



Texans for Fiscal Responsibility 2020 Texas Senate Questionnaire

INTRODUCTION

Texans for Fiscal Responsibility will make endorsements during the **2020 primary and general elections**. We do not always endorse a candidate in every race where one is sought.

To be considered for an endorsement, candidates must apply for an interview by submitting a completed questionnaire. Interviews are not guaranteed.

The deadline for submission is Friday, December 13. However, interview appointments are scheduled in the order questionnaires are received.

Our endorsement of a candidate is based on our belief that the candidate will adhere to the best practices and highest principles of ethics, limited government, and stewardship of the taxpayers' resources.

Our endorsement of any particular candidate does not represent a criticism of any other candidate in the race. Men and women of goodwill can—and often will—disagree on the solutions to the issues facing Texas; that debate is healthy and necessary in a constitutional republic.

Political races are important because they affect and influence public policy. We pursue policy outcomes that are practical in the context of protecting taxpayers, stewarding the people's resources, limiting the size and scope of government, promoting individual liberty, encouraging freedom in the marketplace, and meeting public needs with greater efficiency, transparency, and accountability.

We welcome your comments, questions and thoughts on these and other issues. Additional pages—although optional—are welcome and may be attached to the document.

Topics covered in the questionnaire:

- Budget and Tax Reform
 - Corporate Welfare
 - Election Integrity
 - First Amendment Protections
 - Higher Education
 - K–12 Education
 - Local Government
 - Pro-Citizen Ethics Reform
 - Free Markets
 - Property Rights
 - Government Operation
 - State Sovereignty
 - Role of Government
 - Leadership
-

Budget & Tax Reform

1. When is it appropriate to raise taxes or fees? Explain.

2. To control government spending at the state and local level, Texas should strengthen the current constitutional spending limit and set it as the sum of inflation and population-growth.

Agree: _____ Disagree: _____

Clarifying/related issues.

A. Such a spending limit should only be exceeded at the **state level** by a 3/4 super-majority, recorded vote of both bodies, and the approval of the governor.

Agree: _____ Disagree: _____

B. Such a spending limit should only be exceeded at the **local level** through a majority vote in an election held on one of the state's uniform election dates.

Support: _____ Oppose: _____

3. When is it appropriate for the Texas Legislature to appropriate funds out of the Economic Stabilization Fund, also known as the Rainy-Day Fund?

4. Please name a specific state program, commission, or agency that should be cut or eliminated. Why?

Initials: _____

5. Will you oppose every effort to increase the **overall** tax burden in Texas?

Yes: _____ No: _____

6. Would you support or oppose a constitutional amendment to require a three-fourths vote of the Texas Legislature before state taxes could be raised?

Support: _____ Oppose: _____

7. The "gross margins tax" on Texas businesses, which has been labeled a business income tax by the Federal Accounting Standards Board, should be eliminated.

Agree: _____ Disagree: _____

8. Some specific state taxes and fees are diverted from their intended purpose. A levy should either be used for its intended purpose or be abolished.

Agree: _____ Disagree: _____

9. Texans pay some of the highest property taxes in the nation. The 86th Texas Legislature passed SB 2, which caps the amount local governments can raise taxes without voter approval. What other measures are needed?

10. When should local governments be allowed to raise taxes without voter approval?

Initials: _____

11. Would you support or oppose limiting the revenue growth that could be generated from any single piece of property year-over-year?

Support: _____ Oppose: _____

12. The property tax system is an inefficient system of raising revenue and uniquely harmful to Texans' property rights. That system should be abolished.

Agree: _____ Disagree: _____

Clarifying/related issues.

A. If you agree, how can that be accomplished?

B. If you disagree, why?

C. Would you support or oppose a tax "swap" that was a tradeoff between property tax relief to sales tax increase? Why?

13. "Fees" that generate more revenue than is required to administer their related programs are, in fact, taxes. Such fees should be lowered or abolished.

Agree: _____ Disagree: _____

Corporate Welfare

14. What is the role of government when it comes to facilitating economic development?

15. Some of the most controversial and fastest growing forms of government subsidization of business are tax abatements through which local governments offer tax incentives to a business to move to that area. Should they be continued? Why?

16. The state government operates a number of corporate handout programs such as the Texas Enterprise Fund, Texas Moving Image Industry Incentive Program, and the Major Events Trust Fund. Each of these programs provides taxpayer dollars to private businesses under the auspices of convincing them to come to Texas or expand their operations here. Do you support or oppose abolishing such programs?

Support: _____ Oppose: _____

17. Hotel Occupancy Taxes disproportionately impact Texans from outside the area that is taxed. As such, HOT tax increases are not a "local issue" and should be opposed, like other proposed tax increases.

Agree: _____ Disagree: _____

18. Some have proposed expanding regulated gambling, claiming it will generate new revenue for state government. Others note that states with greater levels of legalized gambling often have higher costs of government, and that expanded gambling leads to collusion between the government and gambling interests. Do you support or oppose expanding regulated gambling in Texas?

