

TEXANS HAVE PRIORITIES
FOR OUR STATE...



HAVE YOU LET DECISION-MAKERS
IN AUSTIN KNOW ABOUT YOURS?

RAISE YOUR VOICE ★ HOLD LEADERS ACCOUNTABLE ★ PROTECT TEXAS' FUTURE

WHAT ARE YOUR PRIORITIES FOR TEXAS?

Texas is one of the country's fastest-growing states and, in terms of population, it is also one of the youngest. Those are positive trends for the future, but only if we work today to prepare children and families for success.



Texas' population increased **21%**, in the last decade, making our state one of the nation's fastest-growing.



Every year, Texas schools' enrollment grows by **85,000** children, but schools aren't guaranteed the funding they need to educate additional children.



Working families who earn **LESS THAN \$30,000** pay about **15%** of their income in state and local taxes. Families with **\$125,000** incomes pay less than **4%**.



TEXAS LEADS THE NATION in both the percentage of **UNINSURED** and persons unable to receive mental health services.



One in six Texans **LIVE IN POVERTY**—a poverty rate nearly **25% HIGHER** than the national average.



Even prior to the 2011 budget cuts, no state invests **LESS PER CAPITA** in its people than Texas.



Large majorities of Texans **OPPOSE EDUCATION CUTS** and **SLASHING HEALTH CARE** for seniors, children, and people with disabilities.

Texans have a long history of joining together to face big challenges and brave new frontiers, to make our world better and deliver progress for the next generation. This is the Texas tradition.

Today, though, that tradition is under threat. State leaders in Austin are making decisions that would change the Texas we know.

They face a choice. Either they can make severe cuts that put our families in jeopardy and deepen the economic downturn, or they can take a balanced approach to the Texas budget—one that involves thoughtful cost-cutting, protecting priorities like education and health care, closing unfair tax loopholes, and using money the state saved for times like these. This balanced approach would:

- ★ Save hundreds of thousands of Texas jobs;
- ★ Protect children, seniors, and people with disabilities from the forced closures of clinics, nursing homes, and rural hospitals;
- ★ Build a workforce that can compete tomorrow; and
- ★ Reflect the will the majority of Texans, who consistently say they oppose the severe-cuts approach.

State leaders need to hear what matters to Texans. Is it the perks and privileges for the few, or the health and wellbeing of Texans? Is it as simplistic as a “no new tax” slogan that ignores the needs that come with a growing population—or as central as a pledge to every Texan that the state we love remains strong for years to come?

The most important choices in Texas involve more than dollars and cents. They reflect the values we Texans hold dear. These choices affect our land, our work, our family lives, and our communities. They determine our shared future, “our Texas,” and, therefore, they must reflect our shared wisdom.

This publication represents an entry point. Will you join the conversation by sharing your priorities and hopes, as a Texan? Will you tell your state leaders your values and dreams for Texas? Will you speak up for what matters to you?



A TEXAS BUDGET THAT WORKS, VERSUS ONE THAT MISSES THE MARK

The services and structures we all share make Texas a better place to live and raise a family. We all rely on hospitals for emergency health care, public roads for travel, and schools to provide opportunity for our children and build Texas' future leaders. These priorities we count on are paid for over the years, by state budgets from the past and the budget we have right now. For that reason, today's choices will affect our state for years to come.

A budget reflects the values of a state's people. We invest in what matters to us, and we move resources away from what does not. Revenue from equitable taxes and fees pays for schools, health care, and other priorities, in good times and in bad. We expect state leaders to be vigilant about getting bang for the public buck. They may choose to use a state dollar in one area because it attracts federal matching funds, making Texans' money go twice as far. They may use funds for mental health or education to prevent spending more later on crime and welfare. They may tax items like tobacco, which lead to disease, so they can also reduce health costs to the state. They work hard to create a budget that is smart and fair.

But, at times, elected officials miss the mark. Rather than crafting a smart budget that works for us all, Texas lawmakers permit special interests to contribute less than their share. And our budget relies heavily on a sales tax, so revenue plummets during recessions, just when the needs for state services rise. As a result, state budgets leave Texans' priorities underfunded. We see deep cuts to things like education and health care, while lawmakers ignore opportunities to protect these basic services by raising even popular taxes, like the one on alcohol, and refuse to use the state's Rainy Day Fund. Those savings were established to serve only one purpose: to protect vital services that Texans count on when tough economic times cause revenues to fall.

In 2006, Texas lawmakers made matters worse. They overhauled how the state finances education and badly underestimated the cost of maintaining children's schools. That miscalculation means that every time Texas lawmakers build a budget, there are billions of dollars less than what it costs to simply hold the line. Texas is building budgets that disregard both reality and the real needs of Texas families.



IS THIS REALLY “THE BUDGET THAT THE PEOPLE OF THE STATE OF TEXAS WANT”?

Because of the recession and shortsighted decisions of the past, Texas leaders headed into the 2011 legislative session facing a \$27 billion revenue deficit. Two clear choices emerged. On the one hand, they could choose an approach to bring stability to Texas. That would mean taking a balanced approach—making thoughtful cuts, using the state’s Rainy Day Fund, drawing in federal funds, and making smart choices to responsibly raise revenue so special interests pay their share.

