

By Arkansas Democratic Party – as recommended by the Platform and Resolutions Committee July 2010

(1) Opportunity. We believe in aggressively upholding the fundamental principal both the Democratic Party and our nation were built on: opportunity. Every citizen deserves the opportunity to work hard, play by the rules, and prosper. Every American parent has the right to live in a land where each child has the opportunity to grow up, live to his or her potential and reach successes greater than the previous generation. Just as our nation was founded by those seeking a land where no title, no family name and no station in life prescribed one's fate, so we hold to the principle that every individual's destiny is his or her own to make, in a land providing opportunity to succeed when one has the will to do so.

(2) Fairness and Justice. As Democrats, we believe that fairness, justice and the level playing field they provide are not simply an issue of laws and regulations, but a value upon which our state and nation hinge. It is not just the responsibility of our elected officials, but of every Democrat, to keep a watchful eye for any injustice that blights the American Dream of equality, opportunity, liberty, and community, and to take action against such injustices.

(3) Progressiveness. We believe that our country and our communities have a moral obligation to lead and to lead in a forward direction. We believe that through our activism and a fervent political discourse, we must deny the agendas put forth by other Parties and groups that want to move our country backwards. No one individual or one group's dogma should stand in the way of another person's personal liberty, personal choice or personal faith. We believe in the teaching within the Bible, as is found in the sacred texts of almost all faiths, that one must not only persevere forward, but also outstretch a hand to help his neighbor forward should he find him in need.

(4) Action. The Democratic Party has a rich tradition of action with results, often in the face of opposition. Throughout our history Democrats who secured for American workers the right to a 40-hour work week, the right to overtime pay and the right to a minimum wage; provided rural electrification; built Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid as systems to preserve the dignity of the elderly and the poor in sickness; secured the right to vote for all citizens; put the first American in orbit and the first person on the moon and established the GI Bill benefits for returning veterans. Democratic Presidents led America to victory in World War I and World War II. The Democratic Party will continue to take action on every level of government, despite opposition, to make positive advances for our country and our people.

While recognizing that there are some within our party who, for reasons of personal conscience, may disagree on some of the specific issues as stated within this platform, we recommend the following guided by these principles:

ETHICS

We embrace the highest ethical standards in government and the full and fair discussion of issues. We support the goals of the Ethics Commission and the Democratic Party's longtime commitment to good government and responsible stewardship of the citizens' trust. We reaffirm the belief in accountability, public accessibility to government, and citizen participation.

Because public servants enter into a sacred trust with citizens, government has a responsibility to be as good as the people of the state through using their tax dollars wisely, valuing the input of all citizens, respecting those citizens' civil liberties and operating ethically. The combination of an engaged citizenry and a decent and dignified government will ensure the promotion of the common good.

EDUCATION

The future of Arkansas demands that we treat education as our most important economic development initiative. A world-class educational system—one that moves seamlessly from pre-kindergarten through adulthood—will help develop jobs to make Arkansas competitive with other states as well as on the world stage. Therefore, the Democratic Party advocates the establishment of a universal pre-kindergarten program, the expansion of programs in the K-12 years so that every child is ensured the opportunity to receive an adequate and equitable education, the increase in access to higher education through the expansion of need-based financial aid, and the enhancement of programming for adult learners.

The Democratic Party of Arkansas believes in working toward the goal of establishing universally available pre-kindergarten programs for all three and four year olds in our state. These children will then enter kindergarten prepared to learn and to thrive academically.

The Democratic Party celebrates progress toward an adequate and equitable K-12 education system over the past three years. We believe that a continued commitment must be shown to recruit the most talented individuals to enter the teaching profession, to maintain teacher pay that is competitive and adequate, and to employ expanded mentoring programs to enhance retention of our best teachers. The availability of quality teaching must be ensured to students in all parts of the state, including the use of new technology and Traveling Teachers programs to assist with this goal in rural areas of our state. Using the established state educational standards as the basis for such evaluation, we believe that it is vital that we know that our schools are producing desired results. We believe that Arkansans are best served by schools that encourage students to pursue the full range of academic inquiry, to include a vibrant and vigorous curriculum, and by rejecting the practice of 'teaching to the test'. We also believe that public funds should be used only for public schools. Therefore, the Democratic Party opposes the use of vouchers, as we believe this would weaken the public education system in Arkansas.

