



Their Own Vines and Fig Trees

a security agenda for all Texans

He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away;
they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks;
nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more;
but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees,
and no one shall make them afraid;
for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken.
Micah 4: 3-4

Texas Impact 2015

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There is a Jewish tradition that the fig leaves that Adam and Eve used to cover themselves were leaves from the Tree of Knowledge. When, as in the passage in Micah, everyone sits in safety under his or her own fig tree, it is to study and learn. There is a similar passage in Zechariah in which all will invite their neighbors to join them under the fig tree.

In that day each of you will invite your neighbor
to sit under your vine and the fig tree,
declares the Lord.
Zechariah 3:10

Our legislative agenda, a product of the work of the denominational representatives and other members of the Texas Impact Board of Directors and the Texas Impact staff, is a document for each to contemplate under his or her fig tree, learning the backgrounds and foregrounds of the policy issues outlined here.

It is also the work of inviting others... our friends, our religious communities, and our legislators... into the work of improving the well-being, opportunities, and safety of the people of Texas.

By the fig and the olive
And the Mountain of Sinai
And this City of security
We have indeed created humanity in the best of forms.
Surat al-Tin 95:1-4

Texans are concerned about security.

Polling shows that the security of Texas' border is a top priority for voters. For many Texans, though, security concerns go beyond issues unique to the border area. For example, recent national reports rank Texas near the bottom of all states in financial security and food security.

But what does security really mean?

The shared teachings of our faith traditions offer a vision of security that is at once universal and deeply personal. The prophet's image of one loving community, all resting together in peace, free from fear, resonates with Texans' hopes for our state.

Texas Impact affirms Texans' desire for security. We offer the following legislative recommendations as concrete opportunities for legislators to increase security for all Texans.

Security means strong families, strong communities, and strong democracy.

Key Recommendations

Ensure that Texas families have access to trustworthy financial services and support strategies for moving more working Texans toward a livable wage.

Strengthen access to affordable healthy food.

Pursue strategies to ensure that all men, women, and children in Texas have access to quality, affordable health insurance.

Build a culture of mental health at the state and local levels.

Take an appropriate and balanced approach to immigration issues.

Protect every Texas child's right to a quality education.

Build healthier communities with improved law enforcement and criminal justice outcomes.

Involve all Texans in securing a clean, affordable water future.

Recommit to clean, reliable, affordable energy.

Deepen investment in Texas' national model faith and community-based initiative.

Make sure the state's revenue system is fair to all and sufficient to meet our needs.

Give voters clear and complete information about policy influencers such as campaign contributors and lobbyists.

Encourage Texans to vote and participate as partners in policy development and implementation.

Security means strong families.



Ensure that Texas families have access to trustworthy financial services and support strategies for moving more working Texans toward a livable wage.

According to the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, 40 percent of Texas households are unbanked or under-banked, meaning they either don't have a bank account at all or they have a checking account but use the alternative financial services market, which often costs more than traditional banks, for basic transaction and credit needs. Texas has the second-highest number of unbanked people among the states, and the fifth-highest number of under-banked.

Households operating outside the traditional banking system rely on alternative financial service providers, including short-term lenders, check-cashing services, and prepaid cards. With such a large share of Texas households currently depending on alternative providers, Texas lawmakers should be especially committed to robust regulation of all financial providers.

Unlike traditional lenders, payday lenders and other alternative short-term lenders use restrictive payment options and high monthly fees to prevent borrowers from making progress toward paying down loan principal, trapping consumers in a "cycle of debt." Legislators in the past have considered legislation to regulate payday and auto title lenders, but have not moved forward beyond laying a foundation for basic regulation by requiring lenders to register with the state and report on their activities.

Some Texas communities have adopted local ordinances regulating payday and auto title lenders. While ordinances may put parameters on lenders who choose to locate inside a particular city, they do not substitute for effective regulation at the state level, and they create enforcement burdens for already over-extended local governments.

Ultimately, lawmakers should strive for a banking system that includes more Texas households. Participating in the traditional banking system is a foundational step toward financial stability. This is important for individual families, and it's also important to the well-being of the state.

Currently, 65 percent of Texans have subprime credit, making Texas the fourth-worst state for household credit.

In 2013, the top reason those surveyed gave for remaining outside the traditional banking system was that they "don't make enough money." Despite Texas' current booming economy, 16 percent of Texas households officially qualify as "poor." Lawmakers should consider the impact Texas' low-wage job market has on the state's long-term economic stability and provide incentives for employers to invest in higher wages.

