



THE TORCH

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Abbott's Plan To "Rein in Skyrocketing Property Taxes"

Last January, Governor Greg Abbott unveiled a plan to "rein in skyrocketing property taxes" in Texas, looking to lay down a marker in a debate that dominated the legislative sessions last year and promises to remain front and center through the 2018 primaries and his re-election campaign. Abbott said, "Texans are fed up with property taxes being raised with impunity. They are tired of endless government spending while honest, hard-working people struggle just to keep up with paying their tax

bills." He expressed confidence that public sentiment will force lawmakers to act. "Frankly, I think it will be easy to get it through both the House and Senate," said Abbott. "Every member of the House is running for election right now ... [and] is hearing they need to do something to constrain property taxes in Texas, and so I know when everyone comes back to the Capitol, they understand they have to do something."

Gov. Abbott's 2018 property tax reform recommendations:

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~ VOTE! ~

City Council & School
Board Elections

Saturday, May 5
(early voting
begins April 23)

Grassroots influence
starts locally!

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1. RESTRAINING THE GROWTH OF PROPERTY TAXES

Establish a property tax revenue growth cap of 2.5 percent per year. Since 1997, total property tax collections in Texas have increased by 195 percent. Under the current system of property taxation, the tax burden is affected by property appraisals (which can increase up to ten percent per year), the tax rate, rollback elections, and debt. Like many other states, imposing revenue caps on local taxing entities would simplify the system and provide a straightforward method by which taxpayers are protected from excessive increases in their property tax burden. The revenue cap outlined in this plan complements and builds upon the rollback rate proposal (SB 1, 85S1) that was debated and passed by both the House and Senate during the most recent special session. A revenue cap and lower rollback rate could work in concert to strenuously protect against property tax increases.

Prohibit the Legislature from imposing unfunded mandates on its political subdivisions. Hand-in-hand with restraining the growth of the local property tax burden, the legislature should not impose unfunded mandates on political subdivisions. Under current state law, the Legislature is permitted to enact requirements or mandates on local governments that impose additional fiscal burdens on those governments.

The Legislature should be statutorily prohibited from imposing any mandates on local political subdivisions that impose additional costs without, at the same time, providing the appropriate funding—effectively prohibiting future unfunded mandates on political subdivisions. Such a proposal must go hand-in-hand with a property tax revenue cap because the state should not limit the ability of political subdivisions to raise revenue, while at the same time imposing additional fiscal burdens on those same subdivisions.

Require appraisal district directors to be locally-elected officials, such as incumbent county commissioners or city council or school board members, and prohibit employees of taxing entities from serving in any capacity with an appraisal district or appraisal review board, because this is an obvious conflict of interest. Under current law, appraisal district directors are appointed by taxing units within the county. SB 2 would have mandated that all members of each appraisal district must be elected officials in their respective counties, such as an incumbent county commissioner or city council member. This will bring greater accountability to the appraisal process. At the same time, in order to avoid conflicts of interest, non-elected employees of taxing entities should be prohibited from serving as appraisal district directors.

Improve the rights of property owners in the property tax appraisal process and the property tax appraisal protest process. In the 85th Legislature, the Texas House and Senate both passed Senate Bill 669 (Nelson, J.), which proposed comprehensive changes to the property tax appraisal review

process. The author's bill analysis explained that the bill's intent was to "increase fairness to taxpayers, expand taxpayer rights and participation in the process, and require more training for appraisal review board members and arbitrators." Most notably, the bill would have prohibited the appraised value of a property from being increased as a result of the property owner contesting the appraised value.

Improve property tax transparency by requiring the Office of the Comptroller to develop and maintain a comprehensive database of property tax rates and levies applicable to every property in the state. In the 85th Legislature, House Bill 15 (Bonnen, D.) would have required the Comptroller of Public Accounts to create and maintain a publicly accessible and searchable database detailing the property tax burden for each property in the state. The database would have been configured in such a way as to provide taxpayers with clear information about the impact of proposed rate increases, as well as the date and location of the public hearing at which the rate would be adopted.

