

2006 Texas Democratic Party Platform

Beliefs Shaped by Democratic Values

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

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

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

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

We believe in freedom

- ...from government interference in our private lives and personal decisions
- ...to exercise civil and human rights
- ...of religion and individual conscience.

We believe in equal opportunity for all Texans

- ...to receive a quality public education, from childhood through college
- ...to have access to affordable health care
- ...to find a good job with dignity
- ...to buy or rent a good home in a safe community
- ...to breathe clean air and drink clean water.

We believe a growing economy should benefit all Texans

- ...that the people who work in a business are as important as those who invest in it
- ...that every person should be paid a living wage and no person who works full time should be paid a wage below the poverty level
- ...that good business offers a fair exchange for customers
- ...that everyone and every business should pay their fair share of taxes
- ...that government policy should not favor corporations that seek offshore tax shelters, exploit workers, or pollute our environment.

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

- ...through cooperative efforts of involved citizens, law enforcement, and emergency personnel
- ...through retirement and pension security
- ...through the preservation of our precious natural resources and quality of life
- ...through compassionate policy that offers a safety net for those most vulnerable and in need.

We believe America is made stronger by the men and women who put their lives on the line when it is necessary to engage our military to secure our nation.

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

We believe in the benefits derived from the individual strengths of our diverse population. Where others would impose their narrow definition of “family values” on everyone, we offer common sense policies that value all our families.

We believe an honest, ethical state government that serves the public interest, and not the special interests, will help all Texans realize economic and personal security by serving the interests of the people who live here, who work here, who worship here and who play here.

To that end, we recommend specific policy goals based on the beliefs and principles that are the foundation of a government of the people, by the people, and for the people.

Putting Beliefs and Values into Action

Democrats base our public policy priorities on the beliefs and values that guide our daily lives, because how we resolve critical issues impacts the daily lives of Texans. We believe our state and federal government must address the priorities of the people.

Education

Texas Democrats believe public education is essential to American democracy and economic opportunity, recognizing that a free public education provides all Texans an opportunity to achieve to their fullest potential. We believe:

- every child deserves a quality public education in a safe, secure school;
- every child should have equal access to an exemplary educational program that meets that child's needs and abilities, so all Texas children can reach their maximum potential;
- public education must be funded adequately with 100% equity to accomplish these goals;
- access to affordable high-quality higher education and career education programs must be provided to all Texans.

Texas Democrats led the fight to improve student achievement and lower dropout rates, often over Republican opposition. Democratic initiatives include the 22-1 class size limit, pre-kindergarten and kindergarten programs and improved funding equity, all of which have been cited in national studies for improvement in our children's schools. Democrats also led efforts to retain and attract qualified, talented professionals to teach in our children's classrooms.

In contrast, education funding was cut by over \$3 billion in 2003, the first year Republicans took legislative control, including a \$500 pay cut for all teachers and school support personnel. In the 2006 special session, Republicans further cut \$350 million below the inadequate amount earmarked for public schools in 2005. Republican cuts in higher education funding and student financial aid, along with their deregulation of tuition and raising student loan interest rates, have put higher education out of reach of many deserving students and left others facing crushing debt burdens.

Improving Public Education—A Moral Imperative

Public schools are meant to educate children, not to manufacture widgets. Equipping students with the well-rounded education they need to succeed in the 21st century is more than a constitutional obligation, it is a moral imperative. To fulfill this commitment, qualified teachers and sufficient, equitable funding are crucial. Excessive emphasis on one standardized achievement test must be replaced with a more comprehensive assessment system. Teaching materials need to be brought up to date, and the test-driven narrowing of achievement standards and curriculum must be reversed. Our teachers need the time and tools to give every child individual attention. Class sizes should be smaller. All children should be eligible for public pre-kindergarten. At-risk children who need extra, individually tailored instruction should get the help they need to succeed instead of becoming anonymous dropout statistics.

The Democratic Goal—An Excellent Public Education for Every Child

Texans believe our children come first and that all children must be guaranteed equal access to the educational resources, programs, and services necessary to achieve their maximum potential. The Texas Constitution provides for free public schools budgeted with public tax dollars, yet many Republicans seek to siphon off public education funds for inequitable, unaccountable voucher and privatization schemes that interfere with that constitutional mandate. To make state education policy reflect that highest priority, Texas Democrats believe we should:

- Establish a 100% equitable school finance system with sufficient state funding for all education costs to offer an exemplary program and equitably reduce reliance on "Robin Hood" recapture;
- Fully reflect in state funding formulas all student and district cost differences and the impact of inflation and all state mandates;
- Require the federal government to fully fund all federally mandated education programs, including those required by the No Child Left Behind Act, special education requirements such as assistive technologies, and others;
- Ensure universal access to pre-kindergarten and kindergarten;
- Provide early-intervention programs so every child can read at grade level;
- Make dropout prevention a top priority, count dropout rates accurately, and reclaim dropouts with programs tailored to their needs;
- Make appropriate vocational education, from apprenticeship programs to college preparatory academics, available to all students in all communities;
- Provide sufficient funding to ensure that every student in our public schools has updated, factually accurate textbooks that cover the state required curriculum and all material on required assessment tests, and preserve an equitable system of statewide distribution of textbooks that reserves the state textbook fund for its intended purposes.
- Involve parents with appropriate, innovative programs and ensure parental and teacher input into local district and campus decision-making;
- Provide sufficient resources for students with special needs or challenges to learn to the maximum of their ability in the least restrictive environment;
- Enforce and extend class-size limits and construct sufficient classroom space to provide a better, more disciplined learning environment by ending overcrowding;
- Support multi-language instruction to make all children fluent in English and at least one other language and reject efforts to destroy bilingual education;
- Oppose any form of private school vouchers;

- Block efforts by right-wing extremists to control curriculum and textbook selection and to censor textbooks;
- Restore the Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund (TIF) to its original purpose of helping public schools and libraries attain access to the internet and electronic communications by funding the technology allotment from the Available School Fund.
- Support continued enforcement of Title IX protections to provide gender equity in all public educational institutions.

Teacher Quality

The most important factor in student success is having qualified teachers in our classrooms. Texas faces a serious shortage of qualified teachers because teacher pay and benefits are not competitive with the private sector. More than 50,000 classrooms are staffed by individuals assigned to subjects they are not prepared or trained to teach.

The solution is obvious: improve pay, benefits, and the conditions for teaching and learning in our classrooms. Texas ranks 33rd in the nation in average teacher pay and 50th - dead last among the states – when average teacher pay is compared with average private-sector pay. The recently enacted teacher pay raise still leaves Texas teachers almost \$5,000 below the national average and fails to close the gap with private-sector pay for comparable knowledge and skills. To recruit and retain our best to teach our children, Texas Democrats advocate the following:

- Raise teacher pay to at least the national average and provide a quality state paid health insurance program for every educational employee;
- Respect and safeguard the rights and benefits of education employees;
- Guarantee that every class has a teacher certified to teach the subject of that class;
- Recruit and train teachers who reflect the state's diversity;
- Repeal the federal "government pension offset" and "windfall elimination provision," which unfairly reduce Social Security benefits duly earned by Texas teachers and other school employees;
- Finance a mentor program to provide every novice teacher the help of veteran, highly qualified teachers to improve their skills;
- Oppose Republican “incentive pay programs” that undercut the collaborative efforts needed to help all children excel by linking pay to student performance on standardized tests that are already an excessive focus of our school system.