Recommendations

- Legislators should adopt uniform, statewide regulation of alternative lenders.
- Legislators should identify and address any barriers preventing traditional community lenders from extending credit to disadvantaged Texans.
- Legislators should provide incentives for employers to offer livable wages.



Strengthen access to affordable healthy food.

In a state where more than 18 percent of residents are at risk of hunger, the sole goal of food programs should be to ensure that food gets to those who need it. Lawmakers should keep all state food policy decisions coherently focused on leveraging all available food resources to the maximum extent. Almost all of the food assistance available in Texas is federally funded; the state saves nothing and hinders economic activity by limiting access to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), but year after year, about one out of every three Texans who could qualify for SNAP is not enrolled in the program.

In the past, lawmakers have considered food assistance policies that try to "kill two birds with one stone," such as restricting foods available to SNAP recipients as a way to steer poor people toward healthy foods and thus minimize tax costs of diet-related diseases such as diabetes. However laudable this goal is, food restrictions discourage stores from accepting SNAP, creating barriers

for individuals who already need help and who often live in areas without grocery stores known as “food deserts.” Similarly, bureaucratic measures such as drug testing for SNAP applicants cost taxpayers more to implement than they save and needlessly punish applicants’ children.

Texas is one of the few states that impose a lifetime ban on SNAP for people who have been convicted of a drug-related felony—even after an individual has served his or her sentence and reentered the community. States have the option to impose the ban, but most do not, preferring to prioritize successful reentry.

Recommendations

- Legislators should make sure that Texas gets the most benefit possible from SNAP by opposing restrictions on food purchases, promoting use of SNAP benefits at farmers’ markets, and lifting counterproductive barriers to SNAP eligibility.



Pursue strategies to ensure that all men, women, and children in Texas have access to quality, affordable health insurance.

Health insurance remains the Achilles heel of Texas’ economy. More than one out of every four nonelderly adult Texans is uninsured, rendering Texas the most uninsured state in the nation.

While health insurance alone cannot guarantee good health or long life, research confirms that access to coverage is associated with a number of positive health-related impacts, such as: having a regular doctor; receiving timely preventive care services; better management of chronic health conditions; improved health status, particularly among people with chronic health problems; greater workforce participation; and longer life expectancy. Health insurance also protects families’ financial stability.

Widespread lack of health insurance results in distortions in public spending. A primary concern is the impact on local government, where tax revenues often go to pay for indigent care at the expense of infrastructure, education, and other priorities. At the state level, lawmakers have allocated about \$1 billion in general revenue in the current biennium to treat diseases and conditions for specific low-income populations that would be covered under a typical health insurance policy.

Texas has the opportunity to cover more than one million nonelderly adults using federal funds made available through the Affordable Care Act (ACA). The ACA provides federal Medicaid funds at an enhanced 90 percent match rate to allow states to provide health insurance to low-income adults. States have the option to use the funds to expand their existing Medicaid programs to non-elderly adults with incomes below 138 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL), or to create other alternatives that provide quality health insurance covering the same population.

Legislators also can help to improve health insurance conditions for individuals above 138 percent of the poverty level. Texans will benefit from these provisions, but they will benefit far more if lawmakers direct the Texas Department of Insurance (TDI) to protect health insurance consumers by intervening in rate increases, and to ensure that consumer health insurance information is accessible and useful. In addition, legislators should direct TDI to use existing fund balances from now-defunct programs to strengthen Texans’ health insurance through strategies such as establishing a grant program for local communities to improve health insurance conditions.

Recommendations

- Legislators should provide health insurance for nonelderly Texans under 138 percent FPL using federal Medicaid funds made available through the ACA.
- Legislators should increase TDI’s authority to regulate health insurance.
- Legislators should direct TDI to use its available resources to improve Texans’ access to health insurance.



Build a culture of mental health at the state and local levels.

In 2013, lawmakers reversed Texas’ decade-long trend of diminishing investment in mental health by increasing mental health funding \$259 million over the previous biennial budget. The allocations included an additional \$57 million to eliminate waiting lists for mental health services for children and adults. An additional \$25 million was set aside to finance grants to local mental health authorities and crisis programs, and \$10 million more went to substance-abuse treatment.