2. LOCAL DEBT

Improve the transparency of local debt, prohibit debt from being used for non-specified purposes, and restrict the use of certificates of obligation. Texas has extremely high levels of local debt, some of which is not approved by local voters. According to the Texas Bond Review Board (BRB), local governments have over \$218 billion in outstanding bond debt. This translates to \$8,350 in local debt per capita—the second highest per capita local debt burden in the nation among the ten largest states. Local bond election ballots should be required to include the following information:

- the amount of debt currently outstanding,
- current debt service payments,
- current per capita debt obligations,
- the amount of new debt being proposed,
- estimated debt service for the new debt, and
- estimated per capita burden being proposed

Require a two-thirds supermajority vote to approve issuance of new local debt. The elections called to approve the issuance of new local debt should require a two-thirds supermajority vote in order for the new debt to be approved. Such supermajority requirements are not uncommon in other states. Indeed, among states that do have such a requirement, it varies from 55 percent to 67 percent of voter turnout.

SOURCE: gregabbott.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/PropertyTaxReform.pdf

NOTE: Passing the tax reforms will depend on the support of the House leadership, which won't be decided until next year. That is why it is crucial to select conservative state legislators in the May 22 run-off election. Governor Abbott's tax proposal will be a priority in the 2019 Legislative Session. TEF supports these proposals.

The Social Engineering Agenda Of “Social-Emotional Learning”

Have you ever heard of “Social emotional learning” (SEL)? It’s the new fad in public schools that has permeated education policy. Proponents of SEL claim that injecting the SEL agenda into all pre-K and K-12 curricula will cultivate in children the attitudes, feelings, and behaviors necessary for academic achievement, such as empathy and regulation of emotions.

Senior contributor to *The Federalist* Stella Morabito reveals how SEL is presented with a veneer of building kids’ self-confidence, but in reality is a form of groupthink through the regulation of personal interactions and relationships. The SEL model is taught in a way that requires total compliance with its methods, including the monitoring and tracking of students’ emotions. As Morabito points out, those pushing the SEL agenda have fallen into the trap of a collectivist utopianism that believes that if only the government were able to teach everyone the “right way” of thinking, everyone would be equally happy.

In reality, the SEL agenda enforces conformity, it invades privacy, and it undermines the influence of family and faith in a child’s life. Instead of promoting strong relationships, as SEL proponents claim, the SEL agenda serves more to isolate

children through a program of peer-modeled behavior modification that manipulates the human fear of being socially rejected. The SEL model makes almost no mention of the primary mediating institutions that form us as human beings: family, church, and civic institutions. Instead, it pushes conditioned emotional reflexes over open and honest discussion. The result of this misguided philosophy is readily apparent in how many in our society now behave—in a mush of emotional sensitivities that are easily “triggered” whenever a contrary opinion is encountered.

How can we respond and fight against this “social emotional learning” movement? Morabito suggests that freethinkers should strengthen their support networks and spread awareness through outreach to those who are not informed on the dangers of SEL. As French philosopher and sociologist Jacques Ellul said, “Propaganda ends where simple dialogue begins.”

SOURCE: Washington Update, Family Research Center, 2/7/18

NOTE: For more information on SEL, read “What Is So Great About Social-Emotional Learning?” by J. R. Wilson, Truth in American Education, 2/7/18

Meet Eagle Forum Chairman Anne Cori



Anne Schlafly Cori is Chairman of Eagle Forum and the daughter of Eagle Forum founder Phyllis Schlafly. Introduced to politics at an early age, Anne remembers, “My mother’s hobby was politics, and she always asked me to get involved in her hobby, including taking me to the Illinois state capital in the 1970s to lobby against the Equal Rights Amendment.”

Anne has a B.A. in history from Georgetown University and is a highly successful entrepreneur, going from gourmet chef to owner and proprietor of St. Louis’s premier cooking school and kitchen store, Kitchen Conservatory. Her professional interest in cooking went up a notch in the summer of 1988, the year she accompanied her mother to the Republican National Convention in New Orleans, where she was fascinated with the food and restaurants in the Crescent City. “I always loved messing around in the kitchen from an early age,” shares Anne. “Cooking is my lifelong hobby.”

