

# 2022 Texas Democratic Party Platform

*On August 6, 2022, the State Democratic Executive Committee, which governs Party Business in between biennial state conventions, met to charge a committee to amend the existing platform and approved this document after it was amended by committee. The committee began with the 2022 Convention Permanent Platform Committee approved platform that was unreported to the Convention due to quorum call/adjournment on July 16, 2022.*

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## **Preamble**

Texas Democrats will fight for a well-functioning government that acts based on facts and evidence to preserve the life, health, and well-being of every person. The interdependence of every Texan on the actions of every other Texan challenges us to give of ourselves so that none of us fall. Together, we will overhaul the social contract and establish a new economic engine that allows all residents to thrive.

## **Representative Democracy**

Government exists to achieve together what we cannot achieve as individuals or families. That government must serve all people. A representative democracy is only truly representative when every citizen is guaranteed the inalienable right to representation by fair and open elections.

## **Equality & Freedom For All**

Texas Democrats will fight to ensure equal opportunity and freedom for all human beings – no matter a person’s race, ethnicity, disability, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic situation, or immigration status.

## **Smart Government**

Our economy must benefit all Texans. Robust public and higher education along with technical training opportunities are critical for our future. Our criminal justice system should treat all people fairly and focus on restitution and remediation.

## **A Healthy Texas**

Healthcare is fundamental to preserving the unalienable right to life for all people. Healthcare rights are human rights. We owe future generations a clean and healthy planet; and a strong social safety net that creates opportunity for all Americans.

## **Support for Veterans**

Texas Democrats support our veterans. We will identify, advance, and address our veterans’ most critical issues.

## Principles Of The Texas Democratic Party

Democratic government exists to achieve as a community, state, and nation what we cannot achieve as individuals – it must serve all its people. Texas Democrats will fight to ensure every Texan has:

Inalienable rights that even a majority may not take away:

- The right to cast an unimpeded vote to gain fair representation in the democratic process;
- The right to quality public education;
- The right to affordable personal and community healthcare;
- The right to unbiased and fair justice;
- The right to a clean and healthy planet; and
- The right to privacy.

Freedom:

- From government interference in our private lives and personal decisions where they do not harm another;
- From discrimination based on race, ethnicity, national origin or Indigenous sovereignty, religion, disability, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity/expression, or any other unconstitutional grounds;
- To exercise civil and human rights; and
- Of religion and individual conscience.

Accountability and Responsibility and that:

- Religion and individual conscience can never serve to excuse hatred and discrimination;
- People are responsible for their actions;
- 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
- Corporations are not people and should not be used to shield individuals from accountability for their actions.

Equal rights:

- Which are guaranteed in Sections 3 and 3a of the Texas Bill of Rights;
- Equal protection and due process under the law, which no state may deny any person, as guaranteed in the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution; and
- The right of each person to bodily autonomy.

Equal opportunity:

- To receive a quality public education, from early childhood through college;
- To be considered for a good job that pays a living wage;
- To buy or rent a good home in a safe community;
- To breathe clean air and drink clean water;
- For all people to fully access governmental proceedings, agencies, and other services; and

- To have our voices heard and not be drowned out by the power of unlimited money to influence or buy elections and legislation.

Economic opportunities that benefit all Texans and that:

- Working people keep our economy running and are as important as business owners;
- Every worker should be paid a living wage consistent with their regional cost of living;
- Support small businesses, which are the backbone of our economy and communities;
- Provide consumer protections through regulation of unfair practices;
- The burden of taxes should be fairly and progressively distributed; and
- Create meaningful and impactful penalties for corporations that seek to avoid paying their fair share of taxes, exploit workers, or pollute our environment.

Our lives, homes, communities, state, and country are made secure by:

- Working together to secure one another's health and safety, recognizing our interdependence and interconnectedness, and leaving no one behind;
- Appropriately staffing, training, and equipping military, law enforcement, and emergency services;
- Preserving retirement and pension benefits;
- Responsible gun ownership;
- Encouraging job security when possible and providing appropriate assistance and re-training when it is not;
- Preserving and conserving our precious natural resources and quality of life;
- Ensuring families have easy access to affordable, healthy food;
- Creating compassionate policies that offer a safety net for those most vulnerable and in need; and
- Supporting family values through policies that value all families.

A community free of harassment and bullying created by:

- Refusing to tolerate, condone, or ignore harassment or bullying of any kind from anyone;
- Educating ourselves and others about all types of harassment and bullying;
- Overcoming sexism in our own behaviors and holding others accountable;
- Considering all reports of harassment or bullying seriously; and
- Prohibiting retaliation for reporting of harassment or bullying.

A United States of America and Texas that are:

- Secured by competent diplomatic leadership that uses the moral, ethical, and economic assets of a powerful, free nation to avoid unnecessary military conflict;
- Strengthened by our diversity;
- Ripe with agricultural opportunities, multiple energy sources, renowned medical and research institutions, and high-tech industries;
- Inspired to create a new economic foundation that provides for everyone; and
- Entitled to an honest, ethical state government that serves the public interest, not the special interests of those who "pay to play."

## The Economy, Good Jobs, & Workers' Rights

Texans need a living wage and full employment that support their families during times of both prosperity and episodes of economic distress.

The Texas Democratic Party supports policies and programs that:

- Minimize inflation and protect Texans from the impact of inflation;
- Promote jobs with good wages, benefits and safe working conditions;
- Protect employees' rights and dignity at work;
- Provide a safety net for the most vulnerable workers, while establishing the infrastructure for businesses to prosper;
- End the misclassification of workers to ensure proper access to pay and benefits;and
- Prioritize support for small businesses at the local, state, and federal level.

### Good Jobs

- Ensure that the minimum wage in Texas is a living wage indexed to inflation;
- Strengthen existing protections and create meaningful consequences for employers who commit wage theft;
- Require that all employment positions guarantee retirement and health benefits, equal pay for equal work, safe working conditions and Workers' Compensation insurance, paid sick leave, paid vacation leave, paid family leave, workplace accommodation for child nursing, and payment of prevailing wages for public projects; and
- Oppose "free trade" proposals that send American jobs out of the country and harm the environment, and support fair trade deals that protect and bring back American jobs.

### Workers' Rights

- Eliminate all forms of forced or coerced labor, including human trafficking, sex and labor trafficking, and the exploitation of migrant labor;
- Protect Texans with disabilities from substandard and subminimum wages and exploitation and ensure they have the right to work from home, if desired, whenever possible;
- Mandate the right for employees to form or join a union in order to negotiate collectively with their employer without fear of union-busting attacks or laws such as prohibitions on payroll deduction of union dues;
- Ensure our judicial system protects the civil rights of labor organizers, campaign workers, and those working to improve workers' rights;
- Repeal so-called "right-to-work" laws designed to weaken labor unions;
- Eradicate workplace discrimination in all its forms, including prejudice against workers of a protected class; and
- Ensure our unemployment insurance system and income safety net are modern, accessible, and efficient so that they are reliable for Texas workers, especially in times of economic distress.

### Workforce Development

- Protect and expand Social Security, ensure a decent retirement and retirement pensions, and protect savings for all working Texans;
- Provide women, minorities, and persons with disabilities, and the underemployed access to skills training, jobs, and job promotions;
- Offer Apprenticeship Readiness Programs and Registered Apprenticeship Programs for high-skill building trades to workers, high school students, and college students;
- Address the negative effects of worker displacement when new technologies, such as automation, robotics, and artificial intelligence are adopted;

#### Economic & Business Prosperity

- Ensure business incentive programs are transparent, accountable, and are only used to create high-paying jobs with good benefits.
- Bring high-paying jobs to every part of Texas by ensuring infrastructure development projects flow to urban, suburban, and rural communities alike.
- Ensure trade policies protect worker health and safety while combatting child and slave labor, environmental degradation, and other practices that turn global trade into a race to the bottom;
- Ensure trade supports and encourages the export of American farm products, goods, and services;
- Make it affordable for small businesses to provide health insurance for their employees;
- Expand access to capital and credit for small businesses in low-income and rural areas;
- Expand programs supporting small businesses owned by women and people of color; and
- Expand mentorship programs.

## Democracy

The right to vote and to participate in civic affairs are fundamental to representative democracy, especially in times of pandemic or other crises that threaten these foundations. Elections must be made secure and free of encumbrance. Openness, accountability, and high ethical standards in elected officials and government agencies are paramount to ensure a level playing field and a government responsive to the needs of its citizens.

The Texas Democratic Party supports policies and programs that:

- Eliminate barriers to voting and encourage full participation in elections and governance;
- Limit the pervasive influence of money in politics and ensure a level playing field; and
- Promote transparency, accountability, and ethics in public life and all levels of government.

### Voting Rights and Fair Elections

- Recognize November's Election Day as a state and federal holiday;
- Combine local, state, and federal elections to minimize how often voters have to go to the polls each year;
- Develop robust and continuous voter education and outreach programs, especially for youth, communities of color, Indigenous populations, voters with disabilities, the unhomed, and other underserved populations;
- Increase access to the ballot through same-day registration, online registration, adherence to federal "Motor Voter" laws, the repeal of voter registrar deputization requirements, automatic registration for eligible Texans aged 17 years and 10 months or older, and sending vote by mail applications to Texans on their 65<sup>th</sup> birthdays;
- Implement countywide vote centers, extended and accessible early voting periods, ensured weekend voting, curbside voting, and universal, no-excuse vote by mail;
- Provide funding, supplies, and a clear plan to county election officials to ensure voter safety is prioritized;
- Clarify legal standards around voter protection and voter assistance to reduce fears of prosecution among county election officials and voter protection volunteers and advocates;
- Reinstate mobile voting so counties can better ensure rural voters, students, and seniors have access to the ballot;
- Remove undue burdens on students by placing polling locations at all institutions of postsecondary education;
- Allow Texans who will turn 18 by Election Day to participate in the preceding Primary Elections;
- Provide voters with disabilities equal access to the ballot via accessible polling places and accommodations, curbside voting, and accessible vote by mail, with poll workers trained in the law, procedures, and equipment use;
- Repeal the highly restrictive and discriminatory Texas Photo Voter ID law;
- Protect voting rights by enforcing the Texas Voting Rights Act and the federal Voting Rights Act with restored preclearance provisions;
- Incorporate paper back-ups and an auditable paper trail into voting systems;

- Provide education on, and work towards implementation of, ranked-choice voting in order to further promote strong democratic ideals and provide more choice to Texans across the state;
- End racial and political gerrymandering by creating a nonpartisan redistricting commission;
- End the discriminatory practice of prison gerrymandering;
- Support elimination of the Electoral College and join the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact, and until the compact is effective, proportionally award Texas's presidential electoral votes based on the U.S Presidential results within the state; and
- Recalibrate the Supreme Court of the United States to equalize the number of justices and federal circuits, and work to elect members of Congress who support its expansion.

#### Campaign Finance Reform

- Overturn the decisions in *Buckley v. Valeo* and *Citizens United v. Federal Elections Commission* that make money the most privileged form of speech;
- Move towards transparent public financing of campaigns and elections;
- Disclose the funding sources for all political advertisements in a readily accessible manner, for candidate campaigns, ballot measures, independent expenditures, and issue advocacy;
- Require candidates and elected officials throughout the state, including local or county officials, to file an annual Personal Financial Statement and disclose their donors' employment;
- Reinstate the federal Public Service and Equal Time requirements; and
- Mandate every federal candidate disclose their complete federal tax return and, upon election, place any private holdings in a blind trust for divestment.

#### Ethics and Transparency in Government

- Empower state employees and government agencies to do their job free of partisan influences;
- Ensure political considerations have no bearing on contract procurement or the use of public funds;
- Guarantee that Texas officials do not exploit public funds to pay for personal or political activities;
- Eliminate the abuse of personal leave policies and bonuses by state officials and agencies;
- Force elected officials to recuse themselves from discussion and voting on legislation that would directly financially benefit themselves or their families;
- Establish an office of an independent prosecutor to investigate and prosecute any state-wide elected or appointed official who is accused of unlawful conduct; and
- Protect civil service from partisan abuses and safeguard whistleblowers in government agencies;
- Support the establishment of a code of judicial ethics for the Supreme Court of the United States, and work to elect members of Congress who support the same.



