed to ending homelessness by removing barriers and increasing access to services that support progress toward self-sufficiency in rural and urban communities.

ENERGY AND CONSERVATION

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. Potential for solar power cannot be ignored, the potential for geothermal energy must be explored, and the enormous strides made in wind power urge us forward in developing a diverse energy portfolio. As the wind capital of the country, Texas has shown that we can cultivate cutting-edge scientific innovation, real local jobs, and solutions to energy independence.

Democrats want what most Texans want for their energy future: a safe, secure, and sustainable supply of clean, affordable energy. We support increased development of renewable energy technologies that

spur the economy, protect the environment, create high-paying jobs, and reduce reliance and dependence on oil from unstable sources. We support:

- the development and use of diverse energy technologies to maximize the availability of non-polluting energy produced by renewable resources via solar and wind combinations to create base-load electricity and expand grid system;
- sales tax exemptions and other incentives for Texas homeowners and businesses to "go solar" and to allow solar system owners to get credit on electric bills for extra energy such systems produce;
- tax incentives for both homeowners and landlords to invest in conservation and energy efficiency;
- public education programs that promote methods and benefits of energy conservation
- introduction of incentives for manufacturing of American-made solar equipment and wind turbines and encourage development of energy storage technologies;
- the development of Texas' abundant and low carbon footprint natural gas resources with environmentally compatible technologies in the transition period from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources;
- energy efficiency standards and green building policies that encourage the wise use of energy and incentives for investment in energy savings initiatives. Utilize State Energy Conservation Office - SECO partners with Texas consumers, businesses, educators and local governments to reduce energy costs and maximize efficiency
- instituting energy audits to identify opportunities for elimination of inefficient energy-consumption buildings and facilities;
- a transportation policy that encourages the development of affordable, fuel efficient vehicles that can run on alternative fuels;
- a full and thorough environmental impact study of the Keystone XL Pipeline on Texas environment and its economic benefit;
- reduced reliance on coal-fired plants in order to protect health and reduce pollution. Investigate applicability of cleaner technologies;
- serious re-examination of the environmental and economic benefits of corn-based ethanol, which studies suggest contributes to pollution and global climate change more than it reduces it;
- creating a state panel on global climate change, including all stakeholders, that recognize this real and serious threat and recommends a statewide energy policy that will spur economic development and reduce carbon emissions in Texas by at least 80% by 2050, as recommended by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC);
- utilization of natural geothermal sources for commercial and industrial applications;
- immediate funding for research to develop new CAFE standards at 50 MPG;
- state minimum standard distances as a requirement for oil & gas wells, collection, and condensate tanks in relation to schools, hospitals, parks, and other vulnerable comm

Environment and Public Land

The pursuits of technology, science, and industrial processing and ingenuity are integral to our ability to interact with the world in a sustainable manner for this and future generations. Water must be clean, the air must be healthy, and we must find a way to transition towards more renewable energy and waste reduction.

As droughts become more frequent and more persistent, we must prioritize a multi-faceted strategy of dealing with our water resources: prioritizing water conservation, recognizing the nexus of energy and water use to find less water-intensive energy generation, helping agriculture find solutions to their

water needs, and ensuring that there's enough water not just for people but for the environment as well.

It is vital that the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) look out for the health and welfare of Texans through environmental stewardship. It is essential to build the political will to use and preserve the earth's resources wisely for both current and future generations, just as it is essential to elect office holders who hold these values and have the vision and will to act.

Clean Water from publicly managed resources is critical to our future and our health. We support:

- the implementation of aggressive water conservation and reuse practices;
- the protection of Texas bays, estuaries, in-stream flows, and wetlands with regulations;
- giving regional groundwater conservation districts authority to preserve the water within their districts;
- thorough analysis of the relative short-term and long-term costs and environmental impact of proposed large new reservoirs and alternative sources of public water supplies, including the impact of electric generation plants that require the use of significant amounts of water;
- expanded testing of fish and shellfish for mercury, radionuclides, and other contaminants and public notification of health risks;
- support research and understanding of the state's groundwater resources;
- preventing depletion and exploitation of limited state water resources by "water wildcatters," and
- open space acquisition to protect Texas aquifers and watersheds that provide sole-source drinking water for millions of Texans.

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. Gov. Perry's TCEQ has failed to enforce the law and as a result, the state is ceding its responsibility to protect Texans' health. We believe that Texas should work more closely with the Environmental Protection Agency and end the current hostile litigious relationship. Environmental protection should be a model of cooperative federalism and not the arena for political gamesmanship and anti-scientific agendas.

- We believe that human health should be paramount in the decision by TCEQ and EPA to grant either an air or wastewater permit;
- We believe that, because there are cleaner technologies/fuel sources, there should be a moratorium in the state of Texas on the building of new coal or petroleum coke burning power plants and we support retirement of the oldest, heavy-polluting, coal burning Texas power plants that are so outdated that pollution controls are not an economically viable option.
- We oppose the destruction of our natural resources by coal strip mining.
- Clean air is becoming the exception instead of the rule on too many days in Texas, and that has a profound effect on children and adults who suffer from asthma and respiratory illnesses. We support the adoption, immediate implementation, and strong enforcement of clean air plans by State officials throughout the entire state.
- We support ending the lax environmental enforcement by Perry's Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) and the policy of giving undeserved breaks to polluters with poor compliance history.
- We support the strengthening of violation penalties so that it does not pay to pollute.
- We support the EPA's proposed rule to reduce emissions of toxic air pollutants from power plants, specifically mercury and air toxics standards (MATS) for power plants will reduce emissions from new and existing coal- and oil-fired electric utility steam generating units.