The increased funding can be seen as a meaningful statement of intent and down payment toward a stronger mental health system for Texas, but policymakers and experts agree that the increased financial investment is just one piece of what should be a much bigger and more long-term strategy. Furthermore, while some mental health system issues—like workforce adequacy—are highly responsive to increased funding, others—such as cultural stigma—require a more holistic approach.

Because the mental health system is part of the 2014 Sunset review of the state's health and human services enterprise, there are special opportunities to realign administrative structures that could help lawmakers target policies and investment. However, legislators should take care that administrative restructuring is not a substitute for substantive change and that stakeholders have the opportunity to participate in all aspects of policymaking. New research and public information initiatives have gone along with evidence of legislative commitment to improving mental health conditions in Texas. As a result, lawmakers in 2015 will have a wealth of information at hand and no shortage of potentially valuable policy proposals to consider. In evaluating mental health policy options, legislators should communicate consistently with

the public about their long-term vision and the steps it will take to get there.

Recommendations

- Legislators should design cross-agency processes that build mental health awareness into all state government processes.
- Legislators should provide incentives for local governments to provide crisis intervention training to first responders and community-based organizations.
- Legislators should direct the Texas Department of Insurance to provide information to health insurance ratepayers about mental health parity and coverage for mental health and substance abuse treatment needs.
- Legislators should ensure that state mental health hospitals are appropriately staffed.
- Legislators should mandate stakeholder processes for mental health and substance abuse treatment policies and programs to ensure transparency and accountability.

You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry; my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children orphans.

If you lend money to my people, to the poor among you, you shall not deal with them as a creditor; you shall not exact interest from them. If you take your neighbor's cloak in pawn, you shall restore it before the sun goes down; for it may be your neighbor's only clothing to use as cover; in what else shall that person sleep? And if your neighbor cries out to me, I will listen, for I am compassionate.

Exodus 22: 21-27

They ask you as to what they should spend. Say: Whatever wealth you spend, it is for the parents and the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer, and whatever good you do, Allah surely knows it.

Quran 2:215

Security means strong communities.



Take an appropriate and balanced approach to immigration issues.

Immigration is an issue appropriately addressed at the federal level, and not by state legislatures. Nevertheless, our extended border with Mexico makes this issue one of great importance and consequence to Texans. Our interests in immigration are practical and focus on the health and safety of local communities. Employers need to be able to hire qualified workers. Schools need to be able to educate healthy students. Law enforcement officials need to be able to trust residents to report and discuss criminal activity when it occurs. Faith communities insist that all people in Texas be treated equally.

Lawmakers should focus on ensuring the safety and security of Texas communities through adequate investment in law enforcement and building trust between law enforcement agencies and local communities. In particular, lawmakers should eschew proposals intended to penalize undocumented individuals that would cause collateral harm to Texas citizens. For example, allowing undocumented individuals to hold drivers' permits and reducing the number of uninsured drivers would provide important protection for all drivers on Texas roads.

Local charitable organizations such as faith communities can be key players in helping to foster robust community-law enforcement partnerships, but should not be placed in a position of enforcing immigration law. Likewise, faith communities should not be prevented from offering humanitarian assistance to those in need.

Recommendations

- Legislators should ensure that Texas law enforcement systems are dedicated to protecting Texans, not enforcing federal civil laws.
- Legislators should reject proposals to co-opt health, education, or human service providers or faith communities into immigration enforcement.
- Legislators should protect Texans' health and safety by establishing limited driver's licenses or permits for undocumented residents.



Protect every Texas child's right to a quality education.

Texas' commitment to public education is enshrined in our state constitution, which characterizes a "general diffusion of knowledge [as] being essential to the preservation of the liberties and rights of the people" and requires "the Legislature of the State to establish and make suitable provision for the support and maintenance of an efficient system of public free schools."

Legislators are struggling to meet this foundational commitment. Over the past decade, legislators have allowed state support for public schools to erode below constitutional requirements. In 2011, the Legislature failed to provide enough state funding to keep pace with enrollment growth, and in 2013 they chose not to restore that shortfall. In 2014, a district court ruled the current system of financing public schools to be below constitutional requirements. Now, for the second time in ten years, Texas' school finance system is before the Texas Supreme Court, and lawmakers face judicial demands that they strengthen the state's investment in public education.

In allocating school funding from the state general revenue, lawmakers confront a tension between the costs of providing a quality education to any student and the need to provide that same quality to every student. Legislators also face conflicting perspectives on which needs a neighborhood school should address and the impact that external influences—such as health status and poverty—have in determining educational outcomes for individual students.