## Education

A world-class education system is a moral imperative and an economic necessity. We must ensure every Texas child receives the best education in the country from pre-K through postsecondary, including the arts and career and technical programs. We do not accept the inadequate investment in public education that has created an unsustainable working environment for teachers and support personnel and a persistent achievement gap for students of color, students with disabilities, and economically disadvantaged students. Our education system must value highly-skilled teachers and encourage critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity, without the harmful impacts of high-stakes standardized testing. We will instill in our students a practice of ethics and a desire to seek the truth, and the tools to analyze and assess the validity and importance of the information they consume, from any media. Texas Democrats support the full, meaningful inclusion of Texas students with disabilities as a fundamental right and reject the notion that undocumented students should not participate fully in public education.

### Early Childhood, Primary, and Secondary Education

The Texas Constitution guarantees the right to a suitable, free public education for all Texas children and places a duty on the Legislature to fund it adequately and equitably. Texas schools currently rank 45th in per-pupil funding; our teachers make \$7,500 under the national average for teacher pay; and 66% of Texan teachers are considering leaving the classroom. Federal funding that was intended for programs to offset COVID learning losses was instead used by Republicans to supplant state funding.

The Texas Democratic Party supports policies and programs that:

- Protect and enhance Texas public education, so that our students are prepared for a diverse and changing labor market and to participate as engaged citizens;
- Fund schools to reflect the actual cost of educating all students;
- Protect public schools funded through local property taxes in Texas and in the United States from funding losses resulting from charter schools;
- Utilize federal funds, especially COVID relief funds, for their intended purpose of supplementing, not supplanting state funds;
- Guarantee a safe and high-quality classroom learning environment;
- Expand learning opportunities for every child at every level of education; and
- Ensure students with disabilities receive an appropriate early childhood, primary, secondary, and postsecondary education in the most equitable environments, including access to the full range of services and supports called for in their individual education plans at all learning institutions.

### Every Student Deserves a Highly Qualified Teacher

Teachers are the single most critical component to a student's success in education. Teachers not only provide classroom instruction, they also provide emotional support, a sense of belonging, and sometimes even provide students with financial support through classroom supplies and other essentials.

The Texas Democratic Party supports policies and programs that:

- Recognize the critical role teachers play in students' lives by setting a starting salary for teachers sufficient to attract appropriately certified teachers and eliminate vacancies, with median salaries commensurate with the national averages, expanding collective bargaining rights and expanding one year contracts to three years, and funding out-of-pocket expenses for classroom materials;
- Ensure that public school employees have attractive compensation packages that incentivize career-long public service of education professionals;
- Protect the Teacher Retirement System (TRS) defined benefit pension system and fund TRS at least at the level enacted by the 86th Texas Legislature plus a regular cost of living adjustment (COLA) for every retiree;
- Encourage the Federal government to repeal the Government Pension Offset and Windfall Elimination Provision;
- Provide TRS-Care funding that is based on an increasing, permanent funding mechanism;
- Prohibit awarding taxpayer dollars to corporations to develop high-stakes tests and "Value Added Modeling" linked to teacher evaluations, and oppose test-based performance pay;
- Support basing teacher evaluations on multiple measures designed by practicing educators;
- Guarantee early acceptance to college and a teaching job to high school students in the top 20 percent of their graduating class who commit to a teaching career upon certification;
- Create an endorsement pathway for teaching readiness;
- 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 become certified as full-time teachers to teach in a critical shortage area such as STEM, Bilingual Education, Special Education, or Career and Technical Education;
- 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;
- Respect support personnel by providing them due process employment rights and a salary schedule; and
- Repeal existing legislation and reject further efforts to arm teachers.

Protect and Improve Texas Public Education

- Establish a 100 percent equitable school finance system with sufficient state revenue to provide every child the opportunity to learn in an exemplary program and equitably reduce reliance on "Robin Hood" recapture;
- Fund public schools based on enrollment, not attendance;
- Fully reflect all student and district-level cost differences and regularly adjust the basic allotment for the impact of inflation and state mandates;
- Guarantee local control, by locally elected school boards, reflective of the district's diverse demographics, and require single-member districts for districts with 20,000 or more students;

- Oppose state takeovers of democratically-elected public school boards;
- Fully fund all federal education mandates including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA);
- Prohibit misnamed “school choice” schemes, such as the use of vouchers, including special education vouchers, virtual schools used as virtual vouchers, or voucher equivalent tax credit schemes that seek to support private and sectarian schools;
- Strengthen state oversight of homeschooling;
- Support a moratorium on new charter schools and on the expansion of existing charter school networks through charter expansion amendments, and conduct a comprehensive study of charter school impact on public education, including the fiscal impact on traditional school districts, the state budget, students, school employees, and taxpayers;
- Insist on due diligence in the screening of charter applicants and veto applicants and expansion amendments from existing charter operators which fail to meet the needs of students;
- Prohibit publicly funded charter schools from contracting with for-profit management companies;
- Prohibit contracts between charter schools and related parties or affiliated organizations that result in conflicts of interest or the misuse of public funds;
- Require property purchased or leased by charter schools with public funds be declared to be public property;
- Require charter schools that receive public funds to have elected boards subject to all the same public notice, open meetings, and open records requirements that apply to traditional school districts;
- Oppose the creation of a statewide “achievement” or “recovery” school district controlled by the Texas Education Agency that could contract with private operators to run neighborhood schools without local accountability;
- Support parental and community involvement in our neighborhood schools and encourage their expansion in partnership with community stakeholders, including parents and teachers, using the community school model in an effort to coordinate and integrate educational, developmental, family, health, and other comprehensive services through community-based organizations and public and private partnerships that provide access to such services to students, especially students at risk, in schools and in the community;
- Use Community Schools as a primary option under the state “turnaround” statute for at least two years before additional sanctions are implemented by law;
- Develop culturally relevant curriculum standards and textbook requirements based on peer-reviewed research and written by subject matter experts, as opposed to being based on the opinions of partisan extremists;
- Ensure the adoption of instructional materials that preserve and teach the methods and content of professional arts, trades, science, and social studies experts without censorship or illegitimate editing;
- Focus on setting curriculum standards and textbook requirements that teach ethical behavior and lead the charge in fighting for racial, social, and economic justice in our public schools;

- Emphasize inclusion of the history and contributions of all demographics, especially communities of color and other historically marginalized groups, when deciding on curriculum and textbook content, including leveled reading materials to allow students to connect to the text; and
- Require the State Board of Education to exercise absolute fiduciary responsibility for the Permanent School Fund and expose and prohibit conflicts of interest.

#### Establish a Quality Classroom Learning Environment

- Extend appropriate class size limits to all grades, enforce those limits, and strive for smaller class sizes;
- Return comprehensive testing to the beginning of the school year and its role as a diagnostic tool, replace high-stakes tests with multiple measures designed to diagnose student needs, improve instruction, and provide prescriptive plans and solutions for each student's needs, disability, and educational path;
- Eliminate all pass/fail standardized tests as a measurement of student success and advancement or as a measure of teacher evaluation;
- End inappropriate testing of students with disabilities whose individual education plans call for alternative assessments of their educational progress;
- Provide free, accurate, and updated instructional materials aligned with educationally appropriate, non-ideological state curriculum standards and tests, including ethnic studies and environmental education programs;
- Ensure that schools, classrooms, programs, and appropriate transportation are physically and programmatically accessible to all students;
- Provide all students with disabilities inclusive and integrated academic and vocational instruction, evidence-informed supports, and full access to the general curriculum, extracurricular activities, and related services in classrooms with their non-disabled peers;
- Support teachers when they exercise their statutory right to remove a disruptive student from class, subject to state guidelines and in line with their campus Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports system;
- Make school campuses and events drug and weapon free, unless weapons are carried by trained peace officers;
- Prohibit active shooter drills that utilize traumatic, realistic simulation;
- Teach non-violent conflict resolution to students;
- Equip classrooms with free computers, high-speed internet access, and digital instructional materials; and
- Adequately fund Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) and Trade programs.

#### Expand Opportunity for Every Child

- Allow individualized subject assessments to place students in the appropriate level of instruction for each content area;
- Devalue grouping by age as the normative class assignments and instead value the levels of which each individual child is capable;

- Fully fund access to high-quality, full-day public pre-K for every child, count these students for full-day attendance and for all special allotments, and establish appropriate standards for the highest quality instruction;
- Equip schools and teachers with resources, including teachers' aides, and effective techniques to ensure that every child performs at grade level in reading, social studies, math, science, and a second language by third grade;
- Fund family education programs and family literacy programs that equip parents to educate their children in the critical years prior to pre-K and to assist in their children's education at all grade levels;
- Promote and appropriately fund multi-language instruction, beginning in elementary school, to make all students fluent in English and at least one other language;
- Support Title IX protections for gender equity in public education institutions;
- Serve the individualized needs of each student with appropriate identification based exclusively on the objective assessment of their strengths and needs by qualified professionals for all students who require special education services or services provided under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act;
- Prohibit arbitrary limits on the numbers of students requiring special education services, such as those previously established by Republican leadership;
- Restrict out-of-school suspension to only those cases necessary for the safety of students and personnel;
- Ensure all children are provided free school breakfasts, lunches, and after school snacks, as well as summer breakfast and lunch programs for all public school children;
- Ensure that every student has access to appropriate academic counseling services, as well as psychological and social services provided by competent and licensed professionals;
- Provide and appropriately fund high-quality instruction for careers in trades and technical education programs;
- Provide fully funded 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 and that is free from political censorship;
- Provide and fund universally accessible after-school programs for grades pre-K through 12;
- Develop, implement, and facilitate peer-reviewed curriculum for mandatory, fact-based ethnic studies classes, such as Indigenous, Mexican American, and African American studies;
- Mandate instruction for all students in studies of diverse cultures and the benefits of diversity to the U.S economy and society;
- Prioritize eradication of the school-to-prison pipeline by using transformative approaches to discipline that are research-based and balanced, and adhere to the fidelity of the original research-based interventions;
- Offer statewide equitable dual credit and early college programs that draw at-risk students into college and career paths while still in high school;
- Provide equitable distribution of highly qualified teachers, in an effort to match the most at-risk students with the most qualified teachers to close the academic achievement gap;
- Provide culturally relevant learning and wraparound services for students' social, emotional, and health needs;

- Provide comprehensive, age-appropriate sex education programs that are LGBTQIA+ inclusive and consent-oriented, with a contraception component to reduce dropout rates due to unintended pregnancy, and end failed abstinence-only education policies;
- Provide access to affordable programs for adults who have dropped out of the education process;
- Identify instances of bullying, including cyber-bullying, and implement school-wide positive behavior interventions and supports to prevent violence, disruption, bullying, and harassment; and
- Eliminate disparities in discipline based on race, ethnicity, national origin, disability, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression or any other improper grounds.

### Postsecondary Education

All Texans should have the opportunity and be encouraged to pursue affordable postsecondary education. We further recognize and support the essential role of Texas community colleges, which provide an affordable, high-quality education responsive to community needs for those who would be otherwise excluded. Texas Democrats will work to ensure that the opportunity of debt-free, safe higher education is accessible to all those who may seek it.

The Texas Democratic Party supports policies and programs that:

- Increase access to higher education by easing financial burdens and leveling the playing field for all;
- Provide equal and expanded opportunity for community college and trade program students; and
- Ensure students attend school in safe, fair, and diverse environments that reflect the true face of Texas.