- We support 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.
- We support the rights of all citizens to participate in the permitting process and contested hearing in order to protect their property, health and the environment.
- We support the enactment of laws and regulations to protect low-income communities and communities of color from environmental racism and environmental injustice.
- We support halting import of radioactive waste to Texas from around the nation because high water levels in monitoring wells at the radioactive waste site need further study in order to prevent groundwater contamination. No radioactive waste disposal agreements should be approved by the Compact Commission until the long overdue contested case hearing regarding licensing of the radioactive waste dump is completed.
- We support preventing contamination of Texas' land, air and water by proposed Canadian tar sands pipelines.
- Texas is blessed with natural gas and oil resources and new hydraulic fracturing technologies for extraction have opened up vast resources. To protect Texas air and water, we support requiring green completions of wells by requiring excess gasses to be captured; stricter limits on flaring, a sustainable yield permit for water withdraws and recycling or appropriate disposal of tainted water; and a prohibition of known carcinogenic or toxic chemicals used in this process.
- We support the overhaul of the TCEQ and new officials must be appointed 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.

- The members of the Railroad Commission should use their regulatory power as a means of protecting the health and welfare of Texans, rather than using it as a political tool.
- The Railroad Commission should look with greater scrutiny at natural gas producers who use damaging fracking techniques as a means of producing natural gas.

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

- providing adequate 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 wild fires;
- 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 and 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;
- responsible e-recycling that does not merely ship the problem to other countries;

- and incentives for communities to provide residential recycling.

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' resources are under increased pressure from forces beyond their control. We support rural communities in their efforts to protect the resources necessary for their economic livelihood.

Access to clean water is vital to life. We believe it is essential that Texas meet the water needs of our population, communities and industries with an absolute minimum of environmental disruption. The ongoing drought has made this a particularly urgent issue. We call on the Texas Legislature to make the protection and balanced distribution of the state's water supply an emergency item in the 2013 session. We support the enhancement of water conservation programs including programs for wetlands, ground water recharge, desalination, and storm water runoff and storage. We recognize that the needs of water for agriculture production must be balanced with the needs for water consumption by urban populations. We specifically call on the Texas Legislature to strictly regulate the use of fresh water supplies in the use of hydraulic fracturing and any other large consumers. We further call on the Legislature to establish emergency programs to assist communities whose local water supplies are disrupted by drought conditions.

We urge the creation and expansion of food producing gardens and farmers markets in inner city and urban area where access to quality food products is not available.

Texans need to breathe clean air. While we recognize the economic importance of utilizing chemicals to improve production on Texas farms and ranches, we support effective guidelines and enforcement relating to the proper use of pesticides and herbicides to protect the health of all individuals exposed to such chemicals as well as to prevent unintended collateral damage to the environment. We also oppose artificial attempts to "cure" pollution with a pencil by restructuring EPA regions to pull less-polluted rural air quality points into more polluted urban areas simply to improve urban pollution numbers.

We believe access to affordable quality health care is particularly important in rural areas. We support incentives to recruit and retain physicians and other health care providers in rural areas, including grants and zero interest loans for public hospitals; programs that bring enhanced medical technology to rural areas; equalizing Medicare reimbursements to rural hospitals; improved emergency care systems; enhanced medical transport systems; and better utilizing nurse practitioners and physician assistants in underserved areas.

We believe access to the most up to date technology is essential to the economic well being of all areas of Texas. We support assistance programs designed to deliver technological resources to our less populated regions.

We believe Texas agriculture must maintain a position of world leadership that has been tainted for the last 18 years by a Texas Department of Agriculture that has failed to support the family farmers and ranchers who are the backbone of the industry. We support:

- new TDA leadership to devise effective global marketing programs to assist our producers sell their products, including training in the use of new technology and the internet;
- offering Euro-gap certification to all Texas producers at a reduced rate;
- working with Mexican officials to make NAFTA work for, and not against, Texas agriculture;
- legislation to improve weights and measures certification of gas pumps and market scales;
- reforms policy to change policy that unduly favors agribusiness and restricts farmers both locally and globally to using only genetically modified seed;
- USDA efforts to toughen meat industry antitrust rules to protect cattle raisers and producers from unfair and deceptive practices by a handful of giant corporate meatpackers that dominate the market;
- federal farm legislation that establishes minimum price support levels and economic protections for FAMILY farms;
- Provide water for personal and household use at the lowest possible cost to the consumer
- preserving proper use of agricultural property tax exemptions and restructuring the current land appraisal system to insure a fair property tax system for all Texans; and
- the full cooperation by Texas state officials and agencies, including the Texas Department of Agriculture, with the appropriate federal authorities in foreign activities.

Property Rights and Eminent Domain

Texas Democrats strongly support private property rights, which are protected by our Constitution. We oppose the use of eminent domain and takings to deprive any property owner of the possession, use, or the ability to control their property without just compensation. We believe eminent domain should only be permitted for a compelling public purpose and the law should not be abused for the sole purpose of benefitting a private business. We recognize that the condemnation deck is currently stacked against the individual property owner and that significant reforms are needed.

We oppose backdoor efforts by Rick Perry and Republicans to keep the development of the Trans-Texas Corridor alive, if under another name. As proposed by the Governor, the TTC was an attempt to transfer ownership of millions of acres of Texas land to a foreign corporation with close ties to him; the plan would have devastated many rural areas, property owners and communities. We support property rights protections that would prevent uncontrolled development along all public and toll road corridors.

JUSTICE

All Texans are entitled to be safe and secure, and free from fear of violence. The guilty must be justly punished for crimes they commit, the innocent must be protected, the rights of victims must be ensured, the accused provided due process under law, and public safety officers must be strongly supported. It is the duty of the state to provide for the safety of the public while also preserving individual liberty.

