

Statewide Offices: Comptroller

For my next column to describe the important statewide races on the November 8 ballot and the Democratic vision for that office, I'll review the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts (CPA).

The CPA basically serves as the state's accounting office. As Texas' chief tax collector, accountant, revenue estimator, treasurer and purchasing manager, the CPA is responsible for writing the checks and keeping the books for the multi-billion-dollar business of state government. As the state's sole accountant, the comptroller has the "bully pulpit" in how Texas taxes are handled.

Democrats will use this office to strongly advocate for Texas public education, its teachers and their retirement savings. Public schools provide every child equal opportunity. High-quality teachers are the backbone of an excellent education, and Texas needs to recruit and retain the best and the brightest. With COVID-19, Texas teachers taught virtually over the internet. Texas children need access to virtual learning

through broadband internet infrastructure. Texas schools must continue to prioritize safety for our teachers and our children. Democrats will protect our schools from state funding cuts.

Texas teachers also deserve an equitable compensation package, including retirement options. Not many realize that only a handful of Texas public schools participate in social security, leaving Texas teachers to retire on TRS (Teacher's Retirement System) without social security benefits. That TRS retirement is a flat amount that has not seen a cost-of-living adjustment in decades.

The comptroller also plays an important part in appraisal district property appraisals. Under the guise of "Property Tax Assistance," the Comptroller audits appraisal district values. Many times, when the comptroller comes up with a higher value, the appraisal district complies by raising its value. Higher appraised values times tax rates equal higher taxes. Democrats will ensure the office's rulemaking authority won't be used to hide



compliance details on property tax corporate giveaways.

Democrats will advocate for Texas to expand Medicaid. For over a decade, Texans heard that "Texas cannot afford" to expand Medicaid to 1.4 million adult Texans. Texas is spending \$100 million dollars more in state tax dollars to deny coverage than it would to expand comprehensive mental health care and physical health care to adult Texans who qualify under the federal regulations. To compound this, Texans are spending their property taxes for critical indigent healthcare.

Democrats will use the aforementioned "bully pulpit" to show that Texans would get a lot more "bang for the buck" by expanding comprehensive mental health and comprehensive physical health care to the 1.4 million-plus Texans who qualify for Medicaid

under the federal guidelines. Expanding Medicaid expands the Texas economy by adding \$45 billion in gross product and \$29.4 billion in personal income while adding half a million jobs.

Another responsibility of the comptroller's office is broadband internet expansion. While good progress has been made, Democrats will explore local broadband as a utility fund of local governments to keep costs down, provide reliable service and provide a revenue stream to rural local governments.

The comptroller is also charged with reducing greenhouse gases like methane – a leading cause of climate change. The comptroller oversees procurement. The comptroller also has rulemaking authority which then becomes part of statute. Working with other agencies (as outlined in statute) and stakeholders, Democrats will work to capture that vapor, which is energy, to cut methane emissions on Texas' vast owned lands. Doing nothing about methane is costing Texans billions of dollars with each

climate emergency disaster.

Lastly, Democrats will work to legalize/decriminalize adult-use recreational cannabis. Texas needs a new revenue stream to reduce property taxes and to fund education, health (and mental health) care and public safety. A growing number of states are bringing in revenue by legalizing cannabis for adult recreational use. Conservative estimates indicate \$1 billion in state revenue would be realized from legalization. Decriminalization also saves the state \$300 million in criminal justice costs and saves local property taxes. Licensing fees from the different areas of the cannabis industry is sufficient to fund enforcement.

The last day to register to vote in the November election is Oct. 11. Go to www.votetexas.gov to check your registration or to register to vote. For more information on statewide offices or to register to vote, call 830-331-1243 or visit www.kcdems.us

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