### Higher Education

- Cancel student loan debt for low-income Texas residents and provide interest-free student loans;
- Provide free tuition for all low-income students and reduced tuition for middle class students at public universities in Texas as well as a rollback of tuition and fees to previous, affordable levels with appropriate regulation reinstated moving forward;
- Keep the Texas DREAM Act and pass the federal DREAM Act to ensure in-state tuition at state universities;
- Protect and increase financial aid set asides while expanding grant funding at the state and federal level;
- Restore formula contact hour funding to historical levels, adjusted for inflation and student growth;
- Institute federal income tax credits for college tuition, fees, and books, and reduce instructional material costs;
- Offer equitable paid internships and debt-free, registered, skilled apprenticeship programs leading to certification;
- Increase research funding and locate a Tier 1 public research and teaching university in all state regions;

- Fund public HBCUs and all historically-minority public institutions equitably;
- Strictly regulate proprietary schools, end their public financial aid eligibility, & fully restate defrauded students;
- Place a voting student regent, as elected by the student body, on the appointed governing board of each public 4-year college or university;
- Establish pay and working conditions sufficient to attract faculty, including adequate and equitable pay, healthcare, security, professional dignity, and reasonable workloads for all university employees;
- Encourage and protect a full liberal arts education, including the arts and humanities;
- Safeguard the fundamental principles of academic freedom, equality of opportunity, and human dignity; and
- Eliminate SAT/ACT testing as an admissions requirement for freshman students at all state universities and develop comprehensive assessments for incoming students.

### Community Colleges

- Guarantee tuition-free public community college and public trade schools for all Texas high school graduates;
- Ensure sufficient financial aid for costs beyond tuition for community college students;
- Provide full formula funding to account for the cost of instruction and the growth in student enrollments, as well as stipulate any “incentive” funding be on top of formula funding and distributed in a non-discriminatory manner;
- Appropriate funds for new campuses and program expansions;
- Allocate funds for community colleges to assist school districts in developing career & technology endorsements;
- Fund Adult Basic Education at a level that fully covers the demand for services;
- Provide full state funding for employee group health insurance and retirement;
- Institute equitable pay, healthcare, security, professional dignity, and reasonable workloads for all employees, including retirement and health insurance for full-time employees and proportional health benefits for part-time;
- Establish universal standards to ensure full transferability of community college credit hours; and
- Eliminate financial aid rules that penalize students who transfer to universities from community colleges.

### Diversity and Safety

- Maintain the “Top 10% Rule” to guarantee access to universities for the top-performing students from all regions of Texas;
- Ensure universities offer culturally competent and diverse curricula, student activities, and student recruitment policies that promote understanding, respect, and acceptance;
- Strictly prohibit discrimination or harassment in any Texas postsecondary institution against any person for any identity or expression;
- Set stringent standards from the campus level to the national level to combat the crisis of sexual violence and harassment against students at postsecondary institutions;
- Repeal “campus carry” policies for public university and community college campuses; and

- Reverse policies that removed the ability of universities to regulate unsafe events.



## Healthcare

Healthcare is a fundamental human right. We support affordable, high-quality, universal healthcare, including moving towards publicly-funded healthcare. While 5 million Texans were already uninsured and lacked access to healthcare, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this crisis, with millions of Texans losing their employer-provided health coverage as a result of the economic downturn. Texas must fix this. We will fight for a healthcare system based on and focused on preventive care and public policy rooted in science. The government should not come between patients and their healthcare providers, but should instead focus on ending disparities for marginalized and underserved communities, and addressing critical issues including maternal mortality, mental health and substance use disorder services, rural hospital closures, and increasing funding for medical research. We must expand Medicaid, protect Medicare benefits, and make prescription drugs affordable for all.

The Texas Democratic Party supports policies and programs that:

- Expand Medicaid coverage to improve healthcare access throughout Texas;
- Implement an affordable and universal "single-payer" healthcare system that would provide high-quality, privately delivered, publicly funded healthcare for all residents of Texas within three (3) years, including prescription drugs, vision, hearing, dental, and mental healthcare;
- Protect and improve the Affordable Care Act to further reduce disparities in health coverage and outcomes, as we move toward universal healthcare;
- Expand access to contraception and reinstate the right to an abortion;
- Prevent illness through vaccines, education, research, primary care, and public health initiatives;
- Eliminate health disparities for all in Texas; and
- Expand access to essential mental healthcare and substance use disorder services and achieve mental health parity.

### Medicaid Expansion and Protection

- Immediately expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act to improve access to healthcare coverage for millions in Texas and bring \$10 billion in tax dollars back to Texas annually; and
- Increase Medicaid reimbursement rates, extend postpartum Medicaid eligibility to at least 12 months, and reverse bureaucratic state policies that remove children from the Medicaid program.

### Universal Affordable, Quality Healthcare

- Protect, expand, and fully fund the Affordable Care Act, its required coverage of pre-existing conditions, and its requirements that all policies must provide comprehensive coverage;
- Support the passage of legislation that provides universal, comprehensive healthcare through a "single-payer" system in order to guarantee all Texas residents access to quality healthcare;
- Include a "Public Option" in addition to the plans currently offered under all exchanges, as we move toward publicly-funded healthcare for all;

- Offer patient choice of providers;
- Prohibit surprise “balance billing”;
- Eliminate co-pays for Medicare Part B and eliminate the “doughnut hole” in Plan D Medicare coverage;
- Restore the right to negotiate Medicare and Medicaid drug prices;
- Prohibit price extortion for essential drugs with limited source availability;
- Prohibit denying coverage for medications prescribed by patients’ doctors or forcing patients into step therapy because the medication initially prescribed is not on their insurance providers’ approved formulary; and
- Provide long-term care benefits for people with disabilities and older adults that cover multiple living arrangements including community and home-based caregiving.

#### Reproductive Freedom and Personal Choice

- Trust Texans to make personal and responsible decisions about whether and when to bear children, in consultation with their families, physicians, personal consciences, and/or their faith;
- Enable families to raise their children in safe and sustainable communities free from individual and state violence with access to affordable, quality childcare;
- Fund qualified healthcare providers, including Planned Parenthood, who provide preventive healthcare, pregnancy prevention, affordable prenatal care, and postpartum contraception;
- Use evidence-based medical science and data to guide reproductive healthcare policies, recognize the rights of the pregnant person are paramount, and oppose any dangerous restrictions on Texans’ access to abortion care;
- Expand access to contraception, including those covered by Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP);
- Fight for the human right to an abortion, including by repealing the Hyde Amendment, which disproportionately impacts people of color and other marginalized communities;
- Ensure individual rights to obtain all forms of contraception, including long-acting reversible contraception, abortion care, and other reproductive services through their health insurance provider without additional premiums;
- Remove the Texas requirement that minors of child-bearing years receive parental consent before accessing contraception;
- Offer comprehensive, age-appropriate sex education, including information about communication strategies, consent, and healthy relationships, as well as support the rights of adolescents to access and consent to their own contraception and other reproductive healthcare, and end failed abstinence-only sex education policies;
- Provide resources for pregnant and parenting teens while encouraging them to continue their education and career development;
- Increase access to accurate information about reproductive health, adoption, and related resources, as well as defund crisis pregnancy centers (CPCs) which discourage abortion using unscientific, inaccurate information;
- Hold medical providers accountable for withholding information about a pregnancy from the pregnant person based on their presumption that a pregnancy would be terminated if they were aware of the condition; and

- Fund research and counseling for postpartum depression.

#### Preventive Healthcare

- Promote vaccinations and immunizations, increase K-12 education about nutrition and healthy living, and expand opportunities for physical activity in schools;
- Fund high-quality research on effective disease prevention, preparedness, and response, as well as invest in evidence-based practices;
- Invest in trauma-informed care and trauma prevention programs aimed at preventing adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), which have been shown to cause increased chronic disease in adulthood;
- Expand community healthcare centers and increase the number of primary healthcare providers, including incentive programs such as tuition forgiveness to practice in underserved areas;
- Increase education initiatives and services that address prevention and effective treatment of communicable diseases to improve quality of life and enable a return to the workforce;
- Review existing public health recommendations and infrastructure to identify opportunities to better prepare for future disease outbreaks, including quarantining and assisting those affected and their families; and
- Denounce the promotion of unsubstantiated information about vaccinations and immunizations not supported by peer-reviewed, scientific research.

#### Eliminating Health Disparities

- Encourage research, policy, and legislation to eliminate health disparities across racial, ethnic, geographic, socioeconomic, and other populations, and specifically the high rate of maternal mortality affecting Black women, to enable all Texans to live long, healthy, and more productive lives;
- Acknowledge and act on systemic inequities embedded into healthcare systems at all levels which disproportionately affect Black, Indigenous, People of Color, people identifying as LGBTQIA+, people with disabilities, people with low incomes, people living in rural areas, and people who are undocumented; and
- Ensure Texans living in rural areas have necessary access to healthcare and hospitals, including expansion of telehealth options and grants to incentivize healthcare professionals to locate in rural areas.

#### Mental Health and Substance Use Disorder Services

- Expand access to providers by increasing insurance, Medicare, and Medicaid reimbursement rates for licensed mental health providers, allowing longer session times, expanding telehealth reimbursement options, and expanding licensed mental health provider eligibility for Medicare reimbursement;
- Increase access to mental health and substance use disorder services through expanded community-based services and inpatient and outpatient treatment facilities for adults and youth, including harm reduction programs;
- Expand mental health provider training programs, including treating marginalized populations, using trauma-informed treatments, and evidence-based therapies, and

mandate periodic completion of updated trainings to meet continuing education licensure requirements;

- Increase funding for treatment modality evaluation research; and
- Fund, develop, and provide education programs addressing suicide prevention and fostering understanding of mental health issues and substance use disorders for the community, including age-appropriate education at all school levels and for professionals, including first responders, law enforcement and justice system personnel, educators, and all healthcare providers.
- Expand and invest in mental health care services in rural communities.

## Energy & The Environment

Texas Democrats are committed to preserving, protecting, and defending our environment. Climate change is real; and it threatens all that we value, from the health of our loved ones to the strength of our economy to the safety and security of Texans and all humankind. As the world's leader in energy technology and innovation for the past century, Texas must now become the world leader in clean energy and environmental consciousness. Future generations demand this of us, and we must deliver.

The Texas Democratic Party supports policies and programs that:

- Ensure Texas leads the global clean-energy revolution through union-wage jobs with good benefits and safety standards;
- Create opportunities for historically disadvantaged communities to access high-quality, paid on the job training programs that lead to careers with advancement in the clean-energy sector
- Uphold stringent regulations on oil and gas operations;
- Maintain clean and available water for all Texans;
- Promote environmental protection, regulation, and enforcement;
- Secure environmental justice and create equitable economic opportunity for low-income communities and communities of color as we serve our nation's energy needs.
- Reform the Texas Railroad Commission;
- Preserve Texas' wildlife, parks, and open spaces; and
- Improve recycling and waste reduction.

Leading the Global Clean-Energy Revolution

- Support the transition to clean energy to advance just, equitable and rapid decarbonization, through investment in transmission infrastructure, innovation, and equitable access to clean energy for America, both nationally and in Texas;
- Focus our talents and experience to lead the world in the development, implementation, and commercialization of clean energy technology and encourage our state and federal governments to take bold action;
- Reinvigorate a muscular Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that sets and achieves a net zero carbon emissions goal in the U.S. by 2050, with the goal of a complete transition to renewable energy for transportation and electricity generation.;
- Support efforts by the Biden Administration to achieve a 100% clean energy electric standard by 2035 and goals to achieve 40% of new car sales to be electric-powered vehicles by 2030;
- Support vigorous enforcement and implementation of the Regional Haze Rule, National Ambient Air Quality Standards (including Ozone, Particulate Matter and Sulfur Dioxide), the Methane Rule, the Mercury and Air Toxics Standard, and the Chemical Safety Rule;
- Provide decisive leadership and full cooperation to combat Climate Change worldwide;
- Develop a statewide climate action plan that will achieve emission reductions in Texas consistent with the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change "Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5 degrees C";

- Institute a carbon tax and re-invest the proceeds in Texas to offset any unlikely increase in energy costs as well as in clean energy technologies that will protect American jobs;
- Promote strong energy efficiency utility goals, energy efficiency appliance standards and green building policies;
- End state and federal subsidies and tax incentives for oil and gas production;
- Fully fund the “Texas Emissions Reduction Plan Fund” administered by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) to offer incentives for clean vehicles and infrastructure, including electric vehicles and storage;
- Implement technical and academic programs that place Texas at the forefront of renewable energy, battery, smart grid, building conservation, and electric transportation technology;
- Fund public education programs that promote the benefits of energy conservation; and
- Offer financial incentives for the manufacturing of American-made equipment for alternative energy, storage, grid, transportation, and conservation to achieve the goal of measurably reducing coal and oil consumption for electricity and transportation in Texas.

