

# **PLATFORM of the TEXAS YOUNG DEMOCRATS**

## **PREAMBLE**

The Texas Young Democrats look to the future with optimism. We are the future of the Democratic Party and we believe that the values reflected in this platform reflect those of our community. Four fundamental principles inform all of our beliefs:

- Growing the wealth of our state demands wise investment in our natural resources, our physical and societal infrastructure, and all of our people.
- Personal liberty and equal opportunity are fundamental to a prosperous society.
- Government must be open and accountable to all Texans.
- Security means more than just protecting our borders; it means ensuring all aspects of the social and economic well being of our citizens.

As Democrats, we will work tirelessly to put into practice the vision of this platform — a vision of a fairer, safer, more prosperous Texas.

## **1. EDUCATING THE NEXT GENERATION**

Education is the most important investment we can make for our future, and it is a fundamental right of all Texans. A strong public education system that prepares children to be successful in the modern economy is the primary goal of state government.

- 1.1. We vigorously oppose voucher schemes that would take money out of our community schools to subsidize private and for-profit institutions.
- 1.2. Teachers are professionals, and they deserve to be paid like professionals. Many good teachers are lured away to the private sector because of low salaries, and many more never enter a classroom for financial reasons. For this reason, we support raising all teachers' salaries equally up to the national average, at a minimum. We also support increasing the state's contributions toward teachers' retirement benefits and including teachers within the state's employee health insurance program.
- 1.3. We support the recruitment of quality teachers and mentors for all students, including those in alternative or disadvantaged schools.
- 1.4. We support reducing the student to teacher ratio to 22:1 in all grades 4-8 for instruction in reading, English language arts, math, science and social studies in Texas public school classrooms to improve and enhance student learning; as well as ensuring its enforcement According to current, relevant research supported by the National Education Association and

the American Federation of Teachers, smaller class size allows for the creation of a more meaningful and manageable classroom, which benefits both teacher and student.

- 1.5. We strongly support the provision of state formula funding for the fine/performing arts programs in public schools.
- 1.6. Any single indicator, such as the State of Texas Assessment of Academic of Academic Readiness test should not allowed to determine the educational success or progression of students. Likewise, teachers' and schools' performance should not be based on any single criteria.
- 1.7. We oppose the incentives compelling schools to reduce student education to spend more time studying for standardized tests.
- 1.8. Age-appropriate and scientifically accurate sex education - including health, sexually transmitted diseases, contraceptives, and pre- and postnatal care - should be implemented. Furthermore, we support school health clinics that serve the basic needs of students including the distribution of and advice on methods of contraception. We support voluntary counseling on different issues concerning sexuality. We encourage state and local governments to implement peer-counseling programs.
- 1.9. Current educational standards do not reflect the diversity of society. We encourage the implementation of multicultural components in education that reflect a greater accuracy of and acknowledge contributions made by all cultural identities. To that end, we support the increased recruitment of teachers from minority communities.
- 1.10. We support bilingual education with a progressive use of English throughout a student's academic career. We also support incentives for teachers to achieve bilingual certification. We support the goal of English-speaking students becoming fluent in other languages, particularly Spanish.
- 1.11. Dilapidated classrooms impede the educational process. No child should have to spend any portion of a school day in classrooms or in buildings that are not structurally sound and safe. The state should provide needed funding to meet basic infrastructure needs.
- 1.12. We support efforts to wire every classroom to the Internet and provide the proper education in the usage of computer technology. Such Internet access should be age-appropriate and supervised by teachers to that end.
- 1.13. We support laws that make our schools safe, gun-free and drug-free.
- 1.14. All children deserve quality early education in their formative years. We support using state funding to develop public early education programs to give all Texans an "early start" on their educations.
- 1.15. Recognizing the importance of guidance counselors in the development of every student, we support increasing funding for the hiring and training of more counselors to ensure that all students have access to information regarding scholarships, higher education and vocational training. Furthermore, we recommend that these counselors be, at the very least, trained in adolescent-related counseling pertaining to psychological development.

- 1.16. We oppose the banning of any constitutionally-protected literature, and recognize any actions thereof as a fundamental violation of free speech.
- 1.17. We support efforts to provide state funding to pay off portions of teachers' student loans.
- 1.18. We oppose efforts by members of the Texas State Board of Education to whitewash and revise history in an effort to impose their personal social and religious agendas on the youth of Texas and, due to the influence that Texas has on the national curriculum market, the United States. We are in favor of teaching an accurate and balanced view of history based on widely accepted standards supported by historians and academic professionals.
- 1.19. We support the use of a standardized grade scale for all high schools in the state of Texas.
- 1.20. We support critical thinking to be taught in schools.
- 1.21. We support casino gambling in the State of Texas for education funding.
- 1.22. We support vocational training in high schools.

