

Legislation we're watching

With the dust (mostly) settled from the midterm election, the Kendall County Democratic Party (KCDP) is pushing for enactment of a few bipartisan bills currently before the US Congress, before it adjourns in about six weeks. (The new Congress is sworn in on January 3.) We're also keeping an eye on bills currently being filed for next year's session of the Texas Legislature (TxLege), which runs January 10 through May 29.

US Congress, Electoral Count Act: This bill, filed by Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME) and supported by several Republican senators—including Mitch McConnell, would reform and modernize the outdated 1887 Electoral Count Act to ensure that electoral votes tallied by Congress accurately reflect each state's public vote for President. Among other things, the bill states that the constitutional role of the Vice President, as the presiding officer of the joint meeting of Congress, is solely ministerial and that he or she does not have any power to solely determine, accept, reject, or otherwise adjudicate disputes over Electors. According to former Treasury Sec-

retary Robert Reich, the bill also "would codify that state legislatures can't declare a 'failed election' and overturn results." This important bill will better protect our democracy.

US Congress, Respect for Marriage Act: According to an article in USA Today, this act "would guarantee federal recognition of any marriage between two people if the union was valid in the state where they married." This bill passed the Senate this past Tuesday. Now it moves to the House, "which approved a similar bill earlier this year with nearly 50 Republicans in support." The bill has wide bipartisan and popular support.

The national advocacy group Indivisible has a solid plan to address these two bills, and KCDP members and volunteers will be participating in those efforts to get them across the finish line. KCDP calls on our Senators and Representative to vote for both bills.

Here's what has our attention at TxLege:

• **Fully Funding Public Education, and Not Vouchers:** As I stated in my November 19 column, most rural



residents strongly oppose any form of vouchers, which siphon off funds from public schools. Only Democrats are committed to fully funding public education and paying teachers what they deserve.

According to an article in the Texas Tribune, "With few private schools in rural regions, the school choice pitch there has mostly fallen flat. Anything that could potentially take away money from public schools usually draws a big no from rural lawmakers... School choice supporters also face opposition from the State Board of Education, the 15-member Republican-controlled board that dictates what Texas' public schoolchildren learn. On Nov. 18, the board voted to reject diverting tax dollars from public schools to private and religious schools." Nevertheless, the Governor, Lt. Governor, and TxLege leadership have identified vouchers as a top legislative priority. KCDP will advocate

strongly for fully funding public education and against vouchers.

• **Enacting Gun Safety Measures:** According to an article in the Texas Tribune, "Following the school shooting in Uvalde, Texas legislators filed a flurry of bills aimed at limiting who can possess firearms, where they can be purchased and increasing accountability around gun purchases." KCDP will advocate for the passage of these and other gun safety measures.

• **Expanding Medicaid:** Democrats have either pre-filed or plan to file bills to expand Medicaid in Texas, which is one of only eleven states that hasn't expanded the program. According to an article on the State of Reform website, Rep. Julie Johnson (D-Carrollton) said, "I was very grateful to the nine [Republican House members] that did [express support in 2021] because they saw the benefit to their community. A lot [of them] represent rural Texas." An article on the Texas Tribune stated, "More than two-thirds of Texans support Medicaid expansion... The federal government would pick up 90% of the cost. Research showed

that by rejecting Medicaid expansion, Texas was turning its back on more than \$5 billion in federal money every year."

• **Discrimination against the LGBTQ+ Community:** KCDP will strongly fight any bills that further discriminate against or take away rights from the LGBTQ+ community, especially transgender children. Many such bills have already been pre-filed, including one that would criminalize gender-affirming care. Per the Texas Tribune, "Gender-affirming care is recommended by all major medical associations to treat gender dysphoria, the distress someone can feel when their physical presentation does not align with their gender identity."

With a strong Republican majority in both houses of TxLege, any bills filed by Democrats will have an uphill battle, to say the least. But KCDP plans to fight for them all the same.

We welcome all who want to build a better Texas. For more information on how to get involved, call our office at 830-331-1243 or visit www.kcdems.us

Laura Bray is Chair of the Kendall County Democratic Party.