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### **Statement at the start of the 87th Texas Legislative Session**

**Austin, Texas** - Today at noon, the 87th Texas Legislative Session formally begins, and as we have done every session, University Democrats are ready to fight for the issues that matter most to students.

*University Democrats issued the following statement:*

“To ensure student voices are heard, the University Democrats created the Longhorn Lobbying Commission which has spent the past few months going through bills filed before session and today presents the first set of items we urge the legislature to at least refer to committee, giving them a chance to be considered.

The legislature is rightly focused on recovering from this pandemic, which is why the Commission stayed focused on building Texas back bigger and better. Universities bring together people from all sorts of diverse backgrounds, and we used this to identify what items were of greatest concern to the broadest cross section of the population. Each item on our slate was found by an issue or identity caucus of the University Democrats (Latinx, Disability, Environment, Women, etc.) and then unanimously approved by each of the other caucuses to ensure the legislation we are presenting today is important to to each of Texas’ constituencies, and supported by all of them.

For too long, the voices of young people have been left out of the policymaking process, but the Longhorn Lobbying Commission will change that. The same politically engaged students that provide much of the workforce for local campaigns now turn our attention to the State Legislature. Each week we will update our legislative priorities as the session progresses, but from the outset we call on the Texas Legislature to refer the following items to committee to ensure we build back bigger and better in Texas.

This requires action on several policy areas as we take this moment to evaluate bedrock parts of our society to ensure they are responsive to this crisis and resilient against the next one. From Lockdowns in Spring to Protests in Summer, to the Elections in Fall, this year has exposed fundamental flaws in our systems that we must fix as we build back better.”

## Economic Security

Millions of Texas families have seen unprecedented financial hardship this last year. These bills if passed will allow Texas to get back to a booming economy:

- SB 33 creates a tuition grant program that allows students to stay in college
- SB 141 provides Medicare coverage to mothers for a year after having a child
- HB 615 establishes a \$15 minimum wage across the state
- HB 732 establishes this minimum wage for school employees who did so much this last year

## Voting Access

This fall we saw record voter engagement despite the pandemic. These bills ensure we continue to have full participation in our democracy:

- HB 93 requires counties have a polling location on (almost) every college campus
- HB 478 addresses some of the longstanding barriers disabled people face when trying to vote
- HB 481 makes early voting more accessible, particularly in smaller counties
- HB 712 allows voters to be registered at their polling place during early voting

## Future Proofing

Part of building back is ensuring we're ready for the next disaster which is what these bills do:

- SB 87 ensures future permits for energy production consider cumulative air pollution
- SB 170 studies the feasibility of transitioning to 50% renewable energy by 2030
- HB 420 establishes a new task force to study maternal mortality
- HB 855 studies the transition from high school to college for students with disabilities
- HB 282 creates a independent redistricting commission for 2030 to ensure fair representation

## Justice for All

This summer people from all kinds of politics, from all over the world, were reminded of the injustices faced by so many every day. We must start to address these injustices by passing:

- HB 73 removes as a legal defense the fact of learning the victim's gender identity
- HB 88 implements a whole host of policing reforms which are supported by a strong majority
- HB 102 restores liberty to women and their families making end of life decisions with child
- HB 188 protects workers from discrimination based on their gender identity
- HB 404 requires new cosmetologists be trained to spot and report domestic violence situations
- HB 407 ensures professional conduct is exhibited when dealing with a child's sexuality

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