

DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF ARKANSAS

Party Platform 2012-2014

PREAMBLE

The fundamental principles of the Democratic Party of Arkansas are the promotion of individual freedom, equality of opportunity, and a healthy and vibrant democracy. All are essential if Arkansas is to reach its full potential.

A spirit of individualism is at the root of the unmatched success of the American experiment and has been a defining characteristic of Arkansas since the state's founding 176 years ago. That individual initiative generally works for the benefit of society as a whole. At certain times, however, the interests of the individual must be balanced with a healthy respect for the benefit of the common good. Thus, in singular fashion, the Democratic Party accepts that unchecked individualism must not be allowed to violate the common good and to create fundamental inequities in society. Ours is a party that celebrates individual initiative and entrepreneurialism but balances those principles with the good of the community. We believe that society is healthiest when all are contributing to a project larger than themselves. In particular, the Democratic Party of Arkansas believes that the community has the greatest responsibility to step in to take care of those who are most vulnerable in our society, especially those at the dawn of their lives and those at their life's twilight.

The Democratic Party of Arkansas is also committed to the assurance of equality of opportunity for all Arkansans. First and foremost, this involves the Party's commitment to work to remove legal structures that treat individuals inequitably based on their socioeconomic status or group membership. But, simply removing legal barriers does not rectify patterns of social inequality; as it has been throughout the modern era, the Party

is therefore committed to working proactively to ensure such equality. The denial of equal educational opportunities or access to basic health security has also shown itself to be a barrier to individuals' full flourishing in the economic and social arenas. Arkansas's Democratic Party commits itself to leadership in promoting equality in these realms as well.

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 to make their views on issues known to their fellow citizens and their elected officials. On the other hand, 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. This combination of an engaged citizenry and a decent and dignified government will ensure the promotion of the common good.

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 expect the highest ethical standards in government and support 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 our belief in transparency, accountability and public accessibility to government and citizen participation.

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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 responsive, fair-minded government will ensure the promotion of the common good.

EDUCATION

Education is central to the sustainability of our nation's democracy and is the foundation upon which the success of Arkansas depends.

The future of Arkansas demands that we hold education as our most important economic development initiative. A world-class educational system—one that moves seamlessly from prekindergarten 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 prekindergarten 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 prekindergarten programs for all three and four year olds in our state. Our 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 few years. We believe that a continued commitment is essential to recruiting 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 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.

The availability of quality teaching must be ensured to students in all parts of the state, including the use of new technology and programs to assist with this goal in rural and underserved 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 our schools are producing desired results. We believe that Arkansans are best served by schools that inspire 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 undermine the public education system in Arkansas.

Parental involvement is a crucial determinant of individual children’s success in school. Therefore, we advocate measures that will empower parents with the tools and the opportunity to be active, respected participants in the education of their children.

The Democratic Party is committed to creating and maintaining a safe, welcoming school environment, which is also necessary for successful teaching and learning. Such an environment must be free of bullying of any kind or based on any factors. There is no justification for bullying. Therefore, we also believe that our education system must ensure respect, 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 and ready to learn. Therefore, we advocate--where needed and appropriate--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 maximally effective and efficient. In

addition, we recognize that food insecurity has a negative impact on students' health, well-being and success in school. Thus, the Democratic Party supports continued funding for comprehensive school nutrition programs. 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/ her education after graduation from high school because of an inability to pay for that education. Arkansas's investment in need-based higher education grants will continue to yield great benefits for our state in terms of economic development and quality of life. In addition, our party is fully committed to maintaining scholarship programs that provide students with an opportunity to pursue college and/or careers after high school. Building upon our investment in the education of our students, the Democratic Party believes that we must be committed to putting policies in place that will result in our graduates choosing to remain in Arkansas rather than choosing to live elsewhere. Finally, in a world in which continuous learning and retraining are crucial to ongoing economic livelihood, the state of Arkansas should seek to increase assistance for adult learners.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, OPPORTUNITY AND OWNERSHIP

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. Key to a healthy economy is a healthy, educated, and financially secure workforce, which creates an environment where business can thrive and produce jobs. The Democratic Party is committed to policies that promote and reward responsible business growth and which also benefit workers and their families throughout the state with well paying jobs.

Through the leadership and vision of the Democratic Party, Arkansas ranks second in the nation for its policies of friendliness for small business success. Each region of our great state should benefit from Arkansas's business friendly climate and should be supported in accordance with its specific needs 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 and other postsecondary 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. The Party, therefore, adamantly supports equal pay for equal work for all. In addition, we will not tolerate sexual harassment in the workplace. We also support the right of workers to organize and bargain collectively without fear of intimidation. Our party advocates that the state meet or exceed its present goal of increased business opportunities for minority-owned businesses, which includes veterans. Continuing the spirit of fairness, we also support our state increasing opportunities for women business owners.

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 longtime 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 policies that benefit all farmers. 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 entire 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, biofuels derived from natural products 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 preparing 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 climate change, creativity in the development of transportation programs--including mass transit--that do not rely solely on the fossil fuels and traditional passenger automobiles should be encouraged within state government.

Finally, because the varied infrastructure needs for quality of life and business and industry must be met, we must prepare to make efficient use of waters, rails, airways, and roadways of Arkansas. The Democratic Party believes our state government should be aggressive in developing plans for such projects that will benefit the rural and underserved communities as well as the urban and suburban centers of the state. As we develop commercial waterways, we must balance economic development needs with protection of 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 matters, we must be caretakers of the environment. 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, 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 renewable 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 agriculture, jobs and the 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 supporting new sources of energy are important steps in preserving the beauty of the Natural State.