## **2. PROTECTING OUR FUTURE THROUGH HIGHER EDUCATION**

No Texan should be denied the opportunity to pursue postsecondary education. The doors to Texas colleges must be open to all.

- 2.1. We support increasing state and federal funding for higher education.
- 2.2. We disagree with the Hopwood decision, and agree with the University of Michigan decision, in that we do believe diversity to be a compelling state issue. We seek greater diversity in our student bodies and faculty, because we understand that diversity is a strength.
- 2.3. We oppose any single measure or indicator as a barrier to admission or scholarships, and believe that admissions boards should consider the whole person before making any admissions decisions. We support making sure all standardized tests meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- 2.4. We support access to financial aid for all students, including foreign students who pay taxes and believe that it should be available on equal terms to all forms of higher education, be it academic, technical, vocational, or professional.
- 2.5. We support increasing financial aid so that a college degree will be affordable for all Texans. We strongly support the availability and accessibility of direct state and federal funding to benefit students, including grants, loans, tax credits, scholarships, and special programs.
- 2.6. We oppose efforts to silence educators from sharing their views and recognize that the First Amendment applies to everyone, educators included. We oppose monitoring educators' membership affiliations, speaking engagements and political activity.

- 2.7. We support an increased student role in the administration of Texas colleges and universities, including the placement of voting student representatives on the boards of public Texas universities and the utilization of students in the grievance process.
- 2.8. We are against tuition deregulation.
- 2.9. We are against taking away any tuition waivers from adjacent states and counties.
- 2.10. We support making the sale of textbooks tax-free, so as to lessen the burden of paying for a college education.
- 2.11. We support the Hazelwood exemption.
- 2.12. We support the State of Texas mirror the federal GI bill ,with a book stipend for Veterans.
- 2.13. We oppose CHL on higher education campuses.
- 2.14. We support policies to eliminate the root causes of out-of-control increases in tuition and other student costs, including the 2006 state tuition deregulation by then Governor Rick Perry, open textbook initiatives, reformed college rankings, the re-establishment of training colleges and revitalization of vocational schools and community colleges, and decentralizing higher education to areas of lower cost of living.
- 2.15. While we recognize the great value of a college education, that level of education can not be a prerequisite for prosperity . We strongly support economic policies to improve the job prospects and standards of living of hard-working and intelligent Texans who lack college educations.

### **3. PROMOTING HEALTH & WELFARE**

The state of Texas is ranked near the bottom in human services spending, despite the fact that it has the highest proportion of working families and children living in poverty. More and more employers are failing to offer health insurance for dependents, and more and more wage earners cannot afford coverage, or daycare, or even well-child care. We support efforts to offer complete health coverage to all Texans.

- 3.1. The children of Texas deserve proper health care. Texas must expand coverage of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), which should be allowed to cover all children of families earning up to 200 percent of the poverty level income until they are 19 years old. We must repeal cuts made to SCHIP by the legislature in 2003, which include restrictive asset limits on families that exclude basic necessities, elimination of coverage for hospice and skilled nursing care, a 90 day waiting period, and cuts in local CHIP outreach programs. We endorse public-private partnerships like the Texas Healthy Kids Corporation, which enables working families to purchase health care coverage for their kids at affordable rates. We strongly condemn any effort to downsize these programs, which would result in any needy children losing access to health care.

