



# **TEXAS DEMOCRATIC PARTY**

## **2008 PARTY PLATFORM**

**JUNE 2008**

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# 2008 Texas Democratic Party Platform

## Beliefs Shaped by Democratic Values

**“We have a vision of a Texas where opportunity knows no race, no gender, no color - a glimpse of what can happen in government if we simply open the doors and let the people in.”**  
*Governor Ann Richards, Inaugural address, 1991*

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

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

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

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

We believe in freedom

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

We believe in equal opportunity for all Texans

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

We believe a growing economy should benefit all Texans

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

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

- ...by cooperative efforts of involved citizens, law enforcement, and emergency personnel
- ...by retirement and pension security
- ...by encouraging job security where it is possible and providing appropriate assistance and re-training when it is not
- ...by the preservation of our precious natural resources and quality of life

...by compassionate policy that offers a safety net for those most vulnerable and in need. We believe America is made stronger by the men and women who put their lives on the line when it is necessary to engage our military to secure our nation.

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

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

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

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

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

## **Putting Beliefs and Values into Action**

Texas Democrats base public policy priorities on values that guide our daily lives. Good government addresses the priorities of the people and solves problems.

### **EDUCATION**

Texas Democrats believe quality public education is essential to American democracy and economic opportunity, recognizing that a free public education provides all Texans a real opportunity to achieve their potential. All children should be able to attend a safe, secure school and have access to an exemplary educational program that meets their needs and abilities. All school districts must be adequately and 100% equitably funded. All Texans should have access to affordable, quality higher education and career education programs.

### **PUBLIC EDUCATION FUNDING**

Texas must have a world class education system to provide our children the skills to compete in a global economy. The Texas Constitution provides for free public schools. Most Texans support our public schools, yet Republicans want to siphon off limited public education funds for inequitable, unaccountable voucher and privatization schemes.

Texas Democrats believe improving public education is more than a constitutional obligation - it is a moral imperative and an economic necessity. To fulfill this commitment, Texas Democrats continue leading the fight to improve student achievement, lower dropout rates, maintain or extend 22-1 class size limits, expand access to pre-kindergarten and kindergarten programs, attract and retain well-qualified teachers and increase funding for public education.

Texas Democrats believe:

- the state should establish a 100% equitable school finance system with sufficient state revenue to allow every district to offer an exemplary program;
- the state should equitably reduce reliance on "Robin Hood" recapture and fully reflect in state funding formulas all student and district cost differences and the impact of inflation and state mandates; and
- the federal government should fully fund all federal education mandates and should reform and fully fund No Child Left Behind.

Republicans have cut or frozen education funding every session they have controlled the Texas Legislature. In 2003, \$3 billion was cut from public education and has never been restored. The 2006 Republican school funding plan has frozen limited per pupil funding to that year's levels, leaving local districts faced with increasing costs for fuel, utilities, insurance and personnel with little new state money. To make matters worse, that same plan placed stringent limits on local ability to make up for the state's failures.

### **EDUCATIONAL QUALITY**

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

- provide universal access to pre-kindergarten and kindergarten;
- provide every student free, accurate and updated instructional materials and free computer and internet access;
- provide early intervention programs to help every child read at or above grade level;
- make dropout prevention and recovery a priority for each district;
- provide sufficient resources for special needs students to learn to the maximum of their ability in the least restrictive environment;
- provide appropriate vocational education programs;
- provide multi-language instruction, beginning in elementary school, to make all students fluent in English and at least one other language;
- reject efforts to destroy bilingual education;
- replace high stakes standardized tests that punish students and schools with a more comprehensive and positive student assessment system;
- enforce and extend class size limits to allow every student to receive the individualized attention necessary to do his or her best;
- reduce excessive emphasis on funding for athletics at the expense of academics, arts, music and other extracurricular activities;
- develop alternative methods of testing youth who are severely handicapped or who are otherwise educationally disadvantaged;
- support Title IX protections for gender equity in public education institutions;
- ensure that students are not excluded from participation in school sports because their family lacks medical insurance;
- stop extremists from controlling or censoring curriculum and textbooks;
- ensure that every school has a fully funded library that meets state requirements;
- provide environmental education programs for children and adults; and
- oppose private school vouchers.

### **TEACHER QUALITY**

The most important factor in student success is having qualified teachers in our classrooms. Texas has a serious teacher shortage. Teacher pay and benefits are not competitive with private sector pay

for people with comparable knowledge and skills. To recruit and retain our best to teach, Texas Democrats advocate the following:

- raise teacher and support staff pay to levels exceeding the national average;
- extend quality state funded health insurance to all education employees;
- respect and safeguard the rights and benefits of education employees;
- guarantee that every class has a teacher certified to teach that subject;
- recruit and train teachers who reflect the state's diversity;
- fund a mentor program for every novice teacher;
- fight Republican plans that undercut collaborative efforts needed to help all students excel by linking pay to student scores on standardized tests; and
- repeal the federal government pension offset and windfall elimination provisions that unfairly reduce Social Security benefits for educational retirees; and
- provide tuition credits and financial assistance for college students who become certified public school teachers and teach for a specified period of time in public schools.

### **SAFE SCHOOLS/QUALITY ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION SETTINGS**

Texas Democrats believe students, teachers and other school personnel should be safe from acts of violence. School campuses and functions must be weapon-free and drug-free. We support swift and fair enforcement of disciplinary standards. Teachers deserve support when they exercise their right to remove a disruptive student from class.

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

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

### **HIGHER EDUCATION AND ADULT EDUCATION**

Texas Democrats believe all Texans should have the opportunity and be encouraged to pursue affordable higher education at public universities, community colleges, and technical schools. Since 2003, designated tuition at our state campuses has increased an average of 112% due to Republican tuition deregulation policies, and when other costs are included, the full cost of attending UT-Austin is over \$100,000 for four years. These rising costs, coupled with budget cuts that were never fully restored, force many students from middle income families to take on substantial debt to avoid being priced out of college. Tuition policies threaten our ability to meet state "Closing the Gaps" goals essential to our economic future. To offer affordable access to higher education, we support:

- full restoration of 2003 budget cuts, adjusted for inflation and student growth;
- legislative rollback of tuition and fees to affordable levels;
- full federal income tax deductibility for college tuition;
- full funding of TEXAS Grants and reopening the state Prepaid Tuition Program to provide higher education to more Texans without excessive debt burden;
- a guaranteed tuition-free two years of public college or technical education for all who complete high school, and additional scholarship aid for military veterans;

- legislation to reduce the inordinately high costs of college textbooks, technical manuals and other instructional materials;
- adequate compensation, security, professional status, and benefits for all faculty;
- upgrading campus infrastructure and providing fair market value wages for college employees through state and/or federal funding, not through tuition increases;
- higher education research funding to spur economic development;
- collaborative public/higher education partnerships from pre-K-16 to enhance learning and teacher preparation;
- enhanced, equitable funding for Prairie View A&M and Texas Southern University and for higher education in South Texas and all border communities;
- sufficient funding to locate a Tier 1 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.

