

TEXAS DEMOCRATS

2016-2018 Texas Democratic Party Platform **Adopted by the 2016 Texas Democratic Convention** **San Antonio, Texas**

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****Grammatical and technical corrections will be made to this document in a timely manner****

PREAMBLE

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

EQUALITY & FREEDOM

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

SMART GOVERNMENT

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

A HEALTHY TEXAS

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

Principles of the Texas Democratic Party

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

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

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

We believe in freedom:

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

We believe in responsibility:

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

We believe in equal rights:

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

We believe in equal opportunity:

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

We believe a growing economy should benefit all Texans:

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

- exploit workers, or pollute our environment; and
- all people, including those with disabilities.

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

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

We believe in America:

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

We believe in Texas:

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

DEMOCRACY

Texas Democrats believe that a healthy democracy is based on free, fair, and transparent elections; that our constitutional right to vote should be protected at all costs by elected officials who exhibit ethical public service.

Voting Rights & Fair Elections

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

- repeal of the highly restrictive Texas photo Voter ID law;
- automatic voter registration upon age 17 years and 9 months for all persons who meet Texas voter registration requirements;
- same day voter registration;
- online voter registration;
- voter outreach and education efforts, especially for youth and underserved communities;
- existing voter protection policies under the federal Voting Rights Act and the Texas Voting Rights Act, and restoration of the federal preclearance policies in the Voting Rights Act that were overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court;
- protect extended early voting periods;
- instituting no excuses vote by mail for all elections, federal state and local;
- public ownership of all election processes, software and equipment;
- the creation of a nonpartisan redistricting commission to end gerrymandering in our redistricting process;
- robust auditing procedures that include absentee ballots; and
- a constitutional amendment to eliminate the electoral college and award the presidency to the winner of the nationwide popular vote, and failing that, urge all states to join the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact, so that candidates must campaign everywhere and not just in swing states.

Campaign Finance Reform

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

- overturning, by Constitutional Amendment if necessary, the decision in *Citizens United v. Federal Elections Commission* that allows corporations to give unlimited amounts of money to political campaigns, and to clarify that corporations are not persons and constitutional rights are for natural persons only, and to end the doctrine that money is speech;
- legislation to move towards public campaign and election financing;
- full disclosure of funding sources for political advertisements, including the largest major funders of all political television, radio, print, slate mailer, and online advertising for ballot measures, independent expenditures, and issue advocacy; and
- the reinstatement of the federal Public Service and Equal Time requirements, so that companies given monopoly use of public television and radio frequencies cannot limit access to only candidates that can afford the high costs of advertising.

Ethics

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

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

EDUCATION

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

Public Education Funding

The Texas Constitution guarantees the right to a suitable free public education for all Texas children. Texas Democrats condemn the unanimous decision by Texas Supreme Court justices and the Governor who declared “victory” when the Court refused to enforce the constitutional right that guarantees a free public education for every Texas child. The Republican legislative majority has shortchanged education funding every session since taking control of both houses. In 2011, Republicans cut public school funding by \$5.4 billion despite having more than enough in the state “Rainy Day Fund” and still haven’t fully restored those funding cuts. Correcting the deficiencies in funding Texas public education must be a legislative budget priority. Texas Democrats believe:

- the state should establish a 100% equitable school finance system with sufficient state revenue to provide every child the opportunity to learn in an exemplary program;
- the state should equitably reduce reliance on "Robin Hood" recapture;
- state funding formulas should fully reflect all student and district cost differences and the impact of inflation and state mandates; and
- the federal government should fully fund all federal education mandates and should fully

fund the Every Student Succeeds Act.

Preservation of the Texas Public Education System

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

- oppose the misnamed "school choice" schemes of using public tax money for the support of private and sectarian schools;
- believe "school choice" is a deceptive marketing frame that purports to advocate something that already exists - school choice - but whose true purpose is to divert public school funds to vouchers or tax credit systems supporting private and sectarian schools;
- That adoption of any vouchers or tax credit scheme would unavoidably financially and academically damage public schools in Texas.

Pre-K and Early Childhood Education

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

- every eligible Texas child must have access to high-quality, full-day Pre-K and kindergarten;
- the Texas Education Agency should establish appropriate quality standards for Pre-K programs to insure that students are receiving the highest quality instruction;
- schools and teachers must be equipped with resources and effective techniques to ensure that every child performs at grade level in reading, social studies, math, and science by third grade;
- state support should be provided for family literacy programs that enable parents to assist their children; and
- resources must be provided to reverse the loss of teachers' aides due to the 2011 cuts.

Every Student Should Have a Highly Qualified Teacher

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

- Bring Texas teacher pay in line with the national average.
- Increase the state contribution to health insurance for educational employees, which has remained stagnant for 14 years while premium costs have eaten away at take home pay for teachers and other school employees.
- Guarantee early acceptance to college and a teaching job to high school students in the top 20% of their class who commit to a teaching career upon certification.
- Enhance the Teach for Texas Loan Repayment Program by tying loan forgiveness to years of teaching service, opening the program to all fields of study and allowing current teachers to go back to school to get additional certification in critical needs fields.

- Restore funding for the Educational Aide Exemption to help teachers' aides go back to school to get certified as full-time teachers.
- Prepare high school students for careers in teaching by creating an educational endorsement pathway specific to teaching readiness.
- Restore, respect and safeguard the rights and benefits of education employees.
- Guarantee that every class has a teacher certified to teach that subject.
- Recruit and train teachers who reflect the state's diversity.
- Provide a mentor or master teacher for every novice teacher.
- Oppose test-based performance pay.
- Respect support personnel by providing them due process employment rights and a salary schedule.

Quality Classroom Learning Environment

Crowded classrooms and an overreliance on high stakes standardized tests that stifle creativity and leave little time for genuine teaching and learning. Smaller class sizes improve student performance, but class size waivers are all too common. Teachers have sued TEA over plans to increase the testing stakes by imposing a statewide test-based "Value Added Measure" as a teacher evaluation metric, despite research that demonstrates such measures are not valid. Parents have sued TEA over numerous flaws in the STAAR test. There is a better way to create an excellent classroom learning environment to help students think critically and succeed. Therefore, Texas Democrats support:

- extending appropriate class size limits to all grades and enforce those limits;
- replacing high-stakes tests that effectively punish students, teachers and schools, with multiple measures designed to diagnose student needs and improve instruction;
- a prohibition on awarding taxpayer dollars to corporations to develop high-stakes tests;
- rejecting efforts to impose a corporate-designed test-based "Value Added" teacher evaluation system and base teacher evaluation on multiple measures designed by practicing educators;
- ending inappropriate testing of students with disabilities whose individual education plans call for alternative assessments of their educational progress;
- providing free, accurate and updated instructional materials aligned with educationally appropriate, non-ideological state curriculum standards and tests, including ethnic studies and environmental education programs;
- equipping classrooms with free computers, high-speed internet access and digital instructional materials; and
- adequately defining and funding programs targeted to increase student proficiency in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM).

Community Schools: A Proven, Sustainable Way to Improve Schools

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

- require every school to meet high standards and repeal "home rule" and "innovation" statutes that allow standards to be reduced and serve as a pathway to privatization;

- oppose A-F school ratings, which serve only to stigmatize schools and undermine struggling communities while doing nothing to improve children’s education.
- oppose the creation of a statewide so-called “achievement” or “recovery” school district that would grant control of a neighborhood school to Austin-based bureaucrats who could contract with private operators to run neighborhood schools without local accountability;
- utilize existing statutes and encourage expansion of neighborhood charter schools that are run by parents and teachers who establish curriculum and policy within state standards;
- strengthen state oversight and academic and financial standards for charter schools to provide the same level of accountability required of neighborhood schools;
- strengthen state oversight of homeschooling; and
- reject efforts to provide state funds for and shift students into for-profit, low-quality, unaccountable “virtual schools” at taxpayers’ expense.

Opportunity for Every Child

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

- reject efforts to destroy bilingual education;
- promote multi-language instruction, beginning in elementary school, to make all students fluent in English and at least one other language;
- support Title IX protections for gender equity in public education institutions;
- support child nutrition acts that provide for free school breakfasts, lunches, and after school snacks, as well as summer lunch programs;
- ensure that every student has access to appropriate academic counseling services, as well as psychological and social services provided by competent and licensed professionals;
- provide and appropriately fund high-quality career and technical education programs;
- provide arts and music education in all schools;
- ensure that every school has a fully funded and staffed library, fully equipped with both print and electronic media, that is regularly open and accessible to students and faculty;
- provide universally accessible after-school programs for grades pre-K-12; and
- develop peer-reviewed curriculum for mandatory ethnic studies classes, such as Indigenous, Chicano, and African-American studies.