- 3.2. We support a Patients' Bill of Rights. Every Texan should have the right to choose his or her medical provider. No government or insurance company should deny treatment deemed necessary by the patient and his or her medical provide. All health insurers must be accountable when their actions, or inactions, lead to harm.
- 3.3. HIV/AIDS continues to be one of the greatest health threats to our nation. It must continue to be a priority to fund medical research and treatments. Every person with HIV/AIDS has a right to have access to treatment and affordable health care without discrimination. We support the education of all Texans in regards to the transmission risk and treatment options for HIV/AIDS.
- 3.4. Medicare and Medicaid should be continued and administered effectively so the elderly and poor may have the same level of healthcare that is enjoyed by other citizens. Medicaid in Texas must be fully realized so that the program covers medically needy adults with dependent children.
- 3.5. We support working toward and promoting standardized health care, and a universal prescription drug programs that reduces the cost of medical care.
- 3.6. We support medical research for the major health concerns facing Texans including but not limited to: cancer, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, and child immunizations.
- 3.7. We support providing access to adequate health care to all people residing or working in Texas regardless of legal status.
- 3.8. We support continuation of funding for prenatal care programs to assist expectant parents and families in need.
- 3.9. We oppose abstinence-only sex education and sex education programs which exclude information on the effectiveness of contraception and condoms.
- 3.10. We believe that abortion should be safe, legal and accessible. We believe that decisions regarding contraception and abortion are private decisions between a woman and her doctor. We oppose any restrictions on a woman's right to legal abortion procedures. This includes any and all frivolous uses of taxpayer money on procedures that have no medical benefit.
- 3.11. We believe that all women should have access to all reproductive options, including education, contraception, and abortion when necessary, regardless of socio-economic status.
- 3.12. We believe that all women should have access to RU-486, the morning after pill, and other forms of emergency contraception, without a prescription. We further believe that all contraceptive methods should be included in medical coverage.
- 3.13. We support a more equitable welfare system that provides adequate aid to needy Texans.
- 3.14. We support state funding for embryonic stem cell research.
- 3.15. We support the full expansion in Texas Medicaid under the Affordable Healthcare Act.

- 3.16. We oppose cuts to Planned Parenthood that are politically motivated and not in the best interest of Texas women.

#### **4. ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY FOR WORKING TEXANS**

We believe in the notion that taxes are an investment in society and should only be in place to benefit that society. We strongly disagree with any form of regressive or so-called flat taxes that unfairly burden the poor and benefit the rich. Any discussion of new taxes or cuts in taxes should follow with the previous statements. Taxes should be used to fund projects that benefit the public good.

- 4.1. We believe housing must be recognized as a basic human right and a necessity for families and individuals to move forward in life. We support housing subsidies based on need relative to the cost of living in their community.
- 4.2. We believe any discrimination in housing or lending practices is not only unfair and unfounded, but an attack on a basic human right. As Texans we cannot stand for any discrimination.
- 4.3. We support reform in the Texas Workforce Commission to give the unemployed and impoverished not only employment assistance but also the resources to sustain financial health.
- 4.4. We support the enforcement of existing antitrust laws and other laws protecting competition.
- 4.5. We endorse the continuation of funding for a strong space program in order to promote and maintain Texas jobs in the aerospace industry.
- 4.6. We support state funding for the growth of small businesses.
- 4.7. We support a state requirement that borrowers' rights be fully explained in any lending agreement to discourage uninformed arrangements that target poorer Texans in their times of need, such as sale-leasebacks and other forms of lending.
- 4.8. We are strongly opposed to the formation and legality of payday loan institutions, as they prey upon the low-income members of our community with predatory loans that they cannot possibly pay back. Furthermore, we support stronger enforcement of usury laws so as to better regulate our financial institutions and prevent the wealth being stripped from these communities.
- 4.9. We support withdrawing from the Rainy Day Fund for events which are not foreseeable or chronic in nature.
- 4.10. We support innovations in property appraisal which make property tax assessment more efficient and less prone to the chronic undervaluation of commercial properties.

## 5. PROTECTING AMERICA'S WORKERS

Texas is among the leaders in the nation in the number of working poor; this is unacceptable. An honest day's work ought to be rewarded with a livable wage, adequate health insurance, retirement benefits and life insurance. In a time where parents often have to work more than one job, affordable child care and health insurance can make the difference between poverty and a chance at prosperity.

- 5.1. We strongly support closing the many loopholes in our state tax code; these allow the corporations and the rich to avoid paying their fair share of taxes, and creates a structural deficit for our state.
- 5.2. We believe all full time employees in the state of Texas should earn a fair wage, one that provides families with an adequate standard of living. The minimum wage should be a livable wage. We support raising the minimum wage.
- 5.3. We continue to believe that large companies should be required to provide their employees with reasonable health care options.
- 5.4. We support the reform of bankruptcy and other laws to discourage corporations from abandoning their pension plans.
- 5.5. We endorse the right of all employees to organize, collect dues and to collectively negotiate freely with their employers. We favor providing equal access to labor unions to the political process as is given to other groups.
- 5.6. We believe that companies should be held responsible for providing a safe work environment for their employees.
- 5.7. We support making child care more affordable for working Texans, and we endorse business tax breaks for companies that put a child care center in their place of business.
- 5.8. We favor the removal of the "right to work" statute in Texas.
- 5.9. We continue to support the use of tax incentives to encourage employers to offer health insurance benefits to every employee and other beneficiaries, regardless of part time or full time status. We also encourage employers to provide substance abuse counseling to their employees.
- 5.10. We support the option of a card-check system, allowing workers to form a union by having over 50% of workers sign an approval form, allowing them to bypass a secret ballot that is able to be influenced by management.
- 5.11. We support the passage of ENDA and SB 237.