Safe Schools for Every Child

Texas Democrats believe we must protect students, teachers, and other school personnel from acts of violence. We support swift and fair enforcement of disciplinary standards. Furthermore, we support the passage of the Dignity for All Students Act to ensure guaranteed safety for all students. Teachers deserve support when they exercise their right to take a disruptive student out of the classroom. Students referred to disciplinary and alternative education programs deserve strong academic instruction, not warehousing in low-quality programs. School campuses and functions must be weapon-free and drug-free.

Higher Education and Adult Education

Texas Democrats believe all Texans should have the opportunity and be encouraged to pursue

higher education, at an affordable cost, at public universities, community colleges, and technical schools. We support:

- a guarantee of two years of public college or post-secondary technical education tuition-free for all who complete high school and additional scholarship aid for military veterans;
- restoration of 2003 budget cuts and the rollback of tuition and fees to affordable levels;
- expansion of the Texas Grants Program and reopening the Texas Tomorrow Program to open the doors of higher education to more Texans without an excessive debt burden;
- adequate compensation, security, professional status, and benefits for all faculty; and higher education research funding to spur economic development.
- Collaborative public/higher education partnerships to enhance pre-K-16 learning and teacher preparation;
- the role of community colleges in providing lifelong educational options;
- enhanced, equitable funding for Prairie View A&M and TSU and for higher education in South Texas and all border communities;
- sufficient funding to locate a flagship research and teaching university in every region of the state; and
- efforts to place a voting student regent on the appointed governing board of each state-supported four-year institution of higher education, and
- the maintenance of current funding for public resolution.

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

State Fiscal Policy

Texas Democrats believe tax and budget policy should serve the public interest and not special interests, to help all Texans realize economic and personal security. We believe the operation of government must be open and accountable, and services must be delivered efficiently and effectively because the revenue government uses to meet its responsibilities is made available by the hard work of taxpayers.

We believe strengthening the economic capacity of middle and working class families not only enhances their quality of life, but also improves the well-being of all Texans, including the wealthiest among us. Unfortunately, short-sighted state fiscal policy has shortchanged our quality of life. Texas ranks first in the percentage of uninsured children, first in toxic and cancerous emissions and second in teenage pregnancies, while we lag far behind in high-school graduation rates, consumer credit scores and percentage of the population with health insurance.

Texas Democrats believe taxes should be fair, equitable and broad based. To that end, Democratic legislators offered school finance solutions that would have provided significant property tax relief to all Texans, only to have that fair plan thwarted by Republican leaders who steered the majority of property tax relief to the wealthiest 10 percent of Texas households and their largest political contributors—insurance companies, financial investment firms, and big oil and gas corporations. We support extending property tax relief to seniors whose taxes were previously frozen, and to renters, who pay for property taxes through their rent and whose landlords received the full benefit of those reductions.

According to fiscal notes prepared by the independent Legislative Budget Board, the Republican tax bills will create a \$25 billion deficit over the next five years, placing tremendous pressure on future state budgets which would likely force additional tax increases and deep cuts in priority areas like education, children's health and human services programs. In fact, Republican leaders have already ordered state agencies to trim 10% from future budget requests, a directive that could extend to a Children's Health Insurance Program that has already dropped over 200,000 Texas children due to Republican privatization measures and new barriers to enrollment.

Texas has one of the highest sales tax rates in the nation, and our Democratic legislators defeated Republican efforts to raise the Texas sales tax to the highest in the nation, consistent with our opposition to any further increase in this regressive revenue source. We support a constitutional amendment to prevent extending the sales tax to food and medicine and oppose the imposition of a national sales tax.

We believe an honest government should spend taxes and fees for the specific purposes for which they were collected. Despite the fact that life and death conditions can arise for elderly and low-income families without household heat or air conditioning, not one penny of the \$147 million collected this year from a \$.65 surcharge on our monthly electric bills was used, as intended, to help Texans on fixed incomes keep their electricity turned on. Instead, the Republicans chose to give Governor Perry over \$400 million to replenish a corporate slush fund and create a brand new technology slush fund.

We believe procurement contracts with private entities and programs that use tax dollars to provide financial incentives to businesses should, whenever possible, be targeted toward the small businesses that create 80% of new employment. State contracts and financial incentives should not be awarded to companies that export our jobs to foreign countries or organize their corporations to utilize tax loopholes specifically intended to avoid state or federal taxes.

Federal economic policies also have a direct impact on state government and Texas taxpayers. We believe that the ballooning federal debt, record-breaking deficit spending, and the ever-widening U.S. trade imbalance are a danger to our way of life, a threat to our national security and a serious obstacle to our children's future. We believe that trickle up works much better than trickle down in stark contrast to fiscally irresponsible and counter productive Republican tax policy that offers the benefit of tax cuts to only a small percentage of the wealthiest Americans.

The reckless "tax, borrow, and overspend" policies of the Republican administrations at both the state and national levels will cause massive financial hardships for future generations of Americans and Texans. Texas Democrats do not believe our children and grandchildren should be responsible tomorrow for the failed economic policies of today.

Security for Our Families

Just as we support responsible efforts to provide security from terrorism and a strong military that works with our allies to ensure peace and provide national security, Texas Democrats support initiatives to ensure the security of our families. Every parent should be able to provide housing, nutrition, clothing, and health care for his or her family. No child should go hungry or

without health care, and we believe government has a role in making sure appropriate supports are in place and accessible to families who are in need.

Privatization of Social Services

Under Republican rule, Texas health and human services are in chaos, disrupting the lives of vulnerable residents while private contractors pad their pockets at taxpayer expense. Republican “cost-effectiveness” has dismantled the infrastructure of the state social services system by moving to lay off thousands of state workers while giving tax dollars to private companies through wholesale privatization. The largest such contract, an \$899 million award to a Bermuda-based private contractor, Accenture, has failed miserably to save the state money or to provide streamlined and efficient services to Texans who need state assistance.

Low-to-moderate-income children, as well as elderly and disabled Texans, are losing or going without health coverage through the CHIP or Medicaid programs. Many elderly and disabled persons have been faced with choosing between medications, food or electricity while trapped in the maze of the state’s privatized health and human services system. Texas Democrats believe privatization of social services has proven to be a poor use of taxpayer dollars, with little or no accountability to voters for taxpayer dollars.

Child Protection and Foster Care

Texas Democrats want to make sure Texas children who have been removed from their homes due to alleged abuse or neglect who enter into the state’s foster care system do not become another privatization experiment. We oppose discrimination in the state foster care system. We support child protection programs that provide safe, secure environments for our children. We support restoration of full funding for Child Protective Services and oppose the privatization of the child protection system, including intake services.

