

Bills local Democrats are supporting

The Kendall County Democratic Party (KCDP) carefully is watching the current session of the Texas Legislature, now meeting in Austin. Our “top three” legislative priorities this session are:

- Voting rights and redistricting (including making it easier to vote and ensuring districts are drawn fairly, once the results of the U.S. Census are received later this year).
- Healthcare (including Medicaid expansion and expanding rural access to healthcare).
- Local control (including the efforts of the Kendall County Commissioners Court and Commissioner Richard Elkins to get a bill filed and passed that would grant more control over development to our own local court).

We’ve already started making phone calls and sending emails to Rep. Kyle Biedermann and Sen. Donna Campbell, signing petitions, attending online seminars, submitting written testimony to committees and other actions. Given the makeup of the legislature, many of our actions will be “defensive,” meaning we’ll fight against bills that would, for example, restrict voting access or centralize control over local rule-making to the legislature in Austin.

But there are a number of bills that we will actively support to bring us closer to a more equitable and just Texas.

PROGRESSIVE VIEWS

LAURA BRAY



Here are a few, and why we’re supporting them. (Thanks to www.progresstexas.org for the excellent summary.)

The election bills we’re supporting will make it easier to register to vote, easier to vote by mail and make certain election days a state holiday (providing greater access to the polls for many Texans).

- House Bill 350 would provide for online voter registration through an official state website. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), “As of October 2020, a total of 40 states and D.C. offer online registration, and one other state (Oklahoma) has passed legislation and is currently phasing in implementation of their online registration.”

That leaves Texas as one of only nine states without online voter registration. A 2010 report showed that when Arizona enacted online registration, it “experienced a reduction in per-registration costs from 83 cents per paper registration to 3 cents per online registration.” NCSL also states, “Several approaches can and are used to ensure system security and

prevent fraud or breaches by hackers.”

- House Bill 400 would expand early voting by mail for any qualified voter who fills out an application.
- House Bills 479, 481, and 482 would help expand the accessibility of early voting and voting by mail.
- House Bill 596 would designate certain election days as state holidays.

The healthcare bills we’re supporting would expand eligibility for Medicaid, expand access to rural healthcare and support the availability of a basic level of quality health care at an affordable cost. According to SickOfItTx, a non-partisan coalition of advocates fighting for expanded healthcare, “Texas continues to have the nation’s worst uninsured rate for adults, for kids and for women of childbearing age – with often devastating consequences.” In particular, KCDP will support a series of bills that would expand the eligibility for Medicaid by providing medical assistance to all persons who apply for the assistance and who are eligible under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

In addition to the above-listed bills, we will support legislation that would increase local control.

“Local Control” means providing city councils and county commissioners courts the legal ability to control

development in their jurisdictions. Per Texas state law, cities have some ability to control development through zoning. But counties have almost no authority at all under state law to control any kind of construction project.

So areas of unincorporated Kendall County are subject to overly dense housing developments, water-chugging and polluting concrete batching plants and other projects that adversely affect quality of life, with no ability for citizens to object and no ability for the county to restrict it.

Legislation submitted by the Kendall County Commissioners Court states, “(the) orderly development of Kendall County is of concern to the citizens of the county to preserve the natural scenic beauty, native wildlife, as well as local historical and cultural heritage of this unique region of the Hill Country. Without adequate development regulations, Kendall County will be developed in ways that endanger and interfere with the proper use of that area as a place to live and the support of business, tourism and recreation activities, to the detriment of public health, safety, morals and general welfare.”

For more information on how to provide your own feedback to the Texas Legislature, visit www.kcdems.us

Laura Bray is Chair of the Kendall County Democratic Party.