Texas has more people in prison and a higher incarceration rate than any other state. Texas also has more private prisons than any other state. And, the inadequacies in our criminal justice system disproportionately impact the poor and people of color. District attorney offices across the state often reward performance by the number of convictions, not necessarily the administration of justice. These forces, coupled with racial profiling, and draconian budget cuts to education create an environment where profit trumps the public interest.

Democrats believe democracy is for all and that the more productive citizens we have participating in the American Dream the better we are as a nation. Yet our current state of justice instead creates both public cost and a private financial reward for government failing in the areas of education, public safety, health and due process.

Hyper-prosecution and over-incarceration have now developed into a fiscal crisis. Texas Democrats believe in policies which use our tax dollars wisely and in the interest of the public rather than in the interest of private prison profits.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Texas Democrats believe protection from crime is a primary responsibility of government that is essential to the quality of life in our communities. Government must provide the necessary training and equipment law enforcement personnel need to do their jobs effectively, and we support higher wages for peace officers commensurate with the daily risks associated with the profession.

The mantra “to serve and protect” must be applied equally to all communities. Democrats believe a community-based approach to crime fighting makes our streets and neighborhoods safer. Public trust in the police department ultimately increases safety. Partnerships should be formed with community groups to assist officers on the streets. Citizen oversight boards should be in place to address conflicts between the police and the community.

The state’s ability to restrict individual liberty must be subject to due process. Democrats believe each citizen is innocent until proven guilty. Texas Democrats call for the end of racial profiling and police brutality. The frenzied, video taped, mob beating of Chad Holley in Harris County revealed one of the worst cases of police brutality since Rodney King. Such practices are an embarrassment to conscientious law enforcement officials and unacceptable to all Texans.

To continue the fight against crime, and to make our streets and homes safer, Texas Democrats support just and smart policies, including:

- placing more police officers on the streets in underserved areas;
- supporting peace officers with current equipment, technology and training to balance their dual role to serve and protect
- ensuring proper oversight and regulation of crime labs, especially labs that process DNA evidence, to assure proper analysis of evidence, including timely analysis of evidence from medical rape kits and entering such evidence in a computerized database;
- increasing the amount of federal grant money obtained through the Edward Byrne Law Enforcement Assistance Program used for drug treatment and drug court programs, homeland security operations, and crime lab upgrades;
- ending racial profiling in searches and traffic stops
- strengthen the national Brady background check system to incorporate all necessary records including criminal, domestic violence, mental health records, and terror watch lists;
- institute a universal background check system to ensure that all firearm sales are subject to a Brady background check;
- fully fund the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives so that it can conduct regular and frequent inspections of Federal Firearms Licensed (FFL) Dealers to prevent unlawful sales;

- require that all persons who sell guns of any kind through employment at a gun manufacturer or through a FFL Dealer pass a Brady background check;
- strengthen programs designed to trace crime gun purchases to shut down unscrupulous firearms dealers;
- remove restrictions on the ability of local, state, and federal law enforcement to access important gun trace information and give police officers across the nation the tools they need to solve gun crimes and fight the illegal arms trade;
- support manufacturers who voluntarily develop and sell childproof handguns;
- sensible gun control laws to curtail the availability of automatic weapons and extended magazines such as those purchased by the shooter of U.S. Rep Gabrielle Giffords which allowed the shooter to hold 30 rounds of ammunition
- promotion of literacy, education and job training which intrinsically prevent both crime and recidivism
- prevention programs addressing drug and alcohol addiction, lack of educational opportunity and other root causes of crime;
- insure that any use of tasers is carried out only when necessary to prevent loss of life or serious bodily injury, as a substitute for lawful use of a deadly weapon;

SEXUAL ASSAULT AND FAMILY AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Sexual assault and family and domestic violence are violent crimes that occur in all types of families and disproportionately harm women and children; crimes that often involve a cyclical, generational pattern, thus affecting entire communities as long as such crimes continue to be perpetrated. We support:

- strong enforcement of Texas laws to hold offenders accountable and increase the likelihood that victims will come forward to report these crimes;
- policies that encourage advocacy, support, and safety for victims and their families;
- early prevention efforts focused on youth to decrease the incidence of sexual and domestic violence prior to victimization;
- training programs for law enforcement, prosecutorial, judicial, health care, mental health and education professionals to promote increased understanding of and improved response to the crimes of domestic violence and sexual assault; and
- a strong statewide initiative to reduce the alarming increase of child abuse and neglect through investment in effective early prevention programs.

ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE

Texas Democrats believe in the efficient, fiscally responsible and moral administration of justice through regulations that promote:

- revising sentencing guidelines for non-violent offenders, redirecting the “War on Drugs” to treatment, and reclassifying some offenses considered felonies;
- fully funding mental health facilities and creating more facilities as necessary to provide appropriate mental health services to redirect individuals from the criminal justice system;
- rewriting the relevant Texas criminal code provisions to take into account modern understanding of severe mental illness and to broaden the legal definition of insanity to ensure that the public is kept safe while allowing treatment for mentally ill inmates;
- significantly reducing the number of people re-incarcerated for technical violations of parole or probation, such as missing an appointment with a supervisory officer;
- ensuring prisons are staffed by professionally trained and compensated corrections officers, in sufficient numbers to achieve safe staffing ratios;

· opposing the further privatization of Texas prisons and mandating a pay scale and state government oversight comparable to public prisons for prison guards at existing private prisons;

DECRIMINALIZATION OF MARIJUANA

Decriminalization of marijuana does not mean we endorse marijuana use, but it is only a call for wiser law enforcement and public health policy. Prohibition of marijuana abdicates the control of marijuana production and distribution to drug cartels and street gangs. Such prohibition promotes disrespect for the law and reinforces ethnic and generational divides between the public and law enforcement.

Every year hundreds of thousands of Americans are arrested for marijuana possession violations- far more than all those arrested for violent crimes in America. Societal costs dealing with the war on drugs concerning marijuana exceeds 12 billion dollars annually. Since the war on drugs began 85% of the arrests for marijuana have been for possession only.