Questions about the true cost of an "adequate" education are leading to calls for a "cost of education" study that would re-establish important markers for lawmakers to meet in building future budgets. Such a study would provide a common set of expectations for all players in the system, but it could be used to excuse inequity in funding for low-income or minority districts. Proposals that education dollars "follow the student" fail to account for the full "cost of service" associated with educational infrastructure, special needs populations, and other aggregate costs.

In any case, with public education funding already in crisis, Texas can ill-afford to consider proposals that would drain existing funding away from the public system. Vouchers and other subsidies for private schools or other educational services that would be funded with taxpayer dollars previously allocated to public schools would only further strain the school finance system. In the future, any public funds used for private education must be held to the same standards of public accountability as those spent on public education, a threshold that could prove challenging for many private schools and, in the case of religious schools, could be perceived as leading to an uncomfortable entanglement with government. The requirements and restrictions in the Education Code that govern public schools must be understood to govern equally any provider that receives any amount of public funding.

Recommendations

- Legislators should re-establish the historic commitment to fund a set share of the cost of public education, including the cost of enrollment growth.
- Legislators should undertake a study of the cost of education to use as a tool in future education funding decisions.
- Legislators should reject policy proposals that would divert public funds assessed to support public schools to other education providers or services, unless those providers are held to the exact same requirements and restrictions as public schools.



Build healthier communities with improved law enforcement and criminal justice outcomes.

Texas ranks near the top among states in terms of share of state population involved in the criminal justice system. The United States had nearly 7 million people under supervision of adult state and local correctional systems in 2012—one in every 35 adults. About one in every 50 adult residents in the community were on probation or parole. Texas had more than 730,000 people under supervision at any time in 2012—about one in every 26 adults. About one in every 37 adult residents in the community were on probation or parole. The increasing cost of incarceration, both in economic terms and in the human impact on incarcerated individuals, families, and communities, requires the

ongoing attention of state and local leadership. More than 90 percent of individuals in prison will one day return home. Individuals coming home from prison or jail face numerous challenges to successful reentry. Recent changes in Texas have improved the outlook for successful reentry into communities from the criminal justice system, but resources may be uneven across the state. Legislators should consider strategies to improve reentry outcomes, including leveraging local faith and community-based resources. Removing criminal background questions from the initial job application phase could help reentering individuals secure employment. Legislators should closely regulate the sale of criminal records to preserve data integrity.

In part because Texas invests relatively little in mental health treatment programs, the state's criminal justice system ends up the default mental health provider for many individuals with mental illness. Examining Texas' community-oriented policing policies and identifying best practices in law enforcement engagement with individuals experiencing mental illness could help to make communities safer and save money in the system overall.

Racial disparities in arrests, convictions, and sentencing have led to a breakdown in trust between law enforcement and community members in some local communities. Racially charged conflicts between law enforcement and residents around the nation have left many communities fearful and resentful of law enforcement officials. Institutional distrust leads to a reluctance to report crime, which decreases the public safety of everyone.

Recent high-profile cases in Texas and across the nation demonstrate the many deep flaws in the U.S. capital punishment system. From execution of innocent people to botched executions with untested drugs, the death penalty is an antiquated system that has no place in 21st century Texas.

Recommendations

- Legislators should promote employment for individuals with criminal conviction records including adopting statewide “ban the box” legislation.
- Legislators should require body cameras on all law enforcement officials.
- Legislators should end the death penalty in Texas.



Involve all Texans in securing a clean, affordable water future.

The poet W.H. Auden mused, “Thousands have lived without love, not one without water,” but lawmakers should not assume that love and water are completely unrelated. Every living being needs water, and Texas legislators are responsible for ensuring they get it.

In 2013, legislators suggested—and voters approved—a \$2 billion loan guarantee program to finance water projects. The new program is called the State Water Implementation Fund for Texas (SWIFT). Conservation and reuse are set to account for at least 20 percent of SWIFT-funded projects. Also in 2013, lawmakers moved water ratemaking to the Public Utility Commission (PUC). Having recently made sweeping changes to Texas’ water management policies, the Legislature will need to evaluate the implementation process so far and make any necessary adjustments.

