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Backers want money put toward schools, health care, job training

By [Jason Embry](#)
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Texas should spend more on education, health care and job training, representatives of religious and other community groups said Friday as they converged on Austin to discuss spreading their message across the state.

About 800 supporters of the statewide Industrial Areas Foundation Network kicked off a two-day meeting by pledging to find 500,000 people to sign on to an agenda that contrasts sharply with the small-government mind-set shared by many at the Capitol.

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"Texas does not belong to Grover Norquist," said Gordon Roesch, pastor of St. Matthew's Lutheran Church in Fort Worth, referring to the Washington activist whose organization encourages lawmakers to oppose tax increases.

"There are two potential futures for Texas," Roesch said. "One is a Texas where there is no money and resources put into education and health care, and we have a Texas that is in a decline. Or there's a future in which we invest in our people, we invest in human development, we invest in those things that help people meet the potential that God has given them."

The nonpartisan network consists of 12 organizations including Austin Interfaith, whose members include congregations, unions and parent groups.

Members of the statewide group said they would use workshops at houses and churches to build a supportive network of 500,000 people over two years.

The network's agenda includes support for a broad-based business tax that picks up the service-sector businesses that now legally avoid paying the corporate franchise tax, which is the state's general business tax. The network also supports putting a sales tax on legal, accounting and computer-programming services while opposing a higher sales tax, which critics say would disproportionately hurt lower-income people.

"There's people power, and there's money power," said Lou Snead, pastor of Faith Presbyterian Church in South Austin. "We have to rally enough people power to support our agenda to turn this around, otherwise it's always going to be in the hands of people with money."

But Michael Quinn Sullivan of the Texas Public Policy Foundation, which advocates for smaller government, said Texans should look to private charities, instead of government, to address social ills. "Our focus has got to be on individuals taking care of each other, not to rely on government to do that," Sullivan said.


Comptroller Carole Keeton Strayhorn, a Republican who is running for governor as an independent, was warmly received during a brief speech to the group, calling for more spending on education and children's health insurance.

"This state is abdicating its responsibility to education and health care," she said.

Perry spokesman Robert Black said Strayhorn "once again" failed in her speech to put forth a plan to restructure the state's school-finance system, which the Supreme Court has ruled unconstitutional. An organizer said Gov. Rick Perry was invited to address the group but other gubernatorial candidates were not because it was not a candidate-vetting event.

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