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New Poll: Texans Concerned about the Future of Texas, Support Using Federal Funds for Critical Needs

[AUSTIN, TEXAS, September 14, 2021] In advance of next week's third special legislative session, a new poll shows Texas voters are increasingly concerned about the state's future — and they overwhelmingly want leaders to take advantage of billions of federal stimulus dollars coming to Texas.

The statewide voter poll, conducted by the nonprofit organization Texas 2036, shows a growing percentage of Texas voters believe state government is not solving problems or serving the needs of its residents.

For the first time in the six years the question has been asked, more Texas voters (26%) said they feel financially worse off than they did the year before; just 20% said they believe they are better off. In addition, a majority of Texas voters (52%) say that the State of Texas is worse off than it was this time last year, and only 13% of voters believe the State of Texas is headed in a better direction than last year.

Further, 92% of Texas voters expressed concern about the state's future, with 58% saying that they are very or extremely concerned.

The poll's findings show Texas voters clearly support state actions to solve long-term challenges and address issues driving public concern. An influx of nearly \$16 billion in federal stimulus money could underwrite such solutions — and, the poll demonstrates, most Texans believe it should.

By overwhelming majorities, Texas voters endorsed the use of federal COVID-19 relief money for large-scale projects that would improve life in Texas today and create a firmer foundation for the state's future economic growth. Legislators will have the opportunity to appropriate those funds when the Texas Legislature convenes on Sept. 20.

Supported uses include:

- Water projects to improve both the cleanliness of drinking water and access to water during droughts (88% favor);

- Upgrades to the state’s electrical grid and generation capacity, including weatherization, new energy technologies, and transmission improvements (83% favor);
- Broadband and emergency communications infrastructure, which would increase access to the internet in rural and underserved areas and enhance disaster response capabilities (81% favor);
- Improvements to the state’s cybersecurity and technology systems, which would improve customer service and protect public data (79% favor);
- Improved flood-prevention capabilities (79% favor)
- The creation of new state parks and improvements to existing state parks (68% favor); and
- Replenishing the state’s unemployment trust fund which will help prevent the need to increase taxes on employers in the future (58% favor).

According to a recent Texas 2036 analysis, \$12.2 billion of the \$15.8 billion in available funds can be spent with relatively few federal limits or restrictions. The remaining amounts can be spent on specific allowable uses under federal law, which can include water, broadband, and COVID-19 public health responses.

“This poll shows that Texans are still one people — far more binds us than divides us,” said Margaret Spellings, President and CEO of Texas 2036 and the former U.S. Secretary of Education. “Most of us share the same aspirations, want to take advantage of the same opportunities, and recognize the challenges that Texas will have to overcome to create a thriving economy.

“The legislature can help address those concerns about the future — and capitalize on the powerful opportunities we now face — by appropriating federal COVID relief funds in an ambitious, responsible, far-sighted way.”

Texas 2036 has released several in-depth analyses regarding federal stimulus funding and how it can best be used. Specifically, the organization has recommended that appropriators:

- **Target Long-Term Solutions** that will positively impact our state for decades, spur economic growth, and reduce future costs.
- **Seek Financial Sustainability** by focusing on one-time costs or expenses that can be covered through long-term savings.
- **Coordinate Efforts to Maximize Impact** by working with cities, counties, school districts, businesses, and the philanthropic community to align strategies and address systemic problems.

“The state has nearly \$16 billion in relief funding to spend — and even after meeting the necessary demands of the ongoing pandemic, most expect there to be billions left for the

state to appropriate,” said A.J. Rodriguez, Executive Vice President of Texas 2036. “State and local governments – which have billions more – can work together to advance toward a unified vision. Texans can achieve the goals that most of its people share, and we can take on big challenges in ways that leave the state better positioned to address future issues.”

Tom Luce, a longtime civic leader in Texas who founded and chairs Texas 2036, said leaders and elected officials need to take every opportunity to create the physical, financial, and human infrastructure that will allow Texas to thrive in the future as it has in the past.

“These stimulus dollars represent the biggest opportunity we’ve seen in some time to create the same sort of groundwork for our children and grandchildren that our parents and grandparents created for us,” Luce said. “Texans have so much in common, and we’re still moving together into the same future. Let’s work together in this special legislative session to make that future a better one.”

The Texas 2036 Texas Voter Poll was conducted on August 24-29, 2021. The poll surveyed 1,001 registered voters, with a margin of error of $\pm 3.1\%$. The distribution of interviews conducted was 43% by cell phone, 23% by landline and 34% through the web.

To view the poll results, visit www.texas2036.org/poll.

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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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