## 6. PRESERVING RESOURCES FOR THE FUTURE

Texans deserve clean air and water, and they should have their energy needs met in ways that are clean, sustainable and affordable. We support the effective enforcement of all Federal and state environmental laws. Therefore, we support businesses that internalize externalities: an honest balance sheet accounts for all the costs of operating a business, including the effects on the environment.

- 6.1. We believe the state must fully comply with the Federal Clean Air and Clean Water Acts, and we express our disapproval of the current policies which have led to unacceptable levels of pollution in Texas cities.
- 6.2. We want to preserve Texas beaches for all Texans, for all time. We oppose any efforts to cancel beach conservation and clean up programs and any reduction in funding for coastal environmental programs managed by the General Land Office.
- 6.3. We believe that polluters must pay for their pollution, not the taxpayers. We believe that polluters who have been grandfathered by existing laws must become compliant. We believe that the punitive damages should greatly exceed the cost of preserving the environment in the first place.
- 6.4. While we recognize the importance of oil and gas to the Texas economy, we support developing alternative and renewable energy sources. As it was for petroleum, Texas can become a leader in cleaner forms of energy as well as green jobs. We support a tax credit for all Texans who purchase an environmentally sound automobile.
- 6.5. Because of the Production Tax Credit, the wind energy industry has installed enough turbines to power the equivalent of over 18 million homes with clean electricity that will never run out. Killing the PTC would result in fewer energy options for consumers and more price volatility. We support a permanent federal Production Tax Credit for the wind energy industry.
- 6.6. We support the re-regulation of the electricity-generating industry. Absent re-regulation, we support legislative efforts to close the loophole on grandfathered plants, requiring them to be brought up to best available control technologies that are feasible and economically reasonable. We support increased State and Federal investment in public transportation.
- 6.7. We want to encourage conservation of the state's waters. To that end, we would support a plan that integrates equally ground and surface water rights.
- 6.8. We support amendments to the Texas Animal Cruelty statute that close loopholes in the statute regarding ownership.
- 6.9. We oppose the Keystone Pipeline.
- 6.10. We support the Citizens right to know when industry is planning building or expansion close to homes and business. We support the when there is an accident that industry responsible must compensate and clean up all they are responsible for in a timely manner.



## **7. PRESERVING JUSTICE AND PROMOTING LIBERTY**

As Democrats, we recognize that the best juvenile justice reform is a good education because kids who succeed in school are less likely to turn to crime. Social policy must focus not only on punishment of wrongdoers, but also make a renewed commitment to preventing crime. The judicial system must work to uphold the civil liberties of all people, and we must ensure the restoration of the Constitutional rights eroded by previous Presidential Administrations.

- 7.1. We take a firm stand against all forms of discrimination including but not limited to race, gender / gender identity, gender expression ethnicity, national origin, immigration status, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religious belief or age.
- 7.2. We defend religious freedom for all people and uphold the separation of church and state.
- 7.3. We believe that affirmative action programs remain necessary in all areas in order to foster inclusive and equitable workplace and school environments and to ensure equal access to economic resources, and bring our nation closer to racial and gender equality.
- 7.4. We support the enforcement of Americans with Disabilities Act.
- 7.5. We believe hate crimes (crimes motivated by personal bias) deserve harsher punishment under law. We also support the addition of gender identity to the list of classes protected by the Texas Hate Crime statute.
- 7.6. We believe that bullying poses a direct threat to the safety of all students. We support ongoing solutions to combat this issue and to insure that students have a safe, secure, inductive learning environment.
- 7.7. We support public access to meetings and records of government at all levels unless there is a legitimate need for confidentiality as determined by law.
- 7.8. We support substantive and immediate reform of the Texas penal system with an emphasis placed on the rehabilitation of the incarcerated.
- 7.9. We believe same sex couples should have the same rights to marriage, benefits, foster parenting, and adoption as heterosexual couples.
- 7.10. We oppose all profiling, based on but not limited to, race, gender / gender identity, gender expression ethnicity, national origin, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religious belief or age by all levels of law enforcement in Texas.
- 7.11. We oppose so-called “tort reform” as it limits a citizen’s right to seek justice in the courts for civil wrongdoing.
- 7.12. We support the abolition of capital punishment in Texas and the United States.
- 7.13. We oppose any English-only legislative initiatives.

