The Phyllis Schlafly Report

Mexican Standoff in Texas Special Session

By John and Andy Schlafly

October 10, 2023

There is a Mexican standoff as Texas begins its third special legislative session, precariously close to its early primary next year. A Mexican standoff is a confrontation in which neither side has a winnable strategy, and neither side can retreat.

Education, immigration, a flourishing new community known as Colony Ridge northeast of Houston, and vaccine mandates by private entities are all on the agenda. Gov. Greg Abbott needs to rehabilitate his political reputation after he quietly supported the failed sham impeachment of Attorney General Ken Paxton.

Meanwhile, a federal appeals court heard oral argument last week on the Biden administration's challenge to the 1,000 feet of orange buoys and barbed wire that Abbott had strung along the middle of the Rio Grande. The Democrat-majority appellate panel signaled that it would probably order Abbott to remove the buoys.

Migrants continue to flow illegally into Texas at many points along the Mexican border. Some lawmakers are casting blame on the fast-growing Colony Ridge community, where illegal residents lacking a valid Social Security number have reportedly been allowed to buy property with financing.

Yet these issues are not the biggest conflict in Texas right now. Instead, it is the fierce opposition by Texas teachers and rural Republicans to enacting a voucher program proposed by Gov. Abbott and an influential think tank, the Texas Public Policy Foundation.

A new voucher program this year in Iowa has resulted in applications exceeding projections, sparking concerns about its impact on rural areas. The Iowa law allows families to take $7,600 per student from public school funding to spend on an accredited private school.

Despite skepticism by many conservatives, Gov. Abbott has staked his political future on enacting his voucher plan. There are approaches other than leaving low-performing public schools, including Donald Trump's proposal to allow parents to fire public school principals who tolerate poor outcomes or bad behavior.

Public school teachers are so opposed to giving parents vouchers to redeem at private

schools that they are even willing to forgo the raises they had been demanding. Teachers oppose vouchers even though the Texas bill would not directly siphon funds from public schools, but instead would fund the vouchers out of general state revenues.

Senate Bill 1 (SB 1) was introduced on the first day of this special session, with state Sen. Brandon Creighton (R-Conroe) as its author. It would provide up to $8,000 in taxpayer-funded vouchers for families to pay private educational expenses, which could include tutoring, homeschooling, textbooks, transportation, and uniforms in addition to tuition.

Simultaneously SB 2 was introduced to provide billions of dollars in raises to Texas public school teachers. Boosted by revenue from higher oil prices and many Americans moving to the Lone Star State, Texas enjoys a surplus of $19 billion in its upcoming fiscal year.

Tapping that surplus, $5.2 billion in new funds would be allocated to public schools, mostly to increase teacher salaries. But Democrats are united against raising teacher pay if the tradeoff is vouchers in any form.

For example, the chairman of the Texas House Democratic Caucus, Rep. Trey Martinez Fischer (San Antonio), announced that his party's position is "very clear: no vouchers and no deals." Abbott vows to call a fourth special session if his voucher program does not pass.

But with illegal aliens overrunning Texas schools without the legislature doing anything meaningful about it, the contentious debate about vouchers seems like a distraction. Immigration is on the agenda but there is no leadership by Gov. Abbott or Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick for meaningful action.

With no way to vet migrants hailing from all over the world, terrorists like those who massacred innocent civilians in Israel could be slipping across our open border, waiting for an opportunity to strike Americans here. Abbott has spent $4.5 billion on Operation Lone Star, which was supposed to curtail illegal immigration but has failed to make a dent in it.

Gov. Abbott wasted five months and millions of dollars unsuccessfully trying to remove the Attorney General who has been the strongest in our country against illegal immigration, Ken Paxton. Abbott never defended Paxton against this witch-hunt, as Trump and many conservatives did.

In New Hampshire Monday night, Trump again read from "The Snake," an allegory about the terrible consequences to a "tender-hearted woman" who invited a menacing creature into her home. Abbott and the Texas legislature should make stopping illegal immigration their top priority of this special session.

With his Attorney General sidelined for the last five months, Gov. Abbott allowed Biden's lawsuit to halt expanding his border buoys beyond a mere 1,000 feet, when by now they should have extended the entire Texas-Mexico border, which is 1,254 miles. Texas should also be building additional walls to stem the tide of illegal migration, and cutting off their benefits.

John and Andy Schlafly are sons of Phyllis Schlafly (1924-2016) and lead the continuing Phyllis Schlafly Eagles organizations with writing and policy work.