

Statewide offices: Land commissioner

With the November election only 10 weeks away, I'll spend my next few columns describing the important statewide races on the ticket and the Democratic vision for that office. First up: the Texas land commissioner.

This elected official oversees the General Land Office. Established in 1836, it's the oldest state agency in Texas. The main role of the TLC is to oversee Texas' 13 million acres of public lands – using the revenue streams from these lands to invest in the Texas Permanent School Fund.

The GLO contributes up to \$600 million annually to the PSF, which funds K-12 public education in Texas. At \$48 billion, the PSF is the largest educational endowment in the United States, yet Texas ranks near the bottom of the list in per-pupil education funding. While the fund has more than tripled over the last 30 years, the inflation-adjusted contribution to public schools by the fund has remained the same at about \$1.2 billion.

The GLO's contributions to the PSF reduce the burden on individuals' contributions to public education through property taxes. Democrats believe that we must improve the performance and increase the amount we distribute to K-12 education – further reducing the burden on taxpayers and giving our kids the best education possible.

The majority of the revenue from those PSF lands is from oil and gas leases. But the lack of diversification in energy production and use of lands will eventually lower revenue for public schools over time.

Currently, only 0.003 percent of revenue created on GLO-managed lands is from renewable energy. Democrats will expand that energy portfolio to secure a source of stable, long-term funding for the GLO's



contribution to the PSF. This expansion would include wind, solar, geothermal, kinetic wave energy and offshore wind.

Democrats would also work to cap flaring, reduce venting, recycle and reuse water and establish winterization protocols on all new and existing oil and gas leases.

The GLO also oversees about 1 million acres of uplands and 4 million acres of submerged lands – leasing state lands for farming, grazing, hunting, timber production and recreational purposes. The land is the cornerstone of Texas' vibrant and functioning ecosystem. It filters air and water pollutants, minimizes the impact of increasing natural disasters through flood mitigation, and provides wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities and economic benefits.

Democrats will work to ensure the GLO is responsibly managing public lands while minimizing the impact of natural disasters and combating climate change through sustainable agricultural and wildlife management practices, such as carbon sequestration.

The GLO can also have a profound impact on CO2 emissions. Texas emits nearly two times more carbon than any other state. Texas is the number one carbon dioxide emitter in the nation and ranks ninth in per-capita carbon dioxide emissions.

We see the effects of climate change every day: extreme heat, drought, more wildfires, unpredictable weather patterns,

increased hurricanes and tornadoes and a decrease in crop yields. Being unprepared for more extreme weather will lead to loss of life, livelihoods and economic damage.

Democrats will work to ensure that Texas takes advantage of a federal tax credit that would allow the state to generate revenue for public schools by safely and permanently storing 700 years' worth of industrial CO2 emissions in our submerged lands off the Texas coast. Democrats would also focus on producing energy on public lands with the environment in mind – preventing flaring, reducing venting and incentivizing the recycling and reuse of produced water on new oil and gas leases.

The GLO is also responsible for distributing federal disaster relief funds. Democrats will make sure that the GLO will equitably help families across Texas, not play politics with billions of dollars in desperately needed mitigation and relief funds. Democrats will prioritize Texans' lives and livelihoods and establish a plan to put emergency federal funds to work in a matter of months – not years – after a natural disaster.

The office is also responsible for overseeing the Veterans Land Board, investing in coastal resiliency and overseeing the design and restoration of the Alamo church and Long Barracks in San Antonio.

The last day to register to vote in the November election is Oct. 11. For more information on statewide offices or to register to vote, call our office at 830-331-1243 or visit www.kedems.us

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