### **COMMUNITY COLLEGES**

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

Republicans have drastically reduced funding for community colleges. Funding per student contact hour is still almost 10% below 2002-03 and is less in actual dollars than it was ten years ago. That burden has been shifted onto students, their families and property taxpayers. A 37% funding increase would be needed to restore Republican cuts and return to the 1998 state funding level, when adjusted for inflation. And now, the Governor and Republican politicians want to shift hundreds of millions of dollars in additional costs for employees' group insurance onto students and local property taxpayers next year. To maintain community colleges' role in providing lifelong education, we endorse:

- full formula funding of the cost of instruction;
- restoration of fully state-funded full time employee group health insurance and proportional health benefits for adjunct instructors;
- creating federally approved student loans that have an interest rate no greater than 2% and no less than 1% for the life of the loan;
- funding for new campuses and program expansions, especially in critical need programs, sufficient to meet Closing the Gaps goals;
- rolling back tuition and fees that have increased 50% under Republican control;
- sufficient financial aid to over 150,000 community college students who are eligible for grant assistance but receive none because state funding is inadequate; and
- elimination of financial aid rules that penalize students who transfer to universities from community colleges.

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

- proposals for "proportionality" that would shift group insurance costs onto students and property taxpayers;
- shifting the basis of formula funding away from actual costs; and

- "incentive" programs that would discriminate against colleges and programs serving disadvantaged and non-traditional students or against non-degree skill-building and retraining programs.

## **DIVERSITY**

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

## **Economic Security: Good Jobs in a Challenging Economy**

Our economic security depends on developing the full potential of 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. Jobs should offer dignity and a decent living instead of a lifetime shadowed by insecurity or poverty.

Texans, like all Americans, are now facing an economic crisis. Under “cheap labor Republicans,” government failed its basic responsibility to foster sustained full employment with reasonably stable prices. Instead, recession was followed by a weak recovery and now, another recession. Absent an industrial recovery or a full recovery in information technology, economic growth was primarily maintained by financial tricks in the housing sector, government and military spending and tax cuts that mostly benefit those who needed them least.

We believe “percolate up” works much better than “trickle down.” Republican policies that cut essential services and investments in our future reward only the wealthiest Americans with tax cuts and threaten massive financial hardships in the future. We recognize the importance of temporary deficits in overcoming recessions, but the growing national debt and trade imbalance caused by failed Republican economic policy endanger our way of life and our national security. Our children and grandchildren should not be responsible for these economic failures.

We understand that economic policy must solve problems -- for our people, our country and our planet. People need good jobs that support their families and offer security for the future. Our country needs to fulfill its historical role as a leader in technology and industry. Our planet faces challenges, from infrastructure shortfalls to energy shortages to global warming, whose solutions will require a concerted long term effort. Democrats must lead our country in the right direction.

We further address economic policy in the sections of this platform related to Energy, Housing, Transportation and the Environment.

**To Strengthen Small Business**, we believe state policy should foster entrepreneurship and the independent initiative of small businesses to enlist Texas workers in creating new goods and services. The new Republican "margins tax," which is effectively a small business income tax, burdens small businesses unfairly at the very time the Republican recession has left many struggling to survive. We believe:

- the tax policies of the current Republican regime that unfairly favor big business at the expense of small businesses must be reversed;
- 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 to 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 restore lost purchasing power and must be indexed 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 state must enforce the law Texas Democrats enacted in 2001 to require the state minimum wage for farm workers to keep up with increases in the federal minimum wage;
- 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 so-called Texas "right-to-work" law must be repealed;
- 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 Employee Free Choice Act should become law;
- 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;
- unemployment benefits should be extended and equally accessible for workers suffering long-term job displacement, and the state's unemployment insurance fund should be bolstered;
- 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;

- a state OSHA law should be enacted and strict enforcement and tougher penalties should be enforced, 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;
- full bargaining rights should be extended to Veterans Administration health professionals, the only category of VA employees excluded from bargaining; and
- in whistleblower protection.

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

- competitive performance and accountability in state government are vital, but we oppose wholesale privatization schemes;
- the effectiveness of privatized contractors should be monitored, and jobs should be restored to the public sector when privatization fails to deliver promised advantages;
- the Legislature should ban "non-compete" contracts that place the financial interests of private toll road operators over the interests of the public by requiring the state to pay penalties, lower speed limits on freeways, or forego improvements on free roads and highways considered to be in competition with toll roads;
- technology development programs serve as a catalyst for productive investment in scientific research essential to our economic and national security in a competitive global economy, led by a strong space program that features manned and unmanned space exploration programs, like the current "Constellation Program," which provides substantial benefits through mission based research and development;
- 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 enforced to provide the best value for all government contracts for goods and services;
- 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;
- specific regulation of the banking industry and mortgage industry must be enacted to protect the public from the kind of excesses experienced in the sub-prime mortgage crisis, and emergency action must be taken to prevent those trapped by this crisis from losing their homes;
- an outright ban should be enacted on insurance policies and scams, like those 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.

**To rebuild America's infrastructure**, public policy must support research, development, training, and public facilities required to keep the American economy at the forefront of the world economy. Texas Democrats support the renewal of America's public infrastructure as essential to economic and national security, which requires us to award funds and contracts to American companies that use American workers who have a vested interest in the security and prosperity of our nation. For a generation, America has neglected its public infrastructure: roads, bridges, railroads, ports, water

and sewer systems, schools, parks and libraries are all inadequately funded. We support a federal initiative to foster a sustained increase in public capital investment. We must not only increase funding to maintain aging infrastructure, but also build new infrastructure that is designed and constructed to be more reliable, last longer and have lower life cycle costs. By rebuilding America's infrastructure, we can improve the quality of life of our citizens; provide much-needed economic stimulus; and underwrite long-term economic growth. We further support a new program of General Revenue Sharing to buffer state and local government expenditures on investments and essential services in times of economic weakness, a far more effective option than another short-term, tax-cut stimulus package.