On the other hand is the choice to cut critical services Texas families depend upon. The governor suggested the cuts-only budget would be the “budget that the people of the state of Texas want.” That budget would:

Cut up to
335,000 TEXAS JOBS
—and put our economy on the skids

Tens of thousands of teachers—and tens of thousands more school support staff, health workers, and public employees—are expected to lose jobs. Unemployment overall is projected to climb, affecting jobs in the private sector, as well.



Gamble with the health and well-being of
**TEXAS CHILDREN AND
PREGNANT WOMEN,**
by making it harder for many
to find a doctor.

Children with stable health coverage are healthier, miss less school, and cost taxpayers less over time, thanks to avoided trips to the emergency room and better health. Women who have prenatal care are more likely to have healthy babies, which, in turn, saves up to \$3,200 per birth. The budget weakens Texas CHIP and Medicaid in ways that will make it harder for children and pregnant women to get the care they need. It also means fewer immunizations and health supports for tens of thousands of new babies and toddlers.



Jeopardize the education of all
Texas school children by providing
NO NEW FUNDING
for the estimated
85,000 MORE CHILDREN
entering Texas schools.

The budget shortchanges neighborhood schools, by pretending that enrollment is well lower than reality. It shortchanges children, too, removing pre-kindergarten programs for as many as 100,000 kids just starting to learn and reducing individual attention students need to make progress and stay in school.



Risk the quality of life of
**SENIORS AND TEXANS
WITH DISABILITIES**
in every part of the state.

Medicaid provides long-term care in nursing homes and residential facilities for roughly 73,000 Texans. An additional 170,000 seniors and Texans with disabilities who receive Medicaid support to stay in their homes and communities also will be affected by cuts to the program.



IT'S TIME TO STAND UP, AND PROTECT WHAT MATTERS.

While some officials act as though the only way to balance the budget is on the backs of children and fellow Texans, lawmakers have other options – better options. We *can* keep educating our children, delivering health care to kids and seniors who need it, protecting our land, and making our state a great place to work, live and raise a family. Texas can:

★ **USE BILLIONS OF DOLLARS SAVED
IN THE STATE RAINY DAY FUND**

so schools, nursing homes, and hospitals stay open for business.

★ **END SPECIAL-INTEREST TAX BREAKS**

to protect care for seniors, immunizations for children, higher education for college students, and roads for our economy. Families shouldn't have to pay more because big corporations lobbied for a free ride. Closing only the natural gas industry's tax loophole would provide Texas over \$1 billion a year—about enough to pay for a full year of care and support for all of the state's foster children.

★ **HOLD TAX OFFENDERS RESPONSIBLE**

by eliminating the discounts given to those who file tax returns on time for simply not breaking the law, and fining those who violate the law by filing late.

★ **BRING FEDERAL FUNDING
BACK HOME TO TEXAS**

to support education for our kids and health care for seniors, children, and Texans with disabilities.

★ **REFORM WHAT'S NOT WORKING IN
OUR TAX SYSTEM.**

Today, funding for services we all need depends on sales taxes, which are especially vulnerable to recessions and hit low- and middle-income Texans hardest. We can look toward a mix of equitable and stable revenue options instead.

★ **RAISE REVENUE IN WAYS THAT MAKE
TEXAS HEALTHIER.**

Research says the tobacco tax was the single most effective tool in reducing smoking. Alcohol taxes, taxes on the purchase of high-emissions vehicles, and taxes on sugary drinks like soda can offer the same “double-win” for our state. They raise money for the services our families depend upon, while reducing alcoholism, pollution, child obesity, and other costly public health challenges.

ADD YOUR VOICE:

Tell your leaders your priorities today

Just five phone calls from constituents can change a legislator's mind. Small actions can make a big difference. Let your state leaders know the choices you want them to make in the Texas budget.

Call your Texas representative, senator, and top state leaders—the governor, lieutenant governor, and speaker of the House—about protecting your priorities in the Texas budget.

Find who represents you: www.fyi.legis.state.tx.us.

GOVERNOR RICK PERRY
P.O. Box 12428
Austin, Texas 78711-2428
(512) 463-2000

LT. GOVERNOR
DAVID DEWHURST
Capitol Station
P.O. Box 12068
Austin, Texas 78711
(512) 463-0001

TEXAS SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE
JOE STRAUS
Room CAP 2W.13
P.O. Box 2910
Austin, TX 78768
(512) 463-1000

BETTER CHOICES WOULD BRING A BRIGHTER TEXAS.

Texas has better choices
than the ones we're hearing from
leaders in Austin.

- ★ Protect Texans' priorities.
- ★ Close outdated tax exemptions for corporations.
- ★ Stop pretending we can educate our children for free.
- ★ Spend the Rainy Day Fund, because for millions of Texans, it's already pouring.
- ★ Bring federal funds into our state's economy.



Brought to you by:

KidsWell Texas is a statewide, grassroots campaign to improve the health and wellbeing of Texas children. Our vision is for a Texas that thrives for years to come and a day very soon when every Texas child has access to quality, affordable health care. Learn more at www.KidsWellTexas.org.

A project of:

**Engage Texas, Center for Public Policy Priorities,
Children's Defense Fund – Texas, and
Texans Care for Children**