#### Stringent Regulations on Oil and Gas Operations

- Implement and enforce strict no-flaring, gas capture, and methane regulations for old wells, new wells, refineries, and processing equipment through a combination of state policy and federal rules;
- Strictly regulate and monitor well design and casing to assure no leakage into the environment;
- Impose a moratorium on new fracking wells with a goal of eliminating environmental damage and a goal of ending the practice of injecting wastewater;
- Incentivize the use of recycled water on site in oil and gas operations;
- Restore the rights of local governments to regulate oil and gas operations within their communities; and
- Require capping of all abandoned wells.

#### Clean Air and Clean and Available Water

- Enact a state law that prohibits all indoor smoking and vaping in workplaces, restaurants, and bars;
- Modernize our water management policies in an aggressive manner because in certain parts of the state we are running out of water, and in other parts of the state, we are forced to deal with floods;
- Recognize that access to clean water and dependable water supplies is a basic human right;
- Implement aggressive water conservation and reuse practices;
- Initiate a well-funded state water education campaign to inform Texans about their water sources and how to best conserve and protect them;
- Require water suppliers to develop and implement effective drought response plans;
- Protect Texas bays, estuaries, in-stream flows, and wetlands;
- Reform protections, district boundaries, conservation rules, and water re-use mandates for groundwater conservation districts in the interests of better supporting water self-sufficiency;

- Reform the “rule of capture” to protect scarce water resources from over-exploitation by for-profit developers;
- Expand testing of fish and shellfish for mercury, radionuclides, and other contaminants, and notify the public of health risks from water pollution; and
- Ensure state water plan statutes and regulations address ways to reduce and manage flood risk as well as prevent the destruction of finite water resources.

#### Environmental Protection, Regulation and Enforcement

- Ensure that the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) protects the health and safety of all Texans because environmental protection, regulation, and enforcement is essential to preserve the health of our people and our quality of life;
- Reform the way TCEQ commissioners are selected to ensure that the commission is non-partisan and works to protect all Texans and our environment, not just to protect the profits of the industries they are meant to regulate;
- Require the TCEQ and the EPA to make human health, environmental justice, and quality of life paramount when deciding whether or not to grant either an air or wastewater permit;
- Enact stronger laws and regulations to protect low-income communities and communities of color from environmental racism and environmental injustice;
- Protect communities of color from environmental racism by establishing an environmental justice office at TCEQ and requiring a cumulative impacts analysis;
- Inform Texans of hazardous chemicals and materials being stored in their communities;
- Establish an “Amber-alert style” notification system for chemical releases or accidents;
- Implement required performance standards and inspections for above-ground petrochemical storage tanks, due to the recurring massive failures of storage tanks;
- Retire all coal electricity generation as quickly as possible;
- End the destruction of our forests, water, and other natural resources by coal strip mining and leasing of public lands for fracking;
- Enforce the Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act for all industries;
- Strengthen the maximum administrative penalties that the TCEQ and the Texas Railroad Commission (TRRC) can assess so that it does not pay to pollute;
- Require TCEQ to analyze cumulative pollution impacts on downwind communities before making permitting decisions;
- Re-enforce the rights of all citizens to participate in the permitting process and contested hearings to protect their property, health, and the environment, ensuring recent legislative efforts do not make citizen participation more difficult in contested case hearings; and
- Halt the plan to import high-level radioactive waste for consolidated storage or disposal in Texas due to risks of water contamination, security concerns, and transportation accidents, and prohibit the transport of high-level radioactive waste on our highways or railways.

#### Reformation of the Texas Railroad Commission (TRRC)

- Implement the previous Sunset Commission’s recommendations to improve the functionality of the TRRC, which oversees Texas’ oil & gas operations should not be a rubber stamp for businesses, and change the name of the agency to better reflect its role and jurisdiction;

- Use TRRC regulatory power as a means of protecting the health, welfare, and property of Texans via regulation of oil and gas operations;
- Adopt newer, stricter rules on injection wells to prevent earthquakes and to avoid contamination of water resources;
- Ban political contributions to TRRC Commissioners from the oil industry;
- Ensure penalties levied by the TRRC are significant enough to deter polluting practices;
- Require the TRRC 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; and
- Direct the TRRC to ask for expanded authority over intrastate pipelines to inspect, monitor, and review pipeline safety.

#### Preservation of Wildlife, Parks, and Open Spaces

- Preserve recreational and open spaces as essential to a healthy Texas;
- Increase funding for upkeep, maintenance, and acquisition of state parkland as well as for ensuring sustainability of state parks in light of natural disasters such as the recent drought-caused wildfires;
- Reward those who voluntarily protect threatened and endangered species on their lands through Safe Harbor Agreements and similar measures;
- Encourage the large-scale planting of native trees and drought-hardy species to absorb greenhouse gasses, improve wildlife habitat, and promote beautification;
- Affirm the Texas Open Beaches Act and the Texas Constitution's guarantee of public access to beaches while opposing any actions that endanger this right;
- Expand the Texas Wildlife Tax Exemption as an effective program to provide support for Texas wildlife; and
- Support the enforcement of the Endangered Species Act and support the preservation and reintroduction of Endangered Species.

#### Recycling and Waste Reduction

- Reduce the use of natural resources, while supporting reuse and recycling;
- Encourage the reduction of use of unnecessary single-use plastics;
- Keep e-waste out of the waste stream, including retailer take-back programs for electronics;
- Offer financial and other incentives for communities to provide residential recycling; and
- Ensure local control of waste reduction through state regulation that allows municipalities to address the issues with ordinances that may be more restrictive than state laws when necessary.

### **Fix The Grid**

We must pass legislation that never allows for another tragedy like the one we faced during the February 2021 winter storm which left more than 700 Texans dead from complications associated with the failed power grid and ERCOT's negligence. Texas Democrats call for our state government to invest in fixing our grid to prevent future disasters, and to ensure the safety and protection of our residents against the failed management of our power grid by ERCOT. We must eliminate the



legalization and use of energy price gouging as the supposed guarantor of “reliability” and establish penalties on the windfall gains to pay off the bonds that Republicans want to finance through the “Abbott Tax”.

The Texas Democratic Party supports policies and programs that:

- Insist on a power grid that won't cause a statewide disaster every time we need to crank the heat or turn up the AC by linking to the national grids for emergency power needs;
- Prioritize the growth of renewable energy options;
- Assure that the Public Utility Commission truly represents the public, not just utilities, as they undergo the sunset process;
- Focus on the power sector instead of punishing the people, by forcing tough penalties if companies fail to comply;
- Require the Public Utility Commission (PUC) and ERCOT create and enforce specific weatherization standards for all power plants including stringent standards for black start units. Black start units must be incentivized to always be ready, and penalties must be imposed when they fail;
- Hold PUC and ERCOT along with utility companies accountable for their ineffectiveness to manage our power grid;
- Oppose planned bailouts for utility companies and ERCOT financed through consumer surcharges and use windfall penalties on price gougers to retire the Republican-issued bonds;
- Ensure that the PUC and the Texas Railroad Commission upgrade weatherization requirements for transmission, natural gas supply chains and power plants, and further ensure that they are followed with penalties for failing to complete weatherization by the required dates;
- Focus also on the demand side of energy by requiring utilities to invest in energy efficiency and demand response programs;
- Pass legislation to update Texas's outdated building codes so that buildings are more energy efficient;
- Allow distributed energy resources like solar and storage to fully compete in ERCOT's energy markets to create a modern grid;
- Offer relief funding to Texas residents to help cover the costs of damaged homes, cars, other property and potentially high utility bills from price surges during extreme weather conditions, and to invest in energy efficiency measures; and
- Require the PUC and ERCOT to take climate change into account when planning for the future grid.

## Reducing Gun Violence

The Texas Democratic Party supports the right of law-abiding Americans to own and bear arms as preserved in the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. We believe that the best way to uphold Texas' strong heritage of responsible gun ownership for self defense, hunting, and recreation is to implement common sense gun safety measures that keep firearms out of the hands of criminals and others deemed dangerous to themselves and others. We call on state leaders to preserve Second Amendment rights while implementing prudent safeguards against needless suicides, senseless mass murders, tragic accidents, and interpersonal violence.

The Texas Democratic Party supports policies and programs that:

- Advocate for responsible actions to promote public safety and reduce acts of violence;
- Require education to promote the responsible use and possession of firearms; and
- Prevent discrimination or restrictions on the possession of firearms solely on the basis of race, religion, color, creed, or socio-economic status.

### Preserving Equal Access to Firearms

- Support the right of any citizen to own guns and oppose any legal restrictions preventing their possession based upon arbitrary classifications or medical conditions unrelated to their safe use; and
- Support the right of Texans to inherit, purchase, and exchange firearms through the stream of commerce.

### Encouraging Education, Training, and Research for Gun Safety

- Support education and training programs that are affordable and accessible to Texans seeking a hunting license or permitting the concealed carry of a firearm;
- Support research promoting gun safety, such as child safety locks and other "smart gun" technology; and
- Lift all restrictions on research by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention into gun violence and allow physicians, mental health counselors, and family counselors to freely discuss gun safety with their patients.

### Promoting Public Safety and Reducing Acts of Violence

- Support compiling a registry of people with violent histories, including family violence, to ensure these individuals cannot purchase guns until their records are cleared;
- Enact an Extreme Risk Protection Order Law, and provide that these decisions are made equitably without consideration of information on name, race, or ethnicity;
- Mandate the temporary surrender of all guns by a person who has had a protective order issued against them in the past 3 years or is convicted of a violent misdemeanor or felony, including animal abuse, or has been in the past 5 years in Texas, any other U.S. jurisdiction, or in military court, returning them only when that person has been deemed safe to own a gun by an approved licensed psychologist hired or contracted by the state or county and no sooner than one year after temporary surrender;

- Require universal background checks coupled with a reasonable waiting period, with the exception of an exchange of firearms within families or by inheritance, to ensure those charged with violent crimes cannot possess or acquire firearms while their charges remain pending;
- Remove loopholes that exempt gun shows and private sales to non-family members from background checks and other safety requirements prior to the sale of a firearm;
- Restore the prior federal prohibition on the purchase of assault weapons, as well as prohibit the manufacture, sale, or possession of bump stocks, binary trigger systems, trigger cranks, attachable silencers, and magazine clips that hold over 10 rounds;
- Prohibit the open carry of all firearms and repeal “campus carry” policies;
- Repeal laws that insulate manufacturers and distributors of firearms from civil liability;
- Promote law enforcement and first responders’ safety by banning all Teflon and armor-piercing ammunition;
- Remove any impediments to the freedom of local governments, school districts, churches, and proprietors to control the use and possession of firearms on their premises or in their public spaces; and
- Enact and enforce responsible gun storage laws.

## Criminal Justice Reform

Justice should not be influenced by wealth or privilege. We must address the institutional and implicit biases that lead to unequal treatment of people of color, people with disabilities, low-income people, immigrants, religious minorities, veterans and the LGBTQIA+ community. We must redefine the goals of our public safety system to focus on preventing crime and addressing the underlying causes of criminal activity. End the treatment of social problems such as addiction and homelessness with criminal statutes and incarceration.

### End criminal penalties for abortion

- Uphold the rights of women to control their bodies and decide how, when and with whom they will have children; and
- Overturn every law that proposes to incarcerate any person for abortion related acts.