Marijuana is no more dangerous than tobacco or alcohol. Recent polls show over 50% of Americans believe marijuana should be decriminalized. While arrests for marijuana since 1965 have been over 20 million citizens, marijuana is more prevalent than ever before.

There is no evidence that marijuana is a “gateway” drug leading to use of other more lethal drugs. 75% of citizens arrested for marijuana are under 30. Minorities account for a majority of those arrested for marijuana. Criminal conviction permanently scars a young citizen for life.

Texas Democrats urges the President, the Attorney General and the Congress to support the passage of legislation to decriminalize the possession of marijuana and regulate its use, production, and sale as is done with tobacco and alcohol.

We further urge the immediate decriminalization of possession and use of medical marijuana.

JUVENILE JUSTICE

Juveniles are presumed to be less culpable for their crimes than adults and therefore have a constitutional right to be treated differently. Prison-style incarceration often does young offenders more harm than good. The use of tasers and pepper-spray at Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD) facilities should be banned, unless it is necessary to prevent loss of life or serious bodily injury. Community-based juvenile justice prevention and intervention programs can ultimately reduce adult crime, Texas’ high incarceration rate and the need for prison construction.

Democrats oppose practices of “hyper-prosecution” which overlook juvenile status. A landmark case brought before the Texas Supreme Court forced the state to reconcile charges of prostitution leveled against a minor without the legal ability to grant consent. Texas Democrats believe the primary goal of juvenile justice is to rehabilitate youth; not to create a feeder system for privatized, for-profit, adult prison facilities.

We support the Innocence Project, which works to assure the integrity of convictions and exonerate and quickly release innocent people who have been wrongfully convicted. We applaud the Dallas County District Attorney for his innovative work with this project. Cases in which innocent persons were convicted of a crime and later exonerated should be reviewed. We should identify the causes of wrongful convictions and determine and implement needed reforms to prevent recurring problems. This

includes a requirement to corroborate eyewitnesses and confidential informant testimony and meaningful penalties for prosecutorial misconduct.

Texas Democrats support the guiding principles of the Texas Youth Commission's Blue Ribbon Task Force Report, which recommend a TJJD environment that facilitates the appropriate educational and moral development of youth who would spend the least amount of time possible in the TJJD system; staffing capacity commensurate with the size and needs of the population; and a child-focused, family-centered, non-violent TJJD. These principles would be best realized in a regionalized, community-based system that admits youth to TJJD using research-based risk assessment and classification and provides specialized treatment for youth and families.

RE-ENTRY

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

- increase funding for the state prison system's Windham School District and restoration of Republican cuts to programs for inmates to take higher education courses, because literacy, education and job training ensure people leave prison and do not return;
- reduce recidivism rates by increasing rehabilitation and re-entry programs, with special emphasis on reducing functional illiteracy and 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;
- 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 reentry;
- allow appropriate partnerships with faith-based programs which address re-entry preparation and reduce recidivism risks;
- 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;
- enforce existing laws which re-instate an ex-offender's right to vote once they have paid their debt to society.

DEATH PENALTY

Despite 41 DNA exonerations in Texas in the last 9 years, Rick Perry says he never loses sleep over executing the innocent. Perry has overseen over 240 executions in Texas. Detailed research shows that the Texas death penalty system cannot insure that innocent and undeserving defendants are not sentenced to death. Death penalty exonerations have already revealed deep flaws in our State's criminal justice system.

Evidence - including scientific evidence, extensive studies by Innocence Project, major newspaper and university research strongly suggests that Texas has already executed innocent defendants including Carlos DeLuna, Ruben Cantu, and Cameron Todd Willingham. Former Governor Mark White has stated we must take every step to ensure there is never another innocent man executed.

The application of the death penalty in Texas is disproportionately applied to the poor and minorities. The system has allowed in the past the execution of juveniles, the mentally ill and poor defendants who had such inadequate counsel that their lawyers literally slept through their trials. Other states are increasingly rejecting the death penalty as evidenced by the legislatures in New Jersey (2007), New Mexico (2009), Illinois (2011), and Connecticut (2012) repealing the death penalty.

In order to promote public confidence and fairness in the Texas Criminal Justice system, Texas Democrats call for the passage of legislation that would abolish the death penalty in Texas and replace it with the punishment of life in prison without parole.

ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Democrats believe our legal system is the bedrock that protects and guarantees our rights and freedoms. Democrats believe that instead of taking the law into their own hands, all people must have full access to the courts and equal treatment before the law, with confidence that their grievances will be fairly adjudicated. We support:

- legislation to preserve the right to self-defense while restoring the duty to retreat when outside of the home to discourage and prevent vigilantism
- open access to the court system as guaranteed by the Texas Constitution, respect by the courts for jury verdicts, and the right to fair and impartial jury trials which cannot be waived by any contractual agreement;
- the right of every person to be tried by a jury that broadly reflects the ethnic makeup of the community, including legislation to eliminate the disgraceful practice of using all-white juries and grand juries in cases involving people of color;
- creating and adequately funding public defender offices across Texas as successfully sponsored by Texas Democrats in the 2010 Legislative Session and currently modeled in Harris County
- protection from unreasonable limitations on access to the justice system, including mandatory arbitration proceedings;
- affordable and efficient access to justice for all Texans through the ability to join together to seek redress for personal injuries and property damages;
- the full protection of due process of law for all Texans in all circumstances;
- improved access to a full range of legal services to assist low-income Texans;
- the unimpeded right to redress grievances to the government and report crime to the authorities without retaliation and harassment, which was denied by the Governor's veto of the Anti-SLAPP Bill;
- the nomination and appointment of qualified, competent persons to serve as Judges, and as members of State Boards and Commissions responsible for carrying out civil and criminal Justice in this State;
- the reversal of unjust provisions of "Proposition 12" that have denied Texans who have suffered severe harm the ability to redress their grievances in fair and open courts; and
- full access to an open, full and independent Executive Branch review process of a court decision, as opposed to a "rubber stamp" of a prior decision.
- Stronger enforcement of laws and punishment for white collar corporate criminals unity locations.