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

**To foster fair global trade**, we must end "cheap labor Republican" policies that out-source jobs and encourage offshore tax shelters. Trade policy must combat child and slave labor, sweatshops, environmental degradation and other practices that turn global trade into a race to the bottom. We recognize the value of trade with our neighbor Mexico and the world. A reformed trade policy should "level up" wages and working conditions by ensuring that foreign workers share in their country's economic gains and become customers for American goods. But trade cannot be an excuse for unemployment in America. Our foremost responsibility is to create good jobs for Americans. American and Texas products and local markets should receive preference.

## **State Fiscal Policy**

Texas Democrats believe tax and budget policy should serve the public interest and not special interests. We believe the operation of government must be open and accountable and services must be delivered efficiently and effectively to make the best use of revenue made available by the hard work of taxpayers.

We believe strengthening the economic capacity of middle and working class families improves the well-being of all Texans, including the wealthiest and the least wealthy 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. We believe that state tax policy must recognize that small businesses create almost 80% of all new jobs in Texas. The Republican tax bill of 2006, however, rewarded large, multi-national companies, Wall Street investment firms, and favored industries like oil and gas companies with substantial tax breaks at the expense of small independent business owners. The new "margins" tax is grossly unfair to small business and must be substantially revised to prevent destroying them. It is overly complicated and threatens the financial viability of small employers, which are often the *only* employers in rural areas. Fortunately, Democratic legislators were able to defeat Republican efforts to raise the Texas sales tax to the highest in the nation.

Despite the fact that life and death conditions can arise for elderly, disabled and low-income families without household heat and air conditioning, Republicans refused to appropriate over \$500 million in fees collected monthly on Texans' electric bills for the sole purpose of helping needy individuals pay their utility bills. Similarly, more than \$3 billion was collected from state park fees, hunting and fishing licenses, environmental permits, and other surcharges such as 911 fees on telephone bills, and that revenue is not being used for the purposes for which they were collected. Instead, it's being used to "balance" the state budget and help create an accounting "surplus."

Although Republican politicians proclaim a \$10 to \$15 billion surplus next biennium, that "surplus" includes \$3 billion that has already been set aside to pay for property tax relief and almost \$6 billion set aside by the Texas Constitution for the so-called "Rainy Day Fund" to be used in times of emergency. Yet despite this so-called "surplus," they have ordered state agencies to trim as much as 10% from future budget requests, a directive that could affect a Children's Health Insurance Program just beginning to recover from devastating 2003 budget cuts.

To restore sound state fiscal policy, Texas Democrats support:

- working with small and independent businesses to correct the punitive and misguided Republican "margins tax" policy;
- extending property tax relief to renters, who pay for property taxes through their rent and whose landlords received the full benefit of those reductions;
- meaningful and fair property tax relief targeted to homeowners by passing a constitutional amendment to lift the \$15,000 ceiling on the residential homestead exemption to allow future legislatures to raise the exemption as necessary to keep pace with increases in property appraisals;
- a constitutional amendment to prevent extending the sales tax to food and medicine and efforts to prevent the imposition of a national sales tax.
- a requirement that state government spend taxes and fees for the specific purposes for which they were collected.
- strict guidelines to require that procurement contracts with private entities and programs that use tax dollars to provide financial incentives to business must target, whenever possible, such contracts and incentives toward small businesses, with a prohibition of such awards to companies that export jobs to foreign countries or utilize tax loopholes to avoid state or federal taxes; and
- the enactment and enforcement of regulations to prevent the continued use of the Governor's Texas Enterprise Fund and Emerging Technology Fund as corporate slush funds that reward businesses owned by political cronies and contributors, despite their failure to meet hiring targets and other program requirements.

Texas Republicans have had complete control of the purse strings of state government since 2003. Despite dramatically increasing state spending, they passed on the cost of higher education to families and students, issued an astounding amount of long-term debt during times of budget surpluses, burdened small businesses with new and higher taxes, instituted a wide array of new user fees, handed out grants of taxpayer money to special interests without demanding accountability, and proposed the sale of profitable state assets and irreplaceable state land and water resources to private investors and speculators. Democrats believe in prudent management of taxpayer funds and protecting and preserving these resources for future generations

## **Health Care for Individuals and Small Businesses**

Texas Democrats believe health care is a right, not a privilege reserved for those able to pay for it. Every family deserves health care they can count on and a health care system that puts the health of the people first. Our 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 too much for it. The result: Americans pay more for health care than citizens of any other industrialized country. Fewer Texans are receiving health insurance through their employers, and those who do have employer-provided health plans are paying higher out-of-pocket expenses for health care.

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

- support guaranteed access to affordable, universal health care for all United States residents;
- support, in the absence of a national plan, the creation of a Texas universal health care plan to insure that every Texas resident has health insurance that covers medical and dental care, full reproductive health services, preventive services, prescription drugs and mental health counseling and treatment;
- believe the state must make use of all opportunities to maximize federal and state dollars; available to fund health care costs. This includes enforcing existing charity care requirements.
- believe small businesses and their employees should have access to affordable and dependable health coverage, through a state-negotiated health plan;
- believe Texans with chronic illnesses should have access to coverage through the high risk pool with full coverage for all prescription medications; and
- believe medical decisions regarding treatment options should be made by physicians in consultation with patients, not by insurance company or government lay people.

### **Protecting Medicare and Medicaid**

Texas Democrats support programs, including Medicare and Medicaid, which 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 the 2003 Medicaid cuts, with funding allocations for population and caseload growth, and re-establishing local and state partnerships to maximize funds for Medicaid programs that assure coverage to low-income Texans. Recognizing that the federal block granting of Medicaid dollars would be based upon historically low 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 and confusing failure for the elderly, individuals with disabilities, and pharmacists who have faced a maze of poorly designed regulations, bureaucracy and red tape. The Republicans literally allowed big pharmaceutical and insurance companies to write the law for their advantage - with little or no regard for its practical impact on individuals and taxpayers. Democrats support reforming Medicare to provide a simple and easily understood prescription drug benefit. We support a program that will ensure the best prices possible by allowing for negotiated drug costs. We discourage efforts to stop the purchase of lower priced medications from certified pharmaceutical outlets across our borders as long as a high level of quality is assured. Universal Health Care should include provisions for

coverage of medications with no cap on benefits and no more than minimal co-pays.

