Thank you, [REP] Kelly [Hancock] for that introduction and thank you to the folks here at M.L. Leddy’s for having us here today.

You can’t get much more Texas than the boot & saddle room here and you’d be hard-pressed to find a better example of the small businesses that form the foundation of our state’s economy.

I want to thank everyone here for taking part in an essential conversation about the future of our state.

We’re here today to talk about one of the core elements of the relationship between government and citizens: trust.

I believe that government is bound by a sacred trust with the consent of the governed to ensure the rights and freedoms of citizens are never trampled in the rush to be all things to all people.

It is time to take specific steps to guard that trust specifically when it comes to the dollars that go from taxpayers’ pockets into public coffers.

Here in Texas, we have a history of maintaining that trust making tough choices in the pursuit of fiscal discipline while others freely increased taxes and spending.

Back in 2003, when we faced a $10 billion budget deficit we heard the calls to raise taxes but we opted to follow the same approach required of a family or a business when times are tough we rolled up our sleeves and got to work.

We ranked our priorities and made tough
decisions choosing to find dollars through spending cuts instead of massive tax increases.

We caught our share of flak for some of those decisions but the tough choices we made set the stage for years of prosperity and our state's current status as the nation's economic leader.

As the national economy has spiraled downward our low taxes, predictable regulations, and fair legal system have enabled us to weather the storm better than most, if not all, of our fellow states. In fact, last year, while other states were scrambling to make ends meet, we were able to balance our budget protect billions in our Rainy Day Fund and give major tax relief to 40,000 small business owners.

Here in Texas, we are fortunate to have fiscally conservative leaders who will make the tough calls instead of pushing the hard choices down the road.

When government resorts to endlessly expanding its programs or throttling economic growth by raising taxes everyday citizens pay the price.

As that particular mindset holds sway over Washington DC, it is more important than ever that we take clear steps to protect our citizens from the excesses of unrestrained government at every level.

That's why I'm proposing two new amendments to the Texas Constitution. The first will require a two-thirds vote of the entire Texas Legislature to raise any taxes.

This sets a nice high hurdle for lawmakers inclined to raise taxes requiring broader support for decisions of this magnitude.

The second would require the Legislature to ensure spending growth does not exceed the combined growth rates of inflation and our population here in Texas.

This would allow the state to keep pace with a growing population and account for the upward pressure exerted by inflation while protecting the hardworking Texas families from those who want to raise their taxes and expand the size, reach and power of government in their lives.

These two sensible amendments will essentially engrave our proven fiscal disciplines into the bedrock of state law expressing our commitment to taxpayer protections in the clearest terms while increasing the stability and predictability that set Texas apart. This brings me to my third proposal to protect taxpayer dollars and strengthen the public trust.

Over the years, we have taken important steps to better prevent, detect, and eliminate waste, fraud and abuse in state government.

Whether you're a state agency or do business with the state we have made it clear you must exercise the highest integrity and maintain the clearest accountability when it comes to taxpayer dollars.

One of the best examples is our Health and Human Services Commission whose Office of Inspector General was created by the legislature in 2003 in a bill authored by Rep. Wohlgemuth.

Since its establishment, that office has closed more than 420,000 investigations against healthcare providers and clients and recovered or saved more than $4.6 Billion. These are real dollars we're talking about real tax dollars and we need to steward them wisely.

At agencies like the Health and Human Services Commission, Inspectors General have provided strong, independent
oversight wisely exercised their authority to launch investigations and recovered taxpayer dollars in the process.

Following this example, we should establish a statewide Office of Inspector General working across state agencies to identify and investigate fraud and abuse.

This statewide OIG will provide strong, independent oversight of agencies and help our hardworking state employees be even more efficient and effective when it comes to taxpayer dollars.

These three proposals give us the best chance to strengthen our state’s fundamental taxpayer protections and sustain that essential trust relationship with our citizens no matter what the future holds.