Support: _____ Oppose: _____

Election Integrity

19. Would you support or oppose a measure requiring all governmental entities offering bond proposals to make clear in the ballot language the following: what voters are deciding on, what the entity's current debt obligation is, and the additional tax increase expected if the bond were to pass?

Support: _____ Oppose: _____

20. Municipal and school board elections should allow for ballot declarations of party/independent affiliation.

Agree: _____ Disagree: _____

21. Voter participation keeps elected officials accountable and promotes good governance. In order to encourage voter participation, local elections for public office should be held on the same day as the state's uniform election date in November.

Agree: _____ Disagree: _____

22. Cities, counties, school boards, and other local taxing entities seeking to pass tax ratifications or bond packages should be required to set their elections on the same day as the state's uniform election date in November.

Agree: _____ Disagree: _____

23. In order to protect the private rights of association of party members, Texas should implement a closed primary system and allow the political parties to govern their own elections.

Agree: _____ Disagree: _____

24. Recent investigations have revealed significant abuse of the ballot-by-mail process by those who are attempting to rig Texas elections. How can the ballot-by-mail process be reformed and this criminal activity eliminated?

First Amendment Protections

25. In recent years, the Texas Ethics Commission has been weaponized and used against citizens who choose to petition their government. How can the TEC be reformed in order to protect the First Amendment rights of Texans?

26. Elected officials should be required to disclose every gift, over a nominal amount, they receive. This would serve as a more effective regulation of the practice of lobbying than any existing system.

Agree: _____

Disagree: _____

Higher Education Reform

27. Since the Texas Legislature “de-regulated” tuition in 2003, costs to Texas families have sky-rocketed. Lawmakers should take back their authority to set tuition rates and freeze them at their current rates.

Agree: _____

Disagree: _____

28. Mandatory tuition set-asides, which divert at least 15% of each student’s tuition to fund scholarships for other students, are a form of wealth redistribution and should be repealed.

Agree: _____

Disagree: _____

29. Do you support or oppose the state’s current policy of giving in-state tuition rates to illegal aliens who graduate from Texas high schools?

Support: _____

Oppose: _____

K-12 Education Reform

30. School administrators always clamor for taxpayers to spend more money on education, yet every time additional funds are appropriated, outcomes remain relatively static. What can be done to improve educational outcomes for students without simply “throwing money at the problem?”

31. When it comes to educational freedom in education, Texas lags far behind many other states. What steps can be taken to expand educational opportunities for Texas children while preserving parental rights?

32. Texas’ “Robin Hood” system was created in an effort to provide equal funding to public schools across the state. However, the system is broken for everyone, over taxes taxpayers in districts whose money is being used disproportionately to educate students in far away districts, and should be abolished.

Agree: _____ Disagree: _____

33. For decades, the school property tax that funds “maintenance and operations” has been causing troubles for taxpayers — skyrocketing burdens, lawsuits and confusion. This tax, which is the largest portion on taxpayers’ property tax bills, should be abolished.

Agree: _____ Disagree: _____

34. A component of compensation for teachers and principals should be based on merit, instead of only taking seniority or tenure into account.

Agree: _____ Disagree: _____

35. I believe a lack of funding from the state is the primary reason for lower educational outcomes compared to other states and nations.

Agree: _____ Disagree: _____

36. School boards seeking passage of a bond proposal should be required to list unrelated projects as separate propositions on the ballot for voters to individually consider.

Agree _____ Disagree _____

Local Government

37. In Texas cities such as Dallas and Houston, public employee pensions are cemented in state law. Under such an arrangement, local taxpayers are responsible for the plans' costs, but have no power to reform them. State lawmakers should return control of local government and pensions back to locally elected officials and voters.

Agree: _____ Disagree: _____

38. While Texans do have the ability to petition local governments, local politicians, bureaucrats, and their tax-funded lawyers use unethical and illegal tactics to stifle voter opposition. The Texas Legislature should reform existing petition laws to ease citizens' abilities to seek redress from their local governments.

Agree: _____ Disagree: _____

39. Local government entities should be allowed to use non-traditional debt instruments to finance projects such as capital appreciation bonds that delay or accrue principal or interest payments over time and do not have fixed interest obligations and amortization schedules.

Agree: _____ Disagree: _____

40. Local government entities should be prohibited from using public funds to pay dues or fees to third party organizations that lobby members of the Texas Legislature.

Agree: _____ Disagree: _____

41. Local government entities should be prohibited from granting taxpayer funds to non-profit organizations, including chambers of commerce or Planned Parenthood.

Agree: _____ Disagree: _____

Pro-Citizen Ethics Reform

42. Texans have a right to know if and when their elected officials are profiting off of government contracts. Elected officials at all levels of government should be required to disclose contracts with governmental entities.