### Transforming Policing

- Train peace officers on communication, civil rights, and interaction with diverse populations;
- Establish de-escalation as the norm in both policy and training for all public safety departments;
- Improve criminal investigations through independent and autonomous crime labs meeting standards set by the scientific community;
- Limit federal programs that provide military equipment to police forces;
- Eliminate the use of SWAT teams to serve routine drug investigation warrants and require police department management to collect and report data on SWAT deployments, require body cameras, and require prior approval of all SWAT raids;
- End the use of “no knock” warrants;
- Institute appropriate disciplinary actions for officers who violate departmental policies and prevent officers who have been terminated for serious misconduct from moving to another public safety department or job within the state;
- Ensure that case processing of an officer's alleged criminal conduct be carried out expeditiously and in the same manner as any other case;
- Allow police to focus on protecting the public by providing appropriate professional staffing for mental health and drug crises, non-criminal family disputes and other social issues;
- Expand statewide use of force reporting to include all incidents resulting in injury to either an officer or a civilian;
- Strengthen independent oversight of all investigations into police conduct by requiring independent prosecutors to investigate questionable officer-involved actions;
- End racial profiling in searches and traffic stops, require written or recorded consent, and require racial profiling data and any of the officers' records to be allowed as evidence in lawsuits alleging racial profiling; and
- Ensure civil asset forfeiture only upon a criminal conviction;

### Reform Bail Policies

- Replace cash bail with policies based on dangers to the community and ensuring court appearances; and

- Require detention decisions be made within 48 hours after arrest and be based upon written orders supported by "clear and convincing evidence."

#### Institute Reentry and Rehabilitation Programs and Reduce Collateral Consequences

- Provide formerly incarcerated individuals with a pathway back to productive participation in society;
- All falsely convicted and incarcerated people have a right to compensation;
- Provide voting restoration information to all formerly incarcerated individuals upon eligibility;
- Restore funding for postsecondary education in prisons and career training afterwards, eliminate barriers to student loans for those with a drug conviction, and provide needed drug treatment to reduce drug use among people released from prison;
- Expand the right to a clean record and "ban the box" laws so that people who succeed in deferred adjudication or complete rehabilitation for nonviolent convictions can get a job and housing; and
- Reform probation to reduce technical revocations, allow probationers to stay in their communities and provide alternate means of discipline, such as local jail time, house arrest, and counseling, without imposing excessive requirements which prevent success;

#### Eliminating Private Prisons and Detention Facilities

- Recognize that a business model that generates profit from incarcerating individuals for long periods of time is unacceptable and immoral;
- Require state and local governments to directly operate and perform all core services at prisons, jails, or detention facilities within the State of Texas, and expressly prohibit the use of private prisons, jails, or detention facilities within the state; and
- Deny corporate status, licenses, permits, and tax incentives to companies that operate private prisons, jails, or detention facilities.

#### Improving Prison and Jail Conditions

- Organize carceral systems to protect human dignity and ensure conditions are safe and sanitary, and do not jeopardize the well-being of the people within their walls, including heating and cooling, good quality food and water, health care and commissary access;
- Practice compassionate release of incarcerated people due to terminal illness, advanced age, sickness, debilitation, or extreme family circumstances as a standard, where they do not pose a clear and current risk to public safety;
- Ensure visitation through video teleconferencing and via telephone are free of charge;
- Protect all individuals from sexual violence and assault while incarcerated; and
- Develop appropriate protocols for members of the LGBTQIA+ community who seek to be accommodated on the basis of gender identity or expression, including appropriate gender conforming medical care.

#### Reforming Court Procedures

- Ensure that the system and officers of the court all place emphasis on the presumption of innocence at each stage of the process regardless of the race or economic status of the defendant;
- Improve both the quality and integrity of the Texas criminal justice systems by criminalizing intentional prosecutorial misconduct;
- Adequately fund attorneys to represent indigent defendants and defendants with disabilities;
- Support disability accommodations, including cognitive disabilities, to facilitate communication with defendants and their counsel;
- Ensure that people with disabilities have free access to civil attorneys if a judge determines that access to a civil attorney is needed to reasonably accommodate the needs of that person and ensure justice; and
- Mandate continuing legal education for judges on issues related to people with disabilities.

#### Reforming Juvenile Justice

- Prioritize prevention using the transformative justice model as a foundational framework;
- Require mandatory training for all staff and volunteers on educating students with disabilities;
- Provide on-campus behavior learning supports, up to and including in-school detention while reducing off-campus suspensions and expulsions and eliminating student referrals to police for routine school discipline;
- Utilize Disciplinary Alternative Education Programs (DAEPs) as therapeutic, rehabilitative learning campuses for extreme instances only;
- Expand the use of proactive, trauma-informed, equity-driven approaches that lead to productive and positive outcomes for students;
- Raise the age of criminal responsibility from 17 to 18 years of age and end the prosecution of juveniles in adult courts; and
- End the housing of youth in large state prison facilities and ensure they are housed in smaller, better-staffed, child-focused, family-centered facilities closer to the youths' homes.

#### Ending “Tough on Crime” Sentencing

- Stop sending indigent people to jail or prison for inability to pay fines and court costs;
- Being an unauthorized immigrant in the U.S. is a federal civil offense but not a crime, so we must stop bypassing civil immigration law by arresting immigrants for trespass;
- Reduce the number of people entering jails and prisons by eliminating incarceration as a penalty for low-level, non-violent offenses;
- Eliminate mandatory minimums, “three-strikes” laws, other sentencing restrictions, and allow judges to use discretion in sentencing when the specifics of the situation justify it;
- End “truth in sentencing” laws that lengthen sentences and limit eligibility for parole;
- Streamline the parole and probation systems for individuals that pose little or no threat to society;
- Treat drug use and mental health as public health challenges rather than crimes;
- Fund accessible, affordable, community-based outpatient care and insurance for mental health treatment, drug treatment programs, and rehabilitation programs;

- Incentivize the expansion of psychiatric residency programs and increase the availability of trauma-informed mental health services for the poor and veterans;
- Require courts to facilitate the application by persons with disabilities for all disability accommodations needed to ensure justice on their websites and in person; and
- Abolish the death penalty.

#### Legalizing Cannabis

- Legalize the possession and use of cannabis, medicinal and recreational, and its derivatives in Texas, and regulate its use, production, and sale for public health and safety as other states do and as is already done with alcohol and tobacco;
- Regulate warning labels and advertisements to educate about the harms and side effects, particularly for minors, as done for tobacco, vaping, and alcohol;
- Establish a taxation and licensing structure and fund critical needs, prioritizing the communities most affected by the failed war on drugs;
- Upon the legalization, immediately release individuals incarcerated solely for possession of cannabis, and automatically expunge the criminal records of persons convicted or receiving deferred adjudication for any possession of cannabis offense; and
- Until legalization, eliminate arrest, promote pretrial diversion and transition to civil fines for cannabis possession offenses in Texas.

## Disability Justice

Every Texan has a right to lead a productive life, enjoy liberty, and to pursue happiness. Texas Democrats will work to ensure all Texans, including Texans with disabilities, are able to exercise their right to live independently in the community in the most integrated setting of their choice. Disability rights are human rights and no person should face discrimination because they have a disability, whether or not it is visible. We will work to preserve, strengthen, and enforce all state and federal disability rights laws. Building from the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), we will work to codify the *Olmstead v. United States* decision (the U.S. Supreme Court ruling based on the ADA, affirming that people with disabilities have a qualified right to receive state-funded support and services within their community). Due to lack of enforcement, rights of people with disabilities are being violated, restricted, or denied. In addition, Texans with disabilities are often excluded in the decisions that affect them. Texans with disabilities must be integral in crafting policy pertaining to disability issues.

The Texas Democratic Party will fight for policies and programs that:

- Guarantee the rights of people with disabilities, and ensure that people with disabilities can live productive, safe, and happy lives in the community;
- Protect persons with disabilities, as persons under the law, from discrimination, abuse, neglect, exploitation, abandonment, endangerment, loss of liberty, and loss of life by local and state government entities;
- End the idea that the State of Texas has sovereign immunity from the ADA and other federal provisions; and
- Enforce the Americans with Disabilities Act requirements for public and private organizations;

Impacts of COVID-19 on People with Disabilities

- Provide personal protective equipment (PPE) to clients with disabilities as well as the attendants, medical professionals, and frontline workers who interact with them;
- Provide support for the transition of persons with disabilities from institutional care to community-based care providers;
- Provide on-site oversight of places where people with disabilities are living in institutionalized conditions, particularly in situations where family and community members cannot visit to monitor;
- Ensure merchants allow people with disabilities to use their specially designed equipment to transport groceries;
- Expand home delivery to make it accessible and available to everyone;
- Ensure medical system and non-emergency needs are not overloaded and that adequate disability services are provided;
- End hoarding and price-gouging on delivery services and shopping services, which disproportionately impacts people with disabilities; and
- Ensure people with disabilities who contract COVID-19 are entitled to the same level of care as other patients.



## Ending Sexual & Family Violence

Work to end interpersonal violence in Texas, including sexual assault and harassment, family violence, human trafficking, child and elder abuse, and other forms of gender-based violence, through comprehensive programs that address the needs of every person regardless of race, ethnicity, geographic location, income, disability status, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, or immigration status. We must break the cycle of violence by working with a broad coalition to create safer and healthier communities for all.

The Texas Democratic Party will uphold policies and programs that:

- Work to break the cycle of violence through comprehensive, evidence-based prevention education;
- Meet the wide-ranging needs of those impacted by interpersonal violence; and
- Create a system in which those who abuse their power are held accountable.

### Education and Prevention

- Fund, develop, and provide early prevention and education efforts to decrease the incidence of adverse childhood experiences (ACES) or interpersonal violence prior to victimization or perpetration;
- Include evidence-based programs that promote social-emotional learning, safe and healthy relationships, consent, and age-appropriate sex education as a part of the curriculum in Texas schools from pre-K to postsecondary institutions; and
- Require trauma-informed education for law enforcement, justice system, healthcare, education and health care treatment for intersex and transgender people, mental health, education, disability services, and social services personnel to promote sensitive and effective interactions with survivors.

### Services and Funding

- Increase funding for family violence programs, including shelters, transitional housing, non-residential programs, counseling, and free legal services for those impacted by abuse, violence, or trafficking;
- Ensure survivors are not billed for medical exams or treatment, including sexual assault nurse examination, medication, strangulation exams, and family violence medical forensic exams, regardless of whether they choose to report to law enforcement, and reimburse all costs incurred by medical and law enforcement institutions by using the Crime Victims Compensation Fund;
- Provide access to a comprehensive sexual assault examination and treatment provided by either a certified Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) or a trained, licensed healthcare provider to every survivor of sexual assault;
- Expand provider training for all law enforcement, justice system, healthcare, mental health, education, disability services, and social services personnel, including training on treating marginalized populations, using trauma informed treatments, and practicing evidence-based therapies, and mandate periodic completion of updated trainings to meet continuing education licensure requirements; and

- Require targeted intervention programs for perpetrators to be established in every county in Texas, including remote options for rural counties.

#### Accountability

- Ensure comprehensive, equitable, trauma-informed responses to incidents of interpersonal violence, as well as enforce current Texas laws to hold offenders accountable and increase the likelihood that victims and loved ones will come forward to report these crimes;
- Adopt comprehensive sexual harassment policies at all levels of government, which apply to all public officials and ensure these officials are held accountable and face meaningful and clearly delineated consequences when these policies are violated;
- Require that every county and district attorney's office in Texas, upon the victim's qualification and request, file a protective order on behalf of victims and represent the victims before the court;
- Establish regional response teams and task forces to assess community needs, build a coalition of agencies, prosecute perpetrators, and improve responses for survivors of human trafficking, interpersonal violence, and sexual assault; and
- Place every defendant charged with a family violence crime on either a probation-deferred adjudication or deferred prosecution program and order them to complete a targeted intervention program for perpetrators.
- Ensure that sex workers, survivors, and victims of sexual assault are not criminally prosecuted for seeking help by repealing FOSTA-SESTA.

## Religious Freedom

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 many Texans and that many Texans have secular beliefs. We support our Constitution's guarantee of every individual's right to practice their own beliefs without imposing them on others.

The Texas Democratic Party supports policies and programs that:

- Safeguard the free exercise of religion without promoting one religion or denomination over others;
- Guarantee individual rights, fair treatment, and protections to all minorities, including religious minorities; and
- Ensure no religious test shall be required as a qualification for public office.