Texas is fortunate to have a public water planning process. In 1997, Texas implemented a locally focused, grassroots approach to water planning, giving substantive responsibility to 16 regional water-planning groups across the state. Every planning group must have representation from environmental groups, municipal utilities, and small businesses—as well as industrial and agricultural stakeholders. Whatever strategies Texas implements for conserving and developing water resources will begin as regional proposals approved by these teams of stakeholders.

Ratemaking, on the other hand, is a much less collaborative process. Rate proceedings at the PUC are professionalized and arcane, and individual ratepayers have few avenues for participation without an attorney. The ratemaking process does not interact with the water planning process, so stakeholders in the planning process may not have a way to consider how alternative scenarios could impact ratepayers. Likewise, water ratemaking is generally disconnected from broader environmental impacts.

Lack of connection between the water planning process and the water ratemaking process could lead to incoherent planning, especially in the area of conservation. Legislators should put in place realistic, accountable water conservation measures across the economy, and—as with energy—consumer-directed

conservation programs should honor the capacity of every Texan, even very small or disadvantaged consumers, to be part of a collective strategy. Water rates should reflect these priorities, and ratepayer incentives should be part of the conservation planning process.

Recommendations

- Legislators should set clear priorities for water conservation planning and make clear connections between water rates and water conservation.
- Legislators should fund the Texas Water Development Board sufficiently for the agency to undertake the scientific research and analysis to meet its water planning responsibilities.
- Legislators should ensure that affordable water is available to all Texans and prevent water from becoming a speculative commodity.
- Legislators should fully account for and create strategies to reduce water used in energy production and vice versa.
- Legislators should ensure that non-human environmental considerations are prioritized, along with human water needs, in the regional planning process and reflected in the ratemaking process.



Recommit to clean, reliable, affordable energy.

Texas continues to have more renewable energy potential than any other state, but in recent years clean energy discussions have taken a back seat to concern about electric reliability. Meanwhile, though cheap natural gas, made possible in large part by Texas’ controversial hydraulic fracturing—or “fracking”—boom, has kept energy costs low, fracking has left many communities and landowners dealing with collateral damage and unsustainable change. At the federal level, environmental regulation aimed at addressing both air pollution and global warming is expected to create new regulatory requirements for states.

Renewable energy continues to be key in addressing many of the concerns that Texas faces and will face. As renewable technologies become more cost-competitive and concerns about fracking mount, legislators should recommit to making Texas the nation’s clean energy leader and update the state’s clean energy goals. Texas’

long-term plan for electric reliability must include a commitment to clean energy that promotes long-term energy independence, human health, and care for God's creation.

Lawmakers should place particular emphasis on consumer-directed energy efficiency programs that yield benefits for the grid and the individual ratepayer. Too often, energy efficiency programs take a one-size-fits-all approach that rewards the heaviest users while minimizing the significance of small consumers. Legislators should affirm that energy efficiency is a community-wide effort, and craft policies that make energy efficiency attractive and effective for all ratepayers, including those who have low incomes or are otherwise disadvantaged.

Recommendations

- Legislators should set new, ambitious clean energy goals in line with the state's clean energy potential.
- Legislators should ensure that Texas' electric reliability plans include strong consumer-directed energy conservation measures and that consumer-directed programs are structured to provide accountability in their savings to the grid and to consumers.
- Legislators should demand that natural gas drillers use the best available technology, and meter and report their water usage.
- Legislators should increase funding for environmental enforcement to monitor fracking and other environmentally hazardous industries.



Deepen investment in Texas' national model faith and community-based initiative.

Texas' faith and community-based initiative is a successful national model that is empowering nonprofit organizations of all sizes and types to take an active role in implementing public policies and programs. In a national political environment too often characterized by sectarian bickering and secular mistrust of religious policy engagement, Texas is showing that faith groups can work alongside other nonprofits and government agencies for the benefit of all Texans.

The faith and community-based initiative is a collaboration between OneStar Foundation, the Interagency Coordinating Group, and the Texas Nonprofit Council. By focusing on collaboration and communication, Texas lawmakers have maintained important boundaries and Constitutional protections while engaging faith groups as key partners with the state.

OneStar Foundation was established in 2003 to serve as Texas' designated commission for volunteerism and community service. OneStar administers Texas' state Americorps programs. The Interagency Coordinating Group (ICG) was established legislatively in 2009 to improve contracting and other relationships between state agencies and the nonprofit sector. The membership consists of a standing body of liaisons from 24 state agencies, ranging from health and human services to environmental protection and public safety. The executive director of OneStar chairs the ICG. The Texas Nonprofit Council (TNC) was established legislatively in 2013 to assist the ICG in its work. The 12 members represent various segments of the nonprofit sector. They are appointed from a pool of applicants by the executive director of the Health and Human Services Commission and elect officers from among their number. The TNC also is charged with recommending additional legislative strategies to strengthen collaboration between state agencies and the nonprofit sector.

