
Texas group presses for more conservative policies

Foundation holds panel discussing crucial issues, legislative session results

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The Texas Public Policy Foundation, a non-partisan research institute which promotes limited government, free markets and personal responsibility, is pushing for more conservative policies on many issues facing the state and local government.

The foundation held a panel at its office Tuesday afternoon to recap the events of the 81st Texas legislative session and to discuss the impact of issues including health care, environmental regulation and federal stimulus funds on state politics.

Justin Keener, policy and communications vice president for the foundation, said Texas was a "shining beacon" for other states as the state government did not get involved unnecessarily in citizens' lives. He said excessive regulation efforts cause the government to spend more money.

"Texas has a real commitment to realizing what the role of government is and what the role of government isn't," Keener said. "We're at a crossroads of deciding what paths government should take and what paths personal responsibility should take."

Talmadge Heflin, Texas Center for Fiscal Policy director, said the state would benefit from not taxing businesses that make less than \$600,000 annually.

"The driver of new jobs is small business," Heflin said. "We believe if you can leave that money in their hands, it's better used than taken out in the form of taxation."

He said Texans should have online access to government spending registers to monitor excess and waste.

"We don't have a tax problem, we have a spending problem," Heflin said. "We hope to see significant work on transparency. We think the power of the citizen is if you know what's going on, you can help restrict and restrain spending."

Bill Peacock, Texas Public Policy Foundation vice president of administration and Center for Economic Freedom director, said that in 2007, Texas markets were about 80 percent unregulated, and he felt they operated most efficiently this way.

"If you look at all these economic freedom issues, the government gets involved to protect consumers, but it always ends up costing consumers more money," Peacock said. "More jobs were created here in Texas last year than all other states. If we're going to maintain that, we need to maintain our march toward economic freedom here in Texas."

Arlene Wohlgenuth, Center for Health Care Policy senior fellow, said she felt there would be "severe ramifications" for Texans and all Americans if the health care reform plan proposed by the Obama administration is put into effect.

"If this legislation passes, it will be the most astounding loss of personal freedom this nation has seen," she said. "It's not about health care. It's about taking over one-sixth of our national economy. Every single thing that has been proposed by this administration has been tried and has failed."

Wohlgenuth said government control would cause the quality of health care to decline. She said the Texas Public Policy Association supports patient-centered reform plans.

Kathleen White, director of the Anne & Tobin Armstrong Center for Energy and the Environment, said two-thirds of environmental regulatory legislation proposed during the legislative session came from the national government rather than the state. She said while many areas in Texas have improved their air quality, tightening of Environmental Protection Agency restrictions has put those areas at risk for not attaining the necessary standards.

"I think it's really important to get the hard facts on the improvements Texas has made," White said. "Texas has made remarkable progress across the board in air quality. I don't think that's widely known or believed, but I think it's important to talk about."

Andy Jones, University Democrats vice president, said that while his organization is primarily focused on issues like tuition relief that directly affect UT students, as Democrats, they stand behind Obama's legislative agenda.

"Unfortunately, Republicans and Democrats got the same thing out of the session, which was nothing," Jones said. "A good session for Republicans is when nothing gets passed and a good session for Democrats is when powerful, meaningful legislation gets passed, things that enfranchise people, that bring children health care, that drive up public safety without damaging civil rights. This time, partisan politics got in the way."

He said he disagreed with the idea that the Obama administration's health care reform plans tread on citizens' freedom.

"I personally find it offensive that someone would say that wanting to give health care to 50 million people in this country who cannot afford it is a violation of civil rights," Jones said. "It's absolutely repugnant to want to deny that to people."


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