As the U.S. Constitution prohibits the establishment of a favored religion and any religious test for public office, while guaranteeing free religious exercise, 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;
- That the determination of when life begins is a religious doctrinal issue that is viewed differently by different religions and denominations, while the right to hold differing views should be respected, imposing the doctrine of some religious denominations on others violates the First Amendment;
- Government must not inhibit the free exercise of religion, but religion can never be used as an excuse to discriminate against or harm others;
- In the separation of church and state;
- Our founders wisely provided for the separation of church and state, which allows religion to flourish in freedom, and respects those who have no religious faith;
- Government must not use any public funds to support religious positions or activities;
- Entangling government with religion is dangerous to both government and religion;
- The religious test for public office in the Texas Constitution must be removed.

Religion should not be invoked to supersede the rights of others. These rights include:

- Legal protection from discrimination, including for LGBTQIA+ Texans;
- Nondiscrimination for individuals in service or public accommodations in the private sector;
- Fair treatment and non-exploitation in employment and business;
- The protection of children and the needy;
- Access to healthcare for all, particularly for women and families;
- Nondiscrimination in the provision of goods and services by government, directly or through grants and contracts;
- The disseminating of valid voter protection information by trusted sources like faith communities; and
- Life and health, which are prioritized by all religions, must not be jeopardized by requiring voters to only vote in-person instead of by mail during a pandemic.

- Free speech and freedom of expression, including the right of individual persons to address grievances through boycotts.

## Equity & Social Justice

All people are equally deserving of dignity, respect, and equitable treatment. The same Texans that are often the targets of ignorance and hate are also disproportionately working on the front lines as low-paid essential workers most exposed by the current pandemic. Texas Democrats will not ignore the unconscionable systemic disparities that ultimately leave us all behind. We stand together and amplify each other's voices for a more equitable, just, and free Texas.

The Texas Democratic Party supports policies and programs that:

- Promote racial equity and ensure that Texans of all racial and ethnic backgrounds are treated with dignity and respect;
- Value and assure women's full, equal, and essential role in Texas' future success;
- Ensure equal protections and rights for all lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and other non-cis non-heterosexual or LGBTQIA+ people; and
- Require the inclusion of fact-based, fair perspectives from all marginalized groups in history and social studies classes in Texas public education.

### Racial Equity

- Treat Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) Texans, including 1.8 million Asian American Texans, 3.8 million African American Texans, 11.4 million Hispanic/Latinx Texans, and 350,000 Indigenous Texans as respected and welcomed as members of a diverse American family;
- Condemn all hateful speech, violence, racism, and disinformation, and misinformation directed at BIPOC both past and present;
- Call on local law enforcement agencies to fully and vigorously enforce hate crimes statutes;
- End people's suffering under the controlling influences of systemic racism, including those influences on either extreme of the political spectrum that attempt to manipulate, control, or exclude them;
- Provide BIPOC the right to heal on their own terms and in culture-specific ways they determine to be most beneficial for their overall health and well-being; and
- Recognize the unique contributions that people of all racial identities make to our party and our society, applaud the ongoing contributions of BIPOC, and encourage further civic engagement from these communities.

### Asian American Texans

- Recognize historic and ongoing discrimination against Asian Americans, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act and the "bamboo ceiling";
- Rectify proactively the contemporary effects of discrimination against Asian Americans, especially those effects stemming from COVID-19-related xenophobia;
- Appreciate and teach Asian American contributions to American society such as knitting the country together with the transcontinental railroad and pioneering Universal Basic Income; and
- Acknowledge the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Asian American community.

## African American Texans

- Acknowledge African Americans as the descendants of the survivors of the middle passage, chattel slavery, convict leasing, and mass incarceration, an ongoing condition that remains unresolved;
- Provide reparations for the descendants of slaves who were brought to America through the Atlantic slave trade;
- Treat today's thriving Black families as the experts; those who mastered the Black experience of survival and resiliency under the weight of prolonged systemic oppression;
- Uphold that African Americans are not a monolith and own the right to address their issues individually or collectively, as a distinct cultural group, without suspicion or fear of unjustified retribution for doing so as exemplified by the Red Summer of 1919 or the FBI's COINTELPRO and IRON FIST programs;
- Affirm African Americans' right to explore new solutions, while recommitting to those practical approaches that made the triumphs of their 400-year survival possible; and
- Make better health outcomes possible in the African American community by effectively addressing the Five Social Determinants of Health: economic stability, education, social and community context, health and healthcare access, and the built environment in and around communities where they live, work, and play.

## Hispanic/Latinx Texans

- Affirm the dignity and the civil and human rights of all documented and undocumented persons and stand against racism, religious discrimination, and persecution; and
- Hold the government accountable to all individuals and communities it serves, documented and undocumented, and ensure it is not used as a tool for oppression or intimidation.

## Indigenous Texans

- Acknowledge that our institutions were built on land stolen from a variety of Aztlan Nation and American Indian groups, including the Caddo, Apache, Karankawa, Comanche, Wichita, Coahuiltecan, Tonkawa, and many more;
- Condemn past and present wrongs against Aztlan Nation and American Indians including the genocide, erasure, and exclusion of Indigenous Texans;
- Support tribal sovereignty, including the rights of tribal communities to maintain jurisdiction over crimes committed by non-Native people against Native people on tribal land, administer elections on tribal land, and regulate environmental protections on tribal land;
- Defend the Indian Child Welfare Act; and
- Commit to building relationships with American Indians and tribal communities as well as to decolonizing ourselves and our institutions.

## Texas Women

- Uphold affirmative action and the rights accorded to women in Title IX and the U.N. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW);
- Since the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) has been passed by a two-thirds vote of Congress and by three-fourths of state legislatures, the ERA has met all the requisites of Article V and

should be enrolled by the Archivist of the United States as an amendment to the U.S. Constitution;

- Preserve and re-establish confidential, unrestricted access to affordable, high-quality, culturally sensitive healthcare services, including the full range of reproductive services, contraception, and abortion, without requiring guardian, judicial, parental, or spousal consent;
- Encourage workplaces to provide paid menstrual leave;
- Call on Congress to enact the Women's Health Protection Act;
- Increase parenting and job skills for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women through accessible, comprehensive education and training;
- Guarantee a safe and inclusive workplace by providing access to affordable childcare and support the right of a woman to report hostile and abusive work environments without retribution; and
- Develop a pipeline for women in leadership with diverse experiences within the Texas Democratic Party.

#### LGBTQIA+ Texans

- Call for the immediate passage and enactment of the Equality Act by Congress;
- Ensure the right of all people to participate in all aspects of life in a manner that is consistent with their gender identity or expression, irrespective of the gender they were assigned at birth, including the use of facilities; streamlined access to accurate legal documents regardless of surgical status; fully inclusive, employer-based healthcare; bodily autonomy and medical decision-making; and gender confirmation surgery;
- Classify discrimination against transgender, intersex, and non-binary individuals as being on the basis of gender;
- Affirm that transgender women are women and transgender men are men, that there are more than two genders, and that transgender Texans are whole people with human rights;
- End the attacks on transgender youth and their families, and ensure that these youth stay with their supportive families free from governmental investigation or harassment;
- End the gay/transgender “panic” defense deployed by hate crime suspects in criminal court;
- Ensure that LGBTQIA+ youth have the right to learn in a bullying and harassment-free setting; are safe from conversion therapy, including recognizing its practice as abuse; and have access to safe housing and healthcare;
- Ban the harmful practice of surgery on intersex infants;
- Recognize, study, and address the epidemic of hate crimes against transgender women, and particularly transgender women of color, in Texas;
- Provide inclusive and comprehensive housing and healthcare for LGBTQIA+ seniors; and
- Protect the U.S Supreme Court decisions which guaranteed the rights to same-sex sexual activity, marriage equality, and the full benefits of marriage to all couples.

#### Hate Crimes

- Enforce the federal Hate Crimes Prevention Act and include “actual or perceived gender-related characteristics” in the Texas James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Act;

- Adopt enforceable requirements for law enforcement agencies to collect and report hate crimes data;
- Enhance training for law enforcement personnel on hate crime identification, response and reporting, including training on cyberstalking, cyberbullying and other forms of online expressions or actions of hate;
- Adopt criminal penalties for cyberstalking, cyber harassment and online activities that encourage, solicit or facilitate the commission of hate crimes;
- Include false alarm “swatting” in crimes eligible for enhancement when motivated by hate; and
- Establish liability and civil remedies for “doxing” harm caused by maliciously sharing personal information of individuals to incite harassment or other abuse.



## Family and Individual Security

All people have a right to live in safe, secure, and healthy environments, and that no one in Texas should live without a home, electricity, or running water that is provided by a secure power grid that functions in all weather. Texas Democrats imagine a world in which compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act is a given, not a fight, and all people can comfortably retire with dignity and financial security.

The Texas Democratic Party supports policies and programs that:

- Ensure people with disabilities and older adults can live safely and independently in the community supported by appropriate personal care;
- Preserve and protect retirement benefits, including Social Security, private and public pensions; and
- Provide housing, utilities, and insurance options to all at affordable prices supplemented by public and private assistance as needed.

### Care for Children and Vulnerable Adults

- Provide greater oversight of private and state facilities and institutions that serve children and vulnerable adults;
- End the privatization of the Department of Family Protective Services;
- Fund Child Protective Services (CPS) and Adult Protective Services (APS) to reduce caseloads, provide essential training, ensure compliance with federal guidelines for caseworker/client meetings, and adequately compensate experienced caseworkers to reduce turnover;
- Require education to address disproportionality and prevent discrimination in the foster care and guardianship systems while providing safe, secure environments for vulnerable populations;
- Allow fostering and adoption of children by qualified adults without discriminatory barriers;
- Ensure medically fragile Texans have access to complete care through an effective system that includes Medicaid coupled with quality of care oversight; and
- Support families by removing outside work requirements to obtain benefits such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), because childcare, eldercare, and disability support are full time jobs

### Long-term Services and Support

- Revise the long-term care system to include Assisted Living, personal care homes, and in-home care options, as well as include increased Medicaid reimbursement rates for long-term care and in-home care providers; and
- Prioritize home and community-based services instead of state-supported living centers (SSLCs) for Medicaid funding;
- Ensure coordination of accessible, affordable, and integrated housing and other non-medical services to contain costs and allow greater individual control for people with disabilities and aging adults; and

- Pay higher wages for personal care providers who typically are employed by for-profit agencies, develop personal care provider virtual training programs, and establish a state registry of those who have completed training and passed background checks.

#### Social Security and Retirement

- Mandate Social Security remain an essential federal government program and preserve the state retirement systems as defined benefit systems;
- Guarantee those who have paid into Social Security receive the benefits they have earned regardless of other systems for which they may qualify and ensure that income caps are raised or removed;
- Calculate cost-of-living adjustments for aging adults using the Consumer Price Index for the Elderly (CPI-E);
- Provide legal protections for participants in any retirement system to safeguard the full benefits they have earned;
- Freeze funds of companies filing for bankruptcy or encountering legal problems to secure their pension plan funding; and
- Support a system for Universal Basic Income which addresses income inequality and would cover all adults within the jurisdiction of the United States.

#### Housing, Utilities, and Property Insurance

- Revise the property appraisal system to prevent people from being taxed out of their homes in order to secure home ownership;
- Provide people experiencing homelessness access to housing combined with individualized case management to guide and support their needs;
- Eliminate unfair underwriting and other discriminatory practices as well as strictly enforce insurance policies that require companies to justify rates;
- Educate homeowners and renters about the need for disaster insurance options including hail, windstorm, and flood coverage; and
- Require the Public Utility Commission to mandate all utility providers describe their products and policies transparently regarding bill calculations and rate history, and eliminate fine print, tiered rates, and confusing rate structures.

## Immigration

Texas Democrats call for an immigration system that serves our families, communities, and economies. Border communities managing immigration on the frontlines face special challenges and bring local knowledge that requires respect from state-level policymakers. We should ensure that state funding is provided to impacted communities and supports the services they need, rather than waste money on misleading political publicity stunts. Importantly, viewing immigrants through the lens of fear and prejudice only serves to undermine our values, prosperity, and security as a state and as a nation. Our government's failure to enact meaningful, long-term immigration reform has left us with the broken system we have today. Our country is stronger with a more fair and equitable immigration system.

