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TEXAS VOTERS ALARMED BY LOW READING SCORES, ACCESS TO JOBS, INCREASING CRIME, OTHER CLOSE-TO-HOME PROBLEMS

Widespread concern for the future of Texas aligns with widespread support for key policy solutions

[AUSTIN, TX, February 10, 2022] With the March 1 primaries and November elections on the horizon, a new statewide poll shows Texas voters broadly agree on a range of issues that affect them as parents, homeowners, business owners, and employees, while sharing widespread concern about the future of Texas. According to Texas 2036's 4th Texas Voter Poll:

- 79% of Texas voters are extremely or very concerned about Texas elementary school students' low reading scores, with almost half (45%) of Texas voters expressing extreme concern.
- 62% are very or extremely concerned that the state's \$100 billion yearly investment in education and workforce doesn't lead to well-paying jobs.
- 59% are extremely or very concerned about the historic backlog of criminal cases in Texas courts, and more than half (55%) are extremely or very concerned that more than one-quarter of Texas police officers who receive a dishonorable discharge get rehired by another law enforcement agency.
- Almost half of Texas voters (47%) believe crime has increased in their community since last year.

Despite statewide headlines that suggest deep divisions within the electorate, the 4th Texas Voter Poll shows that many of Texas voters' concerns cross partisan, racial, and economic lines. The findings also demonstrate strong demand across the state for common-sense, bipartisan solutions to critical issues linked to our future prosperity.

"For our state to be the best place to live and work, we must take a hard look at this frank assessment of where voters think we are today across a wide range of issues and develop strategies that will move our state forward," said Margaret Spellings, president and CEO of Texas 2036.

"We cannot afford to allow voters' concerns about Texas' future to fester and pessimism to take hold. If we are to carry on the legacy of success we have inherited, we must seize this moment to bring people and businesses together in support of policies that can address these fundamental issues," Spellings said.

The survey polled 1,001 registered voters between Jan. 19 and 26 about their attitudes towards the present and future of Texas and their concerns about issues facing the state. It has a margin of error of $\pm 3.1\%$. The interviews were conducted via cell phone (44%), landline (21%), and online (34%).

With inflation continuing at historic levels, Texas voters differed about which goods and services they were most worried about increasing in cost:

- 22% were most worried about the rising prices of food and consumer goods, driven by 35 to 44-year-old voters, West Texas markets, and those making \$75,000-\$119,999.
- 15% were most worried about rising healthcare prices, driven by younger voters, those living in Houston, and Hispanic voters.
- 15% were most worried most about rising utility or gas prices, driven by 55–64-year-old voters and East Texas voters.
- 13% were most worried about rising property taxes, driven by 45–54 year-old voters and those making \$120,000 or more per year.
- 10% were most worried about rising housing or rent payments, driven by 18-44-year-olds, Black voters, renters, and those living in Central Texas.

Voters' specific concerns about education, jobs, and crime are driving deeper worries about Texas, with 90 percent of respondents saying they are concerned about the future of the state. Specifically:

- 55% of Texans say they are very or extremely concerned about the future of the state — significantly up from 31% before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic in January 2020.
- Another 35% said they are somewhat concerned about the future of the state, which means 90% of Texas voters are concerned about the future.
- 61% of respondents say state government is doing just a fair or a poor job of solving problems and serving their needs.
- The biggest driver of that disapproval of state government is frustration over the pandemic response (19% of those rating state government as fair or poor).

In addition, fewer than half of Texans (43%) believe Texas will be better off 20 years from now than it was 20 years ago. Of that group, less than half (41%) think children will have better opportunities than previous generations have had.

70% of Texas voters said they trusted their local police and law enforcement to handle criminal and public safety issues.

This trust in police was driven by age and increased with each older age group that was surveyed. Geographically, voters in largely rural areas in East Texas and West Texas indicated the highest trust in police.

Just over half (56%) agreed that their local police and law enforcement are sufficiently staffed and equipped to handle crime and public safety, with voters in Austin, Waco and Bryan and urban-suburban voters older than 55 agreeing the least that police are sufficiently staffed.

Texas voters support a wide range of proposals to prepare for future success:

- 72% agree that Texas must accept and maximize the impact of federal infrastructure and COVID relief funding while ensuring the funds are spent wisely so as not to create a shortfall when they run out.

- 77% agree state leaders must set goals for our education and workforce systems that ensure Texans earn wages that are at least high enough to stay off all government benefits.
- 78% agree that Texans should authorize highly trained nurse practitioners to provide additional health care services in counties with a shortage of primary care physicians.

The results of this poll, combined with the results of our August 24-29, 2021, poll (N=1,001 respondents; margin of error: ± 3.1%), show an openness and interest by Texas voters to make changes to how we educate and equip Texas students with the skills they need to earn good-paying jobs in the future. Results from our poll from less than six months ago showed:

- 88% of Texas voters agreed Texas should allow all students – regardless of where they live – to take online advanced coursework, including 8th grade Algebra and high school AP courses, offered by other school districts when those courses are not offered at their school.
- 82% of Texas voters agreed that if the public school that a student is zoned to fails to adequately educate the student, the family should have the option to enroll their child in another public school.
- 71% of Texas voters said we needed to care enough about how all students are learning to measure their progress with standardized testing.

The results should guide elected state officials to focus on voters’ priorities and maintain Texas’ historic leadership on economic issues, said A.J. Rodriguez, Executive Vice President of Texas 2036.

“Texas had two decades of rapid economic growth before the COVID-19 pandemic hit. We will be heading into the 2023 legislative session with resources and statewide talent to solve the problems voters have identified,” said Rodriguez. “We have a tremendous opportunity ahead of us, and this poll provides elected officials with reliable data on the issues voters see as most critical in preparing for our future.”

Tom Luce, the founder and chair of Texas 2036, said the poll findings provide a roadmap for state leaders and elected officials to create the physical, financial, and human infrastructure that will help Texas continue to thrive.

“Texas’ history is marked by ingenuity and drive, and I am confident that we are up to the challenge of preparing for our state’s future,” said Luce. “These poll results showcase the growing civic demand for action on the critical issues that matter to future generations of Texans.”

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

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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