

Statement of LCDC Principles

Statement of Principles

Facing Challenges, Working for Opportunity, Protecting Values, Celebrating Community

The moral test of government is how it treats those in the dawn of life, those in the twilight of life, and those in the shadows of life.

Hubert H. Humphrey, 38th Vice President of the United States

The Democratic Party's goal is to ensure the most good, for the most people, most of the time. Democrats are common people, coming together on common ground, using common sense, for the common good. We believe every American has the potential to accomplish great things; the Democratic Party upholds our founding fathers' commitment to opportunity for everyone regardless of background, circumstances, or beliefs.

Democrats advocate a free-enterprise economic system supported by selective government intervention to remedy the excesses and shortcomings of capitalism and to protect those least able to help themselves in an increasingly complex society. The ideas and visions of the Democratic Party have moved this nation forward. Social Security, Civil Rights, clean air and water laws, and collective bargaining are examples of Democratic policies that have improved the quality of life for all Americans.

We believe we must act as a community through neighborhood and faith-based organizations and through our governmental entities to address the problems of today and to plan for the problems and opportunities of tomorrow. We believe in the affirmative use of government to regulate the private enterprise economy, promote social and economic justice, protect freedom and opportunity, and conserve our natural and community resources.

The Lancaster County Democratic Party has a simple vision for the future: We want a Lancaster County that gives all residents a chance to live out their dreams and achieve their potential. We want a county that is coming together around our enduring values, our rich heritage and our changing diversity-rather than drifting apart due to intolerance and selfishness.

Today's Democratic Party is determined to renew America's most basic promise: Opportunity for every American and responsibility from every American while reawakening our great sense of community. These values made our county and nation strong. These same values must guide us into the future. This document, which can be updated and amended, presents the Lancaster County Democratic Party's vision of Opportunity, Responsibility, and Community.

OPPORTUNITY

America began as, and continues to be, a land of opportunity for many to improve their lives and the lives of their children and grandchildren. Lancaster County, in particular, has been a haven for those seeking a better life. The Democrats believe that opportunity for all depends on a well-educated citizenry and the equitable distribution of the bounty of the world's most dynamic free-enterprise system.

A. Education

Lancaster County Democrats believe that education is the key to opportunity and is essential for a free and democratic society. We strongly support the state's responsibility as outlined in Article III, section 14 of the Pennsylvania Constitution which states: "The General Assembly shall provide for the maintenance and support of a thorough and efficient system of public education to serve the needs of the Commonwealth."

It is essential for public schools to provide a first-class education to every child, regardless of family income or where the child lives. Failure to adequately educate our young people for the challenges of the future will weaken their ability to compete and win in the global economy. That is why the Democratic Party believes that education is one of the best investments we, as a society, can make. An educated citizenry is a productive citizenry; productive citizens are prosperous citizens.

Democrats recognize the need for education reform, including high standards for quality and accountability in every classroom. With challenging classes that teach responsibility as well as reading, writing and arithmetic, we can succeed together and unleash the potential within every child, every classroom, and every workplace.

Parents and taxpayers want improved public schools, but they want to know their education dollars are being spent wisely. They want better discipline and they believe parents must take an active role in their child's education. We, too, share those goals and we recognize the need for all citizens to be actively involved in the education process.

Strengthening Public Schools. More than 90 percent of children attend public schools, and many of these schools are doing an excellent job educating our youth. We recognize that some schools, mostly in rural and urban areas, are in dire need. These schools and, more importantly, their students, must be helped. We propose, among other things, that the state fund at least 50% of the cost of public education, drop the voucher scheme to subsidize private education, and invest more in early childhood development.

Public schools in Pennsylvania are funded primarily by property taxes levied by local school districts. School-funding systems based primarily on local wealth, whether property or income taxes, yield unequal educational opportunities. Increasing local taxes in the poorest school districts will not solve the problem. Other, more equitable, funding sources must be found to educate these children.

Over the past thirty years, state support for local public education has fallen to less than 35% from its prior level of 54%. We call on the Pennsylvania General Assembly and the governor to restore the state's share of public education funding to at least 50% of the cost.

