



2014 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 worker 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;

- for all people, including those with disabilities.

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

- by appropriately staffed, trained and equipped military, law enforcement and emergency services;
- by retirement and pension security;
- by 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, engineering and mathematics.

PUBLIC EDUCATION FUNDING

Education must be a budget priority – to assure the promise that “where you start out does not determine how far you can go.” Texas Democrats believe:

- the state should settle the lawsuit that over two-thirds of our school districts had to file after the Republican leadership repeatedly violated their constitutional obligations, rather than wasting even more of the taxpayers’ money defending the indefensible;
- the state should establish a 100% equitable school finance system with sufficient state revenue to provide every child the opportunity to learn in an exemplary program;
- the state should equitably reduce reliance on "Robin Hood" recapture;
- state funding formulas should fully reflect all student and district cost differences and the impact of inflation and state mandates; and
- the federal government should fully fund all federal education mandates and should reform and fully fund the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

The Republican legislative majority has shortchanged education funding every session since taking control of both houses, starting in 2003 when they cut billions from public education. In 2006, they froze per pupil funding and placed stringent limits on local ability to make up for the state's failures. In 2011, Republicans refused to pay for the continued rapid growth of our student population and cut dollars for current students – to the tune of \$5.4 billion over two years, a reduction of almost \$600 per student each year. Worse yet, in both 2011 and 2013, they left more than enough in the state “Rainy Day Fund”—which was created to prevent cutting services during an economic downturn—to avoid these cuts and cover the cost of enrollment growth and the many unfunded mandates they have added.

Democrats, led by Wendy Davis, Leticia Van de Putte and the House Democrats, fought those cuts and then worked to reverse some of the cuts in 2013, but per pupil funding in Texas schools still ranks 46th in the nation, some \$2,600 below the national average and almost \$500 per pupil less than it was in the 2008-9 school year. Yet the Republicans call for further education cuts while adding additional unfunded mandates and working 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.

GREAT SCHOOLS, GREAT TEXAS

"Texas needs to ensure that all Texans have the skills and education to be competitive in the increasingly international economy. The future of Texas will be increasingly determined by minority populations, particularly Hispanics, and how well they do, in educational and economic terms, is how well Texas will do." - Steve Murdock

Texas Democrats believe every child should be provided the opportunity to succeed - not just a select few. The changing demographics of the current and future Texas student population poses new challenges that must be met to keep the Texas economy strong and our communities prosperous. Texas Democratic leaders and candidates have worked with the skilled educators and studied years of respected, peer-reviewed research to develop a platform that will provide

every student that opportunity and meet the challenges facing us today with the same optimism Texans have always shown to meet the challenges of their times.

Great Start: Expand Pre-K and Early Childhood Education

Learning foundations are best established during early childhood. An early education helps to ensure that students from all backgrounds begin to cultivate the skills that will last the rest of their lives. We believe:

- every eligible Texas child must have access to high-quality, full-day Pre-K and kindergarten;
- eligibility for Pre-K programs beyond most in-need students can be expanded by implementing a sliding scale for families above the 185% federal poverty level;
- the Texas Education Agency should establish appropriate quality standards for Pre-K programs to insure that students are receiving the highest quality instruction;
- early childhood reading programs must insure that every student reads at grade-level by the third grade;
- professional development and training must equip teachers with the most effective techniques for maximizing reading comprehension;
- local schools should be encouraged to actively promote early childhood reading through partnerships with the community;
- state support should be provided for family literacy programs that enable parents to assist their children;
- early intervention programs must ensure that every child also performs at grade level in Social Studies, Math, and Science; and
- resources must be restored to rebuild the community of teachers' aides that was lost after the massive school funding cuts of 2011.

Great Teachers: Every Student Should Have a Highly Qualified Teacher

Too many young teachers become discouraged and half of new teachers leave the profession within five years, leaving far too many students taught by teachers who are not certified to teach the subjects they are teaching. There are many reasons for this teacher shortage. Texas teachers' pay averages \$7,000 to \$8,000 below the national average and 20 percent below private-sector pay for comparable jobs within the state. Under Republican rule, over the past decade teachers and all school employees also have seen their share of health-care costs rise dramatically, while benefits have deteriorated. Surveys indicate that 44% of our teachers must take second jobs during the school year. Budget cuts force Texas teachers to spend \$700 a year of their own money – on average – to provide classroom supplies for their students. Democrats believe we must work to attract the best teachers and keep them in our classrooms instead of driving them out of the profession, and we have a plan to help recruit, train, and retain high quality Texas teachers:

- Take steps to bring Texas teacher pay in line with the national average.
- Increase the state contribution to health insurance for educational employees, which has remained stagnant for 12 years while premium costs have eaten away at take home pay for teachers and all school employees.

- Guarantee early acceptance to college and a Texas teaching job to a high school student in the top 20% of his or her class during junior year who commits to a teaching career upon completing his or her requirements and certification.
- Enhance the Teach for Texas Loan Repayment Program for aspiring teachers to meet student demand by providing necessary resources to assist all qualified students, tying loan forgiveness to years of teaching service, opening the program to all fields of study and allowing current teachers to go back to school to get additional certification in critical needs fields.
- Reestablish the Educational Aide Exemption to help teacher's aides to go back to school to get certified as full-time teachers.
- Prepare high school students for careers in teaching by creating, within the Public Services Endorsement newly established for high school students under HB 5, an educational pathway specific to teaching readiness, and by encouraging school districts to develop supplemental programs designed to inspire interested students to pursue a career in teaching.
- Restore, respect and safeguard the rights and benefits of education employees.
- Guarantee that every class has a teacher certified to teach that subject.
- Recruit and train teachers who reflect the state's diversity.
- Provide a mentor or master teacher for every novice teacher.
- Oppose test-based performance pay.
- Respect support personnel by providing them due process employment rights and a salary schedule to reduce favoritism and provide a level of job security.

Great Classrooms: Ending Overcrowding and High Stakes Standardized Testing

Crowded classrooms and an overreliance on high stakes standardized tests leave little time for teachers to teach and students to learn. Three decades of research have consistently shown that smaller class sizes improve student performance. Despite the recent reduction in high school end-of-course exams, high stakes testing in the early grades creates an environment that is an impediment to learning. Recent actions by the Texas Education Agency could raise the testing stakes even higher despite parental and teacher opposition, if TEA is allowed to use compliance with a federal waiver to impose a statewide test-based "Value Added Measure" as a teacher evaluation requirement, despite research that demonstrates such measures are not valid. Texas Democrats believe there is a better way to create an excellent classroom learning environment to help students think critically, be creative and succeed:

- Extend appropriate class size limits to all grades and enforce those limits.
- Replace high-stakes tests that effectively punish students, teachers and schools, with multiple measures designed to diagnose student needs and improve instruction.
- Prohibit awarding hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars to corporations to develop high-stakes tests.
- Reject efforts to impose a corporate-designed test-based "Value Added" teacher evaluation system and base teacher evaluation on multiple measures designed by practicing educators.
- End inappropriate testing of students with disabilities whose individual education plans call for alternative assessments of their educational progress.

- Provide free, accurate and updated instructional materials aligned with educationally appropriate, non-ideological state curriculum standards and tests, including ethnic studies and environmental education programs for children and adults.
- Equip classrooms with free computers, internet access and digital instructional materials.
- Adequately define and fund programs targeted to increase student proficiency in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM).

Community Schools: Stopping the Hostile Private and Corporate Takeover of Neighborhood Schools

Parental and community involvement in neighborhood schools has long been the hallmark of successful public schools. That model offers a blueprint for restoring excellence in public education and provides real local control and accountability that detached, corporate-run schools simply cannot match. The forces of privatization see public education as a profit-making venture and have a three-step plan to take over our schools: cut funding, declare failure, and privatize. Texas Democrats see public education as a fundamental cornerstone of democracy, where the community educates our children to keep our communities and our country strong. Texas should:

- require every school to meet high standards and repeal so-called “home rule” statutes that would allow standards to be reduced and serve as a pathway to privatization;
- oppose the creation of a statewide so-called “achievement” or “recovery” school district that would grant control of a neighborhood school to Austin-based bureaucrats who could contract with private operators to run neighborhood schools without any local accountability;
- utilize existing statutes and encourage expansion of neighborhood charter schools that are literally run by parents and teachers who establish elements of curriculum and policy within state standards;
- strengthen state oversight and academic and financial standards for charter schools to provide the same level of accountability required of neighborhood schools that receive tax dollars;
- strengthen state oversight of home schooling;
- reject efforts to provide state funds for and shift students into privately operated, for-profit, low-quality unaccountable “virtual schools” at taxpayers’ expense; and
- oppose private school vouchers in all forms, including tax breaks for people or corporations.

