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POLL: TEXAS VOTERS ARE MORE CONCERNED ABOUT THE FUTURE AND WANT THE TEXAS LEGISLATURE TO ACT TODAY

Widespread support for legislative action to address education, health and workforce challenges highlighted by the coronavirus pandemic

[AUSTIN, TEXAS, January 26, 2021] As the work of the new legislative session begins, far more Texans than a year ago are concerned about the future, and public confidence in state government has declined considerably.

Those are key findings of a new poll from Texas 2036, a nonprofit organization focused on long-term, data-driven efforts to fortify the state's future as Texas approaches its bicentennial in 15 years. The poll also shows that after nearly a year of the COVID-19 pandemic, far fewer Texans rate the state's ability to solve problems as "good" or "excellent," and 4-in-5 say the legislature needs to take action this year to address the challenges Texas now faces.

"These numbers make clear that across age groups, ethnicities and political parties, Texans want their leaders to take action on the issues that will shape our future," said Margaret Spellings, president and CEO of Texas 2036 and the former U.S. Secretary of Education. "Legislators are in session right now — this is a critical opportunity to act, and they must not miss it."

The poll of registered Texas voters revealed significant shifts from a poll that the organization conducted of registered voters for Texas 2036 in January of last year:

- The percentage of voters who are extremely or very concerned about the future of Texas increased from 31% in January 2020 to 47% in January 2021. Overall, 87% are concerned about the future of Texas.
- Prior to the pandemic, 50% of Texas voters rated the Texas state government's ability to solve problems and serve the needs of its residents as "good" or "excellent," compared to 36% after the pandemic. The economy was cited as the primary reason voters rated state government positively.
- "Politics, government and civility" was cited as the number one issue Texas needs to address to be successful 15 years from now, followed by "economy, jobs and trade" and "education." "Immigration and the border," which topped the list a year ago, is now tied for fourth place with various wedge and social issues.

- In 2020, 34 percent of Texans felt they were better off than they had been the year before, compared to 14 percent who felt they were worse off. In 2021, those levels are nearly even, with 22 percent believing they are better off and 21 percent believing they are worse off.

“This poll reveals stark concerns about core state functions like education and workforce, as well as tragic hurdles Texans are experiencing to health care access,” said A.J. Rodriguez, Texas 2036’s executive vice president. “Texas remains the best place to live and work in the country — these results show that Texans expect their leaders to take action to keep it that way.”

The poll also found particular concern around issues such as education, workforce and health care:

- Seventy-nine percent of Texans said they were “extremely concerned” or “very concerned” about testing results showing that even before the pandemic, only 3-in-10 Texas fourth graders could read at grade level.
- Thirty-four percent — including 57% of women with children — said they or someone in their household had postponed or skipped medical treatment or surgery out of fear about the final medical costs.
- Nearly three-fourths support cost-effective Medicaid changes through which the state could draw down \$4 billion in federal tax dollars and cover another 1 million people through an investment of just \$1 per person per year.
- And a range of questions about whether Texas should better align high school, college and workforce training classes with needs and openings in the job market garnered support of 75% to 91% of voters.

The poll was conducted by Basalice & Associates, Inc. a prestigious Texas polling firm. It surveyed 1,021 Texas voters via cell phones, land lines and the Internet. The margin of error for the results is +/- 3.1 percent at the .95 confidence level.

It revealed widespread support for legislation and policy changes that will help strengthen the Texas economy and set a groundwork for a thriving future:

- 64% of voters support Texas making Medicaid or free government health insurance available to adults with no children who earn \$17,609, which is equivalent to 138% of the Federal Poverty Level, the eligibility threshold set by the federal government for Texas to receive billions of dollars in enhanced federal funding (today, able-bodied childless adults are ineligible for Medicaid in Texas.)
- 86 percent support changes that ensure more of the Medicaid tax dollars that Texas sends to the federal government are actually spent in Texas.
- More than two-thirds of Texans believe the state should use all available tools, including standardized tests, to address learning loss caused by the pandemic.

- 79 percent support better teacher training to improve fourth grade reading levels, and 84 percent support high-quality tutoring to close COVID learning gaps.
- 91 percent believe Texas students need access to the most up-to-date information on jobs and wages so students can make informed decisions about their higher education and colleges can help students get good jobs.
- 84 percent agree that because a high school diploma usually isn't enough to get a good, well-paying job, the state needs to better orient education programs, degree plans and certifications toward jobs of the future.
- 91 percent support modernizing and increasing health care options in rural areas where there is a shortage of doctors, hospitals and clinics.
- 83 percent support market reforms and financial incentives to bring broadband to low-income and rural areas.
- And 86 percent say state and local governments should use better technology to avoid wasting taxpayer dollars and better serve Texans.

By adopting these goals and policy prescriptions, the legislature can prioritize precious current and future state dollars to ensure that Texas receives the greatest return — and Texans experience the greatest benefit — from taxpayers' investment.

"Texas is the greatest state in the country. These results show widespread support for state actions that can make Texas even greater," said Tom Luce, founder and chairman of Texas 2036 and a longtime civic leader in the state. "This isn't the time to rest on our laurels or to be complacent. We've got to act to protect the things we value and ensure future generations can prosper and enjoy the benefits we have received."

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About Texas 2036:

Texas 2036 is a nonprofit organization building long-term, data-driven strategies to secure Texas' prosperity through our state's bicentennial and beyond. We offer non-partisan ideas and modern solutions that are grounded in research and data on issues that matter most to all Texans. For more information, visit www.texas2036.org.

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