Child Support and Child Care that Strengthens Texas Families

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

Texas families should not have to choose between the jobs they need and the children they love. Texas Democrats support child care initiatives that will encourage the private sector and non-profit providers to expand the availability of quality child care services, including tax credits, investment grants, and pooling of local resources to maximize federal funding opportunities. Texas Democrats also believe that expanding after school child care is necessary to ensure the safety of children of working parents and that early childhood education is essential to give young children a strong educational foundation for future educational achievement.

Long Term Services and Supports

Texas Democrats support long term services that promote independent living in the most integrated setting possible for the elderly and disabled people of all ages. This network of services should include community-based attendant services, in-home health care, adult day care and hospice care. We believe the state must comply with the federal Americans with Disabilities Act, and we do not support the Republican claim of state sovereign immunity from ADA. We support:

- Protections of individual homesteads from provisions that allow the taking of a home to recover the costs of long term service;
- Creation of a national attendant services program where the money follows the person;
- Transition of our long term care system to a focus on home and community care services;
- Funding of community-based programs at a level to provide for all individuals who desire to live in a community setting without being placed on a waiting list;
- Coordination of support services, including personal assistance services, respite care, home delivered meals, transportation, homemaker assistance, and caregiver services;
- Providing choice in decisions about where elderly and disabled Texans live and receive support services;
- Access to non-medical services, known as "De-medicalization" ,to contain cost and allow greater individual control;
- Coordination of accessible, affordable, integrated housing; and
- A living wage for all direct care workers.

Social Security

Texas Democrats believe we must keep the promise of Social Security strong and certain for those who have worked and contributed to the system most of their lives. Social Security should continue to be the foundation of income security for working Americans. We believe all Americans should have access to the Social Security system, including public employees. Private savings accounts and other pension programs should be additions to the guaranteed Social Security benefit, not a substitute for any portion of it.

We oppose privatization of the Social Security program and consider the use of taxpayer dollars as capital to invest in the stock market as a threat to the income security of working Americans. Texas Democrats believe privatization of social security is fiscally irresponsible. We oppose Republican federal budget plans to spend down and undermine the Social Security Trust Fund, including proposals to carve out private savings accounts, which would drain trillions of dollars from the Social Security system.

Retirement Security

Millions of workers have invested in public or private pensions to secure their retirement income. Texas Democrats support measures to provide strong and effective legal protections to secure the investments of workers in public or private pensions to honor the principle that a lifetime of honest work should be rewarded with adequate retirement income. We believe:

- a participant in a pension or retirement program should have legal protection for the full amount to which they are entitled if such accounts or corporate pensions lose their funding or are dismantled due to financial improprieties, insolvency or reorganization;

- companies filing for bankruptcy or encountering legal problems should have funds automatically frozen or set aside to fund the pension plan in place;
- time limits must be in place to allow the expedient transfer of pensioners' funds to a new account or directly to the pensioner within the confines of IRS tax regulations;
- measures should be taken to improve corporate governance to enhance confidence of all stakeholders in the private enterprise system; and
- the state should act to ensure the solvency of the Teacher retirement System.

Access to Affordable Insurance with Effective Regulation and Oversight

Texas Democrats support the strict enforcement of policies requiring insurance companies to rollback their rates to provide Texas homeowners, renters and drivers fair and affordable insurance. Governor Perry's so-called insurance reforms have done nothing to reduce insurance costs that place an excessive financial burden on both individuals and businesses. Texans continue to pay the highest homeowner insurance rates in the nation, despite the fact that the American insurance industry made over \$40 billion in profits last year.

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

Consumer Protection

Texas Democrats support the protection of consumers and families from dangerous products and fraudulent, unfair and discriminatory business practices. Consumers should have a high degree of certainty and an understanding of their rights and protections under laws that are strongly and uniformly enforced. Texas Democrats believe we must protect Texans from:

- unscrupulous telemarketing, price fixing and the sale of goods;
- services that prey on individuals, especially children, the poor, the elderly and persons with disabilities, including insurance fraud and nursing home abuse targeted at seniors;
- insurance companies, HMOs and drug companies that deny Texans coverage they need;
- unfair business practices by multinational corporations;
- unscrupulous homebuilders, by reshaping the Texas Residential Construction Commission to include homeowner representation and empowering it with the authority to take meaningful action on their behalf;
- laws and regulations that restrict the ability of communities to provide public utilities at their discretion, including "wi-fi" internet access;
- any interference with licensed public safety communication frequencies;
- identity theft, notary impersonation, and "phishing" viruses and other forms of computer fraud;
- predatory pricing of utilities by providing a fully level playing field for all areas of regulated industry, and we urge our elected representatives to adopt policy that ensures Texans pay the lowest possible cost for regulated utility services; and
- predatory lending practices, such as payday loans and sale/lease back transactions.

Choice and Family Planning

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

- Trust the women of Texas to make personal and responsible decisions about when and whether to bear children, in consultation with their family, their physician, and their God, rather than having these personal decisions made by politicians;
- Support common sense measures to prevent unintended pregnancies, thereby reducing the rate of abortion by making affordable, accessible, and effective family planning and birth control programs available, including emergency contraception,;
- Use sound, mainstream medical science to guide reproductive health care policies;
- Support targeted efforts to reduce Texas' high teen pregnancy rates, including the provision of accurate and effective, age-appropriate sex education programs with an abstinence component, thereby reducing the rate of abortion;
- Using family planning funding for pregnancy prevention and preventive health care in regulated, licensed medical facilities, rather than biased and non-medical activities.
- Promote policies that value Texas families and their children throughout their lives.

Housing

The ability to live in secure, accessible and affordable housing, available without discrimination, is essential to giving families a sense of community, self-respect, and dignity. Texas Democrats are committed to making the dream of home ownership and clean, safe rental housing a reality for more Texas families by:

- Encouraging federal, state and local agencies to work together to broaden the reach and increase access to housing opportunities, housing rehabilitation programs, financial education, and down payment assistance that fits the needs of both rural and urban Texas;
- Eliminating all discrimination in the financing and insuring of homes, including lending practices that prey on the uneducated, the poor, the elderly, and colonia residents;
- Establishing a state program to assist local nonprofit organizations develop and administer individual development account programs for low income individuals; and
- Increasing the number of Section 8 housing vouchers and the availability of low cost financing for new and affordable rental housing.

Homelessness

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

Health Care for Individuals and Small Businesses

Texas Democrats believe health care is a right for all people, not a privilege reserved for those able to pay for it. Every family deserves access to health care they can count on and a health care

system that puts our health security first. Texas Democrats support comprehensive reform to provide guaranteed access to affordable health care for all Texans and Texas small businesses.