The Democratic Party also recognizes the vital role education support professionals play in educating our children, and we must provide salaries and benefits which recognize their worth.

Parental involvement has been shown to be a crucial determinant of individual children's success in school. Therefore, we advocate measures that would expand opportunities for parents and guardians to attend parent-teacher conferences and volunteer at their children's schools. A safe school environment is also necessary for successful teaching and learning; therefore, we also believe that our education system should support and ensure discipline and order in the schools.

Finally, so that they may learn to their full potential, it is crucial that students come to school healthy. Therefore, we advocate the implementation of an integrated school health system so that the health coverage of our youth, especially those eligible for the ARKids program, can be increased.

Through these and other programs, we believe that future generations of Arkansans will see a decrease in dropout rates. No student who is otherwise qualified should be prevented from continuing his or her education after graduation from high school because of an inability to pay for that education. Such a state investment in need-based higher education grants will pay great benefits for Arkansas in terms of the state's economic development. In addition, the Democratic Party is fully committed to the expansion of the other existing scholarship programs that keep the state's best and brightest in this state for their higher education and for the careers that follow. Finally, in a world in which lifelong learning and retraining is crucial to ongoing economic livelihood, the state of Arkansas should seek to increase assistance for adult learners.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND OPPORTUNITY

Gainful and productive employment is the cornerstone of the Arkansas economic system and the Democratic Party of Arkansas honors the hard work of workers and responsible actions of the large and small businesses that create jobs. It is the purpose of the Democratic Party to promote policies that enhance responsible business growth and which also benefit workers and their families throughout the state with

better paying jobs. Each part of our great state should receive attention for economic development, job creation and an enhanced personal and familial quality of life.

Responsible business growth will require expanding entrepreneurship, developing our existing businesses, recruiting new business, funding the state's infrastructure and increasing higher education opportunities and programs for adult learners.

We strongly advocate that workers and their families be supported by fair compensation through a living wage and provision of benefits. The Democratic Party supports policies that create equal opportunities for all Arkansans. We support the right of workers to organize and bargain collectively without fear of intimidation. In addition, we will not tolerate sexual harassment in the workplace. We advocate that the state meet or exceed its present goal of increased business opportunities for minority and women owned businesses.

AGRICULTURE

The Democratic Party of Arkansas recognizes the importance of a vibrant farm economy to the citizens of Arkansas. Additionally, the Party agrees that our state and our nation are best served when the agriculture sector is based on a family farm system. We recognize that farmers, as long-time stewards of the land, enhance the stability and entrepreneurial vitality of our rural economy. We strongly support the development and implementation of federal farm and fair trade policy that benefit all farmers especially minority and limited resource farmers. We further support quick delivery of the court ordered compensation due from the USDA to minority farmers who suffered discrimination.

We support a farm policy that embodies a safety net concept. This net serves as a tool that will allow our efficient, productive farmers to weather the financial hardship caused by economic and natural disasters. The Democratic Party of Arkansas acknowledges that a healthy farm economy will result in cultural, environmental and economic benefits important to our rural and overall state.

Furthermore, we recognize the need for a coherent and strong national and international farm policy that encourages the expansion of exports of Arkansas agricultural products in the global market. In a world in which the need for renewable energy sources is growing each day, biodiesel derived from natural oils like those grown in the fields of Arkansas has great potential for enlarging Arkansas's agricultural economy. The Democratic Party encourages our state and federal political leaders to support efforts toward these goals.

TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The proactive development of a strong system of transportation infrastructure—in the form of ports, bridges, highways, airports, and light rail—is crucial to prepare us for the economic challenges of the 21st century. Good roads improve interstate and intrastate commerce, build tourism, shorten the distance between families and friends, strengthen public safety and enhance our overall quality of life. We must look to responsible and prudent highway financing programs to meet the ever-changing needs of our state. But, in an era of increasing fuel costs and environmental threats from global warming, creativity in the development of transportation programs that do not rely solely on the automobile should be encouraged within state government.