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

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

Preserving the defined benefit pension for retired teachers

Most retired teachers worked for years with inadequate pay and have no Social Security.

Texas Democrats support:

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

SBOE Reform

All too often, extremists on the State Board of Education have made a laughingstock of our state's process by approving curriculum standards and textbooks that violate the integrity and reliability of mainstream science and social studies, leading even conservative think tanks to call our social studies curriculum standards a "politicized distortion of history." Texas Democrats believe the State Board of Education should:

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

Making Schools Safe and Bully-Free

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

- School campuses and functions must be weapon-free and drug-free.
- Teachers deserve support when they exercise their statutory right to remove a disruptive student from class as guaranteed in the Texas Education Code.
- Full compliance with Title IX implementing regulations regarding a student's gender identity and with the DOE and DOJ directive to school principals contained in the document "Examples of Policies and Emerging Practices for Supporting Transgender Students."
- Implementation of systematic programs should be utilized to identify instances of bullying and implement school-wide positive behavior interventions and supports, to prevent violence, disruption, bullying, and harassment:
- Eliminate disparities in discipline based on race, ethnicity, national origin, disability, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression or any other improper grounds.

In light of Texas current discriminatory suspension and expulsion rates, Texas Democrats have taken the lead in passing legislation to eliminate disparities in discipline based on race, ethnicity, national origin, disability, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, or any other

improper grants. The Texas Education Agency should be directed to investigate and correct any patterns of apparent discriminatory enforcement or non-enforcement of discipline standards, including standards for out-of-school suspension.

Texas Democrats have enacted and will work to implement measures to stop indiscriminate use of misdemeanor ticketing for minor infractions on campus and indiscriminate expulsion or placement of students in disciplinary alternative education programs for trivial misconduct. 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 the disciplinary setting offers a full array of educational and social/behavioral services to help that student get back on track.

HIGHER EDUCATION

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

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

- the fundamental principles of academic freedom, equality of opportunity, and human dignity.

Community Colleges

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

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

- providing tuition-free community college to Texas high school graduates;
- full formula funding of the cost of instruction and the growth in student enrollments;
- requiring that any "incentive" funding be on top of formula funding rather than funded at the expense of the actual cost of operations;
- sufficient financial aid to cover eligible community college students for whom aid is not available;
- fully state-funded full time employee group health insurance and proportional health benefits for part-time instructors and restoration of funding for employee retirement;
- funding for new campuses and program expansions;
- funding for community colleges to assist local school districts in development of programs for the new career and technology endorsements and applied mathematics curriculum;
- requiring establishment of rules to ensure full transferability of community college credit hours to four-year institutions;
- sufficient funding for Adult Basic Education to fully cover the demand for services; and
- elimination of financial aid rules that penalize students who transfer to universities from community colleges.

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

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

Diversity and Safety

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

- maintaining the "Top 10% Rule" established by Democrats that guarantees access to our universities for the best students from all communities and regions of Texas;
- encouraging universities to offer culturally competent and culturally diverse curricula, student activities, and student recruitment policies that promote understanding, respect and

- acceptance;
- strict enforcement of policies that prohibit discrimination or harassment in any Texas institution of higher education against any person on the basis of race, sex, color, religion, national origin, ancestry, age, marital status, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, citizenship or military status;
- repealing campus carry policies for public university and community college campuses; and
- comprehensive programs to combat the campus sexual assault crisis.

JOBS AND THE ECONOMY

Good Jobs at Home

Hardworking Texans have the right to good jobs to support their families and invest in their future. Texas Democrats understand we must have an economy that works for all, not just the wealthy. The Texas Republicans reckless reductions in state funding for education at all levels will leave us vulnerable in attracting the jobs of the future. To this end we propose the following as the correct approach to providing the jobs to make our communities strong and resilient long into the future:

- We support requiring a minimum wage that is at least \$15-an-hour that is indexed to keep it from eroding again. No longer should corporate profits be subsidized by letting corporations pay poverty-level wages that leave the taxpayer footing the bill for public benefits to their employees.
- We support the ability of individuals to come together collectively and negotiate their wages, healthcare and work conditions to improve job safety and eliminate the stagnation of wages and reduction of benefits. We oppose anti-union laws and policies, such as so-called “right-to-work” laws, and support laws and agencies that protect the safety of workers and the payment of prevailing wages for public projects.
- We support working with our friends in Labor to maintain the social safety nets that Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid provide, stop attacks on public sector workers and assist in the fights to restore a sound banking system, reinstate Glass-Steagall, and make homes, healthcare and college affordable again.
- We oppose discrimination in employment and support the Employment Non-Discrimination Act.
- We categorically oppose the Trans-Pacific Partnership.
- We also categorically oppose so-called “free trade” proposals which hurt American jobs and workers, the environment, and the American consumer. We support fair trade deals to bring back and protect Texan and American jobs. Trade policy must combat child and slave labor, sweatshops, environmental degradation and other practices that turn global trade into a race to the bottom. 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 products.
- We support eliminating tax policies that reward businesses for shipping jobs overseas and encourage reform that strengthens investment in domestic job creation and protection.
- We support strengthening small business by replacing the Republican “margins tax” with a fair business tax.
- We urge our energy sector to transition to a much needed balance between fossil and renewable energy.

- We support appropriate regulation of utilities, banks and insurance to assure affordability and stability;
- We support holding individuals in Wall Street, big business and government personally accountable to prevent mortgage, antitrust, loan and insurance abuses and to protect workers' retirement pensions and savings;
- We oppose foreign practices that effectively restrict access to markets for American businesses;
- We support promotion of and assistance for the arts and music;
- We oppose foreign-owned U.S. toll roads that require Americans to contribute to the balance-of-trade deficit when they travel on local roads.
- We support a complete overhaul of our infrastructure to bring roads, bridges, utility and internet services, schools, ports, parks and public buildings up to appropriate standards and the capital investment needed for such an undertaking.
- We support the U.S. space program, including both manned and unmanned flight using the U. S.-developed and built CST-100 Space Transportation System, and the revitalized International Space Station.
- We urge governmental entities to “Buy Texas” and Buy America” and we support investigation into the speculative manipulation of food, fuel and metal markets.

HEALTH CARE

Texas Democrats continue to believe healthcare is a fundamental human right for all Texans and not a privilege reserved for those able to afford it. Texas Democrats oppose the repeated efforts by Republican politicians to repeal the Affordable Care Act and return America to the disastrous system that has failed small businesses, working families and drained state and family budgets. Every family deserves quality healthcare they can count on and a secure and stable system that ensures access to affordable medical care. Texans deserve a Texas Solution to fix our medical coverage gap - a solution that should also consider a single payer option.

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

- support accepting the over \$100 billion in federal dollars available to provide Medicaid coverage to the hard working families that have been denied health care by the state's Republican leaders;
- support guaranteed access to affordable, comprehensive universal coverage for all United States citizens and legal residents;
- support creation of an insurance marketplace where small business owners can receive the same buying power that big businesses have while receiving tax credits to make employee coverage more affordable and dependable;
- support the creation of an efficient and robust Texas based health insurance exchange where Texans can access affordable, quality health insurance plans;
- believe the state must realize all opportunities to maximize federal and state dollars available to fund healthcare costs, including enforcement of existing charity care requirements;
- oppose discrimination based on pre-existing conditions, believe Texans with chronic illnesses should have access to coverage at an affordable price and believe insurance companies should not be allowed to violate the protections of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act by finding new ways to deny coverage;

- believe medical decisions regarding treatment options should be made by physicians in consultation with patients, not by an insurance company or government lay people;
- support policies to ensure every Texas child has health insurance;
- support research into stem cell therapies and state funding for research in our our state's public universities;
- support funding for needle exchange programs in at risk communities;
- support protecting Texans from the dangers of secondhand smoke exposure in workplaces including bars and restaurants; and
- that the most efficient and universal and adequate way to provide health care is through a single payer system.