The current American health care system is failing the American people, and in Texas, it is failing even worse than in the rest of the country. Texas has the highest rate of uninsured among all 50 states, with over 1.4 million Texas children without insurance. Even those fortunate enough to have good insurance spend an inordinate amount to pay for it. The result: Americans pay more for health care than citizens of any other industrialized country. Fewer Texans are receiving health insurance through their employers, and those who do receive employer-provided health plans are paying higher out-of-pocket expenses for health care. Texas Democrats believe the state must make use of all opportunities to maximize federal and state dollars that can be used to fund health care costs. Small businesses and the people who work in them should have access to affordable and dependable health coverage, and Texans with chronic illnesses should have access to coverage through the high risk pool. Medical decisions regarding all effective treatment options should be made by medical doctors in consultation with their patients, not insurance company accountants or government bureaucrats.

Protecting Medicare and Medicaid

Texas Democrats support programs, including Medicare and Medicaid that maintain the health care safety net for vulnerable Texans. Even though the 2005 Texas Legislature restored some of the devastating cuts made to the Medicaid program in 2003, the Adult Medically Needy Program was not restored, leaving patients with high medical bills ineligible to receive Medicaid assistance. We support full restoration of Medicaid cuts made in 2003 with funding allocations for population and caseload growth, and re-establishing local and state partnerships to maximize funds for Medicaid programs that assure coverage to low-income Texans. Recognizing that the federal block granting of Medicaid dollars would be based upon historical state spending, Texas Democrats do not support federal block grant funding for Medicaid.

Prescription Drugs

The Republican Medicare prescription drug program has proven to be a tragic failure that caused much confusion among the elderly, individuals with disabilities, and pharmacists who have faced a maze of poorly designed regulations, bureaucracy and red tape. This is one more example of the Republicans literally allowing big businesses to write the laws that govern them for their advantage - in this case as the drug companies and insurance companies – with little or no regard for the interests and practical impact of the law on of individuals and taxpayers. Democrats support reforming Medicare to provide a prescription drug benefit in a simple and easily understood system. We support a program that will ensure consumers receive the best prices possible by allowing for negotiated drug costs.

Children's Health Insurance

Texas Democrats proposed, fought for, and passed the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) that provided health coverage to over 500,000 Texas children in working families until the Republicans gained control of the Legislature in 2003. Since then, the number of children receiving health care through CHIP has dropped by more than 213,000, or over 40%. While other states were taking steps to insure more of their children, Texas, under the Republicans,

passed laws and developed policies that make enrollment in the program more difficult. In addition to erecting barriers to enrollment, virtually all outreach programs were dismantled, and the processing of CHIP applications became the first casualty of the massive private-sector outsourcing contract with Bermuda-based Accenture.

Democrats support full utilization of all federal funds that have been set aside specifically to improve the health of Texas children, and we oppose the redistribution of those funds for the benefit of children in other states. Unless punitive Republican policies are reversed and private contractors are held accountable, the number of Texas children receiving CHIP coverage will likely continue to decline and the federal dollars reserved for Texas children will continue to be spent to cover children in other states. Texas Democrats support full restoration of the original CHIP program and policies, reinstatement of the simplified application process, and a 12 month period of continuous health coverage. We support a moratorium on removing any children from CHIP rolls until the state contractor and enrollment broker have proven that problems have been resolved and CHIP caseload trends show stability.

Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services

Democrats support efforts to eliminate the stigma surrounding mental illness and drug dependent individuals. Recognizing that mental illness is treatable, as is substance abuse, Democrats support ways to increase access to mental health and substance abuse services, while protecting and strengthening the state's public mental health system. Full mental health parity in the private market would help eliminate stigma around mental illness and substance abuse, and make it more likely that individuals suffering would seek treatment and proper maintenance of their mental health. More "reality-based" substance abuse education in schools should be encouraged.

HIV, Hepatitis C, and STDs' Education and Services

Texas Democrats support increased education initiatives and services to address the HIV/AIDS epidemic and Hepatitis C, including increased access to treatment and therapy that improves quality of life and encourages return to the workforce. County health officials should have the option of operating any program proven to prevent communicable diseases.

Stem Cell Research

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

Economic Security: Providing Good Jobs in a Growing Economy

Our economic security depends on developing the full potential of both Texas entrepreneurs and workers to create a prosperous economy and a good quality of life for all Texans. Small businesses are the innovative, job-creating engines of our economy and need to be nurtured. Workers need jobs that offer them and their families the dignity of a decent living instead of a lifetime shadowed by insecurity and poverty.

To Strengthen Small Business, we believe the state should systematically foster entrepreneurship, especially the independent initiative of small businesses, to enlist Texas workers in creating new goods and services. We also believe:

- the tax policies of the current governor that unfairly favor big business at the expense of small businesses must be reversed;
- raising productivity by applying information technology should be a state priority;
- the state should support research and development of environmentally sound alternative energy systems that create markets and jobs and help achieve energy independence; and
- public policy initiatives should be adopted that make it affordable for small businesses to provide health insurance for their employees.

To Improve Wages and Working Conditions, we believe the minimum wage must be increased meaningfully to make up for lost purchasing power and must be indexed from now on to keep it from eroding again; and that workers should be paid a living wage with provisions for health care benefits for their families, as well as their future retirement. We also believe:

- the law Texas Democrats enacted in 2001 to make sure the state minimum wage for farm workers keeps up with increases in the federal minimum wage must be enforced;
- that rapid, thorough retraining of laid off workers and training to improve and update the skills of workers seeking career advancement must be provided;
- workforce entrants must be equipped with the skills needed to participate in the economy without being pitted against other workers in a drive for low wages;
- the guarantee of overtime pay, constantly under Republican assault, must be preserved;
- local wage standards in government contracts must be protected;
- workers have a right to a diverse and safe workplace, free from injury and exposure to harmful materials, and meaningful sanctions must apply to employers who knowingly or negligently expose workers to injury or death;
- workers and employers both benefit from a workers' compensation system that provides affordable coverage for employers, meaningful compensation to injured workers, the right of workers to choose their own doctor, incentives for employers to retain injured employees, and due consideration for the rights of workers within the legal system;
- all employees, public and private, must have the right to organize, collect dues, designate their income voluntarily to organizations and agencies of their choosing, and negotiate collectively with their employers through representatives of their choice;
- the repeal of the Texas right to work law;
- hiring of replacement workers for employees who are on strike should be banned;
- the democratic majority of employees in a workplace should be free to choose union representation by signing cards authorizing a union to negotiate on their behalf, with mediation and arbitration for first contract disputes and with penalties that serve as a true deterrent for employers who violate employee organizing rights;
- the right of unions to engage in political activity, free from partisan attempts to limit the ability of unions to participate in the political process, must not be infringed;
- workers should be free from discriminatory employment practices and the Employment Non-Discrimination Act should become law;

- the statewide job bank should be restored and U.S. Department of Labor data on the demand for occupational training should be used;
- the state should establish a Department of Labor empowered to enforce state law concerning the minimum wage, union representation of employees, fair labor practices, occupational safety and health, and workers' compensation; and
- a state OSHA law should be enacted, and no person should be fired, lose seniority, be demoted, or suffer other reprisal for refusing to work when a violation of OSHA regulations places his or her health, life, or limb at risk.