The United States has always been a vibrant nation of immigrants. We value those who come from different countries and cultures. Immigrants add to the prosperity, innovation, and resilience of this great country. Immigrants hold professional jobs, teach in our educational institutions, own businesses, build our homes, grow our food, and contribute hundreds of billions of dollars to the Texas economy. Texas Democrats will work to foster better bilateral relationships with all nations including our southern neighbor with whom we share an expansive border.

The Texas Democratic Party supports policies and programs that:

- Enact comprehensive immigration reform, including an attainable path to citizenship;
- Reform employment and education-based immigration, including an increase in visas, to continue to attract and retain innovative and talented individuals from across the world;
- Reform family-based immigration, including expanding visa availability, especially for populous countries, to expedite family reunification and lessen visa wait times;
- Abolish reentry bans for non-violent legal permanent resident applicants and increase approvals of hardship waivers;
- Increase hardship waivers for Green Card holders who have deferred their application for citizenship;
- Expand access to crime victim and witness visas to encourage the reporting of criminal activities and pursuit of perpetrators;
- Expand access to Highly Skilled Immigration visas for speciality occupations (H1B) and Permanent Residency (Green Card);
- Restore access to student visas for international students;
- Remove limits placed on asylum claims or Temporary Protected Status for refugees fleeing wars, natural disasters, family violence, political violence, and gang violence and forced recruitment;
- Reduce the fees and excessive paperwork requirements associated with visa applications that create unnecessary barriers to immigration;
- Reverse the previous administration's public charge rules which discourage people, including U.S. Citizen children, from accessing health and education programs;
- Provide a pathway to citizenship for DACA recipients;
- Expand coverage under the Affordable Care Act to undocumented immigrants;
- Ensure there are no bans based on religious affiliation or country of origin;

- Uphold the 14th Amendment provision of the U.S. Constitution;
- Provide equal housing opportunities to all immigrants;
- Ensure asylum seekers are treated humanely;
- Remove unnecessary border walls and stop further wasting of tax dollars;
- Forbid separating children from their parents and housing children in tent cities and cages;
- Prohibit family detention centers and for profit detention centers;
- Protect established federal, state, and faith-based refugee programs from interference;
- Add sufficient judges and provide individual legal assistance to all who come before the court to reduce backlogs in U.S. Immigration Courts;
- Ensure fair and just treatment of all people in immigration proceedings;
- Allow undocumented students to attend in-state institutions of higher learning and qualify for in-state tuition;
- Permit all Texas residents to obtain a driver's license to increase safety on our roads;
- Repeal Texas' "show me your papers" laws, which cause racial profiling by law enforcement;
- Ensure the lawful and humane treatment of immigrants by all law enforcement and correction officers through mandatory education and accountability mechanisms;
- Maintain the independence of local law enforcement from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE);
- Prohibit the use of traffic stops as pretexts for the profiling of persons to determine their legal status;
- Restore the long-standing, historical treatment of unauthorized border crossings as a civil matter;
- Work with our allies to facilitate a safe haven for the millions of refugees fleeing violence or persecution, and welcome properly vetted asylum seekers to the United States, and;
- Protect the right of all children to attend public schools regardless of immigration status.

## Rural Texas & Agriculture

Our rural communities, along with the farmers, ranchers, small business owners, and others who live in them, deserve a bold political agenda to restore economic prosperity to the small towns and rural areas of our country. We support rural values of self-reliance and devotion to country, the preservation of private property rights and separation of church and state, and initiatives to revitalize rural America, including farm policies that restore fair prices and address the current credit crisis confronting American agriculture.

The Texas Democratic Party supports policies and programs that:

- Provide grants and loans to lift the rural economy out of the crisis created by globalization and technology;
- Promote strong rural schools, community colleges, and regional training programs;
- Address the lack of available and affordable healthcare in rural America;
- Promote safe and sustainable use of the land while preserving private property rights and encouraging good stewardship and conservation of limited natural resources;
- Fund projects to repair or replace the aging infrastructure in rural America, including roads, bridges, and public water and sewer systems;
- Enable electric and telephone cooperatives to provide high-speed internet and cell phone service to rural towns and school districts to remediate the disparity in service that exists in rural areas; and
- Empower local governments to address their unique needs and priorities, including ensuring the preservation of rural independent school districts to preserve the identity and autonomy of rural communities.

Restoring Prosperity and Opportunity to Rural America and American Agriculture

- Create a rural loan insurance corporation to guarantee up to 90 percent of loans and grants to purchase farm machinery or equipment, lease and purchase farmland, and finance crop inputs so young farmers can start their operations, new entrepreneurs can create farm-to-table operations, and small business owners can open innovative companies to use local resources in new and different ways, while creating competition in the global economy;
- Promote responsible agriculture, including trade policies to encourage open global markets and fair competition coupled with domestic price supports to enable producers to orderly market their crops and receive fair prices that cover costs of production plus a reasonable profit;
- Prohibit discrimination against family farmers in being denied access to loans or assistance simply because they exercise the right to use federal bankruptcy laws to restructure finances; and
- Ensure the protection of migrant farmworkers, who play a crucial role in the Texas agricultural economy, from inhumane working conditions and provide just wages and humane living conditions.

Ensuring the availability of water vital for private individuals, agricultural businesses, and emergency management in rural areas

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

#### Ensuring Rural Students Equal Access to a Quality Education

- Realize the constitutional right of all Texas students to a free, high-quality, public education and restore adjustments for small and mid-size school districts to ensure they are equitably funded in reflection of the higher costs in all programs;
- Prohibit the forced consolidation of rural school districts and preempt any attempt to fund private schools with public funds, also known as school vouchers;
- Ensure access to affordable, high-speed internet for all rural Texas school districts, staff, students, and families;
- Equip all students with adequate technology at home for distance learning;
- Ensure universal, affordable child development and care centers for pre-K education;
- Increase funding for Communities in Schools to identify and assist students at the earliest possible age;
- Implement alternative learning options to assist teenage students with staying in school, such as a youth corps to instill the benefits of public service and provide resources for rural improvement programs; and
- Allow school districts to use tax funds to create Regional Technical Training Centers by partnering with community colleges and each other to provide students the skills needed for 21<sup>st</sup> century jobs.

#### Accessible and Affordable Healthcare for Rural Texans

- Accept Medicaid expansion in Texas and recognize that healthcare is a fundamental right which should be affordable and accessible to all;
- Address the scarcity of healthcare resources by providing public grants to incentivize health workers to locate in rural towns and open facilities designed to provide the services needed in rural areas;
- Use technological advances, such as telehealth, to provide access to consultative care in rural areas; offer comparatively reimbursed telehealth to increase access to health and behavioral health care in rural areas; and

- Encourage a fundamental shift in healthcare delivery by moving from a “sick care” to a “well care” model.

#### Confronting Environmental Challenges While Preserving Rights of Landowners and Promoting Responsible Stewardship of Resources

- Promote good stewardship of private land through the mitigation and control of harmful impacts;
- Address threats to water quality caused by industry, development, mining, and agriculture through regulation of aggregate and frac-sand production, fossil fuel extraction, and transportation to emphasize the importance of protecting the environment lest we spoil land used for agriculture, recreation, and raising families;
- Reform eminent domain statutes by ensuring a more transparent, accountable, and fair process for landowners, while providing that private entities with condemnation authority are truly deserving of such power by ensuring that any proposed project indeed serves the public good; and
- Prohibit proposed “interstate” pipelines to section such pipeline projects into “interstate” segments to escape the needed and meaningful environmental review required to protect the state’s natural resources.

#### Restoring and Replacing Our Aging Rural Infrastructure

- Reverse the continuing decline in rural population by funding new public infrastructure that fosters economic development, including irrigation projects to replace depleted water resources for both irrigation and drinking water supplies;
- Appropriate funds to repair or replace dams that have been rated “high hazard;”
- Fund the Texas Highway Department at sufficient levels to rehabilitate farm to market highways; and
- Improve rural infrastructure and help rural Texans who often have the greatest needs.

#### Comparable Quality High-Speed Internet and Cell Phone Service

- Provide loans and grants to electric and telephone cooperatives to install infrastructure needed to fill gaps in cell phone service and provide equal access and comparable internet service to rural consumers;

#### Empowering Local Governments and Maintaining Local Control

- Return local control by removing restrictions and empowering local governments to address rural priorities; and
- Allow local governments to create regional authorities for addressing common problems related to the economy and culture.

## Smart Government & Infrastructure

A fair and transparent government should serve all people. Smart government means investing for our future, ensuring the health of our residents, and facilitating an economy that benefits all Texans. We support capital and government investment in infrastructure such as roads, bridges, utilities, internet services, water supply and flood control, schools, ports, parks, and public buildings. We must properly fund education and make it available to all. We also value the diversity of our communities and believe that the State of Texas should recognize the governing authority of those communities on issues where local authority best serves the health and safety of the community.

The Texas Democratic Party supports policies and programs that:

- Promote fiscal responsibility while ensuring transparency and accountability;
- Protect public pensions and restore actuarial soundness;
- Fully fund transportation projects to alleviate congestion and improve the safety of our roadways; and
- Ensure technology serves to empower our people and communities, protects the rights and freedoms of our society, and enhances equitable access to the benefits of technological progress.

### Fiscal Responsibility

- Use the Rainy Day Fund for its intended purpose, which is to ensure the continuation of appropriate services during economic downturns, as well as to recover from natural disasters;
- End debt, diversions, and deception in the state budget process;
- Appropriate assistance to Texans and Texas communities still attempting to recover from Hurricane Harvey and other natural disasters, with management at the local level;
- Establish grants for the task force that was created by Texas Department of Emergency Management relating to disaster issues that affect older adults and persons with disabilities;
- Oppose regressive taxes as well as tax breaks to the 1% of our population at the expense of the other 99%;
- Enact a constitutional amendment to prohibit sales tax on food and medicine, while opposing efforts to replace local property taxes with a tremendous increase in state sales taxes;
- Enact a sales and use tax exemption for items used to assist persons with an intellectual, cognitive, or developmental disability;
- Reform the business “margins tax” to provide fairness to all economic sectors, especially small businesses, while opposing eliminating it and shifting the burden further onto sales taxes and residential property taxes;
- Eliminate tax loopholes and unproductive special breaks to simplify the tax system and provide revenue for essential services;
- Prohibit “corporate welfare” incentives that pit states and communities against each other;



- Reform the property tax appraisal system to benefit all homeowners fairly, prevent families from being taxed out of their homes, eliminate commercial property loopholes, and extend the benefits of property tax relief to renters;
- Require proposed revenue policy to be clearly established in a transparent process and determined by open, public debate and votes cast by elected representatives;
- Prioritize the use of local businesses and labor in local government projects to improve local economies;
- Conduct regular audits of state contracts and impose and enforce fines and/or debarment for corporations and entities receiving contracts that fail to deliver on their contractual obligations;
- Require government procurement contracts and taxpayer-funded incentives to businesses to target, when possible, historically underutilized small businesses and prohibit such awards to companies that export jobs or utilize tax loopholes to avoid state or federal taxes;
- Require the Texas government to spend taxes and fees for the reason they were collected; and
- Prevent the continued use of the Texas Enterprise Fund as a corporate slush fund that rewards businesses owned by political cronies and contributors.
- Require the Texas government to pay its employees competitive wages and provide for indexed wage increases every two years.

#### Public Employees & Pensions

- Protect the defined benefits pension systems that have been faithfully paid into by employees;
- Fully fund our obligations and repair the pension systems without cutting benefit amounts;
- Promote and secure the increase in pensions to reflect cost-of-living adjustments; and
- Prevent the privatization of the U.S. Postal Service and fully fund its operations.

#### Transportation

- Invest state dollars in mass transportation projects with public support and the potential for matching federal funds;
- Enact an equitable way to adequately pay for road and highway infrastructure in Texas;
- Support transportation projects to encourage building safe sidewalks, curb cutouts, and bicycle lanes;
- Review creative and innovative programs like buses on shoulders of major highways, charging stations for electric vehicles, and dedicated lanes for autonomous vehicles to encourage mobility;
- Improve paratransit services to meet the needs of Texans with disabilities;
- Prevent infrastructure built with public funds from being used as private entities;
- Prohibit converting any public highways, freeways, or roads into a toll road, require any tolled lanes to be an addition with no fewer traffic lights or intersections than the free lanes, and provide the funding to convert all existing toll road infrastructure built on public roads to free and non-tolled use;
- Review future transportation planning to reflect the likely increased use of telecommuting;
- Demand transparency in how toll roads are financed and how funds are managed; and

- Develop a state rail plan that does not harm the environment or infringe upon property rights.