### **Children's Health Insurance**

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

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

### **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 by increasing the number of facilities offering such care while assuring their financial viability and maximizing utilization of the state's public mental health system. Full mental health parity in the private market would help eliminate stigma about mental illness and substance abuse, and make it more likely that individuals would seek treatment and proper maintenance of their mental health.

We support Medicare policies for psychiatric care that increase session times in place of inadequate follow-up sessions currently allowed. Individuals should have access to outpatient treatment where appropriate to increase the likelihood that an individual can be a productive member of society while in treatment. Such intrusive treatment would also be more cost effective. More "reality-based" substance abuse education in schools should be encouraged. The Court system must be encouraged to allow treatment as the first option for drug offenders when appropriate, rather than incarceration that may often leads to a pattern of criminal behavior. Outpatient treatment that includes counseling and medication management, if needed, would also be a less costly alternative than incarceration. We support community-based mental health services for children and adults.

### **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. Funding for treatment and therapy through Community Health Centers should be encouraged. County health officials should have the option of operating programs proven to prevent communicable diseases.

### **Stem Cell Research**

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

### **Eliminating Health Disparities**

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

### **Choice and Family Planning**

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

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

- support women’s access to accurate information about adoption and related resources;
- support affordable, quality child-care to support and keep healthy families intact;
- promote policies that value Texas families and their children throughout their lives; and
- support policies for women that promote keeping families healthy and intact through preventative gynecological health care that is crucial to the health of women in caring for their families.

## **Security for Our Families**

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

## **Privatization of Social Services**

Under Republicans rule, Texas entered into an \$899 million health and human services contract with a Bermuda-based private contractor, Accenture. This privatization experiment disrupted the lives of vulnerable residents while padding the pockets of private contractors at taxpayer expense, dismantling the state social services infrastructure and failing miserably to save tax dollars or provide services more efficiently. Texas Democrats support hiring state workers at adequate levels to ensure timely and accurate processing of applications rather wasting money on private contracts.

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 of the elderly and disabled have faced choosing between medication, food or electricity while trapped in the privatized state system. We believe privatization of social services has proven to be a poor use of tax dollars, with little or no accountability to voters and taxpayers.

## **Child Protection and Foster Care**

We support a Children’s Bill of Rights. Texas Democrats do not want Texas children who have been removed from their homes due to alleged abuse or neglect and placed in the state foster care system to be subjected to 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 funding Child Protective Services to reduce caseloads and to ensure compliance with federal requirements for caseworker meetings with clients. Texas Democrats oppose the privatization of the child protection system, including intake services.

## **Child Support and Child Care that Strengthens Texas Families**

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

possible and appropriate.

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

### **Long Term Services and Supports**

Texas Democrats support long term services that promote independent living in the most integrated setting possible for elderly and disabled people of all ages. This services network 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 strongly oppose the Republican claim of state sovereign immunity from ADA. We support:

- protections of individual homesteads to prevent 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 that allows all individuals who desire to live in a community setting to do so 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;
- establishing a standard system for a registry of in-home health care providers and developing a training and certification program that interfaces with other initiatives around the country;
- 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 and health care benefits for all direct care workers.

### **Social Security**

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

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

## **Retirement Security**

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

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

## **Access to Affordable Insurance with Effective Regulation and Oversight**

Texas Democrats support the strict enforcement of policies requiring insurance companies to roll back their rates to provide Texas homeowners, renters and drivers fair and affordable insurance. Governor Perry'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 makes billions in profits every year. We also oppose efforts to abolish of Office of Public Insurance Counsel.

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 believe government has a responsibility to protect the people 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 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 redress for buyers of new homes who discover shoddy work after the purchase is completed;
- unscrupulous telemarketing, internet marketing and price fixing;

- services that prey on individuals, especially children, the poor, the elderly and persons with disabilities, including insurance fraud and nursing home abuse targeted at seniors;
- insurance companies, HMOs and drug companies that deny Texans coverage they need;
- unfair business practices by multinational corporations;
- laws and regulations that restrict the ability of communities to provide public utilities at their discretion, including “wi-fi” internet access;
- any interference with licensed public safety communication frequencies;
- identity theft, notary impersonation, “phishing” viruses and other forms of computer fraud;
- manipulation of the market caused by unscrupulous speculators;
- predatory pricing of utilities by providing a level playing field for regulated industry, through policy to ensure Texans pay the lowest possible cost for utility services; and
- predatory lending practices, such as unscrupulous payday loans and sale/lease back transactions.

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

Texas and the country are engulfed in a man-made housing disaster: the collapse of the sub-prime mortgage market, of housing prices, and of the housing finance system. This calamity is the direct consequence of ideology and greed that led to lax regulation, abusive and predatory lending practices and a massive failure of those responsible for policing the banks and the securities markets. To respond to this crisis, we must:

- help families stay in their homes and thus protect and preserve neighborhoods;
- enact measures to refinance mortgages for affected owner-occupied homes, but not second homes, high-end mansions or speculative real estate investors in real estate; and
- provide rental assistance for those who must move.

### **Homelessness**

Developing effective solutions to the problems related to homelessness requires a strong commitment to public-private partnerships and coordinated state, federal, and local efforts. In addition to the acute problem of homelessness among the mentally ill and their families, runaways, veterans and other populations, the impact of Republican economic policy has left many families

just one rent check or mortgage payment away from homelessness. Texas Democrats are committed to ending homelessness by removing barriers and increasing access to services that support progress toward self-sufficiency in rural and urban communities.

## **The Environment**

Every Texan has the right to breathe clean air and drink pure water, a right that is essential to public health, our economy, and our planet's environment. We believe Texas can protect the environment while protecting and creating good jobs, and we support efforts to require Texas to meet all standards set by the Environmental Protection Agency. Texas should do what the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change scientists say is necessary; by 2020, we must reduce global warming pollution at least 25% below 1990 levels, or as science dictates.