Prevention

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

Protecting and Improving Medicaid

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

In order to protect and improve Medicaid, Texas Democrats:

- reject attempts by Republican officials to cut existing Medicaid services;
- support increasing reimbursement rates for physicians;
- believe cuts to Medicaid reimbursement rates for children's therapy services like physical therapy, speech therapy, and occupational therapy limit our ability to provide care to children who need it most;
- support working with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to transition away from the 1115 waiver towards real long-term funding solutions;
- support the inclusion of a "Single Payer Option" as an addition to the plans currently offered under the state exchange systems
- support changes to the Affordable Care Act in relation to the "Cadillac Tax" language to be a credit as opposed to a deduction, which would provide for tax relief as opposed to a floating type deduction;
- support the rights of workers to be able to collectively bargain for good dependable healthcare for its members, members' families and retirees.

- support the inclusion of severe penalties on corporations and businesses who would manipulate costs on healthcare contributions could being used as financial revenue stream.

Improving Medicare

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

Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services

We support the new coverage now allowed for by the Affordable Care Act for mental health and substance abuse services as well as to encourage Texas to accept the Federal Medicaid dollars and deliver coverage to those Texans living in the coverage gap that has been denied coverage by Republican leaders.

We support:

- A robust continuum of care that offers choices in community-based supports that meet the range of needs that individuals with mental health needs present with. these should include peer operated services, community drop in centers, psychosocial rehabilitation, access to a range of vocational supports including supported employment, and supported housing.
- Ways to eliminate stigma surrounding mental illness and substance abuse.
- Ways to increase access to mental health and substance abuse services by increasing the number of treatment facilities while ensuring their financial viability.
- Medicare policies for psychiatric and psychological care to provide an increase of session times beyond the follow-up sessions currently allowed. We also support federal government initiatives increasing Medicaid funding for substance abuse treatment (medication assisted and counseling) which allow individuals to have access to outpatient treatment. Intensive outpatient treatment would become more cost effective.
- Encouraging more “reality-based” substance abuse education at all school levels. The Court system must be encouraged to allow treatment as the first option for drug offenders when appropriate, rather than incarceration. Outpatient treatment includes counseling and medication management to be less costly than incarceration. We support community-based mental health services for children and adults.
- Qualitative evaluation of all treatment modalities, interventions, agency and individual providers so that proven, efficacious treatments - administered by the most qualified providers - are utilized to improve significantly the lives of service recipients.
- Sufficient private non-profit, state and federal funding for evaluation research and provider training to rank Texas number 1 in mental and behavioral health and substance abuse services in the nation.

Education and Services to Prevent and Treat Communicable Infections

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

Texas Democrats:

- Support coordination with federal officials toward a goal of expanding the Ryan White CARE Act and the Act's attendant and complementary programs, such as AIDS Drug Assistance Program and Housing Opportunities for Persons With HIV/AIDS;
- Support the elimination of the out-dated ban on non-celibate gay men donating blood and apply a uniform, non-discrimination policy;
- Support President Barack Obama's national HIV/AIDS strategy to expanding access to mental health and substance abuse services;
- Oppose state cuts to HIV services in favor of high spending on abstinence-only programs; and
- Oppose Congressional reductions to discretionary funding for such programs in any future budget.

Eliminating Health Disparities

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

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

Choice and Family Planning

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

- trust the women of Texas to make personal and responsible decisions about when and whether to bear children, in consultation with their families, physicians, personal consciences, and/or their faith;
- support the repeal of HB2, which has created dangerous restrictions on Texans' access to abortion care, and oppose any future TRAP (targeted regulation of abortion providers) legislation;

- support preventive measures which have proven successful in reducing unintended pregnancies;
- support using sound, mainstream medical science and evidence-based data to guide reproductive health care policies;
- support targeted efforts to reduce high rates of teen pregnancy and repeat teen pregnancy in Texas, including the provision of evidence-based, accurate and effective, comprehensive age-appropriate sex education programs with an abstinence and contraception component;
- recognize the product of a joined egg and sperm has no independent status, standing, entitlements or rights that would in any way usurp or supersede the rights of the mother or woman which are paramount;
- support the right of a woman to acquire contraception or other reproductive services through her health insurance provider;
- support resources for pregnant and parenting teens while encouraging them to continue their education and career development;
- support family planning funding for pregnancy prevention and preventive health care by all qualified providers in regulated, licensed medical facilities, including Planned Parenthood;
- support women's access to affordable prenatal, including pregnancy insurance and prenatal vitamins;
- support paid maternity and/or paternity leave;
- support women's access to accurate information about reproductive health, adoption and related resources;
- support affordable, quality childcare; and
- promote policies that value Texas families and their children throughout their lives.

ENERGY & THE ENVIRONMENT

Texas Democrats recognize that climate change is a real and serious threat that is causing drought, crop failure, heat waves, more torrential storms, and extreme climate events. We recognize that Texas has some of the dirtiest coal plants in the nation, and our residents are at great risk from the health effects of carbon pollution and climate disruption. We also recognize, as does the Department of Defense, that crop failure and drought caused by climate disruption can lead to political instability throughout the world resulting in massive migration and violence. To mitigate these risks, we recommend statewide and national clean energy policies that will spur economic development and reduce carbon emissions in Texas and the nation through the use of renewable energy and energy efficiency.

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

We support:

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

- institution of a revenue neutral carbon tax increasing in rate each year and rebating a flat amount to each taxpayer so that those whose energy usage generates the least carbon benefit the most;
- development of technical and academic programs and research in renewable energy at state post-secondary institutions;
- requiring all electric utilities to offer free net-metering to create base-load electricity and expand the grid system;
- energy efficiency standards and green building policies;
- financial incentives for the manufacturing of American-made equipment for alternative energy production, for the development of energy storage technologies and for both homeowners and landlords to invest in conservation and energy efficiency;
- public education programs that promote methods and benefits of energy conservation;
- the use and development of renewable energy, while recognizing the importance of the oil and gas industry and seek safe, responsible and well-regulated fracking and other tertiary recovery. Science has shown that large quantities of methane are released in fracking operations, and that such releases are much more powerful in heating our climate than carbon emissions. Fracking should continue only with strict regulation that prevents negative impacts to communities, to our air and water, and to our climate;
- the rights of local governments and voters to regulate oil and gas operations within their communities, including the right to establish setbacks and bans on hydraulic fracturing; therefore, Texas must repeal House Bill 40 (84R), the law restricting those rights;
- the investigation and resolution of the deleterious effects of fracking, including the increased incidence of earthquakes from the disposal of liquids into injection wells; and
- a transportation policy that encourages the development of affordable, fuel efficient vehicles that can run on electricity and alternative fuels.

Clean and Available Water

Texas Democrats understand that global climate change has accelerated and recognize that natural and man-made droughts and floods and changes in emerging energy policy must be addressed as part of a comprehensive federal and state approach to water conservation and control. Clean Water from publicly managed resources is critical to our future and our health.

We support:

- access to clean drinking water, as well as clean irrigation water;
- the implementation of aggressive water conservation and reuse practices;
- a well-funded state water education campaign to inform Texans of the sources of their water and how to conserve and protect those water resources;
- the development and implementation of effective drought response plans by public water suppliers;
- the protection of Texas bays, estuaries, in-stream flows, and wetlands with regulations and with incentives for voluntary actions;
- clear authority and resources to regional groundwater conservation districts to preserve the water within their districts;
- thorough analysis of the relative short-term and long-term costs and environmental impact of proposed large new reservoirs and alternative sources of public water supplies, including the impact of electric generation plants that require the use of significant amounts of water;

- expanded testing of fish and shellfish for mercury, radionuclides, and other contaminants and public notification of health risks;
- research and understanding of the state's groundwater resources and the hydrologic connections between groundwater and surface water; and
- actions to prevent depletion and exploitation of limited state water resources including banning the use of non-brackish water for hydraulic fracturing ("fracking"), prohibiting speculative water marketing, and acquiring open space to protect aquifers and watersheds.