Together, the ICG and TNC work in a team structure to identify opportunities in policy implementation that could be addressed through public-nonprofit partnerships; eliminate duplication and fill gaps in communication between state agencies and the nonprofit sector; and strengthen contracting relationships between state agencies and nonprofits, especially small and medium-size organizations. The TNC also is leading efforts to increase state agency and legislative awareness of the nonprofit sector as a potential partner.

According to research by Texas A&M University's Nonprofit Management Program in the Bush School of Government and Public Service, there are nearly 100,000 IRS-registered nonprofit organizations (excluding many congregations, small grassroots organizations, and community groups) in Texas. Employing more than 400,000 people (or 3.8 percent of the total Texas workforce and 4.6 percent of the state's private workforce), the nonprofit sector is a major force in the state's economy. In 2010, Texas nonprofit employees earned nearly \$16.8 billion in wages, yielding \$1.6 billion in state and local tax revenues.

Legislators should take note of both the size of the nonprofit sector and recent significant growth in the number of charitable nonprofit organizations in Texas. Four out of every ten nonprofit organizations were established in the decade 2000-2010. Core aspects of nonprofit regulation rest with the federal government, but state agencies are responsible for regulating the establishment of new Texas nonprofits and monitoring their compliance with state corporate formation laws.

Recommendations

- Legislators should implement the recommendations of the Texas Nonprofit Council to improve contracting relationships and collaboration between state agencies and the nonprofit sector.

- Legislators should charge the ICG and TNC to develop pilot public-nonprofit partnership programs in the areas of disaster preparedness and reentry, both of which are high-need areas for Texas.

- Legislators should restore funding for the Renewing Our Communities capacity-building grant program for small nonprofits.

- Legislators should affirm that Texas welcomes people of all faiths and celebrate the role that Texas' diverse faith traditions play in building a safer, healthier community for all.

- Legislators should direct the Secretary of State to verify that entities incorporating as nonprofits in Texas are duly formed and not infringing on trademarks of existing entities and provide additional enforcement authority.

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, And he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me. Then the righteous will answer him, Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you? And the king will answer them, Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me. Then he will say to those at his left hand, you that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me. Then they also will answer, Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you? Then he will answer them, Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me. And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.

Matthew 25:31-46

Security means strong democracy.



Make sure the state's revenue system is fair to all and sufficient to meet our needs.

Texans depend on state government to provide infrastructure and services to help local communities function and to help individuals meet their needs. Without sufficient revenue, structures break down and people lose their confidence in government. When the revenue system leans too heavily on one taxpayer class, the system appears unfair and taxpayers lose their goodwill.

Over the past decade, legislators have cut billions of dollars from social services and education in response to anticipated revenue shortfalls. In some cases, those cuts have been wholly or partially restored after months or years because the anticipated shortfalls did not materialize; often the restorations have been bittersweet for individuals and communities whose lives have been permanently disrupted. For example, in 2013, lawmakers partially restored some of the cuts they made to public education in 2011. For students whose education was disrupted and for education professionals who lost their jobs, the restoration came too late, while for school districts facing enrollment growth, the funding remained too little.

The rapid boom-and-bust nature of Texas' recent revenue history suggests that lawmakers should examine strategies to stabilize the system. As a historically "low tax-low spend" state, Texas has not modernized its state tax structure to keep pace with its development as a large urban population center. Over-reliance on consumption taxes leaves the budget vulnerable to economic swings; property taxes favor commercial property at the expense of homeowners, constraining household purchasing power; and lack of a progressive state personal income tax renders the entire system regressive, with low and moderate-income households paying a far greater share of their income in taxes than wealthy households.

Lawmakers could subject the Tax Code to Sunset review to identify opportunities for modernizing and stabilizing the revenue system, protecting the state from budget seesawing. Lawmakers also could offer Texans an

opportunity to consider adopting a state personal income tax to reduce property taxes and volatile consumption taxes.