**Stronger State Environmental Protection, Regulation and Enforcement** is essential to preserve our quality of life and secure long term economic growth. We must end Gov. Perry's "revolving door" practice and demand appointment of state regulatory officials who use will science as a basis for protecting the health of Texans and enforcing all Texas laws to protect our water, air and land from those who would degrade our environment for their own selfish interests. We support:

- a requirement that all major permit proceedings include consideration of the feasibility and cost analyses of less polluting, alternative technology;
- the repeal of state grandfathering provisions that allow circumvention of municipal regulations that protect health and human safety and the property of nearby landowners;
- 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;
- the right of all citizens to participate in the permitting process and contested hearings to prevent the quality of our environment from being compromised without public comment;
- mandating a 90% reduction of mercury emissions from coal-burning power plants to protect the public health and prevent birth defects;
- protecting watersheds, aquifers, schools and neighborhoods from the harmful effects of transporting dangerous materials through pipelines or other forms of surface transportation;
- the enactment of laws and regulations to protect low income communities and communities of color from environmental racism and environmental injustice;
- strict "truth in labeling" laws and regulations that mandate the consumer's right to know what is present in their food, including genetic engineering involved in product preparation;
- proper management and regulation of landfills that threaten community health;
- strengthening penalties so that it does not pay to pollute;
- providing State and Federal funds to address border environmental problems caused by inadequate water, wastewater treatment systems and air pollution;
- the prevention of nuclear waste importation from other countries and other states;
- the enactment of state policy that allows local government to protect air and water quality, public safety, historical sites and health from actions that adversely affect their community.

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

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

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

**The Availability of Clean Water** from publicly managed resources is essential to our future and our health. 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 authority to preserve the water within their districts, protect communities from water hustlers, implement conservation standards related to the development density, green building, and other measures;
- requiring regional groundwater districts to maintain the historic minimum flows of all springs and creeks and to protect drinking water supplies, plants, and wildlife;
- thorough analysis of present and future costs and the environmental impact of proposed large new reservoirs compared to alternative sources of public water supplies;
- increased state funding for local infrastructure to reduce illness-causing bacteria levels in public waters by meeting EPA standards;
- expanded testing of fish and shellfish for mercury and other contaminants and public notification of health risks; and
- preventing depletion and exploitation of limited state water resources by "water wildcatters."

## **Energy**

Democrats want what most Texans want for their energy future: a safe, secure, and sustainable supply of clean energy to reduce our reliance on oil and coal, which have high costs for our pocketbooks, environment, health, and national security. The watchwords of a comprehensive energy policy are technology, investment, conservation, efficiency and affordability. We support increased development of renewable energy technology that will spur the economy, protect the environment, and create high-paying "green collar" jobs while retraining workers displaced by new technology. Texas' natural environment positions us to lead the development of new technologies that reduce greenhouse gas emissions. We must transform energy use to reduce fuel imports and become a leader in the effort combat global warming. To that end, we support:

- requiring 30% of our state's electricity to come from Texas based, non-polluting renewable

- energy such as wind and solar by 2015;
- incentives for Texas homeowners and businesses to "go solar" and to allow solar system owners to get credit on electric bills for extra energy such systems produce;
  - an initiative to utilize unique Texas facilities and specific resources, including those for generating base-load electricity and the reduction and remediation of all forms of 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;
  - transportation policy that encourages the development of affordable, fuel efficient vehicles that can run on alternative fuels;
  - reduced reliance on coal-fired plants to produce electricity until adequate technology is available to capture and store carbon emissions, which contribute to global climate change;
  - a serious re-examination of the environmental and economic benefits of corn-based ethanol, which studies suggest contributes to pollution and global climate change more than it reduces it, and has caused the global food prices to rise dramatically;
  - creating a state panel on global climate change, including all stakeholders, that recognizes this real and serious threat and recommends a statewide energy policy that will spur economic development and reduce carbon emissions in Texas by eighty percent by 2050, as recommended by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC);
  - utilization of natural geo-thermal sources for commercial and industrial applications;
  - incentives for wind generated electricity;
  - removing local legal and architectural restrictions that inhibit using alternate energy sources;
  - green building policies by providing tax credits and passing stricter building codes;
  - ensuring the availability of affordable energy to protect the health and safety of seniors and others on fixed incomes.
  - immediate funding for research to develop new CAFÉ standards at 50 MPG;
  - incentives for homeowners, businesses and state institutions for investment in energy savings initiatives and for using clean and renewable sources of energy; and
  - encouraging all nations to use the best available technologies to develop clean and domestic energy resources to meet their domestic demand.

## **Public Safety**

Texas Democrats believe protection from crime is a primary responsibility of government essential to the quality of life in our 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 makes our streets and neighborhoods safer. Partnerships should be formed with community groups to assist officers on the streets.

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

Texas Democrats applaud the Dallas County District Attorney for working with the Innocence Project on innovative efforts to discover, exonerate and quickly release innocent people who have been wrongfully convicted. We urge the Texas Legislature to create an "Innocence Commission" to

review cases in which innocent persons were convicted of a crime and later exonerated, in order to identify the causes of wrongful convictions, and determine and implement needed reforms to prevent recurring systemic problems, including reforms requiring corroboration of eyewitness and confidential informant testimony and meaningful penalties for prosecutorial misconduct.

Texas faces an imminent crisis in prison space unless we reduce the number of people imprisoned by using prevention, education and alternative sentencing for nonviolent offenders. We shouldn't spend money building more prisons in cases where prevention efforts can keep people from becoming career criminals. Texas has more people in prison than any other state, even though California has 13 million more residents. The incarceration rate in Texas is 687 per 100,000 population, compared to a national average of 440. Texas has the second highest incarceration rate in the nation, second only to Louisiana's 835. There are too many people in Texas prisons who could be supervised safely in the community at a much lower cost, while also paying taxes, paying restitution to their victims and paying child support.

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

Texas Democrats also passed legislation to remove the requirement that a person obtain a letter of innocence from the District Attorney to receive a pardon for innocence; and passed legislation to increase the level of wrongful compensation to \$50,000 for each year of incarceration and \$100,000 per year if the person was wrongfully convicted of a capital crime.