Environmental Protection, Regulation and Enforcement

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

We support:

- Texans' right to know if hazardous chemicals and materials are being stored in their communities;
- the State of Texas fully enforcing environmental laws instead of ceding its responsibility to protect Texans' health;
- working more closely with the Environmental Protection Agency and ending the current hostile litigious relationship;
- TCEQ and the EPA making human health and quality of life paramount when deciding whether or not to grant either an air or wastewater permit;
- retiring the oldest, heavy-polluting, coal burning Texas power plants that are so outdated that pollution controls are not an economically viable option;
- ending the destruction of our natural resources by coal strip mining;
- the enforcement of the Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act for all industries;
- the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in its efforts to cut carbon pollution from existing power plants through the Clean Power Plan;
- strengthening the violation penalties so that it does not pay to pollute;
- EPA's proposed rule to reduce emissions of toxic air pollutants from power plants, specifically mercury and air toxics standards (MATS) for power plants that will reduce emissions from new and existing coal- and oil-fired electric utility steam generating units;
- requiring TCEQ to protect the health of Texans by enforcing the Clean Air Act and analyzing cumulative pollution impacts on downwind communities before making permitting decisions;
- the rights of all citizens to participate in the permitting process and contested hearing in order to protect their property, health and the environment, including reversing recent efforts by the Texas Legislature to make it more difficult for citizens to participate in contested case hearings;
- the enactment of laws and regulations to protect low-income communities and communities of color from environmental racism and environmental injustice;
- halting the plan to import high-level radioactive waste for consolidated storage in Texas due to risks of water contamination, security concerns and transportation accidents, and we oppose transport of high-level radioactive waste on our highways or railways;

- halting expansion of the Keystone XL tar sands pipeline in Texas, and construction of the Trans Pecos Pipeline;
- halting the potential contamination of Texas' land, air and water by all proposed Canadian tar sands pipelines, and call upon Congress to strengthen the authority of the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) to regulate the transportation of tar sands diluted bitumen throughout Texas and the United States;
- requiring green completions of wells by requiring excess gasses to be captured; stricter limits on flaring, a sustainable yield permit for water withdrawals and recycling or appropriate disposal of tainted water; and a prohibition of known carcinogenic or toxic chemicals used in this process;
- efforts to protect our cities, towns and communities from the dangers presented by the dramatic increase in shipments of highly flammable oil and gas products by train; and
- the appointment of new TCEQ officials who will enforce state and federal laws that protect our air, water, and land from those who pollute for profit.

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

We believe that:

- the members of the Railroad Commission should use their regulatory power as a means of protecting the health, welfare and property of Texans, rather than using it as a political tool;
- statutory jurisdiction should require the Railroad Commission to consider quality of life factors and seismic activity when evaluating drilling and disposal permits;
- the Railroad Commission should look with greater scrutiny at natural gas producers who use damaging fracking techniques as a means of producing natural gas;
- the impact of methane emissions on climate should be recognized and controlled;
- political contributions to Railroad Commissioners from the oil and gas industry should be banned;
- penalties levied by the Railroad Commission should be significant enough to deter energy production practices that cause pollution;
- the Legislature should review the ethics and rule of conduct of the Railroad Commission's elected offices as it relates to its recusal policy and revise as necessary to ensure the commissioners' awareness of, and compliance with, these requirements;
- the statutory funding gap in the Oil and Gas Regulation and cleanup fund should be increased from \$20 million to at least \$30 million, and the same fund's floor should be increased from \$10 million to \$25 million;
- legislative action should be taken to elevate the influence of local communities to partner with the Railroad Commission to mitigate concerns regarding pollution, public health, traffic and depreciating property values;
- legislative action should be taken to direct the Railroad Commission to study and use and development of telecommunication technology designed to increase the transparency of, and the public's participation in, agency hearing processes, and better protect the rights of Texas mineral owners and landowners;

- legislative action should be taken to require the Railroad Commission to implement a transparent process to confirm that entities declaring common carrier status for pipelines are actually operating as common carriers and not as private entities. Such legislation should also establish a process for landowners to contest a determination by the Railroad Commission that an applicant is a common carrier; and
- legislative action should be taken to direct the Railroad Commission to ask for expanded authority over interstate pipelines to inspect, monitor and review pipeline safety and maintenance to assist the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration in its federal regulatory responsibilities.

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

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

Recycling & Waste Reduction

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

We support:

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

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

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Texas has more people in prison and a higher incarceration rate than any other state. Texas also has more private prisons than any other state. The inadequacies of our criminal justice system disproportionately impact people of color and the poor. District attorney offices across the state often reward performance by the number of convictions, not necessarily the administration of justice. These forces, coupled with racial profiling, and draconian budget cuts to education, create an environment where profit usurps the public interest. Texas Democrats have appreciation and respect for public safety personnel who risk their lives to protect our communities. We must not allow inappropriate actions by a small number of rogue officers that

undermine that respect, nor allow systemic inequities to perpetuate injustices in all communities. Texas must be smart in dealing with crime and punishment. The “War on Drugs” should be redirected to treatment and the reclassification of certain drug felonies.

Gun Violence Prevention

The Texas Democratic Party supports the language of the 2nd Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and recognizes the need for a balanced approach between upholding and respecting our fundamental constitutional rights and those needs in protecting the rights from those seeking to cause harm. We believe in a comprehensive approach recognizing gun violence as both a public health and criminal justice issue. We strongly support:

- strengthening and reforming current laws requiring a background check prior to the purchase by a firearm by requiring a sufficient waiting period to provide adequate time for law enforcement officials to conduct a mandatory, background check;
- closing loopholes for gun shows and in-state internet sales that allow guns to be sold or traded without a mandatory and thorough background check;
- strengthening the national background check system to incorporate all necessary records, including criminal, domestic violence, and mental health records, for both dealers and purchasers;
- strengthening and reforming current laws requiring a background check prior to the purchase by a firearm by requiring a sufficient waiting period to provide adequate time for law enforcement officials to conduct a mandatory background check;
- Enacting sensible gun control laws to curtail the availability of weapons with extended ammunition magazines such as those purchased by the shooter of U.S. Representative Gabrielle Giffords;
- repealing laws that allow the open carry of firearms;
- improving training and licensing requirements for all Texans wishing to carry a firearm;
- overturn the Congressional prohibition which limits the CDC research on gun violence by removing funds that the CDC would receive due to their inability “to advocate or promote gun control;”
- allowing families to anonymously request pre-emptive, judicial action restricting the possession or purchase of firearms for loved ones in crisis threatening harm to themselves or others;
- repealing federal legislation granting immunity from civil liability to manufacturers and marketers of firearms;
- encourage the research, development and marketing of weapons utilizing “smart gun” technologies;
- establishing a statewide firearms education and public safety campaign – with an emphasis on safely securing guns in the home and denying unsupervised access to minors;
- increasing criminal penalties for parents or guardians who negligently fail to control access to firearms in the home where minors are present;
- manufacturers who voluntarily develop and sell childproof handguns;
- the accepted standard of care allowing physicians and mental health professionals to discuss the presence and safe storage of guns with all patients and parental guardians;

- fully funding the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives so that it may conduct more frequent inspections of FFL dealers; and
- allocating a portion of funds collected from state License to Carry Fees toward programs dedicated to the physical and emotional rehabilitation of gun violence victims and their families.

Public Safety

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

The state’s ability to restrict individual liberty must be subject to due process. Democrats believe each citizen is innocent until proven guilty. Texas Democrats call for the end of racial profiling and police brutality. Incidents like the arrest, detention and unnecessary death of Sandra Bland epitomize the problems of police brutality, poor jail standards and inadequate oversight of treating those with mental health issues in our county jails. Such practices are an embarrassment to conscientious law enforcement officials and unacceptable to all Texans. When police misconduct is alleged, we support the implementation of civilian review boards with proper subpoena power.

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

- preventing officers, who have been terminated for violating civil rights and using unwarranted and excessive force, from moving to another jurisdiction;
- placing more police officers on the streets in underserved areas;
- supporting peace officers with current equipment, technology (including body cameras, dashboard cameras, and prisoner compartment cameras) and training to balance their dual role to serve and protect;
- ensuring proper oversight and regulation of crime labs, especially labs that process DNA evidence, to assure proper analysis of evidence, including timely analysis of evidence from medical rape kits and entering such evidence in a computerized database;
- ending racial profiling in searches and traffic stops;
- the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) and other educational and preventive initiatives, especially those that serve women at risk of sexual and domestic violence;
- Initiatives recognizing that freedom and protection from violence or abuse, domestic and otherwise is a fundamental human right;
- promotion of literacy, education and job training which intrinsically prevent both crime and recidivism;
- prevention programs addressing drug and alcohol addiction, lack of educational opportunity and other root causes of crime; and
- ensuring that any use of tasers is carried out only when necessary to prevent loss of life or serious bodily injury, as a substitute for the lawful use of a deadly weapon.