To improve resilience, legislators also should ensure that the state's budget process is taking account of all foreseeable spending needs. For example, in the past decade lawmakers have dealt with budget emergencies stemming from multiple natural disasters. Global warming is expected to increase the frequency of weather-related disasters, and legislators should include estimates of those costs in their budget calculations. Legislators also have faced some budget emergencies of their own creation stemming from "low-balling" enrollment estimates for large state programs.

In 2013, legislators took advantage of a revenue surplus to enact more than \$1 billion in business tax cuts rather than fully restoring public education cuts from 2011. Legislators should focus on long-term investments that will benefit the people of Texas instead of tax cuts for specific taxpayers that yield short-term political gains. Proposals that would require revenues to be diverted to savings with no clear plan for future use are unfair to current taxpayers who may reap no benefit from their tax payments, while proposals that would cap spending entirely or on specific categories unfairly tie the hands of future legislatures.

Recommendations

- Legislators should calibrate the state tax system to stabilize revenues and prevent policy-distorting budget swings.
- Legislators should allow Texans to vote on a constitutional amendment authorizing a state personal income tax.
- Legislators should resist calls for tax cuts in prosperous economic cycles while Texas remains so far outside national norms for spending on human needs.
- Legislators should resist calls for arbitrary spending caps and instead base state spending on documented needs.

- Legislators should direct state agencies to estimate costs attributable to global warming, such as those associated with natural disasters, and to include those estimates in their legislative appropriation requests.



Give voters clear and complete information about policy influencers such as campaign contributors and lobbyists.

In 2012, Texas' top 150 campaign contributors collectively donated nearly 60 percent of the \$183 million in contributions that candidates reported receiving. In the following year, lobby clients spent just short of \$350 million to influence the outcome of policy decisions. The proverb "Trust, but verify," made famous by former President Ronald Reagan, neatly sums up the importance of Texas' ethics laws to the democratic process. Revolving door, conflict of interest, and financial disclosure laws prevent unhealthy relationships between highly interested parties and government. The mere perception of "regulatory capture" or the appearance of backroom dealings corrodes public trust in democratic institutions.

Given that money is essential to run a political campaign, voters need to understand what interests are funding the candidates in a given election. Interested stakeholders often spend money to support or oppose candidates they believe best benefit their policy agendas, as is their basic right to do so. However, knowing what interests are providing funds to whom is important for voters.

Recently, the cause of "freedom of speech" has been invoked to attack campaign finance and lobby regulation laws. Lawmakers should approach campaign finance and lobby regulations like the well-settled Supreme Court doctrines allowing the regulation of sound trucks in residential neighborhoods. Regulating campaign finance or lobby regulations does not prevent anyone from participating, nor advocating whatever they want, but merely regulates the time, place, and manner in which the speech can occur.

Recent national controversy over "dark money"—campaign contributions attributable only to 501(c)(4) interest groups funneled by undisclosed individual donors—led Texas lawmakers to pass new campaign finance disclosure requirements in 2013, but that legislation was vetoed. Although the Texas Ethics Commission has promulgated new rules along the same

lines, those rules are confined to the authority granted in current statute. The campaign finance system would benefit from a comprehensive statutory elimination of undisclosed "dark money."

The legislative process would benefit from increased regulation on lobbying, especially lobbying by former legislators. At least 32 states have enacted "revolving door" laws, creating a period of time before a former legislator or executive branch regulator can work as a lobbyist. While Texas law does impose a two-year restriction before a former employee of a regulatory agency may attempt to influence a matter on behalf of a person, no such restriction exists for former legislators.

A legislator who is also a doctor or a rancher undoubtedly brings important expertise to health or agricultural issues. On the other hand, the public trust is affected whenever a legislator or executive branch official stands to personally gain financially from an action taken while in the public service. While all 50 states have some sort of conflict of interest statute, the scope and effectiveness of such laws are in the details. For instance, Texas law only prohibits action that would have a "special economic effect" that is distinguishable from its "general effect on the public." In other words, a rancher-legislator can vote on any bill that might affect his business so long as that effect cannot be distinguished from the effect the bill might have on all other ranchers generally.

As recent controversies show, however, rarely is this specific/general distinction so pristine. Lawmakers should revisit conflict of interest laws for both themselves and the executive branch with special attention to both state contracting procedures and legislator or agency official recusal before acting on a measure.

Recommendations

- Legislators should make transparent and require disclosure of the source of all money in Texas political campaigns.
- Legislators should prohibit former legislators from lobbying for two years following their departure from office.
- Legislators should maintain or strengthen lobby registration, conflict of interest laws, financial disclosure requirements, and public notice requirements and always seek ways to increase transparency in government.