Protecting Democracy and Ethics

The democratic process is defined by the right to vote in a free and fair election with confidence that every vote will count. Many Republican politicians say voting is not a right but a privilege, and they have used the offices of government to erect barriers to voting and reward cronies and contributors. Furthermore, the electoral process has been corrupted by the influence of unlimited corporate spending stemming from the U.S. Supreme Court's 2010 Citizens United v. FEC ruling. Texas Democrats believe that money is not speech, and that human beings, not corporations, are persons entitled to constitutional rights. The public trust has been violated by abuse and corruption, and Texas Democrats support changes to restore faith in our government and the integrity of elections.

Free and Fair Elections Voters Can Trust

To ensure the right of voters to cast their ballots in a system that is free from intimidation, discrimination, or abuse by partisans or state and local officials, we support:

- vigorous Justice Department enforcement of the federal Voting Rights Act;
- passage of a State Voting Rights Act;
- the removal of election officials who use their office to engage in unlawful partisan activities to impact the outcome of elections;
- a system of election administration that keeps election officials accountable to the voters;
- better access to accurate voting system instructions to ensure no one is denied the right to vote due to language barriers, disability or voting systems;
- a Constitutional prohibition against mid-decade redistricting unless a court order determines that a redistricting plan violates legal or constitutional standards;
- redistricting standards and practices that demand compliance with the Voting Rights Act, discourage savaging regions and communities for partisan gain, and preserve the constituent-representative relationship to the extent possible to give voters the right to elect their representatives instead of letting representatives pick their voters;
- securing the integrity and outcome of election results by requiring that electronic voting systems provide a durable paper printout to allow votes to be verified, counted accurately, certified, and recounted, including a requirement that a voter verifiable paper ballot serve as the official ballot in recounts;
- opening the certification and selection process for voting systems to public review, testing and analysis;
- implementing rigorous oversight by a non-partisan commission consisting of qualified computer experts and programmers to perform logic and accuracy tests prior to deploying machines for elections, including practices and audit procedures such as parallel testing and risk-based audits with county access to all proprietary and/or open source codes;
- a chain of custody for all voting and tabulating machines, with security protocols for transport to the polling place and returning cast ballots to the counting station; and
- a requirement that the State Party Chairs be allowed to obtain “read and write” access permission to all Texas Election Administration Management (TEAM) database tables and fields with complete documentation, and appoint two liaison persons to attend all meetings called by the Secretary of State on TEAM matters and report findings on data security to the State Chair.

Encourage Voter Participation and Elimination of Voter Suppression

Although Texas consistently has one of the lowest voter participation rates among the 50 states, Republican politicians have used public office to suppress the vote and further restrict participation instead of working to increase it. Voting is a right, guaranteed by the sacrifices of many who died to protect it. Therefore, the Legislature must fund voter database modernization, including automatic registration when qualified citizens turn 18. Voter registration should be a lifetime status for all

qualified, non-felon Texas citizens, requiring only change of address documentation in person or on line --once registered, always registered. It is the responsibility for our State and County government in tandem only to 'suspend' or 'purge' voters for proven ineligibility, not merely for non participation.

Texas Democrats support:

- the principled and courageous efforts of Democratic legislators to defeat restrictive voter ID and proof of citizenship legislation that is not warranted by any evidence of voter impersonation at the polls and would serve only to reduce turnout among the elderly, poor, and people of color;
- expansion of the types of legal identification that can be used to verify residence when a voter does not have a voter registration card at the polling place;
- stronger penalties and stricter enforcement to prevent vote suppression;
- enhanced state funding and requirements for voter registration efforts by counties;
- prohibition of vote caging and full disclosure of county and state processes for purging voter rolls as well as publishing of lists of those purged;
- verifiable same day voter registration;
- a requirement that provisional ballots be counted unless a voters' residence is proven invalid;
- requiring presidential electors to cast votes consistent with the popular vote;
- removing restrictions on mail-in voter registration and mail ballot assistance that do nothing to prevent fraud;
- a mail ballot system open to all voters, with a permanent mail ballot option;
- funding for mandatory publication of all early vote and election day polling place locations and immediate publication of changes in those locations or voting hours; and
- responsible expansion of the vote center pilot program without closing existing precincts.

Texas Democrats oppose all efforts to restrict the legal rights of college students to vote where they attend college.

Restoring Trust and Ethical Government

To ensure that our campaigns are financed legally, fairly, and transparently, and an open and accountable government that honors the public's right to know, we support:

- the amendment of both the Texas and the U.S. Constitution to firmly establish that money is not speech, and that human beings, not corporations, are persons entitled to constitutional rights;
- a ban on corporate campaign contributions and absent an absolute prohibition, strict reporting requirements and regulation of corporate political advertising;
- stronger reporting laws to require the fair market value of gifts to public officials to be listed to provide public access to information about possible conflicts of interest and prevent those who seek favor from public officials from hiding conflicts of interest;
- full and timely disclosure of campaign contributions, expenditures, lobbying and other activities that can influence elections and government operations;
 - prohibiting former legislators and state agency executives from going through a "revolving door" to lobby former colleagues or previous employers for a specified length of time after leaving their office or position;
 - enhanced funding and enforcement tools for the Texas Ethics Commission;
 - requiring the Texas Legislature to record all votes and not just votes for final passage, comply with open meetings laws, and provide real-time internet access to voting records and amendments to provide public accountability;
 - adoption of state government policy to allow the public to use the internet to track state expenditures and activities, similar to federal transparency requirements authored by then Senator Obama;

- requiring state agencies to follow strict contracting guidelines to eliminate favoritism and “sweetheart” deals in awarding state contracts and to document any meetings or contacts with registered lobbyists or paid consultants regarding state contracts;
- continuing to elect judges while working toward a more diverse judiciary and meaningful judicial campaign finance reform;
- public financing for general election campaigns for elective office at all levels, beginning with state judicial elections; and
- strict enforcement of the prohibition forbidding the use of state tax money to pay contract lobbyists to lobby members of our congressional delegation.

RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

Texas Democrats believe all people possess inalienable rights that are protected by freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution, which government is duty-bound to protect. We believe in and support:

- equal opportunity and equal protection before the law for all people;
- full protection of civil and human rights;
- freedom from government interference in our private lives and personal decisions; and
- freedom of religion and individual conscience.

Democrats believe our Constitution is intended to prohibit discrimination in all forms. To protect our rights and freedoms, Democrats support:

- action against all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment;
- the full inclusion of all families in the life of our state, with equal respect, responsibility, and protection under law, including the freedom to marry and the Respect for Marriage Act;
- the repeal of the Federal Defense of Marriage Act, the Texas Defense of Marriage Act and the Texas Constitutional Marriage Amendment and oppose other attempts to deny the freedom to marry to same sex couples;
- strong enforcement of the James Byrd, Jr., Memorial Hate Crimes Act and the federal Matthew Shepherd Hate Crimes Prevention Act;
- preservation and enforcement of all state and federal disability rights laws, particularly the Americans with Disabilities Act;
- prevention of human trafficking and protection for victims of human trafficking;
- protection of free speech, including on the Internet, to ensure equal rights are guaranteed for any individual, business or corporation attempting to access published information;
- the right to privacy and protecting the confidentiality and privacy of personal, medical, and financial records - in both paper and electronic formats;
- full access to governmental records and information on matters of public interest and state employees' rights and duty to provide factual answers to the public in response to requests for information on matters of public interest;
- proper court authorization and review of all surveillance and wire-tapping in full compliance with the Fourth Amendment of the Constitution;
- repeal of provisions of the Patriot Act inconsistent with the Bill of Rights and the right of habeas corpus;
- the adoption of a constitutional amendment to provide all eligible voters an absolute right to vote in all public elections;
- reinstatement of the Fairness Doctrine of the Federal Communications Commission to prevent using exclusive federal licensing of broadcast frequencies as a prior restraint on speech;
- rejection of ideological censorship of public libraries and textbooks; and

Native American nations' rights to self-identification and self-rule.

MARRIAGE EQUALITY

Texas Democrats join President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden in calling for and affirming equal rights including marriage equality for all Americans. We, along with our President and Vice President, recognize that same sex marriages should be valid and legal in America.

Texas Democrats support President Obama and the United States Justice Department in recognizing that the Federal Defense of Marriage Act is unconstitutional and in refusing to defend DOMA in any Federal Court proceeding. We call for the total repeal of DOMA.

Eight states and the District of Columbia have now recognized marriage equality and have legalized same sex marriages.

Texas Democrats support the full inclusion of all families in the life of our state, with equal respect, responsibility, and protection under law, including the freedom to marry. Government has no business putting barriers in the path of people seeking to care for their family members, particularly in challenging economic times. We support the Respect for Marriage Act. We support the repeal of the Federal Defense of Marriage Act, the Texas Defense of Marriage Act and the Texas Constitutional Marriage Amendment and oppose other attempts to deny the freedom to marry to loving same sex couples.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Texas Democrats believe government should scrupulously honor every Texan's right to religious freedom, as guaranteed by the Texas and U.S. Constitutions and protected by the separation of church and state. We believe:

- government must not inhibit the free exercise of religion;
- 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
- 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 impose our personal religious observances on others.

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 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 also recognize that no Texan should be forced to live under religious doctrines to which he or she does not subscribe.

IMMIGRATION

The Texas Democratic Party recognizes that we are a nation of immigrants. Here in Texas, we honor those immigrants, their children and their grandchildren, who fought and died to protect our freedom and earn the blessings of liberty for themselves and all Americans.

Today, immigrants come to our country from all areas of the world. Some come legally and many come without documentation, but almost all are driven by economic necessity. Texas Democrats recognize that a workable immigration policy requires a no-nonsense solution instead of proposals that serve only as political props and wedge issues designed to incite fear for partisan gain. For years, the politics of division has prevailed and the federal government has failed to do its job. A clear and uniformly enforced federal immigration policy is long overdue. The fundamental tenets of a comprehensive immigration policy require an aggressive yet practical approach, including measures that would:

- stand with President Obama and demand that Congress pass the DREAM Act, thus creating a path for children of undocumented parents, who were brought here as minors, a path to earn legal status and future citizenship by going to college or serving in the military;
- secure all our borders, including the allocation and use of sufficient resources to equip and maintain a well-trained Border Patrol with the manpower needed to effectively police our borders;
- eliminate bureaucratic logjams that delay and frustrate those who attempt to follow the rules to become citizens;
- reform the Immigration Nationality Act to address the millions of workers that are in our country illegally by establishing a path to bring them out of the shadows of the underground economy, thus preventing unscrupulous businesses from taking advantage of their indentured services that is detrimental to legitimate businesses and to American workers that play by the rules;
- strengthen the non-immigrant Guest Worker regulations to prevent employers from securing the many types of Visas used to bring in foreign workers when there is such high unemployment in this country;
- implement changes to the tax codes and the “IRS Safe Harbor Rules”, that allows business owners to misclassify “Employees as Independent Contractors” in order to avoid checking workers employability status under the I-9 process required by all employers;
- provide for strict enforcement, appropriate punishment and economic sanctions against those who profit by hiring undocumented workers;
- enforce existing immigration laws;
- emphasize economic security and development on both sides of the border;
- continue the United States’ constitutional provision making all persons born in this country citizens of this country;