GREAT OPPORTUNITIES FOR EVERY CHILD

Standardized testing fails to improve education, in large part because we do not have standardized students. Many children who enter school with unique needs have extraordinary potential, if we simply address their needs and provide them an opportunity to succeed. Texas should:

- provide and appropriately fund high-quality 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;
- support Title IX protections for gender equity in public education institutions;
- ensure that every student has access to appropriate academic counseling services, as well as psychological and social services provided by competent and licensed professionals;

- ensure that every school has a fully funded and staffed library, fully equipped with both print and electronic media, that is regularly open and accessible to students and faculty;
- provide universally accessible after-school programs for grades pre-K-12; and
- develop curriculum for and provide ethnic studies classes.

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;
- 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 age-appropriate sex education programs with an abstinence and contraception component, to reduce dropout rates due to unintended pregnancy; and
- access to affordable programs for adults who have dropped out of the education process.

RESPECTING RETIRED TEACHERS AND PROTECTING THEIR PENSIONS

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

- protecting the TRS defined benefit pension system against attempts to turn it into a risky 401-k plan that could put most retirees' pensions in danger;
- building on the successful efforts in the 2013 session that provided two-thirds of Texas teachers with a cost-of-living increase by providing a COLA for every retired teacher to restore their pensions' purchasing power;
- repealing the federal government pension offset and windfall elimination provisions that unfairly reduce Social Security benefits for educational retirees and other public employees; and
- improving the TRS-Care health insurance program for retired educators.

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 approving curriculum standards and textbooks that guide what our public school students learn. The damage they have done is no laughing matter. Even a conservative think tank, the Fordham Institute, calls the board's current social studies curriculum standards a "politicized distortion of history." Board members regularly dismiss the sound advice of professional educators and insult teachers who dare to speak out on how best to prepare students to succeed in a 21st-century Texas. They also try to censor and distort what students learn about topics such as the contributions of American heroes like Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta, the struggles for civil and equal rights, and the overwhelming scientific evidence supporting evolution and warnings about climate change. Politicizing our children's education is unlikely to encourage a company to relocate and bring jobs to Texas. Moreover, Republicans on the board 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 put the interests of our schoolchildren ahead of politics and ideology. We will realign curriculum and our children’s textbooks 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 the State Board of education should listen 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 research based anonymous surveys that allow parents, students and all employees to identify specific instances of bullying and 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. School must be a place for early interventions that block the cradle-to-prison pipeline—not a place where children who cause trouble are shunted into the criminal-justice system or the juvenile-justice system when behavior interventions have not even been tried.

Texas Democrats have taken the lead in passing legislation to eliminate disparities in discipline based on race, ethnicity, national origin, disability, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression or any other improper grounds. Texas Democrats also have enacted measures to stop indiscriminate use of misdemeanor ticketing for minor infractions on campus, and we have curbed indiscriminate expulsion or placement of students in disciplinary alternative education programs for trivial misconduct. Additionally, Texas Democrats oppose criminalization of school related disciplinary issues particularly truancy. The Texas Education Agency should be charged with investigating any patterns of apparent discriminatory enforcement or non-enforcement of discipline standards, including standards for out-of-school suspension, and corrective action must be required.

Students who are 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.

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 and financial aid policies threaten our ability to meet state “Closing the Gaps” goals essential to our economic future.

Republicans have cut general revenue funding for colleges and universities cumulatively by almost \$800 million since 2009 from the 2008-9 school year level of funding, despite dramatic growth in the number of students. Worse still, they substantially cut financial aid at the depth of the Bush Recession—precisely the time when the growth in students was greatest and their financial resources were lowest. Though Democratic lawmakers in 2013 restored funds that had been cut from TEXAS Grants, the Republican budget’s overall funding for financial aid is still \$134 million less than the appropriation for 2010-2011.

Republican “tuition deregulation”—insidiously named to imply an easing of burdens—has dramatically 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, fees and books;
- full funding of TEXAS Grants and reforming the mismanaged state Prepaid Tuition Program, to provide higher education to more Texans without excessive debt burden;
- programs to develop alternative re-payment plans for students struggling under significant debt burden by capping monthly payments and/or refinance existing loans to a lower rate tied to the current prime rate;
- legislation to reduce the inordinately high costs of college textbooks, technical manuals and other instructional materials;
- an increase in the maximum allowable financial aid set-asides;
- adequate compensation, security, professional status, and benefits for all faculty and fair market wages 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 to completion of bachelor’s degree to enhance learning and teacher preparation;
- enhanced, equitable funding for Prairie View A&M and Texas Southern University and for higher education in South Texas and all border communities;
- 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.

We support initiatives put forth by the President to curb abuse on the part of Sallie Mae and financial institutions that add burdensome penalties onto the balance of a student's debt, often making it impossible for such debtors to ever get out of debt.

In addition to funding cuts, Republicans have tried to undermine higher education programs by shifting funding from the cost of offering those programs to "performance funding" schemes that would reward the advantaged for their advantages and have sought to impose ideological interference into higher education curricula. Yet 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. In addition, faculty pay should reflect the pay that attracts and encourages teachers to stay in the teaching profession. 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;
- 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;
- support equitable pay for adjunct faculty; and
- oppose the elimination of existing academic programs that have classified as financially "low producing" by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.

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, shifting that burden onto tuition and local property taxes. The result is a 31.5% decrease in funding per enrolled student. In the last legislative session, Republicans further reduced formula funding for community colleges by 10% to fund their "performance funding" scheme, which is like saying you have to win the race before we'll pay for the gas.

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;

- requiring that any “incentive” funding be on top of formula funding rather than funded at the expense of the actual cost of operations;
- 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;
- funding for community colleges to assist local school districts in development of programs for the new career and technology endorsements and applied mathematics curriculum;
- sufficient funding for Adult Basic Education to fully cover the demand for services; and
- elimination of financial aid rules that penalize students who transfer to universities from community colleges.

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.

But Texas can do even more. For several years, Tulsa has offered tuition-free community college education to its high school graduates and Tennessee will do the same thing beginning this fall. We believe Texas should identify available revenue sources to achieve this goal.

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 competent and culturally diverse curricula, student activities, and student recruitment policies that promote understanding, respect and acceptance. Democrats are committed to the fundamental principles of academic freedom, equality of opportunity, and human dignity. We strongly oppose discrimination or harassment in any Texas institution of higher education against any person on the basis of race, sex, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, age, marital status, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, or military status.

GOOD JOBS BUILD STRONG COMMUNITIES

Hard-working Texans have a right to good jobs to support their families and invest in their future. Texas Democrats understand that we must make the economy work for all Texans, not just the wealthy. Hard-working families struggle to make ends meet while big corporations, and the wealthy who run them, continue to receive tax breaks and inordinate compensation levels while moving jobs overseas. Eliminating subsidies for corporations moving jobs overseas is

necessary to put Texas back to work in good jobs. Texas Republicans' reckless reductions in state funding for our colleges and universities have left Texas college students with massive debt upon graduation. This debt limits their opportunities and damages our economy by delaying home buying, automobile ownership and other major purchases for years. As the cost of education rises, working families are increasingly unable to send their children to college, preventing promising students from getting a higher education. Texas Democrats know that we must reduce the burden of college debt while providing for good jobs that strengthen communities.

We support the Democratic Statewide Business Commission for legislative study and assistance to the Texas Legislature. By such, the Democrats intend to make our Platform clear in favor of legislation that levels the playing field in support of Small Businesses and the common good of Texas jobs and the Texas economy. The Commission intends to eliminate the Republican approach to economic award package programs, as the Republican approach has almost exclusively favored big business.

The Texas Democratic Party is the partner of working families in the struggle to provide good jobs to strengthen our communities 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 working families.
- 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 paid for by closing tax loopholes.
- Bringing back to America manufacturing jobs that have been outsourced by multinational corporations.

Democrats will continue to rebuild the economy, create good 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 CEOs 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. We also believe that the franchise tax has left deep holes within the state budget. As such, Texas Democrats demand sound and effective oversight to prevent large corporations from being off the tax rolls permanently. We believe this will help fill the holes left in the state budget while also allowing small business the opportunity to use abatements to help grow their own local business; thus providing better jobs in the communities they serve.

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. All employees, including restaurant workers, farm workers, domestic workers and home health care workers, should be paid a living wage with provisions for decent health care and retirement benefits. As President Franklin Delano Roosevelt said in 1938 after signing the first minimum wage bill, “No business which depends for existence on paying less than a living wages to its workers has any right to continue in this country.” As long as we let big corporations under-pay their employees, our tax dollars subsidize their profits through welfare and Medicaid benefits to those employees. 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;
- the Texas Law prohibiting cities and governmental subdivisions from setting the minimum wage higher than the state minimum wage must be repealed;
- 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; therefore worker's compensation insurance should be mandatory for all employers;

- 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 – must be repealed and replaced with The Employee Free Choice Act so workers in Texas will have the right to self-determination on whether they will be represented by a Union through the collective bargaining process;
- 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, making it a violation of a person's civil rights if they are accosted in anyway while involved in a concerted activity, this law will provide protection from reprisals and allow workers to choose a union that can negotiate an employment contract that establishes wages, benefits and working conditions without intimidation or fear of losing one's job;
- 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;
- state and federal law should provide real protection to whistleblowers that expose wrongdoing and unsafe practices;
- the state should enact immediate increases in state contributions to state pension system to ensure the long-term financial health of the pensions funds;
- in supporting regular cost-of-living increases to state retirees from state-funded pension systems so state retirees can continue to contribute to the Texas economy; and
- employers should provide designated, sanitary nursing stations to better enable women's full and uncompromised participation in the labor force and maximize on the many health benefits to infants.