Finally, because the varied infrastructure needs of other job producers in this age must be met so that they can use the waters, rails, airways, and roadways of Arkansas to the benefit of our state's economic development, the Democratic Party believes the state government should be aggressive in developing plans for such projects that will benefit the rural communities as well as the economic centers of the state. In all development of commercial waterways, we should show care as to also protect the fishing and recreation areas that are wonders for our state.

ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY

Arkansas is the natural state and it must remain that way. In all environmental matters, we must consider ourselves caretakers of the land. The Democratic Party of Arkansas believes that we should look for balance in allowing commerce to fairly reap the benefits of our natural resources while preserving or restoring the condition of those resources.

We face many environmental challenges such as wetlands conservation, climate change and water conservation forestry management, protection of public waters, management of commercial animal waste, solid waste disposal and recycling procedures, sustainable agricultural methods, the overuse of fossil fuels and other conditions which cause noise, air and water pollution,.

The Democratic Party believes that the exploration of alternative energy sources--especially the use of clean energy, biofuels, conversion of wood waste, solar, wind, and others--should be encouraged and promoted. In particular, a shift to increased usage of clean energy presents a unique opportunity for Arkansas. It will have beneficial effects on our environment, and a favorable impact on the agriculture and economy of Arkansas.

Energy efficiency and weatherization programs are critical steps in energy conservation and lessening dependence on foreign oil. Expanding recycling programs and adding new programs are important steps in preserving the beauty of the Natural State.

Finally, we must promote economic development that supports green jobs. Our legacy to future generations should be to pass on our "Natural State" in a better condition than we received it.

HEALTH CARE

The Democratic Party is dedicated to guaranteeing health security for all Arkansans and to containing health care costs for families and businesses. Working families must be able to continue to receive health insurance when they change jobs or when someone in their family gets sick. Our Party believes that all Arkansans should have the security of accessible and affordable health care, including mental health care, as well as a choice of health care providers. We are also dedicated to expanding health coverage for those that are currently uninsured or underinsured. We want to provide encouragement to small business owners to provide health insurance to their workers at a reasonable price. Insurance must be made more affordable to the everyday Arkansas working family.

There also must be improved access to quality health care in Arkansas. Because of this, the Democratic Party supports programs to expand rural care systems. We also recommend the implementation of a better health care system through the public schools, in order to improve the health of Arkansas' most vulnerable citizens, its children.

Health education is vital to the future of better care in Arkansas. We support furthering existing health literacy campaigns focused on preventative care, aimed at reducing overall health care costs in Arkansas. The Democratic Party also supports creating new health literacy campaigns and research aimed at future problems in public health.

The Democratic Party recognizes the importance of nurses in the overall health care system in Arkansas. Because there is currently a dire need for more nurses, we support the creation of programs that will help end the current shortage of nurses, and prevent any future nursing shortages.

Our ultimate goal is to ensure that all Arkansans have the opportunity to obtain affordable and accessible healthcare.

SOCIAL SECURITY/MEDICARE/MEDICAID

We remind everyone that Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid are all Democratic creations. The Democratic Party of Arkansas continues its longtime support for all of these fine programs that have meant so much to us as a people.

A hallmark of Medicare is that all beneficiaries, even those in rural or underserved communities, have real access to dependable health care. Democrats feel that the same should hold true of a prescription drug benefit. None of our senior citizens should have to choose between medically necessary drugs and food or other necessities.

We are opposed to cuts in state and federal programs for public health and well being, especially to provide tax cuts to America's wealthiest citizens. We urge that state and federal budgets be balanced to avoid detriment to Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, and veterans' programs. In particular, we recognize that Medicaid provides life-sustaining coverage for many of our seriously debilitated citizens. We urge that our state continue to fund safety net Medicaid programs.

TAXES

We believe we can accomplish great things without requiring new taxes through efficiently providing services within our budget constraints. Moreover, the Democratic Party believes in tax relief through a phase-out of the tax on groceries. We believe in using a portion of the current surplus to phase out the states most regressive part of the sales tax. Because we must adequately balance revenues and essential state services, the Democratic Party of Arkansas believes this phase-out can be matched to economic growth so that they do not threaten the continuance of vitally important state services.

OUR MILITARY, OUR VETERANS AND OUR NATION'S SECURITY

We believe that the peace and prosperity of our nation is assured by the maintenance of a powerful and capable military. We believe the single most important element in our military is the individual soldier, sailor, marine or airman, and that it is absolutely critical that we keep faith with those who defend us.