Sexual Assault and Family & Domestic Violence

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

We support:

- strong enforcement of Texas laws to hold offenders accountable and increase the likelihood that victims will come forward to report these crimes;
- early prevention efforts focused on youth to decrease the incidence of sexual and domestic violence prior to victimization;
- training programs for law enforcement, prosecutorial, judicial, health care, mental health and education professionals to promote increased understanding of and improved response to the crimes of domestic violence and sexual assault;
- a strong statewide initiative to reduce the alarming increase in child abuse and neglect through investment in effective early prevention programs;
- allowing every survivor of a sexual assault access to comprehensive sexual assault examination and treatment provided by either a certified Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) or a licensed physician; and
- all costs of the examination and treatment including medications shall be covered by the Crime Victims Compensation Fund and not the financial responsibility of the victim.

Administration of Justice

Texas Democrats believe in the efficient, fiscally responsible and moral administration of Justice. County jails should not be the largest mental health providers in Texas. Texas Democrats support:

- revising sentencing guidelines for non-violent offenders;
- the reduction of small amounts of controlled substances to misdemeanors and emphasis on drug treatment and Drug Court diversion programs for other felony drug and other substances of abuse cases;
- fully funding mental health services and a more robust continuum of services as necessary to provide appropriate mental health services to redirect individuals from the criminal justice system;
- continued funding and support of the Tim Cole Exoneration Review Commission, which is tasked to prevent wrongful convictions in light of the 2009 posthumous exoneration of Tim Cole, a Texas Tech student wrongly convicted of rape and who died in prison;
- rewriting the relevant Texas criminal code provisions to take into account a 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;
- ensuring prisons are staffed by professionally trained and compensated corrections officers, in sufficient numbers to achieve safe staffing ratios; to lessen overcrowding in our county jails and to provide a fairer justice system, we support reasonable set bond and use of pretrial bonds where appropriate; to allow pretrial intervention and diversion programs where appropriate; to fight to regulate the cost of collect phone calls by inmates so they are not excessive or prohibitive in costs;
- changes to our current bail system, which unfairly keeps poor people jailed when they pose little or no risk, moving away from a money-based bail system, and codifying the right to a speedy trial which will amount to a victory for civil rights and racial justice;

- the appointment of a special prosecutor to investigate and present to a grand jury, when appropriate, any death of a civilian caused by the actions of a law enforcement agent or within a correctional facility;
- ending and reversing the privatization of Texas prisons; and
- ending the use of county jails as mental health facilities.

Cannabis Policy Reform

Our current cannabis laws give power, control, and illicit funding to violent drug cartels. These laws disproportionately affect communities of color, even though cannabis use among different ethnicities is equal, and destroy lives with a criminal record. Cannabis policy reform can improve public safety, boost our economy, and provide much-needed health care options for struggling Texans.

As Texas Democrats, we:

- urge the President, the Attorney General, Congress as well as the Texas Legislature, to support the passage of legislation to decriminalize the possession of cannabis and regulate its use, cultivation, production, and sale as is done with tobacco and alcohol;
- urge the review of all cannabis-related incarcerations, ensure a safe release of any nonviolent Texans jailed for small possession of cannabis, and expunge criminal records for any Texan charged or jailed for those laws;
- support comprehensive study and diligent research, particularly from states who legalized cannabis on health effects of cannabis usage on people;
- urge the Texas Legislature to study the laws and systems in Colorado, Oregon, and Washington as a first step in implementing a similar system in Texas;
- urge the Texas Legislature to improve the 2015 Compassionate Use Act to allow doctors to determine the appropriate use of cannabis to certified patients; and
- urge the immediate decriminalization of possession and use of cannabis for medicinal purposes.

Juvenile Justice

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

Texas Democrats support:

- ensuring that the primary goal of juvenile justice is to rehabilitate youth; not to create a feeder system for privatized, for-profit, adult prison facilities;
- the Texas Youth Commission's Blue Ribbon Task Force Report, which recommend a TJJD environment that facilitates the appropriate educational and moral development of youth who would spend the least amount of time possible in the TJJD system; and
- staffing capacity commensurate with the size and needs of the population; and a child-focused, family-centered, non-violent TJJD through regionalized, community-based

system that admits youth to TJJD using research-based risk assessment and classification and provides specialized treatment for youth and families.

Re-entry

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

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

Texas Democrats support policies that:

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

Death Penalty

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

Texas Democrats support and urge:

- the passage of legislation that would abolish the death penalty and replace it with the punishment of life in prison without parole; and
- the Governor, Texas Legislature, and Texas Judiciary and Texas Prosecutors to impose a moratorium on capital punishment while an unbiased and objective study of the entire process, from arrest, conviction/sentencing, appeals at all state levels, and the execution process itself is shown to be reliable and without such grievous failures as have been evident in the recent past.

Access to Justice

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

- legislation to preserve the right to self-defense while restoring the duty to retreat when outside of the home to discourage and prevent vigilantism;
- open access to the court system as guaranteed by the Texas Constitution, respect by the courts for jury verdicts, and the right to fair and impartial jury trials which cannot be waived by any contractual agreement;
- the right of every person to be tried by a jury that broadly reflects the ethnic makeup of the community, including legislation to eliminate the disgraceful practice of using all-white juries and grand juries in cases involving people of color;
- creating and adequately funding public defender offices across Texas;
- 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;
- the nomination and appointment of qualified, competent persons to serve as Judges, and as members of State Boards and Commissions responsible for carrying out civil and criminal Justice in this State;
- the reversal of unjust provisions of “Proposition 12” that have denied Texans who have suffered severe harm the ability to redress their grievances in fair and open courts;
- full access to an open, full and independent Executive Branch review process of a court decision, as opposed to a “rubber stamp” of a prior decision; and
- stronger enforcement of laws and punishment for white-collar corporate criminals unity locations.

FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY

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

These Republican budget policies have intentionally created a long-term “structural deficit” by cutting school property taxes while not providing the substitute revenue they promised from business taxes. The price for these irresponsible state fiscal policies has fallen squarely on the backs of hardworking Texans for more than a decade.

Drastic state budget cuts in education, healthcare and other areas have shifted the tax burden to

local government, often requiring cities, counties and school boards to cut services or increase local property taxes or regressive sales taxes. As Texas Democrats, we support:

- Reversing the \$5.4 billion in cuts to public education that were made in 2011, which caused many public school employees, including teachers, to lose their jobs while more students were crammed into crowded classrooms;
- Restoring funding for proven services in the women's health programs, where cuts left millions of women without basic preventive care and screening services;
- Supporting college students and their parents, who have been hit with tuition rates that have doubled at the same time Republicans made significant cuts in state financial aid;
- Forward-looking traffic solutions that address traffic congestion;
- Long-term funding solutions for the state water plan that go beyond the decision of Republicans to redirect part of the Rainy Day Fund to serve this vital need;
- Ending debt, diversions, and deception in the state budget process;
- Fully funding our state park systems to ensure all Texans can have access to the natural beauty of our great state;
- An update for state emergency services, including 911 systems that allow communities to manage crisis situations that can arise from floods, hurricanes, and tornadoes;

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

- a progressive tax system based on the principle that all taxpayers should pay based on their ability to pay;
- the end to Republican policy that provides tax breaks to the wealthy at the expense of the vast majority of working Americans;
- enacting a constitutional amendment to prevent extending the sales tax to food and medicine, while opposing Republican efforts to impose a sales tax to replace local property taxes with a tremendous increase in state sales taxes;
- reforming the business "margins tax" policy to provide fairness to all economic sectors, especially small businesses;
- eliminating tax loopholes and unproductive special breaks, such as Chapter 313 agreements, to simplify the tax system and provide revenue for essential services;
- the federal government discouraging economic incentive policies that pit one community against another;
- reforming the property tax appraisal system to guarantee uniform appraisals and eliminate the loopholes that allow business, mineral and commercial properties to be taxed at far below market value, which shifts the burden onto homeowners;
- structured property tax relief to benefit all homeowners fairly and prevent families from being taxed out of their homes when land values rise inordinately, and extend the benefits of property tax relief to renters when landlords receive the full benefit of those reductions;
- requiring proposed revenue policy to be clearly established in a transparent process and determined by open, public debate and votes cast by elected representatives;
- requiring state government to spend taxes and fees for the reason they were collected;

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

IMMIGRATION

Texas Democrats recognize that the United States is a vibrant nation of immigrants. We value those who come from different countries and cultures. Immigrants have added to the prosperity and resilience of this great country and we believe in fostering better bilateral relationships with all nations including our southern neighbor whom we share an extensive border with. Importantly, we understand that viewing immigrants through a lens of fear and prejudice only hurts our nation and Texas. We recognize that through a more fair and equitable immigration system our county is strong. We therefore:

- support comprehensive immigration reform, including an attainable path to citizenship;
- support the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (“DACA”), its expansion, and Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents (“DAPA”) programs and denounce the Republican efforts in Texas v. United States;
- support the passage of the DREAM Act;
- support the expansion of visa availability in order to expedite family reunification and lessen visa wait times;
- support the 14th Amendment provision of the U.S. Constitution which makes all persons born in this country citizens of this country;
- support expanding the Affordable Care Act to cover undocumented immigrants;
- call on Congress to clarify that the Childhood Status Protection Act allows pending visa applicants to retain their place for visas if they aged out;
- support providing equal housing opportunities to all immigrants and denounce all xenophobic or racist conduct that denies equal housing to immigrants;
- support the lawful and humane treatment of immigrants by all law enforcement and correction officers;
- support strict enforcement and appropriate punishment against those who exploit undocumented workers rather than targeting the workers themselves;
- support providing everyone, especially children, legal representation in front of immigration judges;
- support reducing the current backlogs in U.S. Immigration Court;
- support recognizing asylum claims or Temporary Protected Status for refugees fleeing forced gang recruitment and violence perpetrated by gangs;
- support law enforcement agencies disseminating information and assisting immigrants who are victims of crimes or human trafficking and may be eligible for U and T visas and including efforts to reduce turnaround time for certification requests;
- support increasing U Visa availability;
- support allowing all Texas residents to obtain a driver’s licenses regardless of immigration status;

- support counties and Sheriffs who end the voluntary cooperation with ICE and the Priority Enforcement Program;
- support efforts which prevent law enforcement from inquiring about immigration status for malicious purposes;
- support the current in-state tuition statute which allows undocumented students to obtain a higher education and denounce all repeal efforts;
- support the fair and just treatment of all people in immigration proceedings regardless of race, gender, national origin, sexual orientation, gender identity, or other characteristics;
- while we support DPS working cooperatively with federal and local officials for added border security efforts, we oppose redirecting precious state resources for political purposes;
- denounce any type of bans based on religious affiliation or country of origin;
- denounce efforts to build a border wall of any size and the unrealistic claims a foreign country will pay for a border wall;
- denounce Section 287g programs of the Immigration and Nationality Act which allow memorandums of understanding between ICE and local law enforcement agencies to act as federal immigration officials;
- denounce the immigration detention facility bed mandate that creates perverse incentives to increase deportations for private profit;
- denounce and call for an end to all family detention centers;
- denounce efforts to grant child care licenses to family detention centers;
- denounce efforts to limit and interfere with established federal refugee programs;
- denounce all xenophobic, racist, vigilante, and bigoted efforts which scapegoat immigrants; and
- denounce efforts to enforce immigration laws prohibited by preemption.

FAMILY SECURITY

Security for Our Families

Texas Democrats support initiatives to ensure the security of our families. Every parent should be able to provide housing, nutrition, clothing and health care for his or her family. Therefore we support:

- Raising the minimum wage to reflect at least \$15 per hour so that a full-time, 40-hour a week job can adequately care for a family;
- Expanding Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act which would save the lives and health of many hard working Texans, provide much needed additional funding for our hospitals, help relieve pressure to raise property taxes and add hundreds of billions in economic impact to our economy;
- Paid parental leave for fathers as well as mothers without regard to marital status or sexual orientation.
- Aggressive legislation aimed at protecting our elderly and disabled from abuse and exploitation.
- The right of families and communities everywhere to produce, process, access, distribute, and eat healthy food and to understand the sources, quality, and nutritional value of their food regardless of race, class, gender, ethnicity, citizenship, ability, religion, or community.

Privatization of Social Services

Under Republicans, Texas entered into a series of questionable contracts with private companies that have reduced and harmed state services and thereby thwarting attempts by Democrats to improve the lives of the people of Texas. Therefore, we support:

- Ending and banning any agreements with any contractor that has relocated outside the United States to evade taxes;
- State agencies hiring state workers at adequate levels to ensure timely and accurate delivery of state services.

Child Protection and Foster Care

The Department of Child Protective Services (CPS) is in crisis. The underfunding, understaffing and turnover inside CPS is literally putting the lives of our most vulnerable Texans at risk on a daily basis. Given the existing emergency Texas Democrats support:

- Calling an emergency session of the Legislature to consider a broad-spectrum, across the board overhaul of the Department of family and Protective services;
- Greater oversight of private and state facilities and institutions that serve children and vulnerable adults;
- Sufficiently funding CPS to reduce caseloads, ensure compliance with federal guidelines for caseworker/client meetings and adequately compensate experienced caseworkers to reduce turnover;
- Child protective programs that provide safe, secure environments for children and ensure there is no discrimination in the foster care system;
- We oppose any privatization of the child protective system including intake services;
- We support adoption of children by loving qualified parents regardless of marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, and the rights of families created by those adoptions.

Long-term Services and Support

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

- transitioning the long-term care system to focus on home and community based services (HCBS);
- 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 cost 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;
- establishing a registry of direct service and providers and developing a training and certification program that interfaces with similar initiatives;
- access to non-medical services to contain cost and allow greater individual control;
- provide at least a \$15-an-hour living wage and health benefits to all direct care workers;
- effective oversight of the Dept. Of Aging and Disabilities;
- appropriate Medicaid reimbursement rates for long-term care; and

- the provision of sufficient resources for additional random audits, facilities inspections and ombudsmen.

Social Security

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

- That all Americans who have paid (or whose family members have paid) into the system should receive the benefits those payments should entitle them to regardless of other systems they may benefit from including but not limited to Texas Teacher Retirement;
- As the vast majority of earners pay into the system from the first to last dollar earned that a more level playing field requires raising or removing the income caps;
- CPI-E should be used for calculating cost-of-living adjustments (COLA) for the elderly;
- The maintaining of smaller town Social Security offices;
- The maintaining of Social Security as a program of the federal government.

Retirement Security

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

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

Access to Affordable Property Insurance

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

- strict enforcement of policies requiring companies to justify rates or roll them back;
- providing the Insurance Commissioner the authority to deny or approve rates;
- eliminating unfair underwriting practices such as redlining, the use of credit scoring and other discriminatory practices; and
- greater consumer representation on the Insurance Commission.

Utility Regulation

Democrats understand that Texans must have affordable utilities and deregulation has failed to drive down rates and has produced an always confusing and often times misleading marketplace. Therefore we support:

- Requiring the Public Utility Commission to construct policies that force all providers to display all products using the same language terminology and industry measurements, including cancellation policies, to describe those products so that they might be easily understood and compared.

Consumer Protection

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

- repealing laws and regulations that restrict redress for buyers of new homes that discover shoddy work after the purchase is completed;
- stricter laws targeting unscrupulous telemarketing, internet marketing and price fixing;
- the rights of communities to provide public utilities at their discretion including "wi-fi" internet access; and
- the elimination of predatory lending practices particularly payday loans and sell/lease back transactions.

Housing

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

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

RURAL TEXAS AND AGRICULTURE

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

Water is a necessity for both the private individual, agricultural business, and emergency management. We believe that it is essential that Texas meet its citizens water needs, especially in the face of climate change, ongoing droughts, and threatened aquifers. In order to do so:

- create a substantive plan to mediate the threat of mega droughts that is plausible and environmentally sensible;
- create programs for both industry, agriculture, and individuals to ration water in times of extended drought;
- preserve our environment from damages from well development;

- establish sensible and effective water conservation districts in rural areas;
- create groundwater recharge programs, build and maintain desalination plants with proper salt water concentrate sequestration programs;
- promote rainwater reclamation programs to use in traditional gray water systems;
- control stormwater runoff in order to slow erosion and keep water systems healthy;
- recycle hydro fracking and other high volume industrial water use systems through subsidies if needed;
- provide grants-in-aid for rural communities to construct and maintain reverse osmosis plants, and train personnel to staff them.