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 anti-trust 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.

To hold Wall Street, big business and government accountable for any civil or criminal misconduct in relation to the 2008 financial collapse, Texas Democrats believe that taxpayers are entitled to a share of any resulting court-awarded civil or criminal penalty 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. We support the immediate development of American built and operated spacecraft to ferry astronauts to the space station.

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. The Texas Democratic Party overwhelmingly endorses the re-introduction of the “Buy Texas/Buy American Bill” during the next legislative session and every session until passed and signed by the governor.

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.

In this regard, the Texas Democratic Party, in the interest of protecting democracy and promoting trade policy that benefits workers and the communities where they live, oppose Fast Track Trade Promotion Authority. Further, The Texas Democratic Party demands that the text

of the Trans-Pacific Partnership be made available to the public and that the United States Trade Representative seek meaningful, binding input from civil society, including labor, environmental groups, family farmers, public health and consumer protection organizations.

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 need for government services such as higher education and health care increases in bad economic times, precisely the time when government revenues fall. Democratic Texas legislators created the Economic Stabilization Fund – known popularly as the “Rainy Day Fund” — both to maintain essential services like education and meet that increased need. 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 two legislative sessions. We believe the fund should be used for its intended purpose to avoid unnecessary cuts in essential state services and to restore the cuts that have been unnecessarily made.

Furthermore, 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. That budget hole must be plugged.

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 state budget, and as a result, public school employees – including teachers –lost their jobs while more students were 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, significant cuts in financial aid and no new Texas Grants in some years.
- Traffic congestion is taking a toll and the Republican state water plan consisted of little more than praying for rain until Republicans punted to the voters the option of using part of the Rainy Day Fund as a Band-Aid on those vital needs.
- 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 have shifted the tax burden to local government, often requiring cities, counties and school boards to cuts services or increase local property taxes or regressive sales taxes.

Debt, diversions and deception in the budget process have also cost Texans dearly. Texans paid over \$500 million in fees on electric bills that were dedicated to assisting elderly, disabled and low-income families without heat and air conditioning, but that money was diverted to cover the budget shortfall, along with billions in park fees, hunting and fishing licenses, environmental permits, and 911 telephone fees. Now, that utility fee is being spent down with no future relief to be provided to the elderly, disabled and needy. State parks have been left to beg for donations to continue operations while some park facilities were closed. With many Texans no longer using landlines, 911 systems must be upgraded to handle cell-phone calls.

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 must reform state fiscal policy and develop reliable revenue sources that grow 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. Texas Democrats support policies to restore responsible state fiscal policy, including:

- enacting a constitutional amendment to prevent extending the sales tax to food and medicine and oppose Republican efforts to impose a sales tax to replace local property taxes with a tremendous increase in state sales taxes;
- reforming the Republican “margins tax” policy to provide fairness to all economic sectors, especially small businesses;
- eliminating tax loopholes and unproductive special breaks to simplify the tax system and provide revenue for essential services;
- reforming the property tax appraisal system to guaranty uniform appraisals and eliminate the loopholes that allow business, mineral and commercial properties to be taxed at far below market value, which shifts the burden onto homeowners;
- structured property tax relief to benefit all homeowners fairly and prevent families from being taxed out of their homes when land values rise inordinately, and extend the benefits of property tax relief to renters when landlords receive the full benefit of those reductions;
- requiring proposed revenue policy to be clearly established in a transparent process and determined by open, public debate and votes cast by elected representatives;
- requiring state government to spend taxes and fees for the specific purposes for which they were collected;
- adopting 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
- requiring independent audits of the Governor’s Texas Enterprise Fund and Emerging Technology Fund and enact and enforce regulations to prevent the continued use of the Funds as corporate slush funds that reward 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, place lifetime limits on health care, and prevent them from getting care when they need 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.

The previous health care system failed the American people, most especially Texans. Texas has the highest rate of uninsured among all 50 states, and more uninsured children than any other state. 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 accepting the over \$100 billion in federal dollars available to provide Medicaid coverage to the hard working families that have been denied healthcare by the state's Republican leaders;
- support guaranteed access to affordable, comprehensive universal coverage for all United States citizens and legal residents;

- 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;
- 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, believe Texans with chronic illnesses should have access to coverage at an affordable price and believe that insurance companies should not be allowed to violate the protections of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act by finding new ways to deny coverage;
- 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; and
- recognize that the most efficient and universal and adequate way to provide health care is through a single payer system.

PROTECTING AND IMPROVING 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 meaningful funding allocations for population and caseload growth, appropriate reimbursement rates for providers, and re-establishing local and state partnerships to maximize funds for Medicaid programs that assure coverage to low-income Texans.

Texas Democrats believe that accepting the billions of federal dollars for the state's Medicaid program can provide coverage to those working Texans that fall between the cracks and are denied or can't afford private coverage. It would keep those working Texans out of the emergency room where they often can't afford to pay their bills and would stop those costs from being passed on to Texans through higher insurance premiums and property taxes. Accepting the Medicaid dollars will keep the federal tax dollars of Texans in Texas instead of going to other states and it will create jobs and spur economic development in our communities.

By accepting the federal dollars, Texas would be able to provide coverage to more than 1 million estimated working families, veterans, women, and individuals with chronic or catastrophic illness like mental illness and cancer. Texans already make federal tax payments that finance these improvements in other states but have not been able to see any benefit at home.

Texas hospitals currently spend more than \$5 billion a year for uncompensated care, much of which comes from local property tax dollars. Texas Democrats believe the state should accept the federal Medicaid dollars to provide relief for hospitals and taxpayers.

Texas Democrats further support the continued work and future renewal of the Texas 1115 Transformation Waiver from the federal government that allows the state to fund hospitals, provide incentive payments for health care improvements and focus more resources to hospitals that serve uninsured patients.

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. Texas Democrats support the education and promotion of vaccinations and immunizations.

IMPROVING MEDICARE

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

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.

As with the Medicaid funds, 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.

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. We support the new coverage now allowed for by the Affordable Care Act for mental health and substance abuse services.

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. Untreated mental illness is now turning into a leading cause of mass violence throughout our nation.

We support the increase in funds for mental health in the state's budget but also recognize that the quickest, most efficient way to deliver quality mental health coverage to over one million Texans would be to accept the federal Medicaid dollars and deliver coverage to those Texans living in the coverage gap that have been denied coverage by Republican leaders.

We support the qualitative evaluation of all treatment modalities, interventions, agency and individual providers, so that proven, efficacious treatments - administered by the most qualified providers - are utilized to improve significantly the lives of service recipients. We also support sufficient private non-profit, state and federal funding for evaluation research and provider training to rank Texas number 1 in mental and behavioral health and substance abuse services in the nation.

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. State officials shall work with federal officials toward a goal of removing all obstacles currently prohibiting the use of generic drugs for the treatment of HIV and AIDS.

ELIMINATING HEALTH DISPARITIES

Health studies have long indicated disease and mortality do not uniformly impact everyone in our state. Millions of African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders, American Indians and LGBTQ Americans disadvantaged by income, gender, region, immigration status, and discrimination continue to live sicker and die younger than others. The Texas Democratic Party recognizes health disparities are avoidable and unjust.

We support the inclusion of gender reassignment surgery in Medicaid.

Eliminating health disparities will require educating the community on early detection and prevention, providing culturally appropriate services, improving access to health care, and addressing the physician and health professionals shortage in our state.

Obesity is a causal risk factor for diabetes and is directly linked to lifestyle behaviors, such as limited physical activity and poor eating habits. The State Demographer projects that by 2040, 14.7 million Texans will be obese and nearly 8 million Texas will suffer from diabetes. Therefore, we support efforts and programs focused on educating the community through early detection, highlighting the benefits of an active lifestyle and a healthy diet, and encouraging the practice of undergoing routine medical checkups to increase the likelihood of early detection.

Significant health disparities can be found among minority women in the area of reproductive health, such as cervical cancer among Hispanic women and sexually transmitted diseases and breast cancer among African American women. All of these diseases are largely preventable with early detection and proper protection. Therefore, we support efforts to ensure women are educated and have proper access to the best medicines, state-of-the-art prevention and detection techniques, as well as nutrition and exercise programs. Furthermore, we oppose any politicization of providers of reproductive health services and closures that further limit health care access to women.

Cultural and language barriers remain a challenge for large subsets of the Texas population, with 16.3% being foreign born individuals and over a third speaking a language other than English in their homes. For these reasons, we support efforts to make the body of physicians representative

of Texas demographics, such as offering pathways for minority students to enter the STEM fields. Additionally, we support efforts that focus on health professionals undergoing cultural and language training that enables them to better understand the communities they treat.

Access to health care is one of the leading causes of these disparities. Health care access is a serious statewide problem, with Texas leading all states in the number of uninsured, but this problem is compounded for Texas Hispanics and African Americans, who are 2.3 and 1.4 times more likely to be uninsured, respectively. For these reasons, we oppose any efforts to repeal the Affordable Care Act and support the acceptance of federal Medicaid dollars to ensure health insurance coverage for Texas families.

While the bulk of Texas resides in urban cores, there are millions of Texans living in rural counties. Over 70% of Texas counties have 1 physician or fewer per 1,000 people. Counties with physician shortages are disproportionately located in rural areas of the state. However, subsections of many urban counties face the same shortages. For these reasons, we support the innovative use of technology, including telemedicine, and medical intern assignments and incentives that improve access to essential medical services to medically underserved areas and populations by making more primary care, emergency, and other physician services available and more equitably distributed.

We support research, policy, and legislation that work to eliminate health disparities among racial, ethnic, geographic, socioeconomic, and other groups in order to enable all Texans to live longer, healthier, and more productive lives.

CHOICE AND FAMILY PLANNING

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

- trust the women of Texas to make personal and responsible decisions about when and whether to bear children, in consultation with their family, their physician, their personal conscience and/or their God, rather than having these personal decisions made by politicians;
- support preventive measures which have proven successful in 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 the access to emergency contraception free from judgment or pressure;
- support using sound, mainstream medical science and evidence-based data to guide reproductive health care policies;
- support targeted efforts to reduce high rates of teen pregnancy and repeat teen pregnancy in Texas, including the provision of evidence-based, accurate and effective, comprehensive age-appropriate sex education programs with an abstinence and contraception component, to reduce the rates of unintended pregnancy and 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 it 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 by all qualified providers in regulated, licensed medical facilities, rather than biased and non-medical activities in centers which are deceptive and unregulated;
- support women's access to affordable pre-natal care, including pregnancy insurance and pre-natal vitamins to support healthy pregnancies;
- support paid maternity and/or paternity leave to support healthy families;
- support women's access to accurate information about reproductive health and related resources;
- 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 therapies should be expanded without increasing or encouraging any high-risk procedures.

WOMEN

The Texas Democratic Party stands for the complete inclusion of Texas women in our state's affairs and respect the preservation of their autonomy and their rights. Equality and justice for all Texas women, in every part of our state, in every circumstance, in every condition, is a core value of our party.

Over the past 14 years, the Republican Party of Texas has maintained a targeted attack on the rights and autonomy of Texas women. The value of Texas women as equal participants in our democracy has been undermined in the name of "family values." The Texas Democratic Party is committed to ending the damaging policies and laws that threaten Texas women's economic and physical health.

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

The Texas Democratic Party recognizes Texas women are strong, independent and powerful. The Texas Democratic Party seeks to address persistent inequities that make women's economic, physical and legal well-being subject to circumstance, prejudice, sexism and antiquated views of women's role in society. As the Party that truly values Texas women and their families, the Texas Democratic Party:

- supports and affirms Texas women's equal rights at every level, including legal, personal and physical and opposes any attempts to limit those rights;
- opposes any and all attempts to overturn Roe v. Wade;
- supports the right to file suit for equal pay for equal work in state courts by enacting the Texas Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act that was vetoed by Gov. Perry without following customary procedures;
- supports strong enforcement of Texas laws relating to violence against women, including sexual assault and intimate partner violence, in order to encourage the reporting and conviction of these crimes;
- addresses disparities between women of color in all social spheres, including healthcare, criminal justice, and education; and
- opposes changes to voting laws that unfairly/disproportionately affect Texas women.

SECURITY FOR OUR FAMILIES

Just as we support responsible efforts to 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. It is therefore appropriate to raise the minimum wage so that those working a full time job can adequately care for their families. Requiring that employers pay a living wage will prevent our tax dollars from being used to subsidize corporate profits by providing healthcare, food and housing assistance to the employees of those corporations.

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. Rick Perry and the Republican controlled legislature have failed to serve Texans by choosing not to expand Medicaid as offered by the Affordable Care Act. This failure denies life protecting medical care to over one million Texans according to the Kaiser Family Foundation. Additionally failing to expand Medicaid burdens county hospitals with more uncompensated care since the Affordable Care Act reduces funding to those hospitals on the basis that it wouldn't be needed with more Texans covered by Medicaid and private insurance. We must expand Medicaid to address the needs of those currently in the gap between making too much to qualify for Medicaid under current rules and not enough to qualify for subsidies available under the Affordable Care Act.

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 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.

Due to the number of children harmed or that have died while in Texas foster care custody, we support a broad-spectrum, across the board overhaul and restructuring of the Texas HHC- Department of Family and Protective Services with emphasis on the foster care system.

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 support paid parental leave for mothers as well as fathers and without regard to marital status or sexual orientation.

LONG TERM SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

A recent study indicated Texas ranks 47th in the quality of long term care and care for persons with disabilities. 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” that would exempt Texas 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;
- effective oversight of the Dept. of Aging and Disabilities; and
- provision of sufficient resources for additional random audits, facilities inspections and ombudsmen.

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. 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.

Texas Democrats urge the removal of the cap on contributions in order to strengthen the program. Because seniors purchase different products and services, and those differences aren't

taken into account using the standard consumer price index, the CPI-E should be used for calculating cost of living adjustments to Social Security.

We oppose privatization of the Social Security program as fiscally irresponsible. We oppose all Republican federal budget plans to spend down and undermine the Social Security Trust Fund. 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 PROPERTY 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 including the misuse of fees. 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;
- predatory lending practices, such as unscrupulous payday loans and sale/lease back transactions; and
- unlabeled GMOs sold to the public.

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, and the elderly;
- 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;
- increasing the number of Section 8 housing vouchers and the availability of low cost financing for new and affordable rental housing;
- increasing programs and financial assistance for local communities relocating citizens who reside in the 100-year flood plain;
- opposing any law restricting state and local jurisdictions from making access to housing programs, benefits, rights, and legal protections available to people regardless of immigration status; and
- providing appropriate legal protection for those who suffer the consequences of unjust evictions.

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 policies 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 President's Climate Action Plan and the EPA's historic carbon pollution reduction initiative, the Clean Power Plan, and the proposed rules to cut carbon dioxide emissions from existing power plants by 30% (below 2005 levels) by 2030;
- the development of technical and academic programs and research in renewable energy at state post secondary institutions;
- the development and use of diverse energy technologies to maximize the availability of non-polluting energy produced by renewable resources via fee free net metering of all renewable energy sources to create base-load electricity and expand the grid system;
- sales tax exemptions and other incentives for Texas homeowners and businesses to "go renewable" and to allow renewable system owners to get credit on electric bills for extra energy such systems produce and to allow Texans to lease renewable energy systems;
- 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 after verifiable and thorough review of the deleterious effects of hydraulic fracturing (fracking);
- 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 government 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 electricity and alternative fuels;
- greater scrutiny and regulation of pipelines which transport diluted bitumen (Canadian tar sands oil) to protect landowners and communities affected by spills or impacted by increased levels of air pollution resulting from the refining of this foreign product;
- reduced reliance on coal-fired plants in order to protect health and reduce pollution;
- investigating the 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 to include all stakeholders to develop policies to implement the President's rules to reduce emissions from old power plants. We recognize that climate change is a real and serious threat that is causing drought, crop failures, heat waves, more

torrential storms, and extreme climate events. We recognize that Texas has some of the dirtiest coal plants in the nation and our residents are at great risk from the health effects of carbon pollution and climate disruption. We recommend a statewide energy policy that will spur economic development and reduce carbon emissions in Texas through the use of renewable energy and energy efficiency;

- utilization of natural geothermal sources for commercial and industrial applications;
- state minimum standard set-back distances as a requirement for oil & gas wells, collection, and condensate tanks in relation to schools, hospitals, parks, and other vulnerable communities;
- requiring the disclosure of previous oil and gas activity on property deeds; and
- efforts to protect our cities, towns and communities from the dangers of “bomb trains.”

ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC LAND

We respect the consensus among the vast majority of climate scientists and other specialists who agree that we are seeing unprecedented weather events and changes to the climate which are likely due to human activity. On May 24, 2014, a team of more than 300 experts guided by a 60-member Federal Advisory Committee produced the National Climate Assessment, which was extensively reviewed by the public and experts, including U.S. federal agencies and a panel of the National Academy of Sciences. The Assessment made clear that our climate has already changed, and that droughts, wildfires, and superstorms are the result of runaway climate disruption. When crops fail, when towns get flooded, and when heatwaves send kids and seniors to the emergency room, it is clear that all of us are already paying the price for climate disruption. We feel that human-induced climate change requires urgent action.

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 AND AVAILABLE WATER

Texas Democrats understand that global climate change has accelerated and recognize that natural and man-made droughts and floods and changes in emerging energy policy must be

addressed as part of a comprehensive federal and state approach to water conservation and control.

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;
- a well-funded state water education campaign to inform Texans of the sources of their water and how to conserve and protect those water resources;
- the development and implementation of effective drought response plans by public water suppliers;
- the protection of Texas bays, estuaries, in-stream flows, and wetlands with regulations and with incentives for voluntary actions;
- clear authority and resources to regional groundwater conservation districts 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;
- research and understanding of the state's groundwater resources and the hydrologic connections between groundwater and surface water; and
- actions to prevent depletion and exploitation of limited state water resources by banning the use of non brackish water for hydraulic fracturing or fracking, and by "water wildcatters" through open space acquisition to protect Texas aquifers and watersheds that provide sole-source drinking water for millions of Texans.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION, REGULATION AND ENFORCEMENT

Environmental protection, regulation, and enforcement is essential to preserve the health of our people, the quality of life, and to secure long-term economic growth. It is vital that the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) 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.

We believe Texans have the right to know whether hazardous chemicals and materials are being stored in their communities, and that state elected officials should recognize that right and act accordingly.

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:

- human health should be paramount in the decision by TCEQ and EPA to grant either an air or wastewater permit;

- there are cleaner technologies/fuel sources and 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;
- in opposing the destruction of our natural resources by coal strip mining;
- in the enforcement of the Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act for all industries;
- in the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in its efforts to cut carbon pollution from existing power plants through the proposed rules and initiatives in the Clean Power Plan;
- 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;
- in 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;
- in strengthening the violation penalties so that it does not pay to pollute;
- in 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;
- in 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;
- in the rights of all citizens to participate in the permitting process and contested hearing in order to protect their property, health and the environment;
- in the enactment of laws and regulations to protect low-income communities and communities of color from environmental racism and environmental injustice;
- in halting importation of radioactive waste to Texas from around the nation due to risks of water contamination and transportation accidents, and oppose efforts to expand the waste volume and radioactivity at the site. No more radioactive waste disposal agreements should be allowed by the TCEQ or approved by the Compact Commission until the long overdue contested case hearing regarding licensing of the radioactive waste dump is held and completed. We oppose Governor Perry's push to store or dispose of the high-level radioactive in our state, since it is the most dangerous of all radioactive waste, consisting mainly of spent fuel rods of nuclear reactors, and no study has determined that there is a safe site for high level radioactive waste in Texas;
- in opposing the building of the Keystone XL tar sands pipeline and encourage the President and Secretary of State to deny the permit to build the northern segment. We oppose any additional expansion of the Keystone XL in Texas, as we believe the potential costs to the public health far outweigh the benefits of this project both in terms of the environment and to individual property owners whose land may be irreparably harmed by this foreign-owned project;
- in opposing the potential contamination of Texas' land, air and water by all proposed Canadian tar sands pipelines, and call upon Congress to strengthen the authority of the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) to regulate the transportation of tar sands diluted bitumen throughout Texas and the United States;

- 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 withdrawals and recycling or appropriate disposal of tainted water; and a prohibition of known carcinogenic or toxic chemicals used in this process;
- efforts to protect our cities, towns and communities from the dangers presented by the dramatic increase in shipments of highly flammable oil and gas products by train; and
- in 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. We believe that:

- the members of the Railroad Commission should use their regulatory power as a means of protecting the health, welfare and property of Texans, rather than using it as a political tool;
- 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 impact of methane emissions on climate should be recognized and controlled;
- political contributions to Railroad Commissioners from the oil and gas industry should be banned;
- penalties levied by the Railroad Commission should be significant enough to deter energy production practices that cause pollution;
- the Legislature should review the ethics and rule of conduct of the Railroad Commission's elected offices as it relates to its recusal policy and revise as necessary to ensure the commissioners' awareness of, and compliance with, these requirements;
- the statutory funding gap in the Oil and Gas Regulation and Clean-up fund should be increased from \$20 million to at least \$30 million, and the same fund's floor should be increased from \$10 million to \$25 million;
- legislative action should be taken to direct the Railroad Commission to study and use and development of telecommunication technology designed to increase the transparency of, and the public's participation in, agency hearing processes, and better protect the rights of Texas mineral owners and land owners;
- legislative action should be taken to require the Railroad Commission to implement a transparent process to confirm that entities declaring common carrier status for pipelines are actually operating as common carriers and not as private entities. Such legislation should also establish a process for landowners to contest a determination by the Railroad Commission that an applicant is a common carrier;
- legislative action should be taken to direct the Railroad Commission to ask for expanded authority over interstate pipelines to inspect, monitor and review pipeline safety and maintenance to assist the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration in its federal regulatory responsibilities; and
- legislative action should be taken to direct the Railroad Commission to require pipelines that transport "diluted bitumen" (tar sands crude oil) to protect Texas' natural resources and its land and water by establishing a state pipeline liability trust fund similar to the U.S. Spill

Liability Trust Fund which currently requires operators of conventional oil pipelines to pay into, but exempts participation by those pipelines that transport tar sands crude.

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;
- incentives for communities to provide residential recycling.

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

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 in many parts of our state has made this a particularly urgent issue. We support the enhancement of water conservation programs, wetlands preservation actions, ground water recharge, desalination (with appropriate energy sources and proper disposal concentrate), and storm water runoff controls. We recognize that the needs of water for agricultural production must be balanced with the needs for drinking water, but we encourage

the use of drought-tolerant and water-conserving outdoor landscaping by urban and suburban residents. We specifically call on the Texas Legislature to strictly regulate the amount of fresh water supplies and encourage water recycling for hydraulic fracturing and other high volume and industrial uses. We further call on the Legislature to fund and enhance emergency programs to assist communities whose local water supplies are disrupted by drought conditions. Further, we urge the State Legislature and the federal government to provide substantial grant funding to assist rural communities in the construction of Reverse Osmosis (R/O) facilities to recycle waste water into potable water and pursue other recycling and reuse options.

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 are less 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 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. Additionally, we support the expansion of Medicaid as called for in the Affordable Care Act. At a minimum of state expense, this expansion would supply preventive medical care to an uncovered population, ease tension on emergency rooms, supply desperately needed revenues to rural hospitals, help reduce the cost of insurance premiums, help lower property taxes, create more good paying jobs and boost the state’s economy. We firmly believe that the failure of our Republican officeholders to embrace this opportunity for purely political reasons is beyond irresponsible.

While our Party’s position on public education is fully outlined elsewhere in this Platform, it is not possible to create a section on rural Texas without noting the essential relationship between rural areas and the availability of high quality public education. No part of our state depends more on public schools and none has been more adversely impacted by our leadership’s failure to adequately fund education. Cutting funding for rural schools results in teacher layoffs, overcrowded classrooms, a reduction in educational quality, higher property taxes and some forced consolidations in a part of our state where closing a school can often mean closing a community. We call on our Legislature to quit undercutting our children’s future, halt the voucher/charter funding schemes and recommit to fully funding our public schools and our community colleges. It honestly is the least you can do.

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 state of the art 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 24 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 up to date technology and enhanced marketing tools including expanded use of the internet;
- offering GLOBAL G.A.P. 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 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;
- providing 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 international agriculture 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 for private gain. We believe eminent domain should be used only 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 believe that property owners faced with condemnation by a pipeline company should be given the right through a transparent process to challenge an entity who seeks to obtain a T-4 pipeline permit from the Railroad Commission. We believe that property owners should be provided a hearing before an independent hearing officer in the State Office of Administrative Hearings (SOAH), with the right to appeal a SOAH finding of condemnation to a local district judge.

We oppose backdoor efforts by Rick Perry and Republicans to keep the development of the Trans-Texas Corridor alive, and other foreign toll ways. 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, 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 citizen accused must be provided due process under law, and public safety officers must be strongly supported. Law enforcement must be provided necessary training to perform their duties. 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. 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. Texas must be smart in dealing with crime and punishment.

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, videotaped, 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. When

police misconduct is alleged, we support the implementation of civilian review boards with proper subpoena power.

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

- preventing officers, who have been terminated for violating civil rights and using unwarranted and excessive force, from moving to another jurisdiction;
- 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;
- instituting a universal background check system to ensure that all firearm sales are subject to a Brady background check;
- fully funding 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;
- requiring 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;
- strengthening programs designed to trace crime gun purchases to shut down unscrupulous firearms dealers;
- removing 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;
- supporting 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; and
- insuring 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;
- a strong statewide initiative to reduce the alarming increase of child abuse and neglect through investment in effective early prevention programs;
- allowing every survivor of a sexual assault access to a sexual assault examination provided by either a certified Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) or a licensed physician. The examination should include the use of a "rape kit" for the collection of forensic evidence, screening for the possibility of STD's and treatment of any physical injuries resulting from the sexual assault. Treatment shall also include prophylactic treatment for STD's and pregnancy prophylaxis if applicable. All costs of the examination, treatment including medications shall be covered by the Crime Victims Compensation Fund and not the financial responsibility of the victim.

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. We support the U.S. Justice Department guidelines in limiting mandatory minimum sentencing in Federal nonviolent drug cases. We further support reduction of small amounts of controlled substances to misdemeanors and emphasis on drug treatment and Drug Court diversion programs for other felony drug cases;
- 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; to lessen overcrowding in our County jails and to provide a fairer justice system, we support reasonable set bond and use of pretrial bonds where appropriate; to allow pretrial intervention and diversion programs

where appropriate; to fight to regulate the cost of collect phone calls by inmates so they are not excessive or prohibitive in costs;

- 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;
- the full implementation of the Michael Morton Discovery Act authored by Senator Rodney Ellis and passed in 2013; and
- 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.

DECRIMINALIZATION OF MARIJUANA

Our current penal marijuana laws give power, control, and illicit funding to violent Drug Cartels. The laws destroy young lives with a criminal record and possible prison incarceration. Such harsh laws serve no useful purpose. 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 60% of Americans believe marijuana should be decriminalized. While arrests for marijuana since 1965 have included 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. Persons of color account for a majority of those arrested for marijuana. Criminal conviction permanently scars a young person for life.

Texas Democrats urges the President, the Attorney General, Congress as well as the Texas Legislature, 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.

Colorado and Washington have successfully implemented laws to legally possess up to one ounce of marijuana and regulate its use and sale and taxing of marijuana. The Governor in his budget for Colorado projects 134 million dollars in tax revenue in the current fiscal year. We urge the immediate decriminalization of possession and use of medical marijuana. We support the Texas Legislature to study the laws and systems in Colorado and Washington as a first step in implementing a similar system in Texas.

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.

Texas Democrats encourage reviewing capital life sentences for juvenile offenders. 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.

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:

- restore funding Republicans have cut from the state prison system's Windham School District and from programs for inmates to take higher education courses and expand access to those 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; and
- enforce existing laws which re-instate an ex-offender's right to vote once they have paid their debt to society. We support expunging the criminal records of defendants successfully completing deferred adjudication supervision in nonviolent misdemeanors and felonies.

DEATH PENALTY

Despite 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 persons of color. The system has previously allowed 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;
- 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; and
- stronger enforcement of laws and punishment for white-collar corporate criminals unity locations.

PROTECTING DEMOCRACY AND ETHICS

Free and fair elections are the fundamental element of a healthy democracy. The right of we the people to fairly elect our representatives, and thereby influence our local, state and federal governmental policies, is the indispensable foundation of a well functioning democracy. A healthy democracy cannot tolerate burdensome impediments on either the right to register to vote or the equal right to freely cast ballots, for any citizen. A free and healthy democracy must reject election laws and practices imposed by any political group or party on other political groups or parties for the purpose of gaining political advantage at the ballot box.

VOTING RIGHTS PROTECTION

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 is “an act to enforce the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States.” The Voting Rights Act of 1965 was created to ensure that, “No voting qualification or prerequisite to voting, or standard, practice, or procedure shall be imposed or applied by any State or political subdivision to deny or abridge the right of any citizen of the United States to vote on account of race or color.” In June 2013, the U.S. Supreme Court in its *Shelby County v. Holder* majority opinion struck down Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act. The majority opinion was predicated on the premise that institutional racism and systemic discrimination in voting rights have abated in Texas and other states covered by Section 4. With Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act invalidated, Texas and other Section 4 states were freed to enforce election laws previously blocked because they have the intent or effect of abridging the right of citizens to vote.

Texas Democrats call on:

- Texas' U.S. Senators and Congressmen to immediately enact legislation to restore Section 4 of the Voting Rights Act, meeting requirements defined by the Court's majority opinion; and
- The U.S. Department of Justice to enforce voting rights protections afforded by Sections 2 and 3 of the Voting Rights Act, until Congress enacts new Section 4 legislation, thereby, again enabling Section 5 preclearance of the Voting Rights Act.

FAIR VOTER I.D. REQUIREMENTS

Texas Democrats believe voters should show identification to vote, as they have for more than 20 years. While many Texans can easily reach into their wallet and produce a Texas driver's license, gun license, military I.D., or U.S. Passport to qualify to vote under the SB 14 law, many other U.S. citizens eligible to vote in Texas do not have one of the limited types of I.D. required under the SB 14 voter photo I.D. law:

- 18 percent of elderly citizens.
- 15 percent of voters earning less than \$35,000.
- 18 percent of citizens aged 18-24 do not have an I.D. with their current address and name.
- 10 percent of voters with disabilities.
- 25 percent of African-Americans
- Hispanic citizens are between 46% to 120% more likely not to have one of the SB14 I.D.'s

We oppose any law that could make it more difficult for a qualified citizen to exercise their right to vote. Allegations of in-person voter impersonation fraud get big headlines. What does not get headlines is the fact that nearly all allegations of voter fraud turn out to be clerical errors, data matching mistakes, or misunderstandings. In reality, voter impersonation fraud is extremely rare. Texas Democrats call for the return of sensible voter I.D. requirements that have long given Texas fair and honest elections:

- Texas Voter Registration Certificate;
- A driver's license or personal identification card issued by the Texas Department of Public Safety or similar documents from other states;
- A form of identification containing a photograph that establishes a person's identity (such as an employee or student identification card);
- A birth certificate or other document confirming birth that is admissible in a court of law and establishes a person's identity;
- United States citizenship papers;
- A United States passport;
- Official mail addressed to the person by name from a governmental agency;
- A copy of a current utility bill, bank statement, government check, paycheck, or other government document that shows the name and address of the voter; or
- Any other form of identification presented by the Secretary of State's office.

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:

- passage of a State of Texas 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 elections 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 constrain the practice of drawing election districts for the purpose or with the effect of diluting the voting strength of any group based on race, ethnicity or language, minority status, or any individual, which also preserves 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

Voting is a right, guaranteed by the sacrifices of many who died to protect it. While 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.

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 online, once 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:

- stronger penalties and stricter enforcement to prevent vote suppression;
- enhanced state funding and requirements for voter registration efforts by counties;
- a 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;
- responsible expansion of the vote center pilot program without closing existing precincts;
- improved reliability of Texas Motor Voter Registration process; and
- internet based voter registration.

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

CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

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 in campaign spending. To ensure that our campaigns are financed legally, fairly, and transparently, Texas Democrats call for:

- the amendment of both the Texas and the U.S. Constitutions to firmly establish that money is not speech, and that human beings, not corporations, are persons entitled to constitutional rights;
- an amendment to Section 317 of the Communications Act allowing the FCC to require all political advertisements to disclose the identities of the individuals or organizations actually paying for the advertising;
- a ban on corporate campaign contributions and absent such an absolute prohibition, limits on corporate contributions, 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 and public disclosure of this information on the Texas Ethics Commission website;
- prohibiting former legislators and state agency executives from going through a “revolving door” to lobby former colleagues or previous employers after leaving their office or position;
- enhanced funding and enforcement tools for the Texas Ethics Commission by creating an enforcement division and director with full authority, including subpoena power, to oversee all investigations and enforcement action; and
- public financing for general election campaigns for elective office at all levels, beginning with state judicial elections.

RESTORING TRUST AND ETHICAL GOVERNMENT

To ensure an open and accountable government that honors the public’s right to know, we support:

- requiring the Texas Legislature to record all votes and not just votes for final passage of bills, 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 at the local level while working toward a more qualified, diverse judiciary and meaningful judicial campaign finance reform; 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 U.S. 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 the law, including the freedom to marry and the Respect for Marriage Act;

- the complete 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 federal Hate Crimes Prevention Act and inclusion of “actual or perceived gender-related characteristics” in the Texas James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes 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.

PERSONAL SECURITY AND EQUAL PROTECTION FOR LGBTQ TEXANS

Personal Security: Ban Reparative Therapy

For decades it has been beyond dispute by health professionals that homosexuality is a normal, natural and positive variation of human sexual orientation. Similarly, it is clear that a person’s gender identity — one’s inner sense of being male or female — is deep-seated and cannot be changed. Yet, in 2014, the Republican Party of Texas continues to encourage violence against the very souls of LGBTQ people through the quackery known as “reparative therapy” which is now illegal in two states. 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 engages in reparative therapy.

Personal Security: Accurate Identity Documents

In Texas, there is no clear process for transgender adults to obtain accurate personal documents that reflect their transitioned gender. (Transgender is an umbrella term used to describe people whose gender identity, one’s inner sense of being male or female, differs from their assigned or

presumed sex at birth). Texas Democrats support the creation of a uniform, transparent, and streamlined legal process for transgender Texans to obtain accurate identity documents. Pending this process, transgender people must have their preferred names and pronouns respected, regardless of what it says on an ID card. Transgender Texans must be afforded an ongoing right to personal privacy concerning their gender identity.

Personal Security: Education of Service Professionals

Discrimination results in a world of unsafe spaces for LGBTQ people: streets, classrooms, health care facilities, retirement homes and areas of public accommodation. Of the 1.6 million homeless youth in the United States, studies estimate that 20-40% are LGBTQ-identified. In elementary school, gender non-conforming students (those who don't meet society's expectations of gender roles) experience harassment, attacks, and sexual assault at high rates. For older LGBTQ people, a legacy of social rejection and narrowed horizons has left them twice as likely to live alone as their heterosexual counterparts and more than four times as likely to have no children. To address the harms of ignorance and prejudice, Texas Democrats call upon social, health care and public service professionals to seek out and adopt best practices in the delivery of services to all Texans.

Equal Protection: Freedom To Marry

Texas Democrats support the Supreme Court decision in *United States v. Windsor*, which found Section 3 of the federal Defense of Marriage Act unconstitutional. We call for the total repeal of DOMA and passage of the Respect For Marriage Act. Nineteen states and the District of Columbia now recognize and have legalized same-sex marriages.

In February 2014, U.S. District Court Judge Orlando Garcia in *De Leon v. Perry*, ruled that Texas' current prohibitions on same-sex marriage conflict with the U.S. Constitution, "[in] deny[ing] homosexual couples the right to marry, and in so doing, demean[ing] their dignity for no legitimate reason." Texas Democrats call for the immediate repeal of 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.

Equal Protection: Employment Non-Discrimination

Qualified, hardworking Texans are denied job opportunities, fired or otherwise discriminated against just because they are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or gender non-conforming. A person's qualifications and job performance, not irrational prejudice, should determine success on the job. Texas Democrats support workplace protections codified in the federal Employment Non-Discrimination Act. We recognize and applaud the many unions and businesses whose standard contracts prohibit LGBTQ employment discrimination. Texas Democrats support the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's recent decision that transgender employees are included within Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964's prohibition of sex discrimination.

TEXANS WITH DISABILITIES RIGHTS

The Texas Democratic Party believes in the right of every Texan to lead a productive life, enjoy liberty, and to pursue happiness. Texas Democrats want all Texans with disabilities, including veterans, to have a sustainable quality of life in the least restrictive environment possible and to have accessible community settings that are functional to their everyday life. This is not only a basic civil right, but is also part of the economic vitality and interest of Texas. No person should face discrimination based on disability status.

There are an estimated three million Texans with disabilities. Texas is currently in a severe crisis when it comes to the delivery of services to disabled persons. Winning lawsuits or natural wealth cannot be the only hope of disabled Texans to survive and function as part of Texas's social and economic fabrics.

Texas Democrats support the following to impact this sector of our population and enact necessary change to promote social justice for all disabled persons:

- The preservation and enforcement of all state and federal disability rights laws, particularly the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act. Furthermore, we strongly oppose Republican claims of “sovereign immunity” from the ADA or claims that this Act is not constitutional.
- The Affordable Care Act, which opens access to health insurance to Texans with disabilities who were previously uninsured or under insured because of pre-existing conditions, expanding access to Medicaid in Texas to cover an estimated 1.8 million disabled Texans, and helping Medicaid to support home and community-based services to keep people in their communities functioning in their natural environment.
- Promoting and educating all Texans about early diagnosis of diverse disabilities and access to adequate treatment and adequate home care support for children, veterans, and other disabled Texans.
- Ensuring that students with disabilities receive an appropriate early childhood, secondary, and post-secondary education in the least restrictive environments, including access to the full range of services and supports called for in their individual education plans at all learning institutions. Furthermore, we want all disabled Texans to take full advantage of tuition exemption at all state institutions of higher learning in Texas and other grant/scholarship programs for this sector in the population.
- Promoting and broadening financial aid or loan assistance for accessible housing, vehicles, durable medical equipment, and technology which would give much-needed assistance for individuals to pay for improvements to their life functionality.
- Opposing the harsh cuts to Medicaid that are leading to no or significantly less health care for millions of Texans with disabilities, workers with disabilities, and families raising children with autism, Down Syndrome, and other serious disabilities.
- The Help America Vote Act and removing the obstacles and onerous burden placed on Texans with disabilities to obtain a valid Texas I.D. card.
- Legislation and mandates that expand and require adequate construction and maintenance of public spaces to make these accessible in all necessary ways to all of the disabled.
- Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities, its expansion and ongoing mission to deliver quality support to all disabled Texans.

- Full extension of benefits to veterans and families of veterans who sustain partial or permanent disabilities, including post injury and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder 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.

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:

- 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;
- government must not inhibit the free exercise of religion;
- government must not use public resources to support purely religious positions or activities;
- entangling government with religion is dangerous to both government and religion;
- America is the most religiously observant country in the West because our founders wisely provided for separation of church and state, which allows religion to flourish in freedom.

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. We support the U.S. Constitutional provision that no religious test shall be required as a qualification for public office.

IMMIGRATION

The Texas Democratic Party recognizes that we are a nation of immigrants. In Texas, we value those who have come from many different countries and cultures with the common aim of seeking a better life for themselves and their families, and who have contributed from the start of our great nation to the growth, prosperity and security of the United States and of Texas.

Our Party recognizes the urgent need for comprehensive and humane immigration reform - reform that respects the principles upon which our country was founded, including family, freedom and a better future for our children. Our Party understands that given current demographic trends, without immigrants, the strength of our economy and vibrancy of our culture are unsustainable due to an aging population and decreasing birth rates. Without reform that recognizes this reality, our economy will shrink as have other countries with exclusionary immigration policies. Our Party understands that viewing immigrants through a lens of fear and prejudice only hurts Texas and our nation.

Whether through a dollars and cents analysis or through a human rights analysis, an open, inclusive and humane set of policies can only benefit our country and our state. Therefore, we support:

- comprehensive immigration reform with an attainable path to citizenship;
- securing our borders through the allocation of sufficient resources to equip and maintain a well-trained effective Border Patrol;
- protecting Border Patrol officers from threats of job loss for faithfully carrying out their duties and oath of office;
- ensuring lawful and humane treatment by border patrol, military personnel and all other agents enforcing immigration provisions in border communities;
- eliminating bureaucratic logjams in our immigration system;
- preserving family reunification;
- continuing the current federal policy of treating same-gender marriages equally for the purposes of immigration;
- emphasizing economic security and development on both sides of the border;
- alleviating shortages in critical professions and maximizing highly qualified immigrants' ability to contribute to our economy by removing impediments to obtaining occupational licenses;
- safer roads, by allowing all Texas residents to obtain drivers licenses and auto liability insurance;
- ensuring foreign workers have legitimate pathways to contribute to the U.S. economy and potentially obtain citizenship, while preventing employers from exploiting such workers in an attempt to circumvent worker protection and labor laws;
- prioritizing strict enforcement and appropriate punishment against those who exploit undocumented workers rather than targeting the workers themselves;
- the United States' Constitutional provision making all persons born in this country citizens of this country;
- enabling broader access for immigrants to healthcare by recognizing that immigrants' taxes contribute to a system they currently cannot participate in, public health issues do not make distinctions between immigration status, and the economic advantages of an expanded healthcare market;
- the passage of the DREAM Act;
- continuation and expansion of the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals until comprehensive immigration reform is passed, which recent studies have shown have enabled significant numbers of young immigrants to obtain education, employment, and financial independence;
- clarification by Congress that the Childhood Status Protection Act allows pending visa applicants to retain their place for visas if they aged out;
- requesting that the President adopt a moratorium on deportations of immigrants who have meaningful ties to the U.S. and pose little or no harm until a comprehensive immigration reform bill is passed.

Finally, we demand that the Republicans in Congress end the immigration detention facility bed mandate that creates perverse incentives to increase deportations for private profit and ensure effective oversight over such facilities, where families, including young children, are frequently held for long periods under appalling conditions.

Our Party also realizes that Republican officials advocate for discriminatory laws that interfere with the federal government's regulation and enforcement processes and immigration laws that economically damage this state. Therefore, we strongly oppose:

- any effort to repeal in-state tuition benefits to Texas undocumented students, undermining their future economic contributions and the economic investment this state has conferred on them in primary and secondary education;
- any law that would, through its enforcement, result in discrimination, intimidation, or victimization of citizens based on their race, ethnicity, or appearance;
- any law requiring state and local law enforcement officers to inquire about the immigration status of a person;
- any effort to expand the existing border fence without regard to the border economy, environmental impact, or property rights;
- any measures that attempt to improperly limit the constitutional requirement to provide for the health, education, and safety needs of both documented and undocumented individuals and communities.

Finally, we oppose participation by state and local jurisdictions in constitutionally suspect programs that divert local law enforcement resources from community public safety priorities for the purpose of enforcing federal immigration laws, promoting fear and distrust of law enforcement by immigrant communities, including the Secure Communities and 287g programs.

Texas Democrats strongly support the efforts of President Obama and Congressional Democrats to fight for comprehensive immigration reform.

VETERANS

To honor the men and women who serve our county, 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 GI Bill to increase educational benefits for veterans to fully cover the cost of a college degree and related housing expenses. We support the following: Texas Veterans Land Board, which enables veterans to purchase land and homes at favorable terms and interest rates; County Veteran Service offices, that offer a variety of services tailored to their communities that assist veterans and their families with services such as: filing VA disability claims and VA appeals, navigation of the complex and ever-changing VA system and providing referrals in their community for services not provided by VA; County Veteran Courts that provide veterans convicted of misdemeanor and non-violent offenses with rehabilitation and treatment opportunities.

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 healthcare services for veterans and their families, including mental health services;
- Restoring funding and service cuts and expanding clinical services at VA Medical Centers and VA community clinics;
- Legislation that appropriately addresses the role of Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI) and Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome among members of the armed force and ensures proper treatment for all veterans and member of the armed forces with disabilities;
- The full extension of benefits to families of veterans who sustain partial or permanent money allowance, 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 County;
- Extending the right of 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 Hazelwood Act to permit veterans who have not fully utilized their entitlement to pass on any remainder of the unused credit hours to their children;
- Legislation to allow Texas veterans to use their GI Bill benefits and Hazelwood Act concurrently;
- Student loan forgiveness in exchange for public service, including military service, Peace Corps, Teach for America, AmeriCorps, and similar programs; and
- More support for our veteran county service offices.

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 Democratic support:

- Holding federal and state governments to the same standards of Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act (USERRA) compliance as the private sector, extending USERRA protections to National Guardsmen and Reservists, preventing employers from firing an employee while a URESSA claim is being processed, including court imposed injunctions when appropriate, and protecting Reservists and Guardsmen from termination, loss of seniority and loss of sick and vacation time from their civilian jobs while they receive medical treatment for injuries sustained by service;
- Keeping military and veteran families together through household stability that addresses basic needs such as rent/mortgage, utilities, car repairs, and daycare. Many service-members, veterans and their dependents face unique obstacles, and are not eligible for social services assistance. More existing veteran support revenue streams need to go DIRECTLY to service members, veterans and their families. Some suffer an extended loss of employment income due to extended or repeated deployments, delays in VA payments, and other circumstances beyond their control;

- Affordable, quality day-care for our veterans who are transitioning to civilian life, and to maintain household stability;
- Access for all, ensuring that Texas female service members and veterans have a voice that is not filtered through other agendas and entities, put safeguards and/or an independent mechanism in place to make sure the voices of Texas female service members and veterans from ALL socio-economic levels, ethnicities, and generations are heard by their legislators and given due consideration to their concerns;
- Equal pay and promotion mobility for female service members veterans working in governmental agencies at the Federal, State, City and County levels;
- 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;
- Holding non-profits, Federal, State, City and County agencies accountable for the use of funds solicited, and accepted to directly assist our service members, and veterans. “Tax payers must be informed in clear language about how, and what services agencies actually deliver on a daily basis to veterans. This is not political, it is not about free enterprise; it is about right and wrong.” ~Patrick Bellon, Operation Iraqi Freedom veteran. Transparency of how funds are solicited, allocated, and dispersed to assist service members, veterans and their families should be published on a public website;
- 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 transitions;
- 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 disguise;
- The right of all military personnel to serve without discrimination, sexual abuse or prejudice;
- The right of female service members 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 deployment; and
- Providing any Texas veteran with 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;
- legislation to direct the current toll road operators, leasers, private companies whether here or abroad to submit to the State of Texas the net proceeds of 50% of all tolls. These proceeds would be split in a 75% to 25% fashion. From the 75% portion the state would create a way to provide counties low cost loans to repair roads they can not currently afford to fix and to repair Farm to Market roads in Texas. The 25% portion will be used to help fund and bolster the pension funds of workers with the Texas Department of Transportation and the Texas Department of Public Safety;
- reforming 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;
- 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;
- improved signage that provides information and directions to motorists; and
- 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 the aims of Foreign Policy:

"What kind of peace do I mean and what kind of a peace do we seek?.... the kind that enables men and nations to grow, and to hope, and build a better life for their children—not merely peace for Americans but peace for all men and women, not merely peace in our time but peace in all time.... [W]e shall also do our part to build a world of peace where the weak are safe and the strong are just. We are not helpless before that task or hopeless of its success."

Texas Democrats believe peace, prosperity, and national security are assured by maintaining a strong national defense, promoting democracy, and advancing development abroad. 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. To this end we support the use of consistent diplomacy and development efforts abroad in coordination with our allies around the world. We believe the most important element in our military is the individual service member, and it is absolutely critical that we keep faith with those who serve and defend us.

SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT

Texas Democrats believe that protecting our national security requires maintaining robust military capabilities and strong alliances, while also addressing the sources of security risks that stem from state weakness, poverty, corruption, and social breakdown abroad. Therefore we believe America must:

- maintain and expand the capacity of our military and diplomatic organizations to meet the threats from non-state groups and those nations that provide them support and protection;
- work closely with allies and lead international efforts to prevent the further spread of nuclear arms and to eliminate weapons of mass destruction;
- support our government's and especially the U.S. Secretary of State's efforts to obtain the assistance of the countries in the Middle East in helping to stabilize the region;
- encourage Iraq to ensure security within its borders by renouncing sectarian violence and promoting a responsive and inclusive democracy that ensures minority rights and equitable access to resources;
- oppose the regime-sponsored violence occurring in Syria by expanding assistance to vetted opposition groups, expanding humanitarian aid, leading efforts to facilitate a negotiated political solution within Syria, leveraging alliances in the region to constrict the flow of resources to radical groups, and leading regional efforts to counter the crisis emanating from Syria;
- continue to support development of Afghanistan's civil and economic infrastructure through sustained support for economic development, governance capacity, and corruption reduction;
- minimize civilian casualties, which endanger relations essential to our goals, to the maximum extent possible consistent with the safety of our troops in Afghanistan and elsewhere;

- 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 for two states dedicated to peace and democracy – a Jewish homeland in Israel and a Palestinian homeland – can only result from direct negotiations between willing and responsible partners;
- work to ensure that the new governments and societies emerging from the “Arab Spring” become true democracies that promote responsive governance, ethnic and religious minority rights, individual freedoms, and economic opportunity;
- withdraw support for agencies and programs that promote hatred and intolerance;
- make every reasonable effort with our considerable military, economic, diplomatic, and technological capabilities to assist victims of natural disasters worldwide;
- secure our information and telecommunications technology infrastructure from cyber piracy and attack by supporting cooperation across public and private sector agencies, supporting development of a unified national cyber strategy, and ensuring critical infrastructure meets baseline security standards;
- assist economic development of our allies, particularly neighbors where high unemployment creates immigration pressures;
- continue the President’s leadership in reducing U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, promoting clean energy, and mitigating the effects of global climate change;
- adopt policies that advance our national security by freeing us from dependence on the resource of any nation or region, including foreign oil; and
- support the use of direct military force only as a last resort after all reasonable diplomatic and economic options have been exhausted; to this end we propose the use of consistent diplomacy and development in coordination with our allies around the world to provide assistance when necessary.

TRADE POLICY

Texas Democrats believe that our foreign policy must also enhance the economic and employment conditions of American workers and restore our balance of trade. 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 requiring wage practices that lift foreign workers out of poverty; to this end, the Texas Democratic Party, in the interest of protecting democracy and promoting trade policy that benefits workers and the communities in which they live, opposes Fast Track Trade Promotion Authority; further, the Texas Democratic Party demands that the text of the Trans-Pacific Partnership be made available to the public and that the United States Trade Representative seek meaningful, binding input from civil society, including labor, environmental groups, family farmers, public health, and consumer protection organizations;

- consider those trade and human rights practices of other nations before extending aid and security protections to them; and
- oppose foreign-owned U.S. toll roads that require Americans to contribute to the balance-of-trade deficit when they travel on local roads.

NATIONAL SECURITY

Texas Democrats believe that our national security is advanced by legitimate conduct, strong international leadership, and sustained international engagement. Therefore, American policies should:

- 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;
- support a definite timetable for the closure of the Guantanamo Bay detention facility;
- establish 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 operating without government oversight have put America at risk;
- further a safe and peaceful world and focus on practical, nonviolent solutions to the problems of domestic and international conflict;
- support the mission and efforts of the United States Peace Corps as it fosters peaceful relationships with other nations;
- fund a fully staffed and equipped air traffic control system that is an inherent function of the federal Government essential to national security and that should never be subject to privatization; and
- strengthen port security, including inspection of currently unchecked containers.