Finally, Arkansas can benefit from developing a green economy. This new industry can simultaneously provide jobs that cannot be outsourced in every area of the state and will allow us to leave the Natural State in a better condition than we received it, a fitting legacy to future generations.

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 receiving health care 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 and dental health care, as well as a choice of health care providers. We are also dedicated to expanding health coverage for those without access to high quality, affordable health care. We want to provide encouragement and assistance to small business owners to provide health insurance to their employees at a reasonable price. Health care must be made more affordable and accessible to all Arkansans.

There also must be improved access to high quality health care in Arkansas. The Democratic Party, therefore, supports programs to expand and improve rural and underserved care systems. We acknowledge and are committed to vastly decreasing the disparities in our health care system, especially in rural and underserved areas of our state.

Health education and an emphasis on living well are vital to the future of better health in Arkansas. We support furthering existing health literacy campaigns designed to meet people where they are and are focused on preventive care, with an aim of reducing overall health care costs in Arkansas. The Democratic

Party also supports creating new health literacy campaigns and research aimed at preventing future problems in public health.

The Democratic Party recognizes the necessity of growing our overall health care workforce, especially among those that are a part of general health care teams. We, therefore, support the creation of programs that will help address current shortages, prevent any future shortages and create jobs.

Our ultimate goal is to ensure that all Arkansans have the opportunity to access high quality, affordable health care.

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 programs that have meant so much to us as a people. For a very large population of Arkansans, these programs are life-sustaining and central to a decent quality of life.

A promise of Medicare is to ensure that all beneficiaries, including those in rural and underserved communities, have reliable access to dependable health care. Democrats believe the same should hold true for prescription drug benefits. No Arkansan 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 prioritized to avoid detrimental cuts to Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and veterans' programs. In particular, we recognize that Medicaid provides life-sustaining coverage for many who are seriously disabled and in need of costly, ongoing care. We urge that our state continue to fund safety net Medicaid programs.

TAXES

We believe we can continue improvements and growth in Arkansas without requiring new taxes through efficiently providing services within our budget constraints. In the face of very challenging times, Arkansas Democrats have, year after year, responsibly balanced the state budget and continued to provide services necessary for the people of our state. With the prosperity of Arkansas uppermost in our policy positions, Democrats will continue to be good stewards of our tax dollars as we respond to the needs of our state.

The Democratic Party believes in tax relief through a fiscally responsible phase-out of the tax on groceries. 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 it does 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 are 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.

Over the past decade, many veterans, including those in the National Guard and those who are Reservists, have served multiple deployments. To honor the men and women who serve our country and state, our federal policy should demonstrate respect for the sacrifices made by military veterans and their families 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 postmilitary training; medical, with increased

access to mental health services; and disability. The Democratic Party supports continued placement of outpatient clinics in rural and underserved areas as a means of providing increased access to health and wellness programs for veterans and their families. 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 demand whatever cooperation necessary to enable the successful transition of families forced to move from one locale to another, including changes involving public education, job searches, and health care continuity.

Arkansas should demonstrate its support for veterans and military families and communities. We support policies that require accountability for the fiscal and physical oversight of federal and state sponsored homes for veterans, and we demand that in the event of closure of such facilities, all due respect must be given to honoring the promise made to all veterans affected. 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.

Homelessness among veterans is an issue that must be addressed. Veterans have sacrificed to make sure we are secure in our homeland. They deserve not to be homeless in the land they have served. Therefore, the Democratic Party will work to put in place and implement policies to address homelessness among our veterans and to make sure no veteran has to live a life of homelessness.

We believe in maintaining a strong military. At the same time we realize that in a complex world, 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 Afghanistan.

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 responsible for those offenses, we also advocate justice programs dedicated to rehabilitation, alternative sentencing and effective reentry policies so that anyone convicted of a crime(s) can become or return to being fully productive contributors to society.

The Democratic Party believes in effective, smart responses to crime. To that end Democrats support evidence-based policies that save taxpayers' money while punishing but rehabilitating some nonviolent offenders in a manner that has a proven track of success. We pledge to continue to uphold the laws, hold offenders accountable, and act in the best interest of victims, communities, families and taxpayers.

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 among all levels of government and law enforcement, we are also committed to the continued battle against the debilitating effects of the abuse of legal and illegal drugs in our state.

Our party steadfastly opposes the scourge of human trafficking. We support strengthening and making more fair and comprehensive the laws that punish the perpetrators and that empower victims to be a part of the fight against human trafficking.

CIVIL RIGHTS AND CIVIL LIBERTIES

The Democratic Party of Arkansas has been prominent in the evolving process of empowering all Arkansans. The Party recognizes that simply removing legal barriers to inequitable treatment does not rectify time-hardened patterns of social inequality and inequitable institutional practices. 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, socioeconomic status, disability or any other characteristic unrelated to ability. We also reaffirm the constitutionally established rights of privacy and choice.

At the vanguard of civil rights is the right to vote. Generations of Arkansans fought to expand this most basic right of our democracy. As such, the Democratic Party is unalterably committed to preserving voting rights and to fighting efforts that discourage or prevent voters from exercising their right to vote. We are further unalterably opposed to any policies or practices that will result in unreasonable limitations on that right, especially limitations that have a discriminatory impact.

The Democratic Party fully supports equal pay for men and women. We also reject institutional barriers, be they corporate or governmental, which do not allow full access to job opportunities based on race, gender, national origin, religion, age, sexual orientation, disability or socioeconomic status.

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 and group 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 supports the ratification of the federal Equal Rights Amendment by the Arkansas Legislature. We believe all citizens, women as well as men, 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 engagement and volunteerism.