Texas Democrats also realize that politicians in this state and many other states are exerting their state rights by passing their own discriminatory immigration laws that interfere with the Federal Government’s regulation and enforcement processes, and we strongly oppose:

- any law that would, through its enforcement, result in discrimination; intimidation or victimization of citizens based on their race, ethnicity or appearance;
- any law that would force law enforcement agencies to divert limited resources and manpower from their primary duty to protect citizens and prevent crime in order to enforce immigration policy that is the responsibility of the federal government;
- any law that would prohibit ethnic studies classes;
- any law that could make it more difficult for a qualified citizen to exercise the right to vote;
- any effort to expand the existing border fence without regard to the border economy, environmental impact or property rights;
- measures that attempt to improperly limit the constitutional requirement to provide for the health, education, and safety needs of individuals and communities.

Ultimately, the best interest of the United States requires us to help our neighboring countries develop their economies and create better paying jobs for workers in those countries to make the lure of a better paying job in the U.S. less attractive. We believe it is the height of hypocrisy for Republicans who consistently support outsourcing jobs to cheap labor markets overseas to claim they are “protecting American jobs” with extreme immigration proposals.

Veterans

To honor the men and women who serve our country, state and federal policy should demonstrate respect for their service and sacrifices made by ensuring a smooth transition from military to civilian life and providing benefits to honor our veterans’ service.

We support the continuation and enhancement of veteran’s benefits, including post military training, medical and disability. We support a new G.I Bill to increase educational benefits for veterans to fully cover the cost of a college degree and related housing expenses. We support the Texas Veterans Land Board, which enables veterans to purchase land and homes at favorable terms and interest rates.

In many VA hospitals and medical facilities, scandalous budget shortfalls have become so severe that they stopped scheduling new appointments, were unable to replace doctors and nurses when they left, and were even unable to keep surgical suites operational due to a lack of equipment. Texas Democrats support:

- professional licensing for skills learned in the military, like “Troops to Teachers;”
- job training for veterans;
- adequate and affordable health insurance coverage and health care services for veterans and their families, including mental health care services;
- restoring funding and service cuts and expanding clinical services at VA Medical Centers;
- legislation that appropriately addresses the role of Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI) and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) among members of the armed forces and ensures proper treatment for all veterans and members of the armed forces with disabilities.
- The full extension of benefits to families of veterans who sustain partial or permanent disabilities, including post injury and PTSD individual and family counseling, cost of living monthly allowances, childcare assistance, tuition assistance for dependent children, and assistance in job training or referral for the spouse of the veteran;
- the establishment of a new, full service VA Hospital in South Texas and restoration of the Kerrville Veterans’ Administration Hospital to its past status of general medical facility to care for veterans in the Hill Country;
- extending the right of full citizenship to non-citizen veterans who have served our country;
- programs to encourage and support veterans and their families to obtain higher education, such as expanding the Hazlewood Act to permit veterans who have not fully utilized their entitlement to pass on any remainder of the unused credit hours to their children;
- state legislation to allow Texas veterans to use their G.I. Bill benefits and Hazlewood Act benefits concurrently; and
- student loan forgiveness in exchange for public service, including military service, Peace Corps, Teach for America, AmeriCorps, and similar programs.

Supporting the Men and Women of the Military

Texas should demonstrate its support for military families and communities. We insist that our military members on active duty and in the Reserve receive fair pay and allowances. They must be the best

organized, trained, and equipped fighting force possible. We encourage city, county, state, and federal elected officials to review present benefits and determine how they can be enhanced. We also demand truth in recruiting, including a provision that parental permission be required to authorize the recruitment of minors. Texas Democrats support:

- providing appropriate personal and vehicle protection for all combat military personnel;
- programs that assist families of deployed service members in managing difficulties created by longer and more frequent deployments of Guard and Reserve personnel; such as counseling, debt service delays, tax deferrals, and basic needs assistance;
- initiatives to financially assist families of service members who suffer an extended loss of employment income due to extended or repeated deployments;
- interstate cooperation to enable the successful transition of families forced to move from one state to another, including changes involving public education, job searches, and health care continuity;
- preventing predatory lending practices targeted at military personnel and their families, such as payday loans and sale-leaseback transactions;
- a prohibition of a military draft absent a congressional declaration of war; and an end to practices that change deployment and other terms of service for existing military personnel in the middle of the game that amount to a draft in disguise;
- the right of all military personnel to serve without discrimination, sexual abuse or prejudice;
- the right of female soldiers and dependents to have the same access to the full range of reproductive choices and related services that are provided to others;
- adequate time off between deployments; and
- providing any Texas Veteran that has a disability associated with service in the Armed Forces that is assigned a percentage of disability by the Veterans Administration, be granted the same percentage reduction in junior college or college tuition, room, board, books, and any other cost of obtaining additional training or education in a state-supported Junior College, Community College, or Four Year College or University.

