

Editorial: For Christians, public policy is about love of neighbor

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Decisions of the 87th Texas Legislature are a representation of what we as a state care about. They also can reflect what Christians, who are commanded to love their neighbors, care about. What, then, do [we care about](#)?

Education

For at least 12 years, every Texas parent cares about schools. Our checkbooks and calendars reflect just how absorbed we are in our children's education.

We care about schools, because for Texas and the nation to be in good hands well into the future, Texas children—pre-K through 12th grade—need more than a good education. They need the kind of excellent education a prosperous state like Texas can afford.

[The Texas House might agree.](#) It voted 115-29 to adopt a budget amendment barring public funds from being diverted to private school vouchers, ensuring public funds are used for public education. Since not everyone can afford private education, this is good news for students in our public schools—and their teachers.

The Texas House also approved a budget “amendment to send nearly [\\$18 billion](#) in federal aid directly to education.” (UPDATE: Lawmakers [released \\$11.2 billion](#) to public schools after this editorial was published.)

These are positive developments for public education in Texas, but they are

only developments. Final decisions await May 31, the last day of the 2021 regular legislative session. Between now and then, changes still can be made as members of the Texas House and Senate meet “to iron out the differences” in their respective versions of the budget.

Gambling

We also care about gambling in Texas and strongly oppose its expansion.

[HJR 97](#) proposes amending the state constitution to legalize sports betting, and [HJR 133](#) proposes essentially recreating Nevada in Texas through a new Texas Gaming Commission and “a limited number of casinos.”

The language describing [HJR 133](#) is outright laughable in its empty promises. The resolution, which seems to be lifted straight from Las Vegas casino promotional literature, purports “to foster economic development and job growth and to provide tax relief and funding for education and public safety.”

Ask [Maryland](#), [Washington, D.C.](#) or [Florida](#) about those promises.

I’ve learned the hard way that sales pitches are not always as true a representation of a product as later maintenance and repairs. In the case of gambling, the fact that D.C. lawmakers earmarked the first \$200,000 in gambling-generated tax revenue for gambling addiction treatment programs ought to tell us the shiny thing dangled in front of us ultimately will cost us too much.

Gladly, both resolutions were “left pending in committee” after floor debate ended late April 14. They shouldn’t advance any further.

Housing

Also under consideration is a [statewide ban](#) on “camping in a public place.” [HB 1925](#) and [SB 987](#) “would make camping in an unapproved public place a Class C misdemeanor, punishable by a fine of up to \$500.” These bills are in response to homeless encampments in places like Austin.

I am curious how a homeless person charged with a Class C misdemeanor will come up with up to \$500 to pay a fine. Also, will passage of these bills make the homeless any less homeless?

The *Texas Tribune* quoted the author of [HB 1925](#), Rep. Giovanni Capriglione, R-Southlake, saying, “We’ve seen a huge increase in not only the number of homeless living under bridges or on the streets, but also the rise in crime.”

We are left to wonder if Capriglione meant to say homeless people are responsible for the rise in crime. I also wonder how much homeless camping is happening in Southlake.

Sen. Dawn Buckingham, R-Lakeway, who authored [SB 987](#), is quoted as saying: “We as a state act to make sure that our public spaces are safe and that our homeless population is taken care of. The situation has simply gotten out of control.”

I would agree with Buckingham if her statement is aspirational; we do *want* to take care of our homeless population, but is “taken care of” a euphemism? How do we “act to make sure ... our homeless population is taken care of?”

If there is such an increase in homelessness—to the point it is out of control—shouldn’t lawmakers be more concerned with eliminating sources of homelessness than in eliminating spaces for homeless people to sleep?

I'll answer my own question. Yes, eliminating homelessness should focus on its sources, not on where people sleep.

But I get it. We can't let people sleep just anywhere. So, if we're not going to let them camp under overpasses or in parks, where will we permit them to sleep, and how are they going to get there?

Better still, how can we who pride ourselves in our prosperity use it to provide the same dignity of housing to those without?

To answer this question, we can learn a lot from places like [City Square](#) in Dallas, whose property The Cottages at Hickory Crossing is a “supportive housing community for homeless individuals with histories of mental illness, joblessness, poverty, and substance abuse.” [Community First! Village](#) in Austin, a ministry of [Mobile Loaves & Fishes](#), is another example.

Why we care

We care about education, gambling and housing—among other issues—because human dignity and welfare are central to each. And Christians are expected to care about each person's dignity and welfare.

God's command is not to be concerned with power, profits and comfort, but to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. We can embody this command even as far as the letter of our laws.

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