To Foster Fair Global Trade, we must put an end to “cheap labor Republican” policies that encourage American companies to seek offshore tax shelters and outsource American jobs at the expense of hard-working Americans; and promote trade policy that generates jobs at home, affords dignity to working people, and protects the environment. Trade policy must combat child and slave labor, unconscionably low wages, environmental degradation and other practices that turn global trade into a race to the bottom. American and Texas products and local markets should receive preference.

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

- competitive performance and accountability in state government are vital, but we oppose wholesale privatization schemes that result in less competition, less accountability, and inadequate delivery of services
- technology development programs, led by a strong space program that features revitalized manned space exploration and reaps the benefits provided by the Hubble Space Telescope, serve as a catalyst for productive investment in scientific research essential to our economic and national security in a competitive global economy;
- the public should have equal opportunity to invest in any private ownership of publicly financed facilities, including sports facilities;
- improper use of "no bid contracts" should be prohibited and fair bidding procedures must be diligently enforced to provide the best overall value for all government contracts for goods and services, including those contracts that involve assistance to foreign nations;
- regulation of banks, utilities, and insurance carriers must be improved and antitrust laws must be aggressively enforced to ensure public faith in government-licensed and regulated entities central to the success and stability of the economy;
- an outright ban is the appropriate response to policies and insurance scams, including those commonly known as "dead peasant" policies, that leverage state retirement funds into windfall profits for Republicans and their corporate cronies; and
- copyright laws that provide for "fair use" of copyrighted material, including material used to research issues of public interest, must be maintained.

The Environment

We believe every Texan should be able to breathe clean air and drink pure water, and recognize that they are essential to public health, our economy, and our planet’s environment. We reject the false Republican premise that Texas must choose between a clean environment and jobs.

Stronger State Environmental Protection, Regulation and Enforcement is essential to preserve our quality of life, an essential factor in securing long term economic growth. We must end Gov. Perry's "revolving door" practices that result in the appointment of officials to environmental agencies that have backgrounds representing polluters, and replace them with regulators who will use science instead of special interest as a basis for water policy, public welfare and safety. We support:

- mandating that all major permit proceedings include consideration of the feasibility and cost analyses of less polluting, alternative technology;
- the repeal of state grandfathering provisions that allow special interests to circumvent modern municipal regulations that protect both health and human safety and the property of nearby landowners;
- the repeal of legislation promoted by Gov. Perry' which allows the state to interfere with local prosecutors' ability to bring criminals who poison our air and water to justice;
- ending Gov. Perry's fast-tracking of permits for additional coal-fired power plants to provide sufficient time to gather information and allow informed citizen participation in the permitting process to address associated health risks;
- mandating the reduction of mercury emissions from coal-burning power plants by 90% to protect women and fetuses;
- protections regarding transmission of highly explosive materials through pipelines passing through watersheds, aquifers, neighborhoods and in close proximity to schools;
- environmental "siting" rules that protect poor and minority communities;
- food safety regulations and the public's right to know what's in food products through honest and complete labeling
- proper management and regulation of landfills that threaten community health; and
- real property rights protections from Republican proposals to take private land for privately-funded sports stadiums, Perry's Trans-Texas Corridor, and permitting policy that would allow uncontrolled development along the corridor;
- an end to volume discounts and secret deals with polluters, like an arrangement between Governor Perry and TXU that weakens the oversight of coal plant pollution and limits the public's right to comment about proposed new plants in their neighborhood;
- the prevention of nuclear waste importation from other countries and other states;
- a ban on toll road construction which makes the public pay for roads twice; and
- the repeal of legislation that restricts the ability of local government to protect water quality, public safety, and health.

Clean Air is becoming the exception instead of the rule on too many days in too many areas of Texas. We support the adoption, the immediate implementation, and the strong enforcement of clean air plans by State officials, including those for the Dallas-Ft. Worth and Houston areas that will finally comply with the Clean Air Act to reduce asthma and respiratory illnesses in children and adults. We also support:

- policies that favor new technologies that use clean, Texas based fuels and reduce costs to consumers;
- cleaner emissions standards for vehicles comparable to standards manufacturers must meet for vehicles sold in foreign markets;

- policies that encourage the large-scale planting of trees to absorb greenhouse gases, improve wildlife habitat, and promote beautification;
- energy efficiency programs that reduce air pollution from power plants; and
- programs to reduce the threat to our children caused by indoor air pollution, including toxic mold, in our schools;

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

The Availability of Clean Water from publicly managed resources is essential to our future and our health. We support:

- the implementation of aggressive water conservation and reuse practices;
- protecting Texas bays, estuaries, in-stream flows, and wetlands with regulations that safeguard offshore reefs, maritime resources, recreational and commercial fisheries;
- giving regional groundwater conservation districts the authority to preserve the water within their districts, protect their communities from water hustlers, implement conservation standards related to the density of development, green building, and other appropriate measures;
- requiring regional groundwater districts to maintain the historic minimum flows of all springs and creeks and to protect drinking water supplies, plants, and wildlife;
- thorough analysis of the present and future costs and the environmental impact of proposed large new reservoirs compared to alternative sources of public water supplies;
- providing State and Federal funds to address border environmental problems caused by inadequate water and wastewater treatment systems;
- increase state funding for local infrastructure to reduce illness-causing bacteria levels in public waters to levels that meet EPA standards;
- expanded testing of fish and shellfish for mercury and other contaminants and public notification of health risks; and
- state regulation to prevent the depletion and exploitation of limited state water resources by "water wildcatters."

Energy

Democrats represent the views of a majority of Texans and Americans who want a safe, secure, and sustainable supply of clean energy to reduce our reliance on finite petroleum resources. We support the development of a bold yet achievable national policy for energy independence and the development and use of emerging renewable energy technology to address the global need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. To that end, we support:

- a sound state energy plan that balances fossil and renewable fuel, based on science and the best available technologies, to reduce the economic risks associated with pollution;

- requiring 10% of the State's electricity to come from Texas based, non-polluting renewable energy such as wind and solar by 2015;
- an initiative to utilize unique Texas facilities and specific Texas resources, including those for generating base-load electricity and reducing and remediation of land, air, and water pollution;
- energy efficiency standards that encourage the wise use of energy in our homes, offices, and commercial facilities in the place of incentives that encourage inefficiency; and
- transportation policy that encourages the development of affordable vehicles and other transportation methods that can function on a variety of energy sources and affect efficient fuel economy.

Public Safety

Texas Democrats believe protecting citizens from crime is a primary responsibility of government essential to our quality of life and vital communities. All Texans are entitled to be safe and secure, free from fear of violence. The guilty must be justly punished for crimes they commit, the innocent must be protected, the rights of victims must be ensured, the accused provided due process under law, and public safety officers must be strongly supported.