- 7.14. We strongly oppose the Supreme Court ruling *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*. Corporations are not people. Further, we support the implementation of campaign finance reform, including public financing of campaigns.
- 7.15. We continue to oppose the efforts to mandate identification cards for voting, on the grounds that they will deny access to the polls for the following groups: peoples in rural areas with limited access to government offices, persons with mobility and disability issues and persons who cannot afford to pay identification card fees.
- 7.16. We support the legalization, regulation, and taxation of marijuana, in a manner similar to that of tobacco or alcohol.
- 7.17. We support the individual right of every law-abiding citizen to own and possess firearms, as established by the Second Amendment and upheld by the Supreme Court.
- 7.18. We support universal background checks for firearm purchase.
- 7.19. We support a ban on high capacity magazines.
- 7.20. We support a ban on assault rifles.

## **8. SERVING ONE NATION**

As Texas Young Democrats, we believe it is in the best interest of Texas to participate fully as a member of the United States of America.

- 8.1. We support an accurate census and the use of statistical sampling to increase the accuracy of the constitutionally required census.
- 8.2. We support responsible reforms to preserve the Social Security and Medicare programs upon which so many Americans depend. We oppose any bill that would divert Social Security funds into privately managed investment accounts.
- 8.3. We call for a mandated issuance of individual paper receipts in electronic voting, ensuring accountability for each vote cast, as well as measures to address the uneven distribution of polling locations and resources.
- 8.4. We implore the federal government to pressure all nations to uphold basic labor, environmental, and human rights standards in all global trade and investment agreements. We oppose the ratification of any relevant treaty that does not address these concerns.
- 8.5. We oppose legislation that criminalizes the status of undocumented workers and those who support them.
- 8.6. We support the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act as a working solution towards our belief that all Americans deserve affordable, accessible, and adequate health care.
- 8.7. We urge the Federal government and Texas to address the VA backlog.

## 9. IMMIGRATION

The current immigration system is broken and comprehensive immigration reforms are needed.

- 9.1. We support humanizing and dignifying immigration laws so that they reunite families and allow immigrants to seek work, a better life for their families, and a commitment to the United States.
- 9.2. We support immigration laws that are not discriminatory, including equal human rights for immigrants and an earned path to citizenship.
- 9.3. We support temporary legal status for undocumented higher education students through direct support of the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors Act.
- 9.4. We support the rights of undocumented immigrants to remain united with their families.
- 9.5. We support increasing immigration quotas to bring them more in line with reality.
- 9.6. We support a path to citizenship through service in the United States military and demand the immediate apology and the automatic granting of citizenship to those fellow veterans that have been deported from the United States of America solely based on their legal status of residency.
- 9.7. We support common sense immigration reform that includes provisions for foreign guest workers and an opportunity to bring the 11 million undocumented immigrants out of the shadows and into society and immediate overhaul of the immigration system to not only provide a pathway toward citizenship by granting amnesty of the unauthorized entry or stay, but access to government programs and resources.
- 9.8. We support the rights of individuals to report crimes without facing criminal retribution for undocumented status.
- 9.9. We support any and all efforts of state and local officials to develop and create programs for immigrants who currently live within their communities to achieve citizenship through local government-sponsored programs that will help them meet the requirements to be a U.S. citizen with complete anonymity.
- 9.10. We support the de-privatization of immigration detention centers and the eventual eradication of such centers, such that no dehumanizing nor demoralizing institutions exist.
- 9.11. We believe in the right of municipalities and states to declare “sanctuary” status without the fear of federal and state reprimands.
- 9.12. We oppose human trafficking in all of its forms.
- 9.13. We oppose immigration laws directed at penalizing children.
- 9.14. We oppose states and municipalities unconstitutionally enacting their own immigration policies particularly the deputation of officers to behave like federal immigration agents.

- 9.15. We oppose any abuse and exploitation of undocumented workers.
- 9.16. We oppose the hiring exploitation of undocumented immigrants in order to avoid paying market wages and further burdening taxpayers with the cost of health care.
- 9.17. We oppose penalizing victims of human trafficking for unwilling participation in prostitution.
- 9.18. We oppose the continued use of the obsolete federal E-Verify program, which will offshore jobs, hurt the agricultural industry, and hurt American security.
- 9.19. We oppose the construction of President's Trump's proposed border wall between Texas and the Mexican border.

For all issues not otherwise enumerated here, we defer to the platforms of the Texas Democratic Party and the national Democratic Party.

Adopted by the delegates at the 2017 Texas Young Democrats State Convention,  
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Rich Tollerton, Secretary, Platform/Resolutions Committee