Encourage Texans to vote and participate as partners in policy development and implementation.

Civic engagement is essential to a functional democracy, but in 2014 Texas ranked 49th out of 50 states in voter turnout. Legislators should be deeply troubled by the findings of the landmark 2012 Texas Civic Health Index produced by the Annette Strauss Institute:

“Rates of political participation in Texas are low compared with the rest of the nation. Since 1972, Texas has consistently lagged well behind national voter turnout in both midterm and presidential elections. Texas also ranks among the lowest states in terms of the numbers of its citizens who contact public officials and talk with others about politics. Participation rates are correlated with income, education, age, race/ethnicity, and citizenship status.

Rates of civic involvement, such as donating, volunteering, and belonging to groups, are also relatively low in Texas, though not as low as rates of political participation. Income, education, age, race/ethnicity, and citizenship status all correlate with civic involvement. Gender matters as well, with women more likely to be civically involved than men.

Social connectedness, a crucial foundation for civic and political participation, shows both strengths and weaknesses. Texans help their neighbors by exchanging favors comparatively more than residents of most other states, and this neighborliness is greater among those in lower socio-economic brackets. Yet Texans trust their neighbors less than residents of most other states do.”

Strong voter participation is necessary to ensure an accountable, representative legislature. Voting represents nothing less than the satisfaction of an intergenerational debt to the women and men who have struggled and continue to struggle to guarantee a voice in the affairs of state for all Americans. Legislators are honor-bound to encourage robust voter participation and to take seriously allegations of voter suppression.

Civic engagement does not end with voting; rather, it provides individuals the context they need to understand

how public policy impacts their lives and the world around them. Associating with other like-minded Texans, working collaboratively to meet local needs, discussing controversial issues in diverse settings, and considering alternative solutions to problems, all form the basis of experience that helps individuals make informed decisions as citizens, taxpayers, and community leaders.

Within their sphere of legislative influence, lawmakers can nurture civic participation by building clear avenues for public participation in policy implementation. Stakeholder participation in state agency processes creates a connection between Texans’ individual day-to-day experiences and the systems that legislators devise to structure those experiences. Legislators should build substantive public participation into all aspects of policy implementation, especially rulemaking and enforcement. Texans should see their participation as a material part of the policy process, not as an afterthought.

Recommendations

- Legislators should adopt a goal of increasing Texas’ voter participation to at least the national average by 2018 and empower the Secretary of State to lead efforts to achieve the goal.
- Legislators should take certain targeted actions to increase voter participation, including extending the length of the state’s early voting period, exploring online voter registration, mandating “any location” voting for all counties, and directing the Texas Department of Public Safety to deploy mobile ID issuing units throughout the remote areas of the state.
- Legislators should give agencies clear direction and authority to relate to the public by legislatively establishing advisory committees with statutory responsibilities at agencies with substantial, diverse stakeholder populations.
- Legislators should mandate 21st century transparency for executive branch meetings and communications and require that open meetings conform to agenda-last-posted on agency websites rather than information appearing in the Texas Register.

Faith in the Public Square

Texas Impact was founded in 1973 on the central religious conviction that religious communities are called to minister to the whole person—to respond with compassion to the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of all people. The Texas religious leaders who established Texas Impact believed that such a ministry couldn't be performed adequately without a concern for basic social problems at the state government level. Texas Impact and the Interfaith Center exist to advance state public policies that are consistent with the commonly held social principles of our member faith traditions.

Texas Impact's member organizations include Christian denominational bodies, regional Jewish and Muslim social justice committees, and local interfaith councils. Each member organization may designate up to two board members. The board also includes at-large members and representatives from seminaries and other state-level religious social action groups. In addition to denomination-level member organizations, Texas Impact also has dozens of supporting congregations and hundreds of individual members who pay an annual membership fee to be part of our network.

Texas Impact and its sister organization, the Texas Interfaith Center for Public Policy, form an interfaith network that brings faith to bear on social issues through grassroots education and policy advocacy. The Interfaith Center teaches people of all faiths about current affairs and how the questions of the day relate to shared faith values. Texas Impact mobilizes individuals and faith groups to act on their beliefs through legislative engagement and partnerships with public programs.

Together, we give people of faith the information and leadership skills they need to help policymakers improve conditions for families and communities throughout Texas.

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