We believe a community based approach to crime fighting will make streets, neighborhoods, and public places safer for law abiding citizens. Community Policing Initiatives that deploy officers to specific neighborhoods to root out crime and build relationships with residents should be the focal point of law enforcement activity in Texas. Partnerships should be formed with community groups to assist officers on the streets.

Texas Democrats encourage local, state and federal governments to provide the necessary tools and equipment law enforcement personnel need to do their jobs, and to support their officers with higher wages commensurate with the daily risks associated with the profession.

Texas faces an imminent crisis in prison space unless we reduce the number of people we send to prison by using prevention, education and alternative sentencing programs for nonviolent offenders. We can either spend money preventing people from becoming career criminals or spend even more money building more and more prisons.

Texas Democrats have led efforts to make the Texas criminal justice system tough yet fair. Since 2004, Democratic legislators have:

- passed legislation to establish the Texas Forensic Science Commission to oversee the integrity of crime laboratories and DNA evidence testing; and,
- passed legislation to give jurors the option of sentencing a person convicted of a capital crime to life without the possibility of parole.

Juvenile Justice

We believe prevention is the best solution to juvenile crime, but juveniles must be held accountable when they break the law. The juvenile justice system must teach young people drawn to a life of crime at an early age that they will be held accountable and responsible for their actions. Most juveniles in correctional facilities represent a failure of public policy. We must create safe neighborhoods, good schools and stable jobs with livable wages for the parents

and caregivers of our children, so Texas children do not end up wasting their lives in prison and ruining the lives of crime victims. We support:

- teaching responsibility to nonviolent juvenile offenders through programs such as restitution centers;
- drug prevention programs in our schools and communities, including school-based clinics to provide children with access to drug counseling, education and outreach programs that stop drug addiction before it begins.
- Programs that help high-risk kids stay in school and stay positively involved in their communities.
- Teach parents about management of their children's emotions.
- Maintaining the distinction between adult and juvenile justice.

Adult Corrections

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

- tougher laws and new computer technology to protect children from internet predators;
- Reducing prison overcrowding by revisiting sentencing guidelines for non-violent offenders;
- Increased funding for the state prison system's 83,000-student Windham School District, as well as all other public school districts in Texas, because literacy, education and job training are key to ensuring children leave the prison system and do not return;
- Ensuring prisons are staffed by professionally trained and well-compensated corrections officers.
- Rewriting the relevant Texas criminal code provisions to take into account modern understanding of severe mental illness and to broaden the legal definition of insanity to ensure that the public is kept safe while allowing treatment for mentally ill inmates.
- Opposing the further privatization of Texas prisons and mandating a pay scale comparable to public prisons for prison guards at existing private prisons.
- Reducing recidivism rates by increasing rehabilitation and re-entry programs, with special emphasis on reducing the high rate of functional illiteracy and drug use among people released from prison, including the reversal of policies that deny student loans and grants to those who have completed sentences for drug felonies.
- Sensitive treatment for the victims of crime and stronger emphasis on compensation to crime victims by the criminals themselves.
- Strong enforcement of the James Byrd, Jr., Memorial Hate Crimes Act.
- Ensuring proper oversight and regulation of crime labs, especially labs that process DNA evidence, to assure proper analysis of all DNA evidence, including timely analysis of evidence from medical rape kits and entering such evidence in a computerized database.
- Placing more police officers on the streets in underserved areas.
- Increasing the amount of federal grant money obtained through the Edward Byrne Law Enforcement Assistance Program used for drug treatment and drug court programs, homeland security operations, and crime lab upgrades.
- Crime prevention programs addressing drug and alcohol addiction and other root causes of crime and stressing the need for educational opportunity.

- Reform of probation to more closely supervise probationers in their local communities and provide alternate means of punishing them, such as time in a local jail, house arrest, additional counseling and self-help programs, without sending them to a state prison.
- Allowing incarcerated offenders and their families to remain in regular telephone communication at normal commercial rates in order to help inmates and their family members maintain strong family ties, thus reducing recidivism rates.
- Stronger enforcement of laws and punishment for white collar corporate criminals.
- Establishing an “Innocence Commission” to review cases in which an innocent person was convicted of a crime and later exonerated, in order to determine the causes of the conviction, as well as identify needed reforms to prevent systemic flaws from recurring.
- Ending racial profiling in searches and traffic stops.
- The right of every person to be tried by a jury that broadly reflects the ethnic makeup of the community, including legislation to eliminate the disgraceful practice of using all-white juries and grand juries in cases involving accused who are people of color.

Sexual Assault and Family and Domestic Violence

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

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

Capital Punishment

When capital punishment is used, Texans must be assured that it is fairly administered. Texas Democrats extend our deepest sympathies to all victims of crime and especially to the family members of murder victims, and we strongly support their rights. The current system cannot ensure that innocent or undeserving defendants are not sentenced to death.

In the modern era, Texas has executed over 360 people, far more than any other state in the nation. The frequency of executions and inadequacies in our criminal justice system increase the likelihood that an innocent person will be executed. Texas may have already executed at least two innocent people, according to recent major newspaper investigations into the cases of Ruben Cantu and Cameron Willingham. Ernest Willis was exonerated and released from Texas Death Row on Oct. 6, 2004 after 17 years of wrongful imprisonment. In order to promote public confidence in the fairness of the Texas criminal justice system, Texas Democrats support the establishment of a Texas Capital Punishment Commission to study the Texas death penalty

system and a moratorium on executions pending action on the Commission's findings. Texas Democrats support the following specific reforms:

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

Rural Texas and Agriculture

Texas Democrats understand the obstacles our rural areas are facing and we are committed to providing our rural communities the tools necessary to maintain their quality of life and create enhanced opportunities for future generations of rural Texans.

All areas of Texas need natural and economic resources to grow and thrive, yet rural resources are under increased pressure from forces outside their control. We support rural communities in their efforts to protect the resources necessary for their economic livelihood.

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

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

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

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

We believe it is critical that the Texas agriculture industry maintain its' position of world leadership that been tainted for the last 16 years as the Texas Department of Agriculture has failed to support the family farmers and ranchers that make up the backbone of that industry. We support:

- New leadership at TDA that will devise an effective global marketing program to assists our producers in selling their products, including training in the use of new technology and the internet;
- offering Euro-gap certification to all Texas producers at a reduced rate;
- working with Mexican officials to be sure that NAFTA works for, and not against, Texas agriculture;
- legislation to improve weights and measures certification of all gas pumps and market scales;
- working to reclaim Texas' seat at the table in the formation of national agriculture policy which was forfeited when Congressman Charles Stenholm was forced from office in a partisan power grab;
- federal farm legislation that establishes minimum price support levels and economic protections for FAMILY farms; and
- serving the proper use of agricultural property tax exemptions and restructuring the current land appraisal system to insure a fair property tax system for all Texans

We oppose the proposed Trans-Texas Corridor, a proposal that is little more than an attempt to transfer ownership of a strip down the middle of the state to a foreign corporation with close ties to the Governor, which could have a potentially devastating effect on rural areas, property owners and communities.