Agree: _____ Disagree: _____

43. Despite a clear conflict of interest, Texas law does not prohibit elected officials from working as lobbyists while holding elected office. Should you be elected, will you pledge to not lobby while holding elected office?

Yes: _____ No: _____

44. Lobbying while holding elected office is inherently problematic and the practice should be illegal.

Agree: _____ Disagree: _____

45. Due to an antiquated formula in the law, lobbyists are allowed to shower elected officials with food, beverages, and gifts while effectively skirting reporting requirements. This practice should be curtailed and legislators should be required to disclose all gifts above a nominal amount.

Agree: _____ Disagree: _____

46. Some attorneys who serve in public office make money on the side through legal referral fees and through fees earned as counsel for the issuance of government bonds. Allowing public officials to earn these types of fees has been a recipe for bribery scandals in other states and should be prohibited in Texas.

Agree: _____ Disagree: _____

47. The Texas Legislature was intended to be composed of citizens who would serve their communities and their state, then return to private life under the laws they approved. As such, pensions for legislators should be abolished entirely.

Agree: _____ Disagree: _____

48. What other ways can Texas strengthen its ethics laws so that lawmakers are held to a higher standard and citizens can have faith in their government?

Promoting Free Markets

49. Despite Texas' pro-business reputation, the heavy hand of government is present in virtually all taxpayers' economic lives. What are some residual or oppressive regulations imposed at the state level you believe should be repealed?

50. Across the nation, one in four workers are now required to have a government license in order to perform their job, and Texas is no different. When should the government require an occupational license? Can you identify any occupation licenses that should be repealed?

51. Governmental regulations are often duplicative, useless rules that, while advanced with good intentions, result in tremendous costs for businesses and consumers. The Texas Legislature should actively look to limit new regulations from being promulgated and thoroughly review existing regulations for opportunities to repeal them.

Agree: _____

Disagree: _____

Property Rights

52. What entities should be allowed to use eminent domain? For what purposes?

53. Civil asset forfeiture was formed with the intent of disrupting illicit activity by removing valuable assets from criminals, but has been perverted into a revenue stream for some law enforcement agencies. The Texas Legislature should require a criminal conviction before citizens' property can be permanently seized.

Agree: _____ Disagree: _____

Government Operation

54. In order to increase savings to taxpayers, state agencies should be allowed to implement more design-build contracts.

Agree: _____ Disagree: _____

55. What role should toll roads and public-private partnerships play in highway construction?

56. What role should regional "councils of governments" play in transportation planning and other public policy?

57. The current defined-benefit format of many municipal employee pensions is proving unsustainable. Would you support or oppose a transition for public employee pensions to a defined contribution formula?

Support: _____ Oppose: _____

State Sovereignty

58. What should the state legislature's role be in protecting the liberty of local citizens against the mandates of political subdivisions?

59. Mandates from Washington, DC, have begun driving the state budget, mainly through Medicaid and other health care spending. What efforts will you support to bring about greater state and individual control in health care decision-making?

60. "Local control" is a policy-making tool, and not an over-arching conservative principle.

Agree: _____ Disagree: _____

61. Would you support or oppose a constitutional amendment to allow local governments to sue the state to prevent the imposition of laws deemed to be "unfunded mandates?"

Support: _____ Oppose: _____

62. What should the legislature do to compel local governments to comply with state and federal laws, such as laws relating to immigration?

63. Do you support or oppose an Article V Convention of States in order to propose constitutional amendments that would rein in the federal government?

Support: _____ Oppose: _____

Role of Government

64. Would you support or oppose a state law prohibiting public employees from automatically deducting union dues from public employees' paychecks?

Support: _____ Oppose: _____

65. Local governments and state agencies should be required to disclose any tax funds they spend on lobbyist or lobbying activities.

Initials: _____

Agree: _____

Disagree: _____

66. Tax-funded entities, including state agencies, public universities, and local governments, should be prohibited from spending tax funds to employ lobbyists.

Agree: _____

Disagree: _____

Legislative Leadership

67. *What must the Texas Legislature accomplish for the 87th session to be considered a success?*

Initials: _____

Please **sign** the completed questionnaire and return all pages as quickly as possible to be considered for an endorsement interview. **Note:** We will use this information to contact you to schedule an interview should you be selected. Please verify all fields are correct.

Please Print

| | |
|------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| Full Name: | Phone: |
| Campaign Address: | |
| Email: | |
| Campaign Website: | |
| Office Sought (District #): | General Consultant: Campaign Manager: |
| Voting History (circle all that apply): | |
| GOP Primary: 2018 2016 2014 2012 2010 2008 2006 2004 | |
| DEM Primary: 2018 2016 2014 2012 2010 2008 2006 2004 | |
| General: 2018 2016 2014 2012 2010 2008 2006 2004 | |

Signature of Candidate

Date

Please submit your completed questionnaire to endorsement@empowertexans.com as one PDF file. Separate files will not be accepted.

Note: The deadline for submission is Friday, December 13.