Transportation

With volatile energy costs making it more costly for Texans to go to work and earn a living, our rapidly growing population requires a transportation system that will safely and efficiently move more people, goods and products to expand economic opportunity. The guiding principles for a transportation system that benefits all Texans should include the impact of transportation on the economy, public safety, affordability, reduced congestion and environmental quality. To that end, we support:

- feasibility studies for new roads that include assessment of the impact on all factors in surrounding rural or urban environments as well as traffic congestion;
- the development of a state rail plan for Texas to be eligible for federal high-speed rail funding;
- light rail and mass transit improvements as key initiatives in building the state's transportation infrastructure. This will help meet our growing transportation needs, enhance quality of life, attract a vibrant business environment, improve our air quality, and take full advantage of federal funding.
- innovative funding mechanisms to provide needed roadways and develop reliable and affordable public transportation systems as necessary to alleviate congestion and move people and goods efficiently without damaging communities and the environment; and stop any diversion of "gas tax" funds except where provided by the Texas Constitution;
- designing projects to avoid unnecessarily dividing communities or having detrimental impact on land owners;

- prohibiting the use of any a new or existing, publicly-owned roadway facility or right of way to be operated, leased, or managed by private companies, including foreign companies, for profit. No private land should be taken for toll roads to be operated by private companies. We oppose double taxation imposed by conversion of existing roads to toll roads.
- reform of the Texas Department of Transportation in the wake of its infamous billion dollar “bookkeeping error”;
- developing rail and mass transit systems that don’t harm the environment or infringe on property rights, and utilizing the Mobility Fund to convert existing freight lines into passenger rail;
- a requirement that TxDOT incorporate pedestrian and bicycle modes into transportation projects, including connecting them to mass transit to offer Texans alternatives to automobiles to reduce traffic congestion; and
- a requirement that TxDOT mitigate flooding by building water detention ponds with unpaved floors that absorb and filter runoff water, and that these ponds be used to create green space for hike and bike trails.
- improve signage that provides information and directions to motorists.
- fair enforcement of traffic laws. We oppose unfair adjustment of automatic ‘red light cameras.’

Foreign Policy and National Security

Texas Democrats subscribe to President John F. Kennedy’s description of Foreign Policy:
“Let us never negotiate out of fear, but let us never fear to negotiate.”

Texas Democrats believe peace and prosperity is assured by maintaining a strong national defense. We further believe that military action should be used as an instrument of foreign policy only as a last resort, authorized by a Congressional declaration of war, or as allowed by our Constitution. We believe the most important element in our military is the individual soldier, and it is absolutely critical that we keep faith with those who serve and defend us.

President Obama exhibited real leadership in ordering a skilled Navy SEAL operation that killed the leader of one of the worst international threats to security that the United States has ever faced. Not all the threats we face are foreign – domestic right-wing terrorists perpetrated the Oklahoma City bombing. Texas Democrats believe that, whatever their source, attacks against America and Americans must be prevented and those who attempt them must be brought to justice.

Foreign Policy AND NATIONAL SECURITY Objectives

Texas Democrats believe America must:

- modernize our military and diplomatic organizations to meet the threats from non-state groups and those nations that provide them support and protection;
- utilize the advice, wisdom and experience of our professional military officers and diplomats;
- create a new era of alliances for a 21st Century world and lead international efforts to prevent the further spread of nuclear arms and to eliminate weapons of mass destruction;
- support President Obama’s policy of preventing the Iranian government from obtaining a nuclear weapon;
- encourage Iraq’s government to devote its oil revenues and budget surplus to reconstruction and development;
- immediately develop and implement a plan for reconstructing Afghanistan's civil and economic infrastructure;

- minimize civilian casualties, which endanger relations essential to our goals; to the maximum extent possible consistent with the safety of our troops;
- withdraw major U. S. troop support from Afghanistan as rapidly as possible, consistent with their safety and in a manner that does not destabilize the region and place more lives in danger;
- maintain our long-standing policy that a true, mutually respectful peace with safe and secure borders and governments dedicated to peace and democracy for Israelis and Palestinians can only result from direct negotiations between willing and responsible partners;
- work to ensure that the new governments and societies emerging from the “Arab Spring” become true democracies that are also respectful and protective of the rights of ethnic and religious minorities within their borders, rather than becoming havens for intolerance and terror;
- withdraw support for agencies and programs that promote hatred and intolerance;
- establish a rapid deployment force to provide immediate assistance to victims and survivors of national disasters throughout the world;
- secure our information and telecommunications technology infrastructure from cyber piracy and attack;
- assist economic development of our allies, particularly neighbors where high unemployment creates immigration pressures;
- become a leader, not a follower, in reducing worldwide greenhouse gas emissions and in mitigating the effects of global warming;
- adopt policies designed to free us from dependence on the resource of any nation or region, including foreign oil;
- Texas Democrats strongly oppose the regime-sponsored violence occurring in Syria and call for the immediate transfer of power as stated by the Secretary of State.

Democrats also believe that our foreign policy must also enhance the economic and employment conditions of American workers and restore our balance of trade to eliminate dependence on foreign credit. Therefore, American policies must:

- encourage the sale of domestic products and services in foreign markets;
- oppose foreign practices that effectively restrict access to markets for American businesses;
- require all trade agreements to establish a “level playing field” by prohibiting child and other exploitative labor practices, mandating environmental standards comparable to those required of domestic American businesses, and by requiring wage practices that lift foreign workers out of poverty;
- consider those trade and human rights practices of other nations before extending aid and security protections to them
- oppose foreign-owned U.S. toll roads that require Americans to contribute to the balance-of-trade deficit when they travel on local roads.

In our pursuit of national security, Texas Democrats support:

- a 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, together with a definite timetable for the closure of the Guantanamo Bay detention facility ;
- establishing legal oversight over all privatized military security forces operating under U.S. law or the laws of countries in which they operate, because military security contractors like Blackwater operating without government oversight have put America at risk;
- an international ban on the use of anti-personnel mines and cluster bombs;

- furthering policies for a safe and peaceful world that focus on practical, nonviolent solutions to the problems of domestic and international conflict;
- a fully-staffed and equipped air traffic control system that is an inherent function of the federal government essential to national security and should never be subject to privatization;
- strengthening port security, including inspection of currently unchecked containers; and
- the mission and efforts of the United States Peace Corps as it fosters peaceful relationships with other nations.