To honor the men and women who serve our country, state and federal policy should demonstrate respect for the sacrifices made by military veterans by ensuring a smooth transition from military to civilian life and providing benefits to honor their service.

We support the continuation and enhancement of veterans benefits, including post military training, medical and disability. We call for stringent enforcement of State and Federal laws guaranteeing returning service members the right to return to their previous jobs without delay or loss of seniority. We support interstate cooperation to enable the successful transition of families forced to move from one state to another, including changes involving public education, job searches, and health care continuity.

Arkansas should demonstrate its support for military families and communities. We insist that our military members on active duty and in the Reserve receive fair pay and allowances. They must be the best organized, trained, and equipped fighting force possible. We encourage city, county, state, and federal elected officials to review present benefits and determine how they can be enhanced.

We believe that in addition to maintaining a strong military, our Nation's security depends on the wise and deliberate use of diplomacy and adherence to a foreign policy that rightly views war as the very last resort of civilized nations. We further believe that the United States Military in a measured, expedient and responsible process should be withdrawn from our current level of presence in Iraq.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

Our Party believes that lifting people out of poverty with opportunity, education and jobs is the long-term strategy for deterring crime. But, citizens must be allowed to live, work, and play safely; as such, the Democratic Party of Arkansas supports a justice system that is fair, timely and properly punishes those convicted of crimes. While those who commit crimes must be held accountable for those offenses, we also advocate justice programs dedicated to rehabilitation and alternative sentencing so that all people can become full and productive citizens of our state.

In addition, we believe in supporting our law enforcement and pooling Arkansas's safety resources in a collaborative effort to protect children by keeping online predators off the Internet and educating children, parents and teachers about online abuse and the value of online safety. Through fostering a strong working relationship between all levels of government, community groups and law enforcement, we are also committed to the continued battle against the scourge of methamphetamine and other drugs in our state.

CIVIL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

The Democratic Party of Arkansas has been prominent in the evolving process of empowering all Arkansans. In keeping with the progress and expansion of civil rights and liberties in our state and across the nation, we pledge to continue our fight against discrimination or deprivation of rights on the basis of race, gender, national origin, religion, age, sexual orientation or socio-economic status, disability or any other characteristic unrelated to ability. We also reaffirm the constitutionally established rights of privacy and choice.

The Party recognizes that simply removing legal barriers to inequitable treatment does not rectify time-hardened patterns of social inequality and inequitable institutional practices. We are proud of the Arkansas Civil Rights Act and the good works of the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Commission in promoting the principles of nonviolence, racial harmony and equality of all citizens.

The Democratic Party fully supports equal pay for men and women. We also reject institutional barriers, be they corporate or government, which do not allow full access to job opportunities based on race, gender, national origin, religion, age, sexual orientation or socio-economic status as prescribed by federal law.

Our nation is a country of immigrants, enriched and made whole by diversity. But, the immigration crisis currently being faced by this country must be addressed. We advocate comprehensive immigration reform at the federal level that restores the rule of law and enhances the security for America and which is practical and humane in its approach toward undocumented individuals already in the United States. In particular, federal immigration policy should be tough on those who break the law including those employers that hire and too often exploit these workers.

The Democratic Party of Arkansas also recognizes that the freedom to exercise one's religion is a vital component of the liberties held by Americans. In particular, we recognize that individual prayer in schools is legal, while upholding the Constitution.

The Democratic Party of Arkansas believes in and supports the right to bear arms as set forth in the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. We promote strict enforcement of the law while ensuring the rights and responsibilities of gun ownership.

The Democratic Party of Arkansas supports the fundamental principles of the Equal Rights Amendment and urges ratification of the federal Equal Rights amendment by the Arkansas legislature. We believe all citizens deserve to be included in their country's constitution with all its legal rights and protections.

PUBLIC SERVICE

The Democratic Party of Arkansas believes that individual involvement is vital to the health of our democracy. Arkansans have a responsibility to participate fully in their democracy in the voting booth and through using their constitutionally-protected freedoms of speech and association. We encourage all Arkansans to take an active role in civic and social affairs through any combination of military service, public service, political participation, community activism and volunteerism.