The state Constitution in Article III, section 15 states that "No money raised for the support of the public schools of the Commonwealth shall be appropriated to or used for the support of any sectarian school." Therefore, the Democratic Party steadfastly opposes the voucher scheme, in which public education funds would be diverted from public schools to parochial and private schools. This concept is based on the flawed notion that competition among public and private schools will improve the quality and efficiency of education. We do not believe it will work, due to economic, geographic, and cultural barriers that inhibit the true competition needed for success. Valuable public resources will go to subsidize the private education of those children who are not the most in need, thus neglecting the needs of our public schools and those most in need.

Studies show that early childhood development is the most important, most productive, and most cost-effective area in which to help every child reach his or her full potential. This is why we believe in increasing our investment in early childhood development-particularly by fully funding Head Start and reducing class sizes in kindergarten through third grade.

B. Government's Role in a Capitalist Society

It has become quite clear to most of the world that a free-enterprise economic system is the foundation of prosperity and freedom. The Democratic Party steadfastly supports the free-enterprise system as the best vehicle through which goods and services can be produced and delivered.

Market Failures. While acknowledging its success, it would be a mistake to assume that capitalism is perfect. It has shortcomings, which economists refer to as market failures. Common failures of a market economy include failure of competition (monopoly), public goods (roads, police), externalities (pollution, sprawl), incomplete markets (insurance for volatile activities), information failures (consumer unable to make educated purchase), and unemployment, inflation and disequilibrium. We believe that government has a responsibility to correct these market failures, when possible, to ensure that all citizens can enjoy the benefits of the capitalist system.

Since our government gets its power from the people, government should serve us all. There is no better way to spread the benefits of a capitalist economy than for our government to steer prosperity to the greatest number of people. That is why we support government policies that encourage private sector investment and innovation. Government should help foster a competitive environment allowing, but not guaranteeing, economic success for the greatest number of people. We reject the misguided call to leave our citizens to fend for themselves. That is why we support policies that assist those of modest means to become entrepreneurs. Government should welcome, encourage, and assist everyone to compete and win in our economy. It should open doors to those who have been left behind.

Family farmers. Progressive people in America have long acknowledged the difficulty inherent to the farmer in the world marketplace. Protecting farmers from destruction in either the world or domestic markets is a role that must be filled by government.

Standing up for working people. We support the efforts to achieve a living wage for all laborers. We oppose efforts to undermine workers' rights to form and join unions. We support increases in the minimum wage to a family-sustaining level. Additionally, Democrats believe in equal pay for equal work and in pay equity.

Encouraging free enterprise, helping small businesses grow, creating family-sustaining jobs and protecting the rights of workers and farmers are among the most important responsibilities of government.

C. Taxation and Progressivity

The government services we need and enjoy cost money. Taxes and fees are the methods by which our government funds its activities and programs. How we tax ourselves is important to the economy and to our sense of fairness. Taxation should conform to basic principles. First, taxes should be consistent with economic efficiency-as unobtrusive as possible. Second, taxation should be seen by taxpayers as fair and equitable.

Democrats believe progressive taxation is consistent with equity and efficiency. Progressivity simply means that those who can afford to pay more do. We believe those who have been blessed most with success in our economy have the greatest responsibility to contribute to the maintenance of our community.

In most cases, we measure ability to pay in terms of income. Those with the highest incomes (wages and investments) should contribute more than those with the lowest incomes. Our federal income taxation system is progressive. Those with higher incomes are taxed at higher marginal rates. Progressive taxation slows the accumulation of wealth into the hands of the few, which can be detrimental to the growth of the economy.

Democrats oppose flat tax proposals. Flat taxes are regressive and disproportionately hurt those with the lowest incomes. For instance, a family earning \$20,000 a year has little money left after paying for food, clothing, shelter, and health care-their disposable income. If they must pay taxes at the same rate as a family earning \$100,000, the tax burden on the poorer family consumes a vastly larger portion of that family's disposable income than it does of the wealthier family's disposable income.

Flat taxes look fair on the surface, but, in practice, they favor the wealthy. If everyone were taxed at the same rate, those with the highest incomes would pay less than they do now and those with the lowest incomes would pay more. We should be encouraging our modest-income working families, not taxing them into poverty so the rich can pay less.

As Democrats, we support the continued existence of a federal estate tax, which mainly affects the wealthiest 2% of American families, provided that family farms and small family businesses are exempt from such a tax.

RESPONSIBILITY

We all have responsibilities in a free society, collectively and individually. Collectively, we act through our government. Our government has the responsibility to maintain law and order, to function without the undue influence of special interests, to govern in the most responsive and efficient manner, and to respect and maintain individual privacy. Individually, we must be committed to full political discourse and participation. Further, we must respect the rights of those who espouse views contrary to our own.

A. Crime and the Criminal Justice System

Law and Order. The Lancaster County Democratic Party believes that preventing and fighting crime-in that order-are among the most important responsibilities of government. We believe strongly in maintaining a healthy environment in which all citizens will choose opportunity, not crime.

Lancaster County residents deserve a criminal justice system in which criminals are caught, the guilty are convicted, and the convicted serve their time. We denounce crime and violence on our streets and believe that people who commit violent crimes should be punished.

Lancaster County Democrats understand what the police have been saying for years: The best way to fight crime is to prevent it. That is why we support drug and alcohol education programs in our schools. We support organized youth programs that give young people alternatives to hanging out on the streets. We support efforts to create and maintain healthy communities.

We believe that warehousing criminals is not the answer to reducing crime. Furthermore, we believe in "restorative justice," which holds criminals accountable directly to the victims and the community rather than just "doing time." This can include restitution to the victim and the performance of community service.

Mandatory minimum sentencing policies (that now exist in every state) are targeted disproportionately to drug offenders, who make up one in four inmates. Many of these are non-violent, first-time offenders, and their lengthy prison sentences carry a high cost to taxpayers. We believe the authority and discretion of sentencing should be returned to judges who can weigh all the evidence to impose a sentence to fit every crime.

Lancaster County Democrats recognize that many of the inmates in state prisons are mentally challenged or suffering from mental illness. We believe that our fellow residents with mental illnesses do not belong in prison. They belong in humane treatment facilities that are better equipped to recognize mental illnesses, dispense proper medications, and address their special

needs. Humane treatment can be combined with restorative justice measures to see that the public interest is served.

Ending domestic violence. Because it is a threat from within, nothing is a more dangerous threat to the safety of our families than domestic violence. Violence against spouses and children is a dangerous intruder that we must work together to drive from our homes. We support a coordinated, community-based response to domestic violence.

Last, we believe common-sense gun safety laws are needed to eliminate the scourge of gun violence in our streets, schools, and communities. We firmly respect and support the rights of hunters to pursue their sport and do not support laws that eliminate this privilege. Common-sense gun safety laws target dangerous weapons and their acquisition, not the law-abiding safe hunter.

B. Political Reform

We believe a competition of ideas is essential to a strong democracy. Modern elections have become too expensive. Those with the most money have the most say in who gets elected. It is not that others cannot speak their minds, but rather that those who are poorly financed cannot afford to get their ideas and messages to the voters. Those who cannot raise huge sums of money cannot compete. In such one-sided campaigns, the best interests of the people are not served.

The Lancaster County Democratic Party knows we have a responsibility to make our democracy work better by limiting the influence of special interests and returning the power to the people. We share the feeling that government is more responsive to well-financed special interests than to the average working family. We are concerned that not everyone has the opportunity for a voice in the democratic workings of all levels of government.

While money provides the vehicle through which speech is delivered, we are concerned that money is being equated with speech. Money is not speech. Money is money. Further, we see the inequity of money between candidates as a threat to an open political process. We favor the competition of ideas.

We call for the following reforms: First, we support public financing of campaigns as the best investment to promote competition among candidates for public office. Public financing would ensure that all candidates reach the same financial threshold needed to get out their messages. Second, some access to the public airwaves should be free. Television is the most effective and most expensive medium through which to contact voters. We believe television franchisees have a duty to our society to provide limited free access to candidates. Third, we support strict limits on campaign contributions, and immediate and full disclosure of all contributors. It is important that we limit the ability of large contributors to dominate the political process.

C. Reinventing Government

Government programs and operations must be continually reevaluated to ensure that they are efficient, effective, and in the public interest. We believe that government should be continually reinventing itself to better serve its customers.

The Lancaster County Democratic Party believes that we should be open to exploring alternative forms of county government, including, but not limited to, the county council and executive form used in a growing number of Pennsylvania counties under a "home rule" charter.

Democrats believe in the concept of "home rule." We support this change in government for several reasons. Home rule would allow Lancaster County to pass local ordinances to deal with our problems rather than relying on authorizing legislation from the state legislature.

Additionally, we could establish a strong executive and legislative county council form of governing. There would be a clear separation of legislative and executive powers, rather than the combined process of the county commission form we now have. With county council members elected by district, there would be an increased likelihood of greater Democratic representation.

To that end, we believe citizens of Lancaster County should be open to exploring a Home Rule Study Commission to look into county home rule and county government reorganization.

D. Privacy

Individual privacy is an ever-increasing concern to Americans. Its importance will grow in the years to come with the continuing revolution brought on by information technologies such as the Internet and wireless communication. The Bill of Rights protects us from government intrusion into our personal affairs. Democrats stand firm in defending the right of an individual to be safe from unwanted intrusions in the areas of life, liberty, property, and family. Citizens should be empowered with control over with whom their sensitive, personal information is shared.

The Lancaster County Democratic Party believes in individual decision-making and strongly supports the rights of individuals to pursue what they feel is in their best interest. We recognize and accept that deep and sincere differences exist in our society over the issues of conception and birth control. We believe these are private matters best left to the conscience of the individual and should not be mandated by any level of government.

E. Civility in Political Discourse

Like most Americans, we are concerned with the tenor of modern political debate. Character assassination, obfuscation, and misrepresentation appear to have replaced respectful dialogue on important issues. We seek a return to mutual respect among those with differing viewpoints and political persuasions.

Democrats believe in vigorous debates of political issues. Such debate can be lively and still marked by integrity and responsibility. We favor public debate that is rational, compassionate, and infused with concern for the well-being of citizens. In short, we believe in campaigns that are free of hostility, where the focus is on issues of public concern. In this respectful climate, public service, leadership, qualities of programs, and the abilities of candidates and parties to direct government can and should be thoroughly debated.

We support free, open, and lively debate on ideas and programs. We encourage members of other political parties to commit themselves to reasoned and respectful discourse aimed at the public good. Anything less is demeaning to the political process, the public, and the individuals involved.

COMMUNITY

A sense of community is the tie that binds us together as citizens of Lancaster County. Our neighborhoods, municipalities, counties, and states are interconnected and interdependent. What we do in one area has effects in other areas. Because of this, we must conduct ourselves in a way that respects the interests of the whole community. Community is about stewardship, respect, and teamwork. A strong sense of community is needed to preserve and enhance our quality of life.

A. Environment

The Democratic Party wants all citizens to be able to enjoy Lancaster County's magnificent natural heritage. We want all people to know that the air we breathe is pure, the water we drink is clean, and the land we live and work on is safe from pollutants and hazards.

Democrats know we can protect the environment and grow the economy. We believe we can attract more jobs in the long term by safeguarding our natural resources. We challenge businesses and communities to take steps toward being more aggressive stewards of our environment.

We are committed to conserving and enhancing open spaces and greenways, and we support using taxpayer dollars to achieve this goal. We support recycling and the efficient use of energy and land. We believe that investment in mass transit, cleaner vehicles, renewable energy sources, and watershed protection are good for the environment and the economy.

Sound environmental practices create great places in which to live and work. We must continue our efforts in this area.

Agriculture and the rural community. Lancaster County has a rich agricultural heritage and the most productive non-irrigated farmland in the country, if not the world. Our abundant agricultural economy must be preserved and strengthened as we enter a new century. We believe in protecting family farms and ensuring that family farmers receive a fair return for their investment.

B. Smart Growth

Home is the center of our lives-our refuge, if you will. It gives us a sense of place, comfort, and belonging. It is where we raise our most valuable resource-the next generation, our children. Lancaster County is a special place in which to live and we must strive to maintain its unique character. The attributes that brought our forebears and us here-the quality of life, historical and

cultural heritage, open space, farmland, real estate values, and a strong local economy-must be preserved.

One threat to our quality of life is suburban sprawl that results from unplanned growth. Development should be planned with an eye toward controlling its negative effects on the community. As Democrats, we support smart growth policies that are sensitive and compatible with our natural environment and our way of life. We support programs that promote safe and affordable housing for children, senior citizens, and future generations in every municipality.

We oppose ill-planned development that makes it impossible for neighbors to greet each other on a sidewalk or requires that one use a quart of gasoline to drive to the supermarket for a quart of milk. This is what happens when we don't look at the whole picture. This kind of growth is not the American way. We favor livable communities, comfortable suburbs, vibrant cities and green spaces all around.

Inter-municipal cooperation is essential in planning for development, public services, and infrastructure. We encourage the use and periodic review of a well-balanced county comprehensive plan, including a land-use master plan prescribing zoning laws that require housing opportunities for all income levels in all municipalities. Therefore, we support changes to the state's Municipalities Planning Code that strengthen and promote regional planning and inter-municipal cooperation.

We support efforts to promote land conservation by the use and development of creative zoning ordinances that reduce large lot minimums to achieve greater efficiencies and allow more families to live on less land.

Additionally, Democrats support efforts to revitalize our urban areas-Lancaster City, our boroughs, and towns-by fueling a renewal of existing housing stock and encouraging the inflow of new families into urban areas. We support promoting family-friendly policies, encouraging neighborhood development, affordable housing, and home ownership. When areas with existing public services are favored for growth over farmland, we maximize our public infrastructure dollars. We recognize the need for infrastructure improvements throughout the county, particularly transportation, water, and sewer systems. We urge the Governor and the Legislature to increase their level of investment in our county's infrastructure.

Relationship of city and county. The Democratic Party supports efforts to maintain a strong and vibrant Lancaster City, which is the cultural and economic core of the county. Since many of the county's governmental, cultural, and health care institutions are located in the city and enjoy tax-free status, we believe that the county as a whole has a responsibility to ensure that Lancaster remains vibrant. Enhancing the quality of life in the city makes it a more desirable place to live and work. This, in turn, helps to reduce the demand for suburban development and the effects of sprawl.

Farmland preservation. A critical part of Lancaster County's identity and economy is our rich, fertile farmland. We support the farmland preservation program, which protects our most fertile

land for farming forever. The county Farm Preservation Board has done a superior job in maintaining this precious resource. We applaud and support this effort.

C. Diversity

Although it is human nature to embrace that with which we are most familiar, our country was founded on religious, ethnic, and racial diversity. The infusion of divergent points of view and cultures has enriched our country in countless ways. To benefit from our rich diversity, we must respect the differences that exist between us.

Lancaster County Democrats value and encourage active participation in the political process of people from all walks of life, without regard to gender, race, age, ethnicity, disability, economic status, religion, or sexual orientation.

The Democratic Party will actively recruit and provide opportunities, training, and support for people from groups previously under-represented to achieve and succeed in leadership positions. We will carry out the directives in the national, state, and local by-laws of the Democratic Party that call for gender parity in all party leadership offices.

Fighting discrimination and protecting civil rights. Lancaster County Democrats know we must renew our efforts to stamp out discrimination and hatred of every kind, wherever and whenever we see it. We will continue to lead the fight to end discrimination on the basis of race, gender, religion, age, ethnicity, disability, and sexual orientation. As Lancaster County grows more diverse, we must celebrate and draw strength from our differences and our shared values.

D. Separation of Church and State

The Democratic Party firmly believes in the separation of church and state. The First Amendment states that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." It is a mandate to neither aid nor hinder religion, by any institution of government. We respect the wisdom of our nation's founders who adopted the First Amendment.

Religious pluralism is expanding in the United States. This growth in diversity, cultures, and religions makes it even more important to maintain a wall of separation between church and state. Religious freedom for all only exists because of this separation. Religious conviction is a matter of faith that cannot be forced upon or taken away by government. Religion in America will flourish or perish without the support or opposition of government.

In conclusion, as we begin a new millennium, it is important for us, as citizens, to reflect on the progress that we have made since this country's inception. This progress was made possible by combining the power of a market economy and the wisdom of our collective conscience and intellect with the tool of government action. Our country has matured from one of modest means that endorsed slavery and discrimination into the most prosperous nation in the world that provides ever-expanding opportunities to all citizens.

Democrats are proud of the progress that has been made to promote equality and opportunity for all citizens by the Democrats of yesteryear. This progress was not easy and we must be vigilant to ensure that the hard-earned progress of the past is not squandered.

We renew our commitment to the affirmative use of government, when appropriate, to provide opportunity for every American, to promote responsibility from every American, and to protect and enrich our communