

2010 Texas Democratic Party Platform

Report of the Permanent Committee on Platform

Preamble

"The Democratic Party is not a collection of diverse interests brought together only to win elections. We are united instead by a common heritage - by a respect for the deeds of the past and a recognition of the needs of the future."

John F. Kennedy, from a speech he was to deliver in Austin on November 22, 1963

Texas Democrats believe government can be as good as the people. We have faith that democracy, built on the sacred values of family, freedom and fairness, can afford every Texan, without exception, the opportunity to achieve their God-given potential.

We believe democratic government exists to achieve as a community, state, and nation what we cannot achieve as individuals; and that it must not serve only a powerful few.

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 equal opportunity for all Texans

- ...to receive a quality public education, from childhood through college
- ...to have access to affordable, comprehensive 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.

We believe a growing economy should benefit all Texans

- ...that the people who work in a business are as important as those who invest in it
- ...that every person should be paid a living wage
- ...that good business offers a fair deal for customers
- ...that regulation of unfair practices and rates is necessary
- ...that the burden of taxes should be fairly distributed
- ...that government policy should not favor corporations that seek offshore tax shelters, exploit workers, pollute our environment, or spend corporate money to influence elections;

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

- ...by appropriately staffed and trained law enforcement and emergency agencies
- ...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.

We believe America is 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.

We believe America is made more secure by competent diplomatic leadership that uses the moral, ethical, economic assets of a powerful, free nation to avoid unnecessary military conflict.

We believe in the benefits derived from the individual strengths of our diverse population. We honor “family values” through policies that value all our families.

We believe an honest, ethical state government that serves the public interest, and not the special interests, will help all Texans realize economic and personal security.

We believe many challenges require national solutions, but talented and resourceful Texans, blessed with opportunities provided by agriculture, “old” and “new” energy sources, renowned medical and research institutions and high tech industries, should not need federal action to make progress in providing quality education, affordable health care, a clean environment, a strong economy and good jobs.

Based on our belief in a government of the people, by the people, and for the people, we recommend specific policy goals to establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty for ourselves and our posterity.

EDUCATION

Texas Democrats strongly support our 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 be able to attend a safe, secure school and 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 continue leading the fight to improve student achievement, lower dropout rates, and attract and retain well-qualified teachers.

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

PUBLIC EDUCATION FUNDING

Texas Democrats believe:

- the state should establish a 100% equitable school finance system with sufficient state revenue to allow every district to offer an exemplary program;

- the state should equitably reduce reliance on "Robin Hood" recapture;
- state funding formulas should fully reflect all student and district cost differences and the impact of inflation and state mandates;
- Texas should maintain or extend the 22-1 class size limits and expand access to pre-kindergarten and kindergarten programs; and
- the federal government should fully fund all federal education mandates and the Elementary and Education Act.

Republicans have shortchanged education funding every session they have controlled the Texas Legislature. After cutting billions from public education in 2003, the 2006 Republican school funding plan froze per pupil funding, leaving local districts faced with increasing costs for fuel, utilities, insurance and personnel with little new state money. To make matters worse, that same plan placed stringent limits on local ability to make up for the state's failures.

In 2009, Republicans hypocritically supplanted state support for our schools with the very federal "stimulus" aid they publicly condemned after state revenues plunged because of the Republican-caused recession and the structural state budget deficit they created. They reduced state funding for our schools by over \$3 billion. Because our student population continues to grow, the combined reduction in state revenue per student was nearly 13%.

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

EXCELLENT SCHOOLS FOR EVERY STUDENT

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

- provide universal access to pre-kindergarten and kindergarten;
- provide universally accessible after school programs for grades 1-12;
- provide free, accurate and updated instructional materials aligned to educationally appropriate, non-ideological state curriculum standards and tests;
- provide free computer and internet access, as well as digital instructional materials;
- provide early intervention programs to ensure every child performs at grade level in English Language Arts, Social Studies, Math, and Science;
- ensure that students with disabilities receive an appropriate education in the least restrictive environment, including access to the full range of services and supports called for in their individual education plans;
- provide appropriate career and technical education programs;
- reject efforts to destroy bilingual education;
- promote multi-language instruction, beginning in elementary school, to make all students fluent in English and at least one other language;
- replace high-stakes tests, used to punish students and schools, with multiple measures that restore the original intent of the state assessment system--improving instruction to help students think critically, be creative and succeed;
- end inappropriate testing of students with disabilities whose individual education plans call for alternative assessments of their educational progress;

- enforce and extend class size limits to allow every student to receive necessary individualized attention;
- support Title IX protections for gender equity in public education institutions;
- ensure that every school has a fully funded library that meets state requirements;
- provide environmental education programs for children and adults; and
- oppose private school vouchers.

SOLVING THE DROPOUT CRISIS

Rick Perry may be willing to write off more than a fourth of the school age children in Texas, but Texans can't afford to pay the price for Perry's complacency in the face of the dropout crisis. Solving the dropout crisis is a priority for Texas Democrats because it threatens the economic well-being of all Texans, and failure to solve the dropout crisis could write off economic progress for an entire generation. Texas already has more low-wage and minimum wage workers than any other state, and in Texas dropouts earn \$7,000 less per year than high school graduates. According to the state demographer, if these trends persist, by 2040, the average annual Texas household income will be \$6,500 less than in the year 2000, at a cost to Texas of over \$300 billion per year in lost income.

More than one-fourth of Texas high school students fail to graduate on time. For African American and Hispanic students, the dropout rate is more than one-third. Out of all 50 states, Texas has the highest percentage of adults who have not completed high school. However, in response to the Governor's call for across-the-board budget cuts to address an \$18 billion state budget shortfall, his Texas Education Agency recommended cutting programs that have helped keep kids in school and off the street. The economic consequences of such shortsighted policies are stark. Rick Perry's refusal to address this dropout crisis is making Texas poorer, less educated, and less competitive.

Proper funding of all our schools to meet the needs of students who are most at risk of dropping out is essential. Specific solutions include:

- school-community collaboration that brings educational and social services together under one roof to help at-risk students and their families;
- expanded access to early childhood education, targeting at-risk students;
- dual-credit and early-college programs that draw at-risk students into college and career paths while still in high school;
- equitable distribution of highly qualified teachers, to change current practices that too often match the most at-risk students with the least experienced and least prepared teachers.
- enforce daytime curfew laws to reduce truancy
- providing access to affordable programs for adults who have dropped out of the education process,

EFFECTIVE TEACHERS FOR EVERY STUDENT

The most important factor in student success is having qualified teachers in our classrooms. Texas has a serious teacher shortage. Teacher pay and benefits are not competitive with private sector pay for occupations requiring comparable knowledge and skills. To recruit and retain our best to teach, Texas Democrats advocate the following:

- raise teacher and support staff pay to levels exceeding the national average;
- extend quality state funded health insurance to all education employees;
- respect and safeguard the rights and benefits of education employees;
- guarantee that every class has a teacher certified to teach that subject;

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

REFORM OF THE UNBALANCED STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

The right-wing Republican extremists who have dominated the State Board of Education have made a laughingstock of our state's process for developing and implementing school curriculum standards that determine what our students learn. The damage they have done is no laughing matter. In rewriting the curriculum for social studies, English language arts, and science, they repeatedly have dismissed the sound advice of professional educators. Personal ideology, not high academic standards, has guided their work. Their skewed vision slights the contributions of racial and ethnic minorities. Their slanted versions of American history and of science mislead students and violate the separation of church and state. They use loaded language to favor the roles of right-wing organizations and activists. Led by a Rick Perry appointee as chair, this State Board of Education wants to indoctrinate, not educate, the schoolchildren of Texas. Their actions are unlikely to encourage a company to relocate and bring jobs to Texas. Any substantive changes to curriculum must be reviewed by non-partisan experts, and that review must be made public prior to any changes in curriculum by the State Board.

Texas Democrats will realign the State Board of Education with mainstream Texas values, will realign the state curriculum with objective reality and the facts of history and science, and will insist on the exercise of sober fiduciary responsibility for the Permanent School Fund, exposing and prohibiting conflicts of interest.

MAKING OUR SCHOOLS SAFE HAVENS FOR LEARNING

Texas Democrats believe students, teachers and other school personnel should be safe from acts of violence, and students 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 right to remove a disruptive student from class.

Students referred to disciplinary alternative education programs should continue to receive strong academic instruction. When a student's misconduct is serious enough to warrant disciplinary placement, the state should make sure that the disciplinary setting - whether a school district's own disciplinary alternative program or a county's juvenile-justice alternative education program - offers a full array of educational and social/behavioral services to help that student get back on track. School districts should be discouraged from indiscriminately placing students in disciplinary alternative education programs for trivial misconduct.

We support the Dignity for All Students Act to guarantee safety for all students.

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 deregulation” – cleverly 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. Tuition policies threaten our ability to meet state "Closing the Gaps" goals essential to our economic future. To offer affordable access to higher education, we support:

- restoration of formula contact hour funding to the level prior to Republican cuts, adjusted for inflation and student growth;
- legislative rollback of tuition and fees to affordable levels to reflect the restored funding;
- federal income tax credits for college tuition;
- full funding of TEXAS Grants and reforming and reopening the mismanaged state Prepaid Tuition Program, to provide higher education to more Texans without excessive debt burden;
- legislation to reduce the inordinately high costs of college textbooks, technical manuals and other instructional materials;
- adequate compensation, security, professional status, and benefits for all faculty and fair market wages for college employees;
- weapon-free institutes of higher education;
- higher education research funding to spur economic development, including sufficient funding to locate a Tier 1 research and teaching university in every region of the state;
- collaborative public/higher education partnerships from pre-K-16 to enhance learning and teacher preparation;
- enhanced, equitable funding for Prairie View A&M and Texas Southern University and for higher education in South Texas and all border communities;
- efforts to place a voting student regent on the appointed governing board of each state-supported four-year institution of higher education; and
- the continuation of the Texas DREAM Act.

COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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. A significant funding increase would be needed just to restore Republican cuts to the 2002-3 state funding level, without adjusting for inflation. Not only do the Governor and Republican politicians again want to shift hundreds of millions of dollars in additional costs for employees' group insurance onto students and local property taxpayers, they have already cut funding by 5% this year. And they are asking for an additional 10% in cuts to Republican budgets that currently allow only 4% of students eligible for Texas Equal Opportunity Grants to

receive grants designated for community college students. 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;
- fully state-funded full time employee group health insurance and proportional health benefits for adjunct instructors;
- funding for new campuses and program expansions, especially in critical need programs, sufficient to meet Closing the Gaps goals;
- 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; 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:

- proposals for "proportionality" that would shift group insurance costs onto students and property taxpayers;
- shifting the basis of formula funding away from actual costs; and
- "incentive" programs that would discriminate against colleges and programs serving disadvantaged and non-traditional students or against non-degree skill-building and retraining programs.

DIVERSITY

Texas Democrats support innovative approaches to ensure diversity in every Texas institution of higher education. We condemn intolerance on Texas campuses and encourage universities to develop and offer culturally diverse curricula, student activities, and student recruitment policies that promote understanding, respect and acceptance.

Good Jobs, Rebuilding from an Economic Crisis

Now more than ever, hard-working Texans need good jobs to support their families and to invest in their retirement future. The national economic crisis that resulted from the failure of the previous Republican administration to regulate financial markets in the name of "deregulation" threatens the economic security of all Americans. Democrats are working to address the unemployment crisis by creating jobs for skilled workers. Republican leaders, on the other hand, love to cut and outsource jobs, which is another reason we face tough economic times.

Democrats strongly believe in promoting entrepreneurship and consumer confidence through a market system that is checked and balanced by government in order to prevent financial abuses and excesses. In contrast, many Texas Republican politicians worship a version of the free market system in which the highest-paid CEO's make thousands of times more than their employees even when there is evidence of gross corporate mismanagement.

To Strengthen Small Business, we believe state policy should foster the independent initiative of small businesses. The new Republican "margins tax," which is effectively a small business income tax, burdens small businesses unfairly at the very time the Republican recession has left many struggling to

survive. We believe the tax policies of the current Republican regime that unfairly favor big business at the expense of small businesses must be reversed.

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

Unemployment Benefits could have been made available to more Texas workers during the 2009 legislative session. But Republican Governor Rick Perry vowed to veto any expansion of benefits funded with half a billion federal stimulus dollars, and 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 instead.

We believe eligibility for unemployment compensation must be extended so that individuals victimized by the recession but honestly seeking work do not lose their homes, their health care, or their dignity because they cannot find jobs.

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

- that laid off workers must be provided effective retraining;
- state leaders should be held accountable for how well they help prepare young people to enter the workforce;
- the guarantee of overtime pay, which is constantly under Republican assault, must be preserved;
- local wage standards in government contracts must be protected;
- workers have a right to a safe workplace, free from injury and exposure to harmful materials, and meaningful sanctions must apply to employers who knowingly or negligently expose workers to injury or death;
- workers and employers both benefit from a workers' compensation system that provides affordable coverage for employers, meaningful compensation to injured workers, the right of workers to choose their own doctor, incentives for employers to retain injured employees, and due consideration for the rights of workers within the legal system;
- all employees, public and private, must have the right to organize, collect dues, designate their income voluntarily to organizations and agencies of their choosing, and negotiate collectively with their employers through representatives of their choice;
- the so-called Texas “right-to-work” law – which does not protect the right to work – must be repealed;
- hiring of replacement workers for employees who are on strike should be banned;
- the Employee Free Choice Act should become law in order to allow workers to choose a union that can negotiate an employment contract that establishes wages, benefits and working conditions;
- the right of unions to engage in political activity must not be infringed;

- workers should be free from discriminatory employment practices and the Employment Non-Discrimination Act should become law;
- no person should be fired, lose seniority, be demoted, or suffer other reprisal for refusing to work when a violation of OSHA regulations places his or her health, life, or limb at risk;
- state and federal law should provide real protection to whistleblowers who expose wrongdoing and unsafe practices; and

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

- competitive performance and accountability in state government are vital, but we oppose privatization schemes that simply reduce wages and benefits for workers in order to reward private companies with a profit at the expense of taxpayers;
- the Legislature should ban the improper use of “no-bid contracts;”
- "non-compete" contracts that place the financial interests of private toll road operators over the interests of the public should be prohibited;
- the U.S. space program, including both manned and unmanned flight and the revitalized International Space Station, serves as a catalyst for investment in scientific research that is essential to both national security and success in the global economy, and it should be supported and continued;
- regulation of banks, utilities, and insurance carriers must be improved and antitrust laws must be aggressively enforced;
- specific regulation of the banking industry 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 irresponsible Wall Street speculators accountable for engaging in wrongful conduct that has contributed to the financial crisis and damaged the State of Texas and its citizens, Texas Democrats believe Texas taxpayers are entitled to economic recovery. We endorse the initiative by Attorney General nominee Barbara Ann Radnofsky to lead State legal action to recover these losses on our behalf.

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

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

Texas Democrats believe it is “good business” for state government to contract with Texas and American companies to the extent possible.

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

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

State Fiscal Policy

Texas Democrats believe restoring responsible and accountable state budget policy is necessary to establish trust between taxpayers and elected officials in Austin. Earning that trust requires leaders who will put aside partisan agendas to engage in an honest debate and evaluation of the challenges facing Texans today and in the future.

Instead of fiscal responsibility, Governor Perry and the Republicans in charge have pursued a shortsighted political agenda that has created a looming \$18 billion state deficit. That deficit is due in large part to a 2006 Perry-Republican plan that comes in \$4.5 billion in the red every year, according to the Legislative Budget Board.

Perry’s “structural budget deficit” is a direct result of his “leadership deficit.” With every passing month, the budget shortfall grows while the Governor dawdles, casually referring to it as “a number someone pulled from the sky” that he will deal with “next year.” Meanwhile, hard working Texans who tackle real challenges every day deserve responsible state leaders who will work day and night to solve this finance crisis, get the most out of every tax dollar, and avoid slashing critical state services or enacting any new fees or so-called “revenue enhancements” unless absolutely necessary.

For almost a decade, Texans have paid the price as Perry’s out-of-balance priorities shortchange our quality of life while rewarding his cronies and contributors. The burden of Perry “taxes” falls squarely on the backs of hard working Texans. College students and their parents have been “taxed” with tuition that has doubled on some campuses. Thousands of small businesses have been burdened with new and higher taxes and a wide array of new user fees have been instituted.

Homeowners were promised property tax relief, but the Republican version of “tax relief” primarily rewarded multi-national companies, Wall Street investment firms, and favored industries like insurance and oil and gas with big tax breaks at the expense of homeowners and small businesses. Fortunately, Democratic legislators were able to defeat Republican efforts to raise the Texas sales tax to the highest in the nation.

Adding insult to injury, we Texans aren't getting our money's worth when we pay these "Perry taxes." Our children's schools have been shortchanged, forcing hundreds of local school districts to ask voters to approve local property tax increases, lay off teachers, and cut back course offerings. Traffic congestion is taking a toll. Texas has an embarrassingly poor record on children's health insurance and teen pregnancy. Scandal and abuse plague state agencies charged with protecting and rehabilitating children.

Yet Perry has rewarded businesses with connections to his contributors, cronies and special interests with hundreds of millions in grants from his "Texas Enterprise Fund." And he has fought efforts to require an independent audit of the Fund, despite evidence many of the grant recipients have not created jobs and economic benefits required by their contracts. And if that isn't enough, special interest tax breaks for companies like Valero threaten to take billions off the property rolls, which could shift an even greater local and school tax burden to homeowners and small businesses.

Dishonesty and hypocrisy in the budget process have also cost Texans dearly. Texans pay over \$500 million in fees on electric bills that are dedicated to assisting elderly, disabled and low-income families without heat and air conditioning, but Republicans diverted that money to pay for other things. Billions in park fees, hunting and fishing licenses, environmental permits, and 911 telephone fees are also being used for other purposes.

Hypocrisy also carries a big price tag. At the same time Perry railed against Washington to attract votes from secessionists and tea partiers, he and his fellow Republicans used as much as \$22 billion in federal stimulus funding to balance the state budget. Yet Perry picked one stimulus program to "oppose" for political purposes, refusing additional federal Unemployment Insurance Funds, a move called "insane" by a Republican State Senator. The price: the state had to issue costly bonds and raise taxes on small businesses to make up the difference.

Texans deserve better. Texas Democrats support policies to restore responsible state fiscal policy, including:

- Reform the Republican "margins tax" policy to provide fairness to all economic sectors, especially small businesses.
- Structure property tax relief to benefit all homeowners fairly;
- Extend the benefits of property tax relief to renters when landlords receive the full benefit of those reductions;
- Claim our federal tax dollars before they are sent to other states by securing available federal funds to help alleviate the budget deficit and provide economic benefits and job opportunities here in Texas;
- Enact a constitutional amendment to prevent extending the sales tax to food and medicine and oppose efforts to impose a national sales tax.
- Require state government to spend taxes and fees for the specific purposes for which they were collected.
- Adopt strict guidelines to require that procurement contracts with private entities and programs that provide tax-funded incentives to business must target, when possible, small businesses, and prohibit giving such awards to companies that export jobs or utilize tax loopholes to avoid state or federal taxes.

- Require an independent audit of the Governor's Texas Enterprise Fund and enact and enforce regulations to prevent the continued use of the Fund as a corporate slush fund that rewards businesses owned by political cronies and contributors, despite their failure to meet hiring targets and other program requirements.

Democrats support these changes because taxpayers deserve responsible management of hard earned dollars that should be spent wisely to help Texans secure a prosperous future.

Health Care for Individuals and Small Businesses

Texas Democrats believe health care is a right, not a privilege reserved for those able to pay for it. Texas Democrats oppose efforts by the Republican Party 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 that important work remains to correctly implement health care changes at the state level. Democrats oppose efforts by Republicans to go back to a system that allowed insurance companies to discriminate against Americans with illnesses, shove them off their plans and place lifetime limits on health care, preventing them from getting care when they needed it most. Democrats support effective implementation of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act at the state level to protect Americans' new, hard-fought health care rights. Texas Democrats:

- Oppose Republican attempts to repeal the ban on preexisting conditions
- Oppose Republican attempts to repeal sweeping small business tax credits
- Oppose Republican attempts to repeal the ban on rescissions, where insurance companies shove individuals off their health insurance coverage if they develop a catastrophic illness
- Oppose Republican attempts to repeal tax breaks for Americans to aid in the purchase of health insurance
- Oppose Republican attempts to repeal the closure of the Medicare prescription drug donut hole that forced seniors to pay exorbitant prices under the Republican Medicare Part D plan
- Oppose Republican attempts to repeal the expansion of health insurance to uninsured Americans, including 4 million Texans
- Oppose Republican attempts to repeal the ability of parents to insure their children up to age 26.
- Oppose Republican attempts to repeal the creation of health insurance marketplaces where consumers can shop for and compare affordable, quality health insurance plans
- Oppose Republican attempts to repeal a healthcare system based on prevention and wellness

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

health insurance through their employers, and those who do have employer-provided health plans are paying higher out-of-pocket expenses for health care.

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

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

- support guaranteed access to affordable, comprehensive universal health care 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;
- support creation of a Texas universal health care plan as permitted under the Affordable Care Act to insure that every Texas resident has health insurance that covers medical, child vision and dental care, full reproductive health services, preventive services, prescription drugs and mental health counseling and treatment;
- believe the state must realize all opportunities to maximize federal and state dollars available to fund health care costs, including enforcement of existing charity care requirements;
- Oppose discrimination based on preexisting conditions and believe Texans with chronic illnesses should have access to coverage at an affordable price through the high risk pool with full coverage for all prescription medications during the interim period before the preexisting condition ban passed by Democrats takes effect; and
- believe medical decisions regarding treatment options should be made by physicians in consultation with patients, not by an insurance company or government lay people.

Protecting Medicaid

Medicaid plays an essential role in the health of millions of Texans, and Texas Democrats oppose misguided attempts by Republicans to dismantle and disrupt the delivery of services to needy Texans. We support full restoration of the 2003 Medicaid cuts, with funding allocations for population and caseload growth, and re-establishing local and state partnerships to maximize funds for Medicaid programs that assure coverage to low-income Texans. We support an effective and sound expansion of the infrastructure needed to deliver coverage to all newly eligible recipients under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act living at or near the federal poverty level.

Prevention

Texas Democrats support the underlying philosophy of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act: to move our country forward to a preventive based system where a priority is placed on the health and wellness of all Americans. Democrats support the legislation's elimination of co-payments for preventive services, as well as plans to expand community health centers and the number of primary care physicians and health care practitioners. Democrats support efforts in Texas to increase the number of primary care physicians and nurses, as well efforts to encourage healthy living.

Improving Medicare

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

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

Children's Health Insurance

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

Democrats support full utilization of all federal funds that have been set aside specifically to improve the health of Texas children, and we oppose the redistribution of those funds to other states. Unless all punitive Republican policies are reversed and private contractors are held accountable, many Texas children who qualify for CHIP coverage will go uninsured and the federal dollars reserved for Texas children will continue to be spent in other states. We support full restoration of the original CHIP program and policies, reinstatement of the simplified application process, aggressive outreach to enroll all eligible children, and a 12 month period of continuous health coverage. We further support congressional Democrats' expansion of the federal SCHIP program to provide greater opportunity for states to provide health coverage for children and maintenance of effort provision to protect the program from cuts by Republicans in the Legislature.

Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services

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

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

HIV, Hepatitis C, and STDs’ Education and Services

Texas Democrats support increased education initiatives and services to address the HIV/AIDS epidemic, increased instances of Hepatitis C, and rises in sexually transmitted diseases’. These initiatives and services should include 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 diseases.

Stem Cell Research

Stem cell research should not be held hostage to politics that limits 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 politics 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 state public universities. Curing disease is the right thing to do, and stem cell lines should be expanded without increasing or encouraging any high risk procedures.

Eliminating Health Disparities

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

Choice and Family Planning

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

- trust the women of Texas to make personal and responsible decisions about when and whether to bear children, in consultation with their family, their physician, personal conscience or their God, rather than having these personal decisions made by politicians;
- support prevention measures which have proven effective at reducing unintended pregnancies, and which would reduce the rate of abortion when made affordable, accessible, and available as effective long-term programs. These programs include family planning and birth control, including emergency contraception free from judgment or pressure;
- support using sound, mainstream medical science to guide reproductive health care policies;
- support targeted efforts to reduce Texas' high teen pregnancy rates, including the provision of accurate and effective, comprehensive age-appropriate sex education programs with an abstinence component, to reduce the rate of abortion;
- support resources for pregnant and parenting teens while encouraging them to continue their education and career development;
- support family planning funding for pregnancy prevention and preventive health care in regulated, licensed medical facilities, rather than biased and non-medical activities;
- support women's access to affordable pre-natal care, including pregnancy insurance and pre-natal vitamins to support healthy pregnancies;
- support paid maternity and/or paternity leave to support healthy families;
- support women's access to accurate information about adoption and related resources;
- support affordable, quality child-care to support and keep healthy families intact;
- promote policies that value Texas families and their children throughout their lives; and
- support policies for women that promote keeping families healthy and intact through preventative gynecological health care that is crucial to the health of women in caring for their families.

Security for Our Families

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

Privatization of Social Services

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

Low-income children, as well as elderly and disabled Texans, are going without proper nutrition because of delays in processing of food stamp applications due to the lack of a sufficient number of eligibility workers. Low-to-moderate income children and families continue to experience difficulty accessing or maintaining health coverage through the CHIP or Medicaid programs since the system

was privatized. Texas Democrats support hiring state workers at adequate levels to ensure timely and accurate processing of applications rather than wasting money on private contracts. We believe privatization of social services has proven to be a poor use of tax dollars, with little or no accountability to voters and taxpayers.

Child Protection and Foster Care

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

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

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

Child Support and Child Care that Strengthens Texas Families

The economic security of many Texas families depends on strong child support enforcement coupled with available and affordable quality child care that is good for parents, good for children and vital for the Texas economy. Texas Democrats believe sufficient child support enforcement field staff is needed to ensure the timely and reliable collection and distribution of child support payments. We support policies to ensure that child support payments go to custodial parents rather than to private collection agencies. We believe parental counseling, mediation, job training and job placement should promote the beneficial involvement and support of both parents whenever possible and appropriate.

Texas families should not have to choose between the jobs they need and the children they love. Texas Democrats support child care initiatives that encourage both private and non-profit providers to expand the availability of quality child care services by using tax credits, investment grants, and pooling of local resources to maximize federal funding opportunities. Texas Democrats also believe expanded after school care ensures the safety of children and that early childhood education develops the strong educational foundation needed for future achievement.

Long Term Services and Supports

Texas Democrats believe elderly and disabled Texans of all ages should have access to long-term services and supports that promote independent living in the most-integrated setting possible. A robust continuum of long-term services and supports includes state supported living centers, home and community-based services, in-home health care, adult daycare, and hospice care. We believe the state must comply with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and strongly oppose the Republican claim to "sovereign immunity" from the ADA. We support:

- Transitioning the long-term care system to focus on home and community-based services (HCBS); Creating a national HCBS program where funding for services "follows the person";
- Fully funding all HCBS programs and ending all waiting lists for community services;

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

Social Security

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

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

Retirement Security

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

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

Access to Affordable Insurance with Effective Regulation and Oversight

Texas Democrats support the strict enforcement of policies requiring insurance companies to roll back their rates to provide Texas homeowners, renters and drivers fair and affordable insurance. Governor Perry and his fellow Republicans have done nothing to reduce insurance costs that place an excessive financial burden on both individuals and businesses. Texans continue to pay some of the highest homeowner insurance rates in the nation, despite the fact that the American insurance industry makes billions in profits every year. We support providing the Insurance Commissioner the authority to deny or approve rates.

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

Utility Regulation

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

Consumer Protection

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

- laws and regulations that restrict redress for buyers of new homes who discover shoddy work after the purchase is completed;
- unscrupulous telemarketing, internet marketing and price fixing;
- services that prey on individuals, especially children, the poor, the elderly and persons with disabilities, including insurance fraud and nursing home abuse targeted at seniors;
- insurance companies, HMOs and drug companies that deny Texans coverage they need;
- unfair 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.

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

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

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

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

Homelessness

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

The Environment

We believe in using technology, science, industrial processing and ingenuity to interact with our world in a sustainable manner for this and future generations. We believe in keeping water clean, keeping air healthy, and using more renewable energy while creating less waste. We believe in keeping rivers flowing and estuaries and bays healthy.

We recognize that the sun is the most plentiful source of energy on the planet and that its energy is renewable and clean. We recognize that people vote every day when they buy. We know it is essential to build the political will to use the earth's resources wisely for both current and future generations. We know it is essential to have office holders who hold these values and have the vision and will to act.

Unlike Governor Perry, Democrats believe that the disaster in the Gulf of Mexico was the result of gross corporate irresponsibility, not an "act of God." We should not apologize to BP for making them put up money to pay the legitimate claims of people who have been so terribly harmed by their malfeasance.

Stronger State Environmental Protection, Regulation and Enforcement is essential to preserve our quality of life and secure long-term economic growth. Gov. Perry's lax TCEQ has failed to enforce the law and as a result, the state is ceding its responsibility to protect Texans' health. "Flex permits" that allow excess pollution must be changed to protect the health of Texans. The use of TCEQ permits to make billions of dollars for some of Perry's largest contributors must end. State regulatory officials must be appointed who will protect our health by using science as a basis for decisions. They must enforce state and federal laws, and protect our air, water and land from those who pollute for profit.

We support:

- a requirement that all major permit proceedings include consideration of the feasibility and cost analyses of less polluting, alternative technology;
- the repeal of state grandfathering provisions that allow circumvention of municipal regulations that protect health and human safety and the property of nearby landowners;
- limiting the volume and curies of radioactive waste coming to Texas and only allowing disposal of radioactive waste from the Compact States of Texas and Vermont to prevent Texas from becoming a dumping ground for radioactive waste from other countries and 36 or more other states;
- thorough scrutiny of the lax environmental enforcement by Perry's Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) through the Sunset Review process;
- 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;
- strengthening violation penalties so that it does not pay to pollute;
- repeal of legislation promoted by Gov. Perry allowing the state to interfere with local prosecutors' ability to bring criminals who poison our air and water to justice;
- the rights of all citizens to participate in the permitting process and contested hearings in order to protect their property, health and the environment;
- a 90% reduction of mercury emissions from coal-burning power plants in order to protect public health and prevent brain damage in children;
- retirement of the oldest, heavy-polluting, coal burning Texas power plants that are so outdated that pollution controls are not an economically viable option; prevent contamination of Texas' land, air and water by proposed Canadian tar sands pipelines;
- protecting watersheds, aquifers, schools and neighborhoods from the harmful effects of transporting dangerous materials through pipelines or other forms of surface transportation;
- enacting and enforcing guidelines to prevent contamination of Texas' land, air and water by

pipelines;

- the enactment of laws and regulations to protect low-income communities and communities of color from environmental racism and environmental injustice;
- strict “truth in labeling” laws and regulations that mandate the consumer’s right to know what is present in their food, including genetic engineering involved in product preparation;
- proper management and regulation of landfills that threaten community health;
- providing State and Federal funds to address border environmental problems caused by inadequate water, wastewater treatment systems and air pollution;
- the enactment of state policy that allows local government to protect air and water quality, public safety, historical sites and health from actions that adversely affect their community.

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, including those for the San Antonio, El Paso, Austin, Dallas-Ft. Worth and Houston areas. We also support:

- new technologies that use clean, Texas-based fuels and reduce costs to consumers;
- stricter vehicle emissions standards comparable to standards required in foreign markets;
- encouraging the large-scale planting of trees to absorb greenhouse gases, improve wildlife habitat, and promote beautification;
- energy efficiency programs that reduce energy needs and as a result also reduce air pollution from power plants; and
- reducing the threat caused by indoor air pollution, including toxic mold, in our schools.

The preservation of recreational and open spaces is essential to a healthy Texas. Unfortunately, recent actions by Texas Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson have violated the public trust and highlighted the need to reverse years of Republican neglect of our state parks and public lands. We must provide adequate funding for the upkeep, maintenance and acquisition of state park land. We must also reward those who voluntarily protect endangered species on their lands through Safe Harbor Agreements and similar measures, and we support open space acquisition to protect Texas aquifers and watersheds that provide sole source drinking water for millions of Texans. We support strong enforcement of laws that provide full public access and restoration of public lands, parks, beaches, and waters.

The Availability of Clean Water from publicly managed resources is essential to our future and our health. As a result of the recent Gulf Oil Spill the natural environment has been devastated, local economies crippled, and billions are now needed for cleanup. We support:

- strong penalties and remediation requirements in response to the massive contamination of the Gulf of Mexico,
- vigorous research and the adoption of safeguards to prevent future oil spills;
- the implementation of aggressive water conservation and reuse practices;
- protecting Texas bays, estuaries, in-stream flows, and wetlands with regulations that safeguard offshore reefs, maritime resources, recreational and commercial fisheries;
- giving regional groundwater conservation districts authority to preserve the water within their districts, protect communities from water hustlers, implement conservation standards related to the development density, green building, and other measures;

- requiring regional groundwater districts to maintain the historic minimum flows of all springs and creeks and to protect drinking water supplies, plants, and wildlife;
- thorough analysis of the relative short term and long term costs and present 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;
- increased state funding for local infrastructure to reduce illness-causing bacteria levels in public waters by meeting EPA standards;
- expanded testing of fish and shellfish for mercury, radionuclides and other contaminants and public notification of health risks;
- preventing depletion and exploitation of limited state water resources by "water wildcatters;" and,
- support research and understanding of the state's groundwater resources.

Energy

Texas has long been a world energy leader, and Texas can continue that leadership in a transition to clean, abundant energy as we tap our wealth of solar, wind and geothermal resources. 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 foreign oil. We support:

- a goal of 5000 MW of nonpolluting renewable non-wind energy by 2025, which will help spur develop solar and geothermal resources;
- the development and use of energy storage technologies to maximize the availability of energy produced by renewable resources;
- Sales tax exemptions and other incentives for Texas homeowners and businesses to "go solar" and to allow solar system owners to get credit on electric bills for extra energy such systems produce;
- the development of Texas' abundant and low carbon footprint natural gas resources with environment-compatible technologies in the transition period from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources;
- the utilization of Texas' unique facilities and resources, including use of solar and wind combinations with storage and natural gas to create base-load electricity;
- further development of the many energy storage technologies;
- the reduction and remediation of all forms of pollution from power generation;
- energy efficiency standards that encourage the wise use of energy in our homes, offices, and commercial facilities in the place of incentives that encourage inefficiency;
- transportation policy that encourages the development of affordable, fuel efficient vehicles that can run on alternative fuels;
- reduced reliance on coal-fired plants in order to protect health and reduce pollution
- 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, and has caused the global food prices to rise dramatically;
- creating a state panel on global climate change, including all stakeholders, that recognizes this real and serious threat and recommends a statewide energy policy that will spur economic

development and reduce carbon emissions in Texas by at least 80% by 2050, as recommended by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC);

- utilization of natural geothermal sources for commercial and industrial applications;
- incentives for wind generated electricity;
- removing local legal and architectural restrictions that inhibit using alternative energy sources;
- develop green building policies by utilizing federal and other incentives and strengthening building codes;
- ensuring the availability of affordable energy to protect the health and safety of seniors and others on fixed incomes;
- immediate funding for research to develop new CAFE standards at 50 MPG;
- incentives for homeowners, businesses and state institutions for investment in energy savings initiatives and for using clean and renewable sources of energy;
- encouraging all nations to use the best available technologies to develop clean and domestic energy resources to meet their domestic demand; and
- state minimum standard distances as a requirement for oil & gas wells, collection, and condensate tanks in relation to schools, hospitals, parks, and other vulnerable community locations.

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. All Texans are entitled to be safe and secure, and free from fear of violence. The guilty must be justly punished for crimes they commit, the innocent must be protected, the rights of victims must be ensured, the accused provided due process under law, and public safety officers must be strongly supported. We believe a community-based approach to crime fighting makes our streets and neighborhoods safer. Partnerships should be formed with community groups to assist officers on the streets. We must also be just as tough when addressing the causes of crime, so we can more effectively deter and reduce criminal conduct.

Texas Democrats believe government must provide the necessary tools and equipment law enforcement personnel need to do their jobs, and we must support officers with higher wages commensurate with the daily risks associated with the profession.

Texas Democrats applaud the Dallas County District Attorney for working with the Innocence Project on innovative efforts to assure the integrity of convictions and exonerate and quickly release innocent people who have been wrongfully convicted. We urge the Texas Legislature to create an “Innocence Commission” to review cases in which innocent persons were convicted of a crime and later exonerated, in order to identify the causes of wrongful convictions and determine and implement needed reforms to prevent recurring problems, including a requirement to corroborate eyewitness and confidential informant testimony and meaningful penalties for prosecutorial misconduct.

Texas has faced recurring crises in prison space that can be addressed by making sure dangerous criminals are locked up by adopting effective prevention, education and alternative sentencing strategies to reduce the numbers of nonviolent offenders imprisoned. Less money will be needed to build more prisons when prevention efforts can keep people from becoming career criminals. Texas has more people in prison and a higher incarceration rate than any other state. There are too many

people in Texas prisons who could be supervised safely in the community at a much lower cost, while also paying taxes, paying restitution to their victims and paying child support.

Texas Democrats are leading efforts to make the Texas criminal justice system fairer, more equitable and less costly. We support reforms passed with the support of the Democratic legislators in 2007, which redirected corrections policy to include short-term residential diversion and treatment facilities for low-level substance abusing offenders and additional outpatient drug and mental health treatment resources.

Texas Democrats also led efforts to pass legislation to remove the requirement that a person obtain a letter of innocence from the District Attorney to receive a pardon for innocence; and increase the level of compensation for each year of wrongful incarceration.

Transforming Juvenile Justice in Texas

The shocking Texas Youth Commission scandal showed how desperately Texas needs to make sweeping changes in juvenile justice policy to end a pattern of abuse and cover up by stressing treatment and reduce ineffective punishment. The “tough love” approach adopted by former Governor George Bush has failed and led to a shocking 50 percent recidivism rate for juveniles.

The state should consider TYC reforms based on the “Missouri model,” which emphasizes preventive measures, education and training, parental involvement, treatment for drug abuse and mental health problems and housing troubled juveniles closer to home in community-based settings instead of large, remote, TYC prisons. The use of Tasers and pepper-spray at TYC facilities should be banned, unless it is necessary to prevent loss of life or serious bodily injury.

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. Community-based juvenile justice prevention and intervention programs can ultimately reduce adult crime, Texas’ high incarceration rate and the need for prison construction.

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

Administration of Justice

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

- revising sentencing guidelines for non-violent offenders, redirecting the “War on Drugs” to treatment, and reclassifying some offenses considered felonies;
- increased funding for the state prison system’s Windham School District and restoration of Republican cuts to programs for inmates to take higher education courses, because literacy, education and job training ensure people leave prison and do not return;
- ensuring prisons are staffed by professionally trained and compensated corrections officers, in

- sufficient numbers to achieve safe staffing ratios;
- 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;
- opposing the further privatization of Texas prisons and mandating a pay scale comparable to public prisons for prison guards at existing private prisons;
- reducing 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;
- sensitive treatment for the victims of crime and stronger emphasis on compensation to crime victims by the criminals themselves;
- strong enforcement of the James Byrd, Jr., Memorial Hate Crimes Act and the federal Matthew Shepherd Hate Crimes Prevention Act;
- 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;
- placing more police officers on the streets in underserved areas;
- insure that any use of tasers is carried out only when necessary to prevent loss of life or serious bodily injury, as a substitute for lawful use of a deadly weapon;
- 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;
- prevention programs addressing drug and alcohol addiction, lack of educational opportunity and other root causes of crime;
- probation reform 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;
- significantly reducing the number of people reincarcerated for technical violations of parole or probation, such as missing an appointment with a supervisory officer;
- stronger enforcement of laws and punishment for white collar corporate criminals;
- ending racial profiling in searches and traffic stops;
- 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;
- staff the Parole Division to achieve the 60:1 ratio of parolees to parole officers; and
- creation and adequate funding of a public defender office in the state's most populous counties.

Sexual Assault and Family and Domestic Violence

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

- strong enforcement of Texas laws to hold offenders accountable and increase the likelihood that

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

Capital Punishment

When capital punishment is imposed, Texans must be assured that it is fairly administered. Texas Democrats extend our deepest sympathies to all victims of crime and especially to the families of murder victims, and we strongly support their rights. The Texas death penalty system has been severely criticized by religious leaders, appellate courts and major newspapers that have observed that the current system cannot ensure that innocent or undeserving defendants are not sentenced to death. The Dallas Morning News has called for abolition of the death penalty in Texas.

In the modern era, Texas has executed over 400 people, far more than any other state in the nation. The frequency of executions and inadequacies in our criminal justice system increase the likelihood that an innocent person will be executed. The State of Texas may have already executed at least two innocent people, according to major newspaper investigations into the cases of Carlos DeLuna and Cameron Todd Willingham. Another inmate, Ernest Willis, was exonerated and released from Texas Death Row in 2004 after 17 years of wrongful imprisonment.

We condemn Governor Perry's manipulation of the forensic science commission investigation of the science which led to the execution of a possibly innocent person.

In order to promote public confidence in the fairness of the Texas criminal justice system, Texas Democrats support the establishment of a Texas Capital Punishment Commission to study the Texas death penalty system and a moratorium on executions pending action on the Commission's findings.

Texas Democrats support the following specific reforms:

- establishing a statewide Office of Public Defenders for Capital Cases to ensure that every person accused of a capital crime has equal access to well-trained trial and appellate attorneys, regardless of income, race or the county of jurisdiction;
- allowing testing of any possibly exculpatory DNA evidence to ensure guilt or innocence before executions are carried out, and allowing testing of DNA evidence after an execution to determine if an innocent person has been executed;
- establishing procedures to determine before a trial takes place whether an accused has mental retardation, in order to be sure that Texas complies with the U.S. Supreme Court's ban on executions of people with mental retardation;
- banning death sentences and executions for people with mental illness;
- requiring the Board of Pardons and Paroles to meet in person to discuss and vote on every case involving the death sentence;
- restoring the power to the Governor to grant clemency in death penalty cases without a

- recommendation from the Board of Pardons and Paroles. To restore public confidence in the process, the Board should meet in public and decisions should be made by majority vote;
- when the imposition of the death penalty is before the Parole Board or the Governor we urge consideration of all reasonably certain scientific or factual evidence that has become known since the trial; and
 - reforming statutes related to the “Law of Parties,” to make sure individuals who actually commit crimes are the primary focus of prosecution.

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.

We believe it is essential that Texas meet the water needs of our population, communities and industries with an absolute minimum of environmental disruption. We support the enhancement of water conservation programs including programs for wetlands, ground water recharge, desalination, and storm water runoff and storage.

Texans need to breathe clean air. We oppose artificial attempts to cure pollution with a pencil by restructuring EPA regions to pull rural air quality points into more urban areas. These actions do nothing to improve the environment but they do deprive rural areas of economic opportunity.

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

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

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

- new TDA leadership to devise effective global marketing programs to assist our producers sell their products, including training in the use of new technology and the internet;
- offering Euro-gap certification to all Texas producers at a reduced rate;
- working with Mexican officials to make NAFTA works for, and not against, Texas agriculture;
- legislation to improve weights and measures certification of gas pumps and market scales;
- reforms policy to change policy that unduly favors agribusiness and restricts farmers both locally

- and globally to using only genetically modified seed;
- USDA efforts to toughen meat industry antitrust rules to protect cattle raisers and producers from unfair and deceptive practices by a handful of giant corporate meatpackers that dominate the market;
- federal farm legislation that establishes minimum price support levels and economic protections for FAMILY farms;
- preserving proper use of agricultural property tax exemptions and restructuring the current land appraisal system to insure a fair property tax system for all Texans; and
- the full cooperation by Texas state officials and agencies, including the Texas Department of Agriculture, with the appropriate federal authorities in foreign activities.

Property Rights and Eminent Domain

Texas Democrats strongly support private property rights, which are protected by our Constitution. We oppose the use of eminent domain and takings to deprive any property owner of the possession, use, or the ability to control their property without just compensation. We believe eminent domain should only be permitted for obvious and compelling public need. We recognize that the condemnation deck is currently stacked against the individual property owner and that significant reforms are needed.

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

Transportation

With volatile energy costs making it more costly for Texans to go to work and make 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 and toll ways 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 so that Texas will be eligible for federal high-speed rail funding;
- designing projects to avoid unnecessarily dividing communities or having detrimental impact on land owners;
- 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;
- reform of the Texas Department of Transportation in the wake of its infamous billion dollar “bookkeeping error.”
- a ban on converting existing roads to toll roads, which amounts to double taxation; and
- 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 detention ponds be used to create green space for hike and bike trails.

Protecting Democracy and Restoring Public Trust

The democratic process is defined by the right to vote in a free and fair election with confidence that every vote will count. Many Republican politicians say voting is not a right but a privilege, and they have used the offices of government to erect barriers to voting and reward cronies and contributors. The public trust has been violated by abuse and corruption, and Texas Democrats support changes to restore faith in our government and the integrity of elections.

Free and Fair Elections Voters Can Trust

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

- vigorous Justice Department enforcement of the federal Voting Rights Act;
- passage of a State Voting Rights Act;
- the removal 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 demand compliance with the Voting Rights Act, discourage savaging regions and communities for partisan gain, and preserve the constituent-representative relationship to the extent possible to give voters the right to elect their representatives instead of letting representatives pick their voters;
- securing the integrity and outcome of election results by requiring that electronic voting systems provide a durable paper printout to allow votes to be verified, counted accurately, certified, and recounted, including a requirement that a voter verifiable paper ballot serve as the official ballot in recounts;
- opening the certification and selection process for voting systems to public review, testing and analysis;
- implementing rigorous oversight by a non-partisan commission consisting of qualified computer experts and programmers to perform logic and accuracy tests prior to deploying machines for elections, including practices and audit procedures such as parallel testing and risk-based audits with county access to all proprietary and/or open source codes;
- a chain of custody for all voting and tabulating machines, with security protocols for transport to the polling place and returning cast ballots to the counting station; and
- A requirement that the State Party Chairs be allowed to obtain “read and write” access permission to all Texas Election Administration Management (TEAM) database tables and

fields with complete documentation, and appoint two liaison persons to attend all meetings called by the Secretary of State on TEAM matters and report findings on data security to the State Chair.

Encourage Voter Participation and Elimination of Voter Suppression

Although Texas consistently has one of the lowest voter participation rates among the 50 states, Republican politicians have used public office to suppress the vote and further restrict participation instead of working to increase it. Texas Democrats support:

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

Restoring Trust and Ethical Government

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

- 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;
- a ban on corporate campaign contributions and, to the extent possible under the Supreme Court's "Citizen's United" decision, strict reporting requirements and regulation of corporate political advertising;
- prohibiting former legislators and state agency executives from going through a "revolving door" to lobby former colleagues or previous employers for a specified length of time after leaving their office or position;
- enhanced funding and enforcement tools for the Texas Ethics Commission;
- requiring the Texas Legislature to record all votes and not just votes for final passage, comply with open meetings laws, and provide real-time internet access to voting records and amendments to provide public accountability;

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

Religious Freedom

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

- government must not inhibit the free exercise of religion;
- entangling government with religion is dangerous to both government and religion;
- America is the most religiously observant country in the West because our founders wisely provided for separation of church and state, which allows religion to flourish in freedom;
- that, just as personal faith and values guide and inspire us to further the well-being of our community; we must never use the power of government at any level to impose our personal religious observances on others.

Democrats hold political views motivated by deeply held personal beliefs. No political party and no extremist group hold a lock on religious or ethical beliefs and values. We recognize the importance of religion and prayer in the lives of Texans and support our Constitution’s guarantee of every individual's right to practice his or her own beliefs without imposing them on others.

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:

- 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;
- 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

Rights and Freedoms

Texas Democrats believe all people possess inalienable rights that are protected by freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution, which places responsibility on our government to protect and defend those freedoms just as those freedoms place responsibilities on us as individuals. 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.

We believe our Constitution is intended to protect our freedoms. Republicans seek ways to ignore or deny those protections. Democrats believe our Constitution is intended to prohibit discrimination in all forms. Republicans wish to make it a tool of discrimination. To protect our rights and freedoms, we support:

- action against all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment;
- the right to privacy and protecting the confidentiality and privacy of personal, medical, and financial records - in both paper and electronic formats;
- preservation and enforcement of all state and federal disability rights laws, particularly the Americans with Disabilities Act;
- repeal of discriminatory laws and policies against members of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community;
- 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;
- protecting of free speech, including on the Internet, to ensure equal rights are guaranteed for any individual, business or corporation attempting to access published information;
- prevention of human trafficking and protection for victims of human trafficking;
- repeal of provisions of the Patriot Act inconsistent with the Bill of Rights and the right of habeas corpus;
- proper court authorization and review of all surveillance and wire-tapping in full compliance with the Fourth Amendment of the Constitution;

- 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.

Immigration

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

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

- secure all our borders, including the allocation and use of sufficient resources to equip and maintain a well-trained Border Patrol with the manpower needed to effectively police our borders;
- enforce existing immigration laws;
- eliminate bureaucratic logjams that delay and frustrate those who attempt to follow the rules to become citizens;
- emphasize economic security and development on both sides of the border;
- continue the United States' constitutional provision making all persons born in this country citizens of this country;
- provide for strict enforcement, appropriate punishment and economic sanctions against those who profit by hiring undocumented workers; and
- establish a path to citizenship for those who meet qualifications and seek to become part of our national community.

Texas Democrats also realize that politicians who pander politically with foolish, shortsighted and wasteful proposals are not offering solutions. Texas will not become Arizona, and we strongly oppose:

- any law that would, through its enforcement, result in discrimination; intimidation or victimization of citizens based on their race, ethnicity or appearance;
- any law that would force law enforcement agencies to divert limited resources and manpower from their primary duty to protect citizens and prevent crime in order to enforce immigration policy that is the responsibility of the federal government;
- any law that would prohibit ethnic studies classes;
- any law that could make it more difficult for a qualified citizen to exercise the right to vote;
- any effort to expand the existing border fence without regard to the border economy,

- environmental impact or property rights;
- wasteful efforts like Governor Perry’s “virtual wall” of border cameras that resulted in only a handful of apprehensions at a cost of tens of thousands of dollars per arrest; and
- measures that attempt to improperly limit the constitutional requirement to provide for the health, education, and safety needs of individuals and communities.

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

Veterans

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

We support the continuation and enhancement of veteran's benefits, including post military training, medical and disability. We support a new G.I Bill to increase educational benefits for veterans to fully cover the cost of a college degree and related housing expenses. We support the Texas Veterans Land Board, which enables veterans to purchase land and homes at favorable terms and interest rates. We deplore the hypocrisy of arm chair patriots who talk glowingly of war and wrap themselves in the flag while turning their backs on those who fought and defended that flag.

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

- professional licensing for skills learned in the military, like “Troops to Teachers;”
- job training for veterans;
- adequate and affordable health insurance coverage and health care services for veterans and their families, including mental health care services;
- restoring funding and service cuts and expanding clinical services at VA Medical Centers;
- legislation that appropriately addresses the role of Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI) and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) among members of the armed forces and ensures proper treatment for all veterans and members of the armed forces with disabilities.
- The full extension of benefits to families of veterans who sustain partial or permanent disabilities, including post injury and PTSD individual and family counseling, cost of living monthly allowances, childcare assistance, tuition assistance for dependent children, and assistance in job training or referral for the spouse of the veteran;
- the establishment of a new, full service VA Hospital in South Texas and restoration of the Kerrville Veterans’ Administration Hospital to its past status of general medical facility to care for veterans in the Hill Country;

- extending the right of full citizenship to non-citizen veterans who have served our country;
- programs to encourage and support veterans and their families to obtain higher education, such as expanding the Hazlewood Act to permit veterans who have not fully utilized their entitlement to pass on any remainder of the unused credit hours to their children;
- state legislation to allow Texas veterans to use their G.I. Bill benefits and Hazlewood Act benefits concurrently; and
- student loan forgiveness in exchange for public service, including military service, Peace Corps, Teach for America, AmeriCorps, and similar programs.

Supporting the Men and Women of the Military

Texas should demonstrate its support for military families and communities. We insist that our military members on active duty and in the Reserve receive fair pay and allowances. They must be the best organized, trained, and equipped fighting force possible. We encourage city, county, state, and federal elected officials to review present benefits and determine how they can be enhanced. We also demand truth in recruiting, including a provision that parental permission be required to authorize the recruitment of minors. Texas Democrats support:

- providing appropriate personal and vehicle protection for all combat military personnel;
- programs that assist families of deployed service members in managing difficulties created by longer and more frequent deployments of Guard and Reserve personnel; such as counseling, debt service delays, tax deferrals, and basic needs assistance;
- initiatives to financially assist families of service members who suffer an extended loss of employment income due to extended or repeated deployments;
- interstate cooperation to enable the successful transition of families forced to move from one state to another, including changes involving public education, job searches, and health care continuity;
- preventing predatory lending practices targeted at military personnel and their families, such as payday loans and sale-leaseback transactions;
- a prohibition of a military draft absent a congressional declaration of war; and an end to practices that change deployment and other terms of service for existing military personnel in the middle of the game that amount to a draft in disguise;
- the right of all military personnel to serve without discrimination, sexual abuse or prejudice and the repeal of the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy;
- the right of female soldiers and dependents to have the same access to the full range of reproductive choices and related services that are provided to others;
- adequate time off between deployments; and
- providing any Texas Veteran that has a disability associated with service in the Armed Forces that is assigned a percentage of disability by the Veterans Administration, be granted the same percentage reduction in junior college or college tuition, room, board, books, and any other cost of obtaining additional training or education in a state-supported Junior College, Community College, or Four Year College or University..

Foreign Policy and National Security

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

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

The misdirection and misdeeds of the previous administration drained an immense reservoir of international good will and support for American foreign policy objectives after the “9/11” terrorist attack, while failing to bring its leaders to justice. The policy changes Democrats have already implemented have increased the favorable image of the U. S. by over 25% and increased international support for our war efforts by nearly 40%, according to the most recent Pew survey.

Not all the threats we face are foreign – domestic right-wing terrorists perpetrated the Oklahoma City bombing. Texas Democrats believe that, whatever their source, attacks against America and Americans must be prevented and those who attempt them must be brought to justice.

FOREIGN POLICY AND NATIONAL SECURITY OBJECTIVES

Texas Democrats also believe America must:

- modernize our military and diplomatic organizations to meet the threats from non-state groups and those nations that provide them support and protection;
- utilize the advice, wisdom and experience of our professional military officers and diplomats;
- create a new era of alliances for a 21st Century world and lead international efforts to prevent the further spread of nuclear arms and to eliminate weapons of mass destruction;
- encourage Iraq’s government to devote its oil revenues and budget surplus to reconstruction and development;
- immediately develop and implement a plan for reconstructing Afghanistan's civil and economic infrastructure;
- minimize civilian casualties, which endanger relations essential to our goals; to the maximum extent possible consistent with the safety of our troops;
- withdraw major U. S. troop support from Afghanistan as rapidly as possible, consistent with their safety and in a manner that does not destabilize the region and place more lives in danger;
- maintain our long-standing policy that a true, mutually respectful peace with safe and secure borders and governments dedicated to peace and democracy for Israelis and Palestinians can only result from direct negotiations between willing and responsible partners;
- withdraw support for agencies and programs that promote hatred and intolerance;
- establish a rapid deployment force to provide immediate assistance to victims and survivors of natural disasters throughout the world;
- assist economic development of our allies, particularly neighbors where high unemployment creates immigration pressures;
- become a leader, not a follower, in reducing worldwide greenhouse gas emissions and in mitigating the effects of global warming;
- adopt policies designed to free us from dependence on the resource of any nation or region, including foreign oil;
- secure our information and telecommunications technology infrastructure;
- consider the trade and human rights practices of other nations before extending aid, security

protections or trade preferences to them.

In our pursuit of national security, Texas Democrats support:

- a ban on the use of all methods of torture, including waterboarding and other policies that violate or conflict with the values embodied by the Bill of Rights and the U.S. Constitution;
- establishing legal oversight over all privatized military security forces operating under U.S. law or the laws of countries in which they operate, because military security contractors like Blackwater, also known as Z, operating without government oversight have put America at risk;
- an international ban on the use of anti-personnel mines and cluster bombs;
- furthering policies for a safe and peaceful world that focus on practical, nonviolent solutions to the problems of domestic and international conflict;
- a fully-staffed and equipped air traffic control system that is an inherent function of the federal government essential to national security and should never be subject to privatization;
- strengthening port security, including inspection of currently unchecked containers; and
- the missions and efforts of the United States Peace Corps as it fosters peaceful relationships with other nations.