

State's fiscal health legislative priority

Free markets, limited government the best way forward.

By Brooke Rollins / Special To The Express-News

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In November, Texans seeking a strong future delivered a mandate to their elected leaders.

The Legislature has an historic opportunity to increase our prosperity. They will succeed by continuing Texas' commitment to free markets and limited government.

This month, the [Texas Public Policy Foundation](#) released "Keeping Texas Competitive," a roadmap for positioning Texas for future greatness.

Today's budget challenges are formidable, but we have been here before. In 2003, the [Texas Legislature](#) closed a \$10 billion shortfall by cutting spending rather than raising taxes. That decision laid the groundwork for Texas to lead the nation in economic growth and job creation during the last decade.

Even today, Texas' economy continues to gain strength relative to other large states.

Reducing Texas' tax-and-spend burden should be the top priority of the Legislature. By balancing the budget, spending only available revenue, reforming the tax and expenditure limit, and creating greater transparency in expenditures, Texas can secure its future prosperity.

Resisting federal overreach should also be high on the must-do list. The federal government is intruding on areas that should be left up to the state, particularly health care and the environment. Medicaid threatens to bankrupt our state, while the [EPA](#) bureaucracy has Texas' energy and manufacturing sectors in its crosshairs.

In health care, freedom can be preserved by reducing Texas' dependence on federal funding, and by reducing health care spending without sacrificing quality of care.

As the only state to say "no" to greenhouse gas controls, Texas can resist federal overreach by strengthening our authority over state environmental law and preventing efforts to regulate carbon dioxide and green energy subsidies and mandates.

Texans care deeply about education. However, the exponential growth in education spending has not been reflected in academic performance. We have committed enough money to education, but those funds are being spent unproductively.

Fostering competition is the key to effective educational growth and reform. Parents should be free to choose their child's education provider.

Great teachers — whether in our K-12 classrooms or our public colleges and universities — should make a lot more money, while mediocre or indifferent teachers shouldn't be on the payroll, period. Lifting restrictions on charter and virtual schools will provide parents and students with even more choices.

Finally, the Texas Legislature should continue fostering a free-market economy. Governments don't create jobs; entrepreneurs do. Entrepreneurs want to live, work, and create jobs in Texas because our state gives them the best opportunity to succeed or fail on their own merits.

While Texas has some of the most entrepreneur-friendly policies in the country, there is room for improvement. Legislators should eliminate the last vestiges of price regulation in homeowners' insurance and telecommunications products, and reduce bureaucratic interference in our electricity market.

Legislators should also ban eminent domain for takings that are not a public use, increase consumer choice in health care, and avoid criminalizing non-fraudulent business activities or licensing new occupations.

Texans deserve to have all of the "Keeping Texas Competitive" recommendations fully debated and ultimately passed by the Texas Legislature — so the Lone Star will keep shining as a beacon of opportunity. That's not just good for Texas; it's good for America.

Brooke Rollins is president and CEO of the Texas Public Policy Foundation, a nonprofit, free-market research institute.

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