From 2012 to 2016, Anne was a regular guest host for “Eagle Forum Live,” a weekly radio show on the Bott Radio Network. She has also emceed several Eagle Forum events over the years, including Eagle Council and Collegians. “Ten years ago, my mother asked me to join the board and help her. I am thrilled to continue her mission in Eagle Forum,” said Anne. “And I am honored to serve and work with the Eagles, many of whom have devoted decades to ‘saving our country,’ to quote my mother.”

She and her husband, Tom, live in Ladue, Missouri.

National Day of Prayer: May 3

The 2018 National Day of Prayer is Thursday, May 3, and the theme is, “Pray for America—UNITY,” based upon Ephesians 4:3: “*Making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*” The National Day of Prayer is an annual observance held on the first Thursday in May, inviting people of all faiths to pray for the nation. To find events in your area, go to nationaldayofprayer.com.

Federal Subsidies for Businesses to Hire Alien Grads

A recent analysis by the Center for Immigration Studies examined the Optional Practical Training (OPT) program, in which the American government pays American employers to discriminate against American workers. Started by the Bush administration, expanded by the Obama administration, and tolerated by the Trump administration, the program in 2017 diverted nearly \$2 billion from trust funds for the elderly to favor 240,000 alien college graduates over American college graduates. Under this subsidized foreign worker program, employers of foreign students who have a degree from a U.S. institution are given an 8.25 percent tax break if they hire an alien. The subsidies are extracted from the Social Security, Medicare, and Unemployment Insurance trust funds. David North, author of the analysis, said, “The unlawful OPT program was created by the executive branch to circumvent the H-1B visa quotas set by Congress. The program allows foreign students to remain in student visa status for years after graduation in order to supply cheap labor for employers, resulting in lost jobs for Americans and lost revenue for the trust funds for the elderly. The program needs to be terminated.”

SOURCE: Center for Immigration Studies, 2/27/18

Save the Planet by Not Having Kids?

What would you do to save the planet? Apparently some people are so distraught over the condition of the environment that they’re considering making the ultimate sacrifice and remaining childless. The *New York Times* recently interviewed people who plan to have fewer children, or to avoid childrearing altogether, because they think procreating is one of the costliest actions one can take environmentally. The movement to avoid childbearing to save the earth comes at a time when America could use more babies, not fewer. The birthrate has been falling for a decade and reached a record low of 1.8 babies per woman in 2016. That’s below the 2.1 babies per woman needed to keep a population from declining, and almost every country in the world is experiencing plummeting fertility rates. Instead of remaining childless, here’s an idea for those who want to do something noble for the planet: how about raising your children to be conscientious people who are good stewards of the environment.

SOURCE: Gary Bauer, “The Virtue-Signaling Of ‘Don’t-Have-Kids’ Environmentalists Is LUDICROUS,” dailycaller.com, 02/13/18

Erasing “Man” From Our Vocabulary

There is a growing contingent of overzealous cultural reformers who believe that excising the word “man” from the English language will instantly do away with inequality on every level of existence. The “me too” movement has been expanded from recognizing widespread sexual abuse to include all kinds of supposed discrimination, all of which is ascribed to the ubiquitous appearance of the word “man.” There are a few problems with this emasculation of English. First, it assumes that by excising the root, prefix, or suffix usage of “man” the perceived dominance of that sex would also be expunged. What a silly premise. This takes us to the next level, that by redefining a few words to mean something else it changes the physical world. Sorry to be the bearer of bad news, but it does no such thing. Calling a girl a boy doesn’t make her one, and removing “man” from the language won’t remove the physical and conceptual being from existence. Deleting the word “man” from language rejects God’s role of the Creator who made Man. It leaves creation up to whatever people fantasize.

SOURCE: A. Dru Kristenev, “Welcome to ...hattan,” Canada Free Press, 3/10/18

Quote of the Month

“The movement to legalize the illegal will never stop until the untold millions of undocumented democrats have the right to vote. Eternally shopping for the a perpetual majority so they can finish the work of fundamentally transforming America the Progressives agitate ceaselessly for amnesty.”

~ Dr. Robert Owens,
“DACA Will Never Be Enough,”
freedomoutpost.com, 2/8/18

Great American Quote

“Americans have the right and advantage if being armed—unlike the citizens of other countries whose governments are afraid to trust the people with arms.”

~ James Madison,
The Federalist Papers No. 46

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