Texas Democrats understand that the backbone of our food supply should be local farms, and not massive industrial farming. There can be a healthy balance between ensuring that our food is safe for consumers to eat without any long term health effects, and allowing farmers to use petrochemicals/pesticides/antibiotics to ensure good crop and livestock yields. There must also be a concerted effort by the Texas Department of Agriculture to support the local farmer over the industrial. In order to do so:

- decrease the cost and bureaucracy to small scale farming associated with becoming USDA Organic certified;
- strongly encourage large scale agribusiness to limit blanket use of petrochemicals on produce especially susceptible to absorption (strawberries, tomatoes, etc.);
- pass a farm bill that subsidizes the local farmer over agribusiness;
- support the legalization of hemp for agricultural purposes;
- establish consistent policy with respect to support for land conservation easements to allow rural landowners to access private foundations and government matching funds for preservation of open space and family land holdings;
- work with the Texas Parks and Wildlife to manage the wild hog population, and provide small scale farmers subsidies to construct deer/hog fences using local labor;
- in coordination with the TDA, establish effective global and local marketing programs using updated technology to sell products;
- offer GLOBAL G.A.P certifications to all Texas producers at a reduced rate;
- pass legislation to improve weights and measures at gas pumps and market scales;
- support USDA efforts to toughen meat industry antitrust laws to protect the small scale farmer from large scale agribusiness;
- pass federal farm legislation that establishes minimum price support levels and economic protections for family farms;
- strengthen and support OSHA health & safety regulations in the industrial meat-packing industry;
- protect family farms from predatory lending, and allow a greater ability for the individual to refinance farm related business debt;
- preserve proper use of agricultural property tax exemptions and restructuring the current land appraisal system to insure a fair property tax system for all Texans;
- demand the full cooperation by Texas state officials and agencies, including the TDA, in international agricultural activities;
- forbid the patenting of any genetic material;
- establish protections that safeguard small scale farmers from lawsuits filed against them for the accidental use of patented/proprietary seeds, and allow them to collect seed from season to season regardless of their proprietary nature;

- expand programs that allow consumers to use WIC/SNAP/ETB at local farmers markets;
- regulate the sale of horses to Mexico for the purpose of consumption, and ban the round-up of wild horses for slaughter;
- support the labeling of GMO products; and
- move to ban neonicotinoids, a pesticide chemical linked to massive honeybee die-offs. Loss of bees jeopardize one-third of the U.S. fruit and vegetable supply; some 140 fruits and vegetables depend on bee pollination.

Access to quality healthcare in rural Texas is critical; many areas in rural Texas are underserved because of budget cuts from the state legislature. In order to remedy this:

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

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

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

The founders of Texas and America understood that the protection of personal property is a cornerstone of freedom and liberty. The use of eminent domain for the benefit of the corporation would be something that they would not stand for, and the Texas Democratic Party will not either. Texas Democrats understand that seeking personal property should be in cases where extreme action is needed. In regards to eminent domain:

- eminent domain should be used as a last resort, and only for programs such as public highways, hospitals, and other programs that serve the public interest;
- those facing condemnation must be provided with quality legal representation, and the process of said condemnation must be transparent;

- all pipeline requests to the Texas Railroad Commission need to be independently reviewed in coordination with the State Office of Administrative Hearings, with the right to appeal said findings to a local judge;
- amend the Texas Constitution and relevant laws to eliminate giving private entities commonly understood governmental authority to exercise the powers of eminent domain in condemnation of private property; and
- before eminent domain condemnation occurs, it must be shown in a state court proceeding that it is, in fact, a legitimate public use and public purpose underlying the proposed seizure of private property.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The Texas Democratic Party stands for the complete inclusion of Texas women in our state's affairs and respect the preservation of their autonomy and their rights. Equality and justice for all Texas women, in every part of our state, in every circumstance, in every condition, is a core value of our party. Texas is the proud home of pioneering women: who have blazed new trails in business, entrepreneurship, culture, and politics. The Texas Democratic Party is committed to ending the damaging policies and laws that threaten Texas women's economic and physical health. We proudly and vigorously support a woman's right to choose how to use her body and her time. Texas Democrats respect women as full partners in family and society. The Texas Democratic Party demonstrates its commitment to Texas women through women's leadership at all levels of party activity and by working for policies, laws and elected officials that share our commitment to women's full, equal, and essential role in Texas' future success.

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

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

- expand workplace rights for women including flex time, compensatory time, and pregnancy and paid family leave in all employment contracts;
- promote the engagement of young women in our political process in order to develop a pipeline for new leadership; and,
- opposes changes to voting laws that unfairly/disproportionately affect Texas women.

LGBTQ RIGHTS

Texas Democrats take pride in and support the continued progress of the LGBTQ movement. Since *Lawrence v. Texas*, our country has continued to take steps towards achieving full equality for LGBTQ citizens. However, our work is not done when someone can still face discrimination for being LGBTQ and harassed or harmed for representing their authentic selves. Texas Democrats support and welcome all people regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. We therefore:

- support the passage of the Equality Act by Congress;
- support the right of all people to use facilities and participate in all aspects of life in a manner that is consistent with their gender identity, irrespective of the gender they were assigned at birth;
- support streamlined processes for transgender individuals to obtain legal documents consistent with their gender identity, including state IDs, regardless of surgical status;
- support the classification of discrimination against transgender individuals as being on the basis of gender;
- support the inclusion of gender reassignment surgery in Medicaid;
- denounce efforts to not comply with the U.S Supreme Court court decisions which guaranteed marriage equality to all couples;
- support municipal, state, and federal nondiscrimination laws which protect LGBTQ individuals in all aspects of their lives including housing, employment, adoption, education, commerce, and public accommodation;
- support a ban on so-called “reparative” therapy;
- support the use of best practices in the delivery of services to all Texans regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity by social, health care, and public service professionals;
- support the factual inclusion of the LGBTQ movement and individuals in history and social studies classes;
- support programs to combat suicide and homelessness among LGBTQ youth;
- support programs to provide inclusive and comprehensive housing and healthcare for LGBTQ seniors;
- denounce the use of hate speech, disguised as free speech and religion, that fosters and promotes bigotry and violence against LGBTQ citizens; and
- denounce Texas elected officials’ lawsuit stemming from President Barack Obama’s May 13, 2016 directive which states that a school “must not treat a transgender student differently from the way it treats other students of the same gender identity” and encourage schools to follow the federal administrative guidelines regarding transgender children.

DISABILITY RIGHTS

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

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

- the preservation and enforcement of all state and federal disability rights laws, particularly the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act;
- access to Medicaid in Texas to cover an estimated 1.8 million disabled Texans, and helping Medicaid to support home and community-based services to keep people in their communities functioning in their natural environment. Essential to maintaining independence is the availability of caregivers who are paid a \$15/hr minimum wage;
- promoting and educating all Texans about early diagnosis of diverse disabilities and access to adequate treatment and adequate home care support for children, veterans, and other disabled Texans;
- ensuring that students with disabilities receive an appropriate early childhood, secondary, and postsecondary education in the least restrictive environments, including access to the full range of services and supports called for in their individual education plans at all learning institutions;
- promoting and broadening financial aid or loan assistance for accessible housing, vehicles, durable medical equipment, and technology which would give much-needed assistance for individuals to pay for improvements to their life functionality;
- opposing the harsh cuts to Medicaid that are leading to no or significantly less health care for millions of Texans with disabilities, workers with disabilities, and families raising children with autism, Down Syndrome, and other serious disabilities;
- the Help America Vote Act and removing the obstacles and onerous burden placed on Texans with disabilities to obtain a valid Texas I.D. card;
- the Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities, its expansion and ongoing mission to deliver quality support to all disabled Texans; and
- full extension of benefits to veterans and families of veterans who sustain partial or permanent disabilities, including post injury and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder individual and family counseling, cost of living monthly allowances, childcare assistance, tuition assistance for dependent children, and assistance in job training or referral for the spouse of the veteran.

VETERANS' AFFAIRS

Texas Democrats believe that our veterans should be awarded all the benefits they have been promised, honored for their service, and accepted back into society with open arms.

Providing education benefits to veterans for their service enables them to be the next generation of leaders, business owners, and highly skilled workers. Historically, empowering

returning veterans to obtain education, at any level, has benefitted America as a whole, and ushered in eras of prosperity. Texas Democrats wish to see this continue, and will do so by:

- supporting and maintaining the Post 9/11 GI Bill (Chapter 33) in its entirety;
- supporting and maintaining the VA Vocational Rehabilitation Program (Chapter 31), and allowing the 42 months of benefits to be non-consecutive;
- enabling the direct translation of military job training (EMT, vocational, communications, etc) to be recognized by states and federal programs;
- fully fund the Hazlewood Act entitlements, allow the transfer transfer of those entitlements to dependents, and study allowing non-Texas enlistees to use those entitlements;
- support and encourage school cooperation with veterans struggling with physical disabilities and PTSD, and provide reasonable accommodations;
- encourage every school, public and private, to participate in the Yellow Ribbon Program
- allow for the transfer of remaining Chapter 31 and Chapter 33 entitlements to dependents, regardless of time in service;
- allow Basic Allowance for Housing (BAH) to be collected in both Chapter 31 and Chapter 33 programs.