We also oppose the use of eminent domain to deprive any property owner of the possession, use, or the ability to control the use of their property, for the pure purpose of economic development; without just compensation; in the absence of an obvious and compelling public need.

Protecting Democracy

The democratic process depends on open, accountable and ethical government, secure and verifiable elections, and fair and enforceable campaign laws. The faith of the people in their government has been shaken by Republican cronyism, corruption and abuse of power. As our gubernatorial nominee Chris Bell has said, “the problem with Texas ethics isn’t what is illegal so much as what is perfectly legal. The culture of corruption is so entrenched in Texas politics that it is now a radical notion to apply common sense to something as basic as right & wrong.” Texas Democrats believe existing state laws must be enforced and strengthened and new laws must be enacted to protect our democracy and restore the public trust.

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

- extension and enforcement of the Voting Rights Act and the right of all Texans to participate in the political process, including improving access to accurate instruction for

using voting systems to ensure no voter is denied their right to vote due to language barriers or new and confusing voting systems;

- securing the integrity and outcome of election results by requiring that electronic voting systems provide a paper printout to allow votes to be verified, counted accurately, certified, and recounted, including a requirement that a voter verifiable paper ballot serve as the official ballot in recounts;
- a constitution prohibition against mid-decade redistricting unless a court order determines that a redistricting plan violates legal or constitutional standards;
- a certification and selection process for voting systems is open to public review, testing and analysis, including rigorous oversight by a non-partisan commission consisting of qualified computer experts and programmers who would perform logic and accuracy tests prior to deploying machines for elections, as well as parallel testing during the election;
- a requirement that the TDP State Chair be allowed to obtain “read and write” access permission to all Texas Election Administration Management (TEAM) database tables and fields with complete documentation and appoint two liaison persons who are required to attend all meetings called by the Secretary of State on TEAM matters and report findings on data security to the TDP State Chair; and
- reform of the electoral college.

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

- full and timely disclosure of campaign contributions, expenditures, lobbying and other activities that can influence elections and government operations; Strengthen reporting laws to require that fair market value of gifts to public officials be listed as a way to ensure public access to financial backing and possible conflicts of interest that have allowed public officials to hide conflicts of interest;
- a ban on corporate campaign contributions and sham “issue ads” funded by undisclosed donors within sixty days prior to an election;
- prohibiting former legislators and state agency executives from going through a “revolving door” to lobby former colleagues or previous employers for a specified length of time after leaving their office or position;
- enhanced funding and enforcement tools for the Texas Ethics Commission;
- requiring the Texas Legislature to record all votes, comply with open meetings laws, and provide real-time internet access to voting records and amendments so the public can hold their elected officials accountable;
- requiring state agencies to follow strict contracting guidelines to eliminate favoritism and “sweetheart” deals in awarding state contracts and to document any meetings or contacts with registered lobbyists or paid consultants regarding a state contracts;
- continuing to elect judges while working toward a more diverse judiciary and meaningful judicial campaign finance reform;
- public financing for general election campaigns for elective office at all levels;
- strict enforcement of the prohibition forbidding the use of state tax money to pay lobbyists to lobby members of the Texas state or congressional delegation;
- reinstatement of the Fairness Doctrine of the Federal Communications Commission to prevent using exclusive federal licensing of broadcast frequencies as a prior restraint on speech;

Rights and Freedoms

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

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

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

- action against all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment;
- the right to privacy and protecting the confidentiality and privacy of personal, medical, and financial records - in both paper and electronic formats;
- preservation and enforcement of all state and federal disability rights laws, particularly the Americans with Disabilities Act;
- full access to governmental records and information on matters of public interest and state employees' rights and duty to provide factual answers to the public in response to requests for information on matters of public interest;
- repeal of provisions of the Patriot Act inconsistent with the Bill of Rights;
- proper court authorization and review of all surveillance and wire-tapping in full compliance with the Fourth Amendment of the Constitution;
- the adoption of a constitutional amendment to provide all eligible voters an absolute right to vote in all public elections;
- rejection of ideological censorship of public libraries and textbooks; and
- Native American nations' rights to self-identification and self-rule.

Religious Freedom

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

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

Many Democrats hold political views that are motivated by deeply held personal beliefs. No political party and no extremist group hold an exclusive lock on such beliefs. We recognize the importance of religion and prayer in the lives of Texans and support every individual's right to practice his or her own beliefs without imposing them on others.

Access to Justice

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

- Open access to the court system guaranteed by the Texas Constitution, the right to fair and impartial jury trials and respect by courts for jury verdicts;
- Protection for Texans from unreasonable limitations on access to the justice system, including mandatory arbitration proceedings;
- Affordable and efficient access to justice for all Texans through the ability to join together to seek redress for personal injuries and property damages;
- The full protection of due process of law for all Texans in all circumstances;
- Improved access to a full range of legal services to assist low-income Texans;
- The unimpeded right to redress grievances to the government and report crime to the authorities, which was denied by Governor Perry's veto of the Anti-SLAPP Bill.
- The nomination and appointment of qualified, competent persons to serve as Judges, and as members of State Boards and Commissions responsible for carrying out civil and criminal Justice in this State.
- The reversal of unjust provisions of “Proposition 12” that have proved harmful by denying Texans who have suffered severe harm fair and open courts and the ability to redress their grievances.
- Full access to an open, full and independent Executive Branch review process of a court decision, as opposed to a “rubber stamp” of a prior decision.
- The unimpeded right to redress grievances to the government and report crime to the authorities without retaliation and harassment.

National Security

We believe that the peace and prosperity of our nation is assured by the maintenance of a powerful and capable military. We believe the single most important element in our military is the individual soldier, and that it is absolutely critical that we keep faith with those who defend us. In our pursuit of national security, Texas Democrats support:

- a well equipped military with sufficient resources to maintain and enhance our defense capacities;
- safeguards to prevent the imposition of national security policies that would violate or conflict with the Bill of Rights and the U.S. Constitution; and
- increasing our national security through the competent use of nonviolent intervention, mediation, and conflict resolution at home and abroad and to ensure that war is always a last resort.

Veterans

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

We support the continuation and enhancement of veteran's benefits, including post military training, medical and disability. We deplore the hypocrisy of arm chair patriots who talk glowingly of war and wrap themselves in the flag while turning their backs on those who fought those wars and defended that flag.

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

- professional licensing for skills learned during military service, including programs like Troops to Teachers;
- job training for veterans;
- adequate and affordable health insurance coverage and health care services for veterans and their families, including mental health care services;
- restoring funding and service cuts and expanding clinical services at the Veterans Affairs Medical Centers;
- the establishment of a new, full service VA Hospital in South Texas;
- extend the rights of full citizenship to non-citizen veterans who have served our country in the United States military;
- programs to encourage and support veterans and their families to obtain higher education, such as expanding the Hazlewood Act to permit veterans who have not fully utilized their entitlement under this act to pass on any remainder of the unused credit hours to their children.