## Technology

- End the warrantless digital surveillance of Americans as authorized by the Patriot Act and the USA Freedom Act;
- Enshrine “Net Neutrality” as the law of the land, and require the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to interpret internet service providers as subject to Title II Communications Service Common Carrier regulations;
- Establish a universal “Right to Repair,” so that people are always able to repair or modify electronic devices that they own, without violating intellectual property laws;
- Regulate facial recognition systems, including their use in public or private spaces;
- End government requirements for “encryption backdoors,” as they create unnecessary security risks for widely adopted software and online services;
- Encourage our government, whenever possible, to make use of open-source software, and provide any internally developed software, under an open-source license, for use by the public;
- Promote the responsible regulation of emergent technologies to ensure they serve the needs of the people instead of benefiting the proprietors of a technology;
- Protect our right to consent regarding the collection and sale of our personal data by websites, software applications, and network service providers;
- Provide high-speed internet and cell phone service, along with Wi-Fi capabilities, and end the disparities in services for low-income and rural communities;
- Require all state agencies and public universities to develop and implement telecommuting infrastructure and employment policies;
- Improve telecommuting infrastructure and employment policies to allow for a more flexible work/life balance, ease the stress on roads, and to ensure the continuity of business and education during national disasters such as the COVID-19 pandemic; and
- Amend Government Code, Chapter 551, Subchapter B, by adding the requirement that all publicly available broadcasts of open governmental meetings, including Texas Legislative hearings, be captioned.

## Veterans Issues

Service Members and Veterans should be honored for their service and deserve the benefits they have earned and been promised. Veterans experiencing homelessness or who commit suicide are a national tragedy. We urge full funding of the Texas Veterans Commission to support its mission to advocate for and provide superior service to Veterans.

The Texas Democratic Party advocates for policies and programs that:

- Determine the unmet, entitled needs of Veterans to provide those services when and where needed;
- Address Veteran homelessness and unemployment through comprehensive Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Texas Veterans Commission, and community programs;
- Provide focused outreach as well as trauma informed training and treatment to end Veteran suicide;
- Engage Veterans to become actively involved in Democratic politics.

### Veterans Services

- Recognize that holistic healthcare encompasses mental and physical health including substance use disorders, and advocate for improving the availability of healthcare services for Veterans throughout Texas;
- Include initial assessments of Veteran's physical and mental health upon separation from Active/Reserve Service, followed by free periodic reassessments and referrals for care needed to include PTSD;
- Strengthen programs for Service Members and their families leaving Active Duty by addressing employment, housing, financial management, healthcare, earned benefits and entitlements, and applying for those services;
- Assess and address the needs of Reserve/Guard members and their Families; and limit their activation to actual and legitimate (i.e., not political) emergencies;
- Fund and provide State benefits comparable to or better than Federal benefits for Reserve/Guard members on State orders;
- Recognize and address the needs of Veterans within historically marginalized communities through specialized training, targeted programs, and oversight;
- Expediently enable access to VA health care and benefits required by the Honoring Our Pact Act, H.R. 3967 (117), that recognizes multiple new illnesses related to "Burn Pit" exposure, incorporates toxic exposures into questionnaires; and expands Agent Orange benefits for high blood pressure and includes additional countries; and
- Support Educational benefit entitlements for all Veterans in Texas.

### Veterans Unemployment and Homelessness

- Introduce liaison services for unemployed Veterans offering benefits, healthcare, and training opportunities;
- End homelessness of Veterans through offering affordable supportive housing combined with case management, employment services, and healthcare in coordination with the VA's Continuum of Care (CoC) Programs; and

- Identify every Veteran who is at risk of, or experiencing homelessness to connect them with VA programs for homeless Veterans.

#### Veterans Suicide

- Improve suicide awareness through public service announcements addressing behaviors of concern and resources for help with specific messaging for Veterans;
- Require counties/regions to identify Veterans who commit suicide, then compile and publish data to determine the extent of the problem locally and within Texas; and
- Mandate all healthcare providers screen Veterans for risk of suicide and homelessness at every contact, document that screening, and make appropriate referrals to VA or community resources.

#### Veterans Community Engagement

- Support repatriation of Deported Veterans and protect the rights of Veterans' immigrant family members;
- Encourage Veterans to continue to serve using their leadership skills to become politically active especially as candidates or campaign staff and volunteers; and
- Motivate and train Veterans to actively lobby their legislators and local officials for the services to meet the needs of Veterans.

## Consumer Protection

Our government has a duty to protect Texans from predatory lending, dangerous products, price gouging during natural disasters and other fraudulent, unfair or discriminatory business practices. We aim to make consumer financial markets work for consumers, responsible product/service providers, and the economy as a whole. In a market economy that works optimally, the prices, risks, and terms of the deal are clear upfront so that consumers can understand their options and comparison shop. Companies should all play by the same consumer protection rules, compete fairly on providing quality and service, and be able to rely on the consistent fairness of a level playing field and structure their business practices accordingly to maximize benefit.

The Texas Democratic Party supports policies and programs that:

- Make price gouging by gas, pipeline and electric companies during disasters illegal;
- Increase funding, personnel, and bandwidth in the Texas Office of the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division;
- Reaffirm the enforcement function and authority of the Texas Office of the Attorney General's Consumer Protection Division;
- Arm Texans with the information, steps, and tools they need to make smart financial decisions;
- Ensure protection of consumers' private data and accountability within companies that manage it, and impose penalties for broken promises to do so;
- Strengthen laws targeting unscrupulous telemarketing, internet marketing, and price fixing;
- Revise or rollback laws and regulations restricting redress for buyers of new homes that discover shoddy work after the purchase is completed;
- Repeal the cap on mass tort liability to allow for appropriate damages tempered by the current legal process;
- Allow class certification related to credible fraud, product liability, and personal injury claims;
- Eliminate, discourage, or disincentivize predatory lending practices, particularly payday loans and sell-leaseback transactions;
- Create tools to help consumers navigate their financial choices and make better deals that work for them;
- Foster financial education and capability from childhood through retirement;
- Foster innovative and interactive school programs that teach young Texans how to be successful financial stewards of their own finances;
- Educate Texans about their financial rights, protections, and opportunities;
- Educate companies about financial rights, protections, and opportunities; and
- Allow consumers to have legal standing to protect their rights against third-party debt collectors, including but not limited to finance companies in automobile transactions.

Empower, Enforce, Educate

- Support the mission of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau to empower consumers;
- Enforce penalties against companies who have taken advantage of Texans in violation of state or federal law; and

- Support the enforcement function and authority of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

## Foreign Policy

Texas Democrats believe peace, prosperity, and national security are best achieved by maintaining a strong national defense, promoting democracy, advancing development abroad, and supporting and engaging with the United Nations and its institutions. Our policies should prioritize prevention and diplomacy through our State Department, with military action used only as a last resort and authorized only as allowed by our Constitution. Texas Democrats support consistent diplomacy and development efforts abroad in coordination with our allies who promote freedom and justice, and strongly oppose the former Trump administration's actions that have driven out skilled diplomats and replaced them with partisan, ideologically-driven political appointees.

The Texas Democratic Party supports policies and programs that:

- Restore the United States to a leadership role in world affairs;
- Nurture proven alliances and honor our treaty obligations;
- Restore our moral status in the world by promoting human rights and democracy; and
- Promote trade that is both free and fair to benefit the people and workers in America and abroad.

### Restore U.S. Leadership

- Lead international efforts to prevent the further spread of nuclear arms and to eliminate weapons of mass destruction, including reinstating the Iran nuclear deal with appropriate conditions and supporting verified efforts to denuclearize North Korea as a prerequisite for lifting sanctions;
- Utilize our diplomatic, military, and economic resources to assist with worldwide disasters;
- Support U.S. leadership in and improvement of international agencies such as the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) International Organization for Migration (IOM), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), World Health Organization (WHO), World Food Programme (WFP), International Labour Organization (ILO), World Trade Organization (WTO), International Court of Justice (ICJ), International Criminal Court (ICC), and Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC);
- Restore U.S. leadership in international institutions such as the United Nations and other alliances; and
- Restore U.S. leadership in mitigating the effects of climate change.

### Work with Our Allies

- Restore the territorial integrity of Ukraine and end Russia's criminal invasion;
- End Governor Abbot's interference in international trade with Mexico that has already caused billions of dollars in economic losses to Texas, and particularly to our border communities;
- Recognize the interconnectivity between Texas and Mexico and restore dignity to U.S. – Mexico relations as well as establish a "Marshall Plan" for Central America to foster economic stability and end gang violence;

- Work with our allies to facilitate a safe haven for the millions of refugees fleeing violence or persecution and welcome these vulnerable people in the United States when properly vetted;
- Support our Kurdish allies who led the fight against ISIS within Syria, oppose the regime-sponsored violence occurring, and lead efforts to negotiate a political solution that will counter Russian dominance and prevent the establishment of Iranian bases in Syria;
- Work with the African Union and the United Nations to bring stability to the continent by defeating African terrorist organizations;
- Support the mission and efforts of the United States Peace Corps; and
- Nurture proven alliances such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and honor treaty obligations.

#### Defend Our Country

- Recognize that the most important commitment to our military is to the individual service member and that it is absolutely critical that we are faithful to those who serve and defend us;
- Improve the capacity of our diplomatic organizations and military to address the threats from non-state groups and those nations that provide them support and protection;
- Implement nationally standardized information security protocols to protect our communications networks and critical national infrastructure from all enemies foreign or domestic;
- Prevent all sources of foreign meddling in our elections and those of our allies, regard this as an act of enemy aggression, and continue to strongly sanction Russia until it ceases its attacks on our democracy;
- Advance our national security by restoring domestic manufacturing of essential goods to free us from dependence on the resources and products of any nation or region and to avoid future shortages;
- Strengthen port security by inspecting unchecked containers; and
- Prohibit privatized military security contractors from operating without legal oversight and putting America at risk.

#### Promote Human Rights and Democracy

- Work to ensure that governments and societies become true democracies that promote responsive and transparent governance, minority rights, individual freedoms, and economic opportunity;
- Encourage Iraq to renounce sectarian violence and promote a responsive and inclusive democracy that ensures minority rights and equitable access to resources;
- Maintain our long-standing policy that a true, mutually respectful peace with safe and secure borders for two states dedicated to peace and democracy, namely, a Jewish homeland in Israel and a Palestinian homeland, can only result from direct negotiations between willing and responsible partners;
- Condemn mass detentions and restrictions on communications, civil rights, and human rights in Kashmir;
- Support ending the war in Yemen;



- Condemn the acts of violence and ethnic cleansing against Myanmar’s Rohingya and other minority populations and position the U.S. to play an active role in ending this humanitarian tragedy;
- Support efforts to end arbitrary detention in “re-education camps” of millions of Uyghur and other ethnic minorities and to combat discrimination and human rights violations;
- Support democracy and autonomy in Hong Kong and Tibet;
- Promote understanding between the people of the U.S. and China through non-government-sponsored cultural, university, and religious exchanges;
- Withdraw support for foreign or domestic agencies and programs that promote hatred and intolerance; and
- Support the continued ban on using all methods of torture.

#### Promote Fair Trade Policy

- Encourage the sale of domestic products and services in foreign markets, oppose foreign practices that restrict access to markets for American businesses and farmers, and protect American companies from intellectual property theft;
- Require all trade agreements to establish a “level playing field” by prohibiting child and other exploitative labor practices, mandating environmental standards comparable to those required of domestic American businesses to prevent U.S. job losses, and requiring wage practices that lift foreign workers out of poverty to increase markets for American products and services;
- Oppose arbitrary tariffs that harm our farmers and other exporters as well as our allies; and
- Oppose the export of American jobs.