### **Transforming Juvenile Justice in Texas**

The Texas Youth Commission scandal showed how desperately Texas needs to make sweeping changes in juvenile justice policy to stress treatment and reduce ineffective punishment. The "tough love" approach adopted by former Governor George Bush has failed and led to a shocking 50 percent recidivism rate for juveniles. The state should consider TYC reforms based on the "Missouri model," which emphasizes preventive measures, education and training, parental involvement, treatment for drug abuse and mental health problems and housing troubled juveniles closer to home in community-based settings instead of large, remote, TYC prisons. The use of Tasers and pepper-spray at TYC facilities should be banned, unless it is necessary to prevent loss of life or serious bodily injury.

Juveniles are presumed to be less culpable for their crimes than adults and therefore have a constitutional right to be treated differently. Prison-style incarceration often does young offenders more harm than good. Community-based juvenile justice prevention and intervention programs can ultimately reduce adult crime, Texas' high incarceration rate and the need for prison construction.

Texas Democrats support the guiding principles of the Texas Youth Commission's Blue Ribbon Task Force Report, which recommend a TYC environment that facilitates the appropriate educational and moral development of youth who would spend the least amount of time possible in the TYC system; staffing capacity commensurate with the size and needs of the population; and a child-focused, family-centered, non-violent TYC. These principles would be best realized in a

regionalized, community-based system that admits youth to TYC using research-based risk assessment and classification and provides specialized treatment for youth and families.

### **Adult Corrections**

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

- revising sentencing guidelines for non-violent offenders, redirecting the “War on Drugs” to treatment, and reclassifying some offenses considered felonies;
- increased funding for the state prison system’s Windham School District and restoration of Republican cuts to programs for inmates to take higher education courses, because literacy, education and job training ensure people leave prison and do not return;
- ensuring prisons are staffed by professionally trained and compensated corrections officers, in sufficient numbers to achieve safe staffing ratios;
- fully funding mental health facilities and creating more facilities as necessary to provide appropriate mental health services to redirect individuals from the criminal justice system;
- rewriting the relevant Texas criminal code provisions to take into account modern understanding of severe mental illness and to broaden the legal definition of insanity to ensure that the public is kept safe while allowing treatment for mentally ill inmates;
- opposing the further privatization of Texas prisons and mandating a pay scale comparable to public prisons for prison guards at existing private prisons;
- reducing recidivism rates by increasing rehabilitation and re-entry programs, with special emphasis on reducing functional illiteracy and drug use among people released from prison, including the reversal of policies that deny student loans and grants to those who have completed sentences for drug felonies;
- sensitive treatment for the victims of crime and stronger emphasis on compensation to crime victims by the criminals themselves;
- strong enforcement of the James Byrd, Jr., Memorial Hate Crimes Act;
- ensuring proper oversight and regulation of crime labs, especially labs that process DNA evidence, to assure proper analysis of evidence, including timely analysis of evidence from medical rape kits and entering such evidence in a computerized database;
- placing more police officers on the streets in underserved areas;
- increasing the amount of federal grant money obtained through the Edward Byrne Law Enforcement Assistance Program used for drug treatment and drug court programs, homeland security operations, and crime lab upgrades;
- prevention programs addressing drug and alcohol addiction, lack of educational opportunity and other root causes of crime;
- probation reform to more closely supervise probationers in their communities and provide alternate means of punishing them, such as local jail time, house arrest, additional counseling and self-help programs, without sending them to a state prison;
- significantly reducing the number of people reincarcerated for technical violations of parole or probation, such as missing an appointment with a supervisory officer;
- stronger enforcement of laws and punishment for white collar corporate criminals;
- ending racial profiling in searches and traffic stops;
- the right of every person to be tried by a jury that broadly reflects the ethnic makeup of the community, including legislation to eliminate the disgraceful practice of using all-white juries and grand juries in cases involving people of color.

## **Sexual Assault and Family and Domestic Violence**

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

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

## **Capital Punishment**

When capital punishment is 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 families of murder victims, and we strongly support their rights. The Texas death penalty system has been severely criticized by religious leaders, appellate courts and major newspapers that have observed that the current system cannot ensure that innocent or undeserving defendants are not sentenced to death. Last year, the Dallas Morning News called for abolition of the death penalty in Texas.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

- new TDA leadership to devise effective global marketing programs to assist our producers sell their products, including training in the use of new technology and the internet;
- offering Euro-gap certification to all Texas producers at a reduced rate;
- working with Mexican officials to make NAFTA work for, and not against, Texas agriculture;
- legislation to improve weights and measures certification of gas pumps and market scales;
- reclaiming Texas' seat at the table in the formation of national agriculture policy, which was forfeited when ranking rural Congressmen were forced from office in a partisan power grab;
- legislation against an agribusiness environment that restricts farmers both locally and globally to using only genetically modified seed;
- federal farm legislation that establishes minimum price support levels and economic protections for FAMILY farms; and
- preserving proper use of agricultural property tax exemptions and restructuring the current

land appraisal system to insure a fair property tax system for all Texans

## **Property Rights and Eminent Domain**

We oppose development of the Trans-Texas Corridor. As proposed by Governor Perry, the TTC is little more than an attempt to transfer ownership of millions of acres throughout the state to a foreign corporation with close ties to him. The TTC could have a potentially devastating effect on rural areas, property owners and communities. We support property rights protections that would prevent uncontrolled development along the corridor.

We also oppose the use of eminent domain and takings to deprive any property owner of the possession, use, or the ability to control their property for the pure purpose of economic development; without just compensation; in the absence of an obvious and compelling public need. We demand the closing of a legal loophole enacted last session that has allowed a private oilman and water hustler, Republican billionaire and contributor Boone Pickens, to use the power of eminent domain to acquire private property for a private water pipeline and power lines running from the Panhandle to the Dallas-Ft. Worth Metroplex.

## **Transportation**

With rising energy costs making it more costly for Texans to go to work and make a living, our rapidly growing population requires a transportation system that will move more people, goods and products, and do so safely and efficiently to expand economic opportunity. The guiding principles for a transportation system that benefits all Texans should include the impact of transportation on greenhouse gas emissions, safety, affordability, reduced congestion and environmental quality. To that end, we support:

- feasibility studies for new roads and toll ways that include assessment of the impact on all factors in surrounding rural or urban environments as well as traffic congestion;
- designing projects to avoid unnecessarily dividing communities or having detrimental impact on land owners;
- innovative funding mechanisms to provide needed roadways and develop reliable and affordable public transportation systems as necessary to alleviate congestion and move people and goods efficiently without damaging communities and the environment;
- reform of the Texas Department of Transportation in the wake of its infamous billion dollar “bookkeeping error” by creating an elected Transportation Commission;
- a ban on converting existing roads to toll roads, which amounts to double taxation; and
- developing rail and mass transit systems that don’t harm the environment or infringe on property rights, and utilizing the Mobility Fund to convert existing freight lines into passenger rail.