Supporting the Men and Women of the Military

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

- providing appropriate personal and vehicle protection for all military personnel in combat areas;
- programs that assist families of deployed service members in managing difficulties created by longer and more frequent deployments of Guard and Reserve personnel, such as counseling, debt service delays, tax deferrals, and basic needs assistance;
- initiatives to financially assist families of service members who suffer an extended loss of employment income due directly to extended or repeated deployments;
- interstate cooperation to enable the successful transition of families forced to move from one state to another, including changes involving public education, job searches, and health care continuity;
- efforts to prevent predatory lending practices targeted at military personnel and their families, such as payday loans and sale-leaseback transactions;

- a prohibition of a military draft absent a congressional declaration of war; and an end to practices that change deployment and other terms of service for existing military personnel in the middle of the game that amount to a draft in disguise;
- the right of all military personnel to serve without discrimination or prejudice, including the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy;
- the right of female soldiers and dependents to have the same access to the full range of reproductive choices and related services that are provided to others;

We believe air traffic control is an inherent function of the federal government that is essential to national security, and that our air traffic control system should be fully staffed and equipped and never subject to privatization. We also oppose attempts to privatize the National Weather Service.

Immigration

The Texas Democratic Party recognizes that we are a nation of immigrants who came across borders to build our national society. In Texas, we know immigrants, and their children and grandchildren, who fought and died to protect our freedom, earning the blessings of liberty for themselves and all Americans. For that reason, we condemn those who use immigration as a political wedge issue to incite fear for partisan gain.

We feel no ill will toward those who seek our country as a matter of necessity, but we recognize that our national security requires us to secure all our borders as part of a clear and uniformly enforced immigration policy that also emphasizes economic security on both sides of the border.

We support the allocation and use of all necessary resources to equip and maintain a Border Patrol with sufficient manpower to effectively police our borders, and providing this Border Patrol with the training, technology and authority to use appropriate measures to accomplish their mission in a way that respects civil liberties, human rights, and personal dignity.

We oppose the creation of any law that would, through its enforcement, result in scapegoating, intimidation or victimization of those who may simply "look like immigrants." And we vehemently oppose any law that would make it more difficult for any qualified citizen to exercise his or her right to vote.

We support strict enforcement, appropriate punishment and economic sanctions against those who have profited by knowingly hiring workers at substandard wages, a practice common to many employers who are major Republican donors.

We believe that national security requires that we determine who is in our country and what their intentions are, but our nation has the neither the economic nor the emotional capacity to expel eleven million people. We support the creation of a policy that would establish a path to citizenship for the majority of those currently here, without undue financial burden, and with priority for those who have lived or worked here the longest, provided they qualify and seek to become part of our national community. We strongly oppose Republican proposals that they should be charged with a felony simply because they are undocumented.

Any cost associated with assimilating this population, including health care, education, increased infrastructure and cooperative enforcement of national laws, should be primarily assumed by the federal government. We oppose measures that would limit the ability of our state, religious institutions or charities to provide for the health, education, safety, and welfare of individuals, including immigrant members of our communities.

The best interest of the United States requires us to help our neighboring countries find ways to develop their economies and create better paying jobs for workers in those countries. The lure of a better paying job in the U.S. would then become less attractive and illegal border crossing would become less attractive. We believe it is the height of hypocrisy for Republicans who consistently oppose increases in the minimum wage and worker protections to now claim they are "protecting American jobs" with extreme immigration proposals.

Foreign Policy

In 2001, America was attacked by enemies of freedom and democracy - the international terrorist group known as Al Qaeda - in a heinous act that was a crime against the American people and all humanity. With the concern and respect of the rest of the free world, we launched a war on terror with an understood national goal that the intentional targeting of innocents would be forever eliminated. Today, that immense reservoir of good will has been drained, the war on terror has been misdirected, and we have failed for five years to bring our attackers to justice. The administration responsible for such incompetence and failure should be held accountable.

All Americans recognize that Saddam Hussein was an odious dictator, and none mourn his defeat. But the Bush administration's case for going to war was built on false pretenses and those deceptions have been exposed. Weapons of mass destruction have not been found in Iraq. The administration's claim of links between Al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein was rejected by the bipartisan "9-11" commission. Global U.S. security interests have been badly served by the Bush administration's excessive investment of resources in Iraq.

Texas Democrats stand strongly by all the men and women of our armed forces, as well as diplomats and others in the service of our country who are often placed in harm's way. We believe the advice, wisdom and experience of our professional military officers, which have been subordinated to the ideological and political concerns of the current administration, must be central to successful military policy in Iraq and elsewhere.

We are committed to developing a clearly-defined policy for Iraq and other regions based on that wisdom and experience and a respect for sovereignty and international cooperation with our friends and allies. This administration's "go-it-alone" policy threatens to undermine a legacy of generations of American leadership that secured a safer and more just world.

Because the terrorists are successfully using the continued major involvement of U.S. troops in Iraq as a tool to rally support against us and for their war of terror on Iraqi civilians, we believe the President should:

- take all steps necessary to provide the Iraqi people with the opportunity to control their internal affairs;

- immediately develop and implement a plan for reconstructing Iraq's civil and economic infrastructure;
- convene an emergency meeting of Iraq's leadership, Iraq's neighbors, our allies and the United Nations to create an international peacekeeping force in Iraq and to replace U.S. troops with Iraqi police and Iraq National Guard forces; and
- develop and implement a plan for the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq in the most rapid manner possible, consistent with their safety and in a manner that does not destabilize the region and place more lives in danger"

Texas Democrats also believe America must:

- modernize our military and diplomatic organizations to meet the threat of terrorism and properly equip and provide for our soldiers and veterans;
- create a new era of alliances for the post 9-11 world and cooperate in an international effort to eliminate weapons of mass destruction;
- use to the fullest our nation's diplomatic, intelligence and economic resources;
- adopt policies designed to free us from dependence on the resource of any nation or region, including Mideast oil; and
- consider the trade practices of other nations before extending aid and security protections towards those nations.

Texas Democrats recognize that lasting stability in the Middle East depends upon a true, mutually respectful peace with safe and secure borders and governments dedicated to peace and democracy for Israelis and Palestinians. We affirm our long-standing policy that such a peace must result from direct negotiations between willing and responsible partners.

Texas Democrats call for an end to all preaching and teaching of hatred and intolerance and for the withdrawal of support from agencies and programs that promote hatred. America must not dictate a solution, but we must be prepared to assist and encourage actions that lead toward peaceful coexistence.

America can be made stronger and regain confidence and trust among the nations of the world by respecting human rights and restoring our leadership role in the international community. The United States must comply with our Constitution and laws, and our obligations under international accords. Our Declaration of Independence urges "a decent respect for the opinions of mankind." Our foreign policy must reflect that core value by promoting policies that addresses urgent needs of the world community and minimizes the potential for hatred and conflict.