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

- extending the Operation Enduring Freedom/Operation Iraqi Freedom coordinator program to all separated service members, regardless if they served in a conflict;
- increase Combat Related Special Compensation entitlement payments;
- extend Tricare Standard/Extra/Prime health insurance eligibility to all service members who served in any conflict or hazardous duty area;
- continue and support the Veterans Choice Program, and encourage acceptance of the program by all private medical providers;
- strive for 100% enrollment of separated service members;
- expand and support the VA Domiciliary Care Program and the associated Mental Health Residential Rehabilitation and Treatment Programs (MH RRTPs);
- establish communication links between local homeless shelters and the VA to identify homeless veterans;
- establish community service programs to identify homeless veterans, and facilitate their integration into an associated VA Domiciliary Care program or MH RRTPs;
- continue, expand, support, and fully fund the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program;
- allow VA disability payments to increase based on the rate of inflation;
- hold individual VA hospitals, providers, and administrators to high standards;
- audit VA hospitals with failing performances;
- support crisis hotlines for veteran suicide; and
- upgrade the status of any LGBTQ service members discharged for their sexual orientation to Honorable and allow them to receive appropriate benefits.

Empowering veterans economically allow them to successfully reintegrate into their communities, and provides them with the stability needed post service separation. Texas Democrats believe that enabling veterans to buy houses, land, and start businesses not only helps them, but helps their community, state, and country. In order to do so:

- continue the VA Secured Home Loan program in its entirety;
- continue the Veterans Land Board program in its entirety;
- establish a VA secured loan program similar to the Secured Home Loan program for small business start up;
- provide low cost child care to recently separated servicemembers transitioning to work or attending school;
- support and expand veterans services courts in order to address veteran-specific legal needs; and
- support homestead exemptions for disabled veteran and surviving spouses.

TRANSPORTATION

Like most Texans, Democrats support an increase in transportation funding to alleviate our congestion and safety crisis. More traffic accidents on highways as well as highways in our urban core between cars and cyclists and cars and pedestrians call for us to take a new look at where our transportation dollars go. The growth we have been experiencing has had negative effects on our traffic congestion - raising concerns about air quality, traffic safety and lost productivity from commute wait times. Texas Democrats support:

- investing state dollars in mass transportation projects with public support and the potential for matching federal funds;
- land use policies that create walkable bikeable and transit oriented communities;
- transportation projects to encourage building safe sidewalks and bicycle lanes;
- reviewing creative programs like telecommuting and buses on shoulders of major highways to encourage mobility and incentives for increased usage of mass transportation;
- legislation to demand transparency in how toll roads are financed and how funds are managed; and
- the development of a state rail plan for Texas to be eligible for federal high-speed rail funding, and rail and mass transit systems that do not harm the environment or infringe on property rights.

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

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

- that, just as personal faith and values guide and inspire us to further the well-being of our community, we must never use the power of government at any level to promote one religion or denomination over others or to impose our personal religious observances;
- government must not inhibit the free exercise of religion, but religion can never be used as an excuse to discriminate against or harm others;
- government must not use public resources to support purely religious positions or activities;
- entangling government with religion is dangerous to both government and religion;
- America is the most religiously observant country in the West because our founders wisely provided for separation of church and state, which allows religion to flourish in freedom and respects those who have no religious faith; and
- the religious test for public office in the Texas Constitution must be removed.

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

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

FOREIGN POLICY

Texas Democrats believe peace, prosperity, and national security are assured by maintaining a strong national defense, promoting democracy, and advancing development abroad. Military action should be used only as a last resort, authorized only as allowed by our Constitution. We support consistent diplomacy and development efforts abroad in coordination with our allies. We believe the most important element in our military is the individual service member, and it is absolutely critical that we keep faith with those who serve and defend us.

Security and Development

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

- prioritize working with allies whose values promote freedom and justice;
- maintain and improve the capacity of our military and diplomatic organizations to meet the threats from non-state groups and those nations that provide them support and protection;
- work closely with allies and lead international efforts to prevent the further spread of nuclear arms and to eliminate weapons of mass destruction;
- support our government's efforts to obtain the assistance of the countries in the Middle East in helping to stabilize the region;

- encourage Iraq to ensure security within its borders by renouncing sectarian violence and promoting a responsive and inclusive democracy that ensures minority rights and equitable access to resources;
- oppose the regime-sponsored violence occurring in Syria by expanding assistance to vetted opposition groups, expanding humanitarian aid, leading efforts to facilitate a negotiated political solution within Syria, leveraging alliances in the region to constrict the flow of resources to radical groups, and leading regional efforts to counter the crisis emanating from Syria;
- continue to support development of Afghanistan's civil and economic infrastructure through sustained support for economic development, governance capacity, and corruption reduction;
- minimize civilian casualties to the maximum extent possible consistent with the safety of our troops in Afghanistan and elsewhere;
- withdraw U.S. troop support from Afghanistan as rapidly as possible, consistent with their safety and in a manner that does not destabilize the region and place more lives in danger;
- maintain our long-standing policy that a true, mutually respectful peace with safe and secure borders for two states dedicated to peace and democracy – a Jewish homeland in Israel and a Palestinian homeland – can only result from direct negotiations between willing and responsible partners;
- work to ensure that new governments and societies become true democracies that promote responsive governance, ethnic and religious minority rights, individual freedoms, and economic opportunity;
- support the passage of the Global Respect Act, the International Human Rights Defense Act, and revising the World Bank's Safeguard Policy.
- work with our allies to assure safe haven for the millions of refugees fleeing conflict and persecution, to welcome these vulnerable people in the United States when properly vetted to maintain our national security, and to assist in their eventual safe return home;
- withdraw support for agencies and programs that promote hatred and intolerance;
- develop a new strategic approach to fragile states that prioritizes prevention, aligns policies across U.S. agencies, and leverages the full range of U.S. diplomacy, defense, development, and democratic engagement tools;
- make every reasonable effort to utilize our considerable military, economic, diplomatic, and technological capabilities to assist victims of natural disasters worldwide;
- secure our information and telecommunications technology infrastructure from cyber piracy and attack by supporting cooperation across public and private sector agencies, supporting development of a unified national cyber strategy, and ensuring critical infrastructure meets baseline security standards;
- assist economic development of our allies, particularly neighbors where high unemployment creates immigration pressures;
- continue the President's leadership in reducing U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, promoting clean energy, and mitigating the effects of global climate change;
- adopt policies that advance our national security by freeing us from dependence on the resource of any nation or region, including foreign oil;
- work with the African Union and the UN to bring stability to the continent by defeating terrorist organizations such as Boko Haram, Al Shabab, and other Central African terror groups;

- encourage universities and colleges to participate in foreign exchange programs and conduct joint research projects with foreign institutions; and
- remove legal barriers that prevent highly skilled foreign nationals educated in U.S. universities from continuing to work and live in the United States.

Trade Policy

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

- encourage the sale of domestic products and services in foreign markets and oppose foreign practices that effectively restrict access to markets for American businesses;
- support a fundamental rethink of how we approach trade agreements, because we support the strengthening of labor and human rights protections and stronger health, environmental, and consumer safety standards in future agreements. NAFTA-style trade agreements like the Trans-Pacific Partnership - which have led to massive U.S. job losses, sweatshop conditions and human rights abuses in developing countries, and environmental degradation - must be opposed;
- protect American companies from intellectual property theft, especially from state sponsored companies, and file lawsuits through the World Trade Organization when theft occurs; and
- protest through the World Trade Organization when countries artificially manipulate their currency to maintain trade imbalances.

National Security

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

- support the continued ban on the use of all methods of torture, including waterboarding, indefinite detention of persons without charges or legal representation, and other policies that violate or conflict with the values embodied by the Bill of Rights and the U.S. Constitution;
- support the immediate closure of the Guantanamo Bay detention facility and set up a special court to hear the cases for detainees;
- establish legal oversight over all privatized military security forces, because military security contractors operating without government oversight have put America at risk;
- focus on practical, nonviolent solutions to the problems of domestic and international conflict;
- support the mission and efforts of the United States Peace Corps;
- fund an air traffic control system, essential to national security, that is fully equipped and staffed by public employees;
- strengthen port security, including inspection of currently unchecked containers; and
- support the repeal of the detention bed quota, as it targets indigenous peoples and undermines domestic and national security.