## **Protecting Democracy and Restoring Public Trust**

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

## **Free and Fair Elections Voters Can Trust**

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

- vigorous enforcement of the federal Voting Rights Act;
- passage of a State Voting Rights Act;
- a constitutional prohibition against mid-decade redistricting unless a court order determines that a redistricting plan violates legal or constitutional standards;
- a redistricting process that respects Voting Rights, does not willfully savage regions and communities for partisan gain, and gives voters the right to elect their representatives instead of letting representatives pick their voters;
- improving access to accurate voting system instructions to ensure no one is denied the right to vote due to language barriers, disability or confusing, new voting systems;
- securing the integrity and outcome of election results by requiring that electronic voting systems provide a durable paper printout to allow votes to be verified, counted accurately, certified, and recounted, including a requirement that a voter verifiable paper ballot serve as the official ballot in recounts;
- a chain of custody for all voting and tabulating machines, with security protocols for transport to the polling place and returning cast ballots to the counting station.
- opening the certification and selection process for voting systems 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, and best practices audit procedures such as parallel testing and risk-based audits, with county access to all proprietary and /or open source code;
- Replacement of DRE voting systems with optical scan voting systems as they require replacement, with professional testing and oversight;
- a requirement that the State Party Chairs be allowed to obtain “read and write” access permission to all Texas Election Administration Management (TEAM) database tables and fields with complete documentation, and appoint two liaison persons to attend all meetings called by the Secretary of State on TEAM matters and report findings on data security to the State Chair; and
- the adoption of a modern 21<sup>st</sup> century constitution to replace the antiquated Constitution of 1876.

## **Encouraging Participation and Eliminating Vote Suppression**

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

- The courageous efforts of Democratic legislators to defeat restrictive Voter ID and proof of citizenship legislation that would reduce turnout among the elderly, poor, and people of color, a proposal that addresses a “voter impersonation” problem that doesn’t exist;
- Expansion of the types of identification that can be used to verify residence when a voter does not have a voter registration card at the polling place;
- Stronger penalties and stricter enforcement to prevent vote suppression
- Enhanced state funding and requirements for voter registration efforts by counties;
- Prohibition of vote caging and full disclosure of county and state processes for purging voter rolls as well as publishing of lists of those purged;

- Same day voter registration;
- A requirement that provisional ballots be counted unless a voters' residence is proven invalid;
- Requiring presidential electors to cast votes consistent with national popular vote;
- Removing restrictions on mail-in voter registration and mail ballot assistance that do nothing to prevent fraud;
- A mail ballot system open to all voters, with a permanent mail ballot option; and
- Funding for mandatory publication of all early vote and election day polling place locations and immediate publication of changes in those locations or voting hours.

### **Restoring Trust and Ethical Government**

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

- Stronger reporting laws to require the fair market value of gifts to public officials to be listed to provide access to information to that inform the public about possible conflicts of interest and those who seek favor from public officials to hide conflicts of interest;
- full and timely disclosure of campaign contributions, expenditures, lobbying and other activities that can influence elections and government operations;
- a ban on corporate campaign contributions and 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 and not just votes for final passage, comply with open meetings laws, and provide real-time internet access to voting records and amendments to provide public accountability;
- adoption of state government policy to allow the public to use the internet to track state expenditures and activities, similar to the federal program authored by Senator Obama;
- requiring state agencies to follow strict contracting guidelines to eliminate favoritism and "sweetheart" deals in awarding state contracts and to document any meetings or contacts with registered lobbyists or paid consultants regarding a state contracts;
- continuing to elect judges while working toward a more diverse judiciary and meaningful judicial campaign finance reform;
- public financing for general election campaigns for elective office at all levels, beginning with state judicial elections; and
- strict enforcement of the prohibition forbidding the use of state tax money to pay contract lobbyists to lobby members of our congressional delegation;

### **Religious Freedom**

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

- government must not inhibit the free exercise of religion;
- entangling government with religion is dangerous to both government and religion;
- America is the most religiously observant country in the West because our founders wisely

- provided for separation of church and state, which allows religion to flourish in freedom;
- that, just as personal faith and values guide and inspire us to further the well-being of our community; we must never use the power of government at any level to impose our personal religious observances on others.

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

## **Access to Justice**

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

- open access to the court system guaranteed by the Texas Constitution, respect by the courts for jury verdicts, and the right to fair and impartial jury trials which cannot be waived by any contractual agreement;
- protection from unreasonable limitations on access to the justice system, including mandatory arbitration proceedings;
- affordable and efficient access to justice for all Texans through the ability to join together to seek redress for personal injuries and property damages;
- the full protection of due process of law for all Texans in all circumstances;
- improved access to a full range of legal services to assist low-income Texans;
- the unimpeded right to redress grievances to the government and report crime to the authorities, which was denied by the Governor's veto of the Anti-SLAPP Bill;
- the nomination and appointment of qualified, competent persons to serve as Judges, and as members of State Boards and Commissions responsible for carrying out civil and criminal Justice in this State;
- the reversal of unjust provisions of "Proposition 12" that have denied Texans who have suffered severe harm the ability to redress their grievances in fair and open courts;
- full access to an open, full and independent Executive Branch review process of a court decision, as opposed to a "rubber stamp" of a prior decision; and
- the unimpeded right to redress grievances to the government and report crime to the authorities without retaliation and harassment.

## **Rights and Freedoms**

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

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

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

- action against all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment;
- the right to privacy and protecting the confidentiality and privacy of personal, medical, and financial records - in both paper and electronic formats;
- preservation and enforcement of all state and federal disability rights laws, particularly the Americans with Disabilities Act;
- full access to governmental records and information on matters of public interest and state employees' rights and duty to provide factual answers to the public in response to requests for information on matters of public interest;
- protecting of free speech, including on the Internet, to ensure equal rights are guaranteed for any individual, business or corporation attempting to access published information;
- prevention of human trafficking and protection for victims of human trafficking;
- repeal of provisions of the Patriot Act inconsistent with the Bill of Rights and the right of habeas corpus;
- proper court authorization and review of all surveillance and wire-tapping in full compliance with the Fourth Amendment of the Constitution;
- the adoption of a constitutional amendment to provide all eligible voters an absolute right to vote in all public elections;
- reinstatement of the Fairness Doctrine of the Federal Communications Commission to prevent using exclusive federal licensing of broadcast frequencies as a prior restraint on speech;
- rejection of ideological censorship of public libraries and textbooks; and
- Native American nations' rights to self- identification and self-rule.

## **Immigration**

The Texas Democratic Party recognizes that we are a nation of immigrants 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 oppose the use of Homeland Security waivers to hastily construct a border fence without regard to the border economy, the impact on the environment, property rights or other more effective measures to secure our border.

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**

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

Just as we support a strong military, Texas Democrats believe it should be used as an instrument of foreign policy only as a last resort, authorized by a Congressional declaration of war as required by our Constitution. The Constitution does not empower the President to undertake preemptive military strikes against adversaries by simply stating they are hostile to our security.

America can be made stronger and regain confidence and trust among nations by complying with our Constitution and laws, our obligations under international accords and respecting human rights. Just as our Declaration of Independence urges "a decent respect for the opinions of mankind," a foreign policy that addresses urgent worldwide needs and minimizes the potential for hatred and conflict will restore our leadership role in the international community.

In 2001, America was attacked by an international terrorist group 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 has been misdirected, and we have failed for seven years to bring our attackers to justice. The administration responsible for such incompetence and failure and those who support its policies should be held accountable.

### **ENDING THE IRAQ OCCUPATION**

All Americans recognize that Iraq was ruled by 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 weakened 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 has 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 throughout the world, 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 terrorists are successfully using the continued involvement of U.S. troops in Iraq to rally support for their war of terror against us and Iraqi civilians, we believe the President should:

- take all steps necessary to provide the Iraqis 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 to replace U.S. troops, along with Iraqi police and Iraq National Guard forces;
- 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; and
- recognize that the effort to rebuild a secure Iraq and the expense of its security should be paid from the proceeds of its domestic oil production, not solely at the expense of US taxpayers.

### **THE MIDDLE EAST**

Texas Democrats recognize that lasting stability in the Middle East depends on 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.

## **FOREIGN POLICY OBJECTIVES IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

Texas Democrats also believe America must:

- modernize our military and diplomatic organizations to meet the threat of terrorism;
- create a new era of alliances for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century world and lead international efforts to eliminate weapons of mass destruction;
- become a leader, not a follower, in reducing worldwide greenhouse gas emissions and in mitigating the effects of global warming;
- use to the fullest extent our nation's diplomatic, intelligence and economic resources;
- immediately develop and implement a plan for reconstructing Afghanistan's civil and economic infrastructure;
- withdraw support for agencies and programs that promote hatred and intolerance;
- establish a rapid deployment force to provide immediate assistance to victims and survivors of national disasters throughout the world;
- adopt policies designed to free us from dependence on the resource of any nation or region, including foreign oil; and
- consider the trade and human rights practices of other nations before extending aid, security protections or trade preferences to them.

## **National Security**

We believe the peace and prosperity of our nation is assured by maintaining a strong national defense. We believe the most important element in our military is the individual soldier, and that it is absolutely critical that we keep faith with those who serve and defend us. The Texas Democratic Party asserts that any commitment of Texas National Guard and Texas-based military and air force units against Iran require first a formal declaration of war by the US Congress, subject to the provisions of the War Powers Act. In our pursuit of national security, Texas Democrats support:

- a well equipped military with sufficient resources to maintain and enhance our defense;
- a ban on the use of all methods of torture, including waterboarding and other policies that violate or conflict with the values embodied by the Bill of Rights and the U.S. Constitution;
- enhancing national security through the competent use of nonviolent intervention, mediation, and conflict resolution at home and abroad to ensure that war is a last resort;
- compliance with the War Powers Act to prevent the reckless use of preemptive military action;
- an international ban on the use of anti-personnel mines and cluster bombs and efforts to ultimately eliminate all nuclear, chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction;
- establishing legal oversight over all privatized military security forces operating under U.S. law or the laws of countries in which they operate, because military security contractors like Blackwater operate without government oversight and have put America at risk;
- a fully-staffed and equipped air traffic control system that is an inherent function of the federal government essential to national security in the post 9-11 era, and should never be subject to privatization;
- efforts to prevent the privatization of the National Weather Service;
- furthering policies for a safe and peaceful world that focus on practical, nonviolent solutions to the problems of domestic and international conflict; and
- strengthening port security, including inspection of thousands of containers that are currently left unchecked.

## **Veterans**

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

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

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

- professional licensing for skills learned in the military, like "Troops to Teachers;"
- job training for veterans;
- adequate and affordable health insurance coverage and health care services for veterans and their families, including mental health care services;
- restoring funding and service cuts and expanding clinical services at VA Medical Centers;
- legislation that appropriately addresses the role of Traumatic Brain Injuries (TBI) and Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) among members of the armed forces and ensures proper treatment for all veterans and members of the armed forces with disabilities.
- The full extension of benefits to families of veterans who sustain partial or permanent disabilities, including post injury and PTSD individual and family counseling, cost of living monthly allowances, childcare assistance, tuition assistance for dependent children, and assistance in job training or referral for the spouse of the veteran;
- the establishment of a new, full service VA Hospital in South Texas and restoration of the Kerrville Veterans' Administration Hospital to its past status of general medical facility to care for veterans in the Hill Country;
- extending the right of full citizenship to non-citizen veterans who have served our country;
- programs to encourage and support veterans and their families to obtain higher education, such as expanding the Hazlewood Act to permit veterans who have not fully utilized their entitlement to pass on any remainder of the unused credit hours to their children;
- state legislation to allow Texas veterans to use their G.I. Bill benefits and Hazlewood Act benefits concurrently; and
- student loan forgiveness in exchange for public service, including military service, Peace Corps, Teach for America, AmeriCorps, and similar programs.

## **Supporting the Men and Women of the Military**

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

authorize the recruitment of minors. Texas Democrats support:

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