

Here is our special session agenda

A special session of the Texas Legislature began last week. In light of the governor's specified agenda, we at the Kendall County Democratic Party submit our own agenda – one that's designed to make Kendall County and Texas better and stronger and one that will help Texans who need it the most.

- Providing counties more authority to control development:

House Bill 3883, which would have provided Kendall County more approval authority over development in non-incorporated areas, died in committee during the regular session. As our population continues to explode, situations with irresponsible development will continue to crop up.

Under current law, neither residents nor the commissioners court have any legal recourse to prevent these developments or modify them to make them more compatible with our water resources and environmental concerns. The legislature must provide counties with this ability.

- Fixing our broken power grid:

According to a recent story on Bloomberg News, "Gas sellers reaped an \$11 billion windfall during the Texas freeze."

Unless the legislature takes more robust action than it did in the regular session, consumers may get stuck with that bill. And the issues that created the widespread power outages still exist. We call on the legislature to take stronger steps to make our electrical grid more resilient. Nobody wants a repeat of what happened in February – except those who got rich off it.

- Making voting easier:

According to the Brennan Center for Justice, "With a status quo that leaves aside many voters, we are constrained in our ability to realize our vision of a government of, by and for the people. Something must change."

We call on the legislature to enact policies that allow everyone to vote by mail (already a success with excellent security in states like Colorado and Utah), allow



online voter registration, allow drive-through voting and permit same-day voter registration, all of which will improve access to the polls. In a recent editorial in the Dallas Morning News, Republican Joe Straus stated, "Texas leaders would be wise to avoid restrictions on voting access, new barriers for voters with disabilities and other ideas that lead to insurmountable partisan disagreement."

- Expanding access to the COVID-19 vaccine:

According to the Texas Tribune, "More than 40 percent of Texans are fully vaccinated, but the rate of shots administered has slowed."

The New England Journal of Medicine states that "Given flagging vaccination rates and the societal imperative to end the pandemic, financial incentives hold appeal, especially if an incentive-based program were focused on groups with persistently low vaccination rates."

The legislature should develop strategies to get to the 80 percent vaccination rate that experts say is needed to achieve herd immunity.

- Expanding Medicaid:

This would provide coverage to over a million currently uninsured Texans. Such an expansion would be 90 percent funded by the federal government.

In an editorial in the Austin American-Statesman in February, Republican State Rep. Lyle Larsen said, "We are forgoing 90 percent of federal matching funds – this is money Texans have already paid to the federal government that we are not accessing."

- Ensuring the rights of the LGBTQ+ community:

Several bills reducing the rights of the LGBTQ community were defeated or died in the regular session. Unfortunately, many of those same bills have been reintroduced in the special session.

According to Equality Texas, "70 percent of Texans support nondiscrimination protections for the LGBTQ+ community."

We call on the legislature to strengthen these protections.

- Establishing a non-partisan commission to conduct redistricting:

The League of Women Voters says, "Redistricting commissions can help ensure an ethical and transparent process. ... Independent redistricting commissions and bi-partisan redistricting commissions allow voter residents to be directly involved in the map drawing process."

Several states already use such commissions. We call on the legislature to establish such a commission for this year's redistricting effort.

- Increasing funding for public education and directing schools to teach the truth about science, climate change and history:

Our public schools remain underfunded, and our teachers are not properly compensated. Climate change deserves to be a focal point of any science curriculum. Some aspects of American and Texas history may not be pretty, but facts are facts. As the greatest democracy ever constructed, we have much to be proud of and should not be afraid to understand and confront the elements in our past that were not in keeping with our current ideals.

- Expanding access to reproductive healthcare:

The Legislature should enact policies to ensure women have access to full reproductive health care services. That access requires adequate state funding and broad availability of birth control, especially for low-income women.

To learn more about how to get involved, visit www.kcdems.us.

Laura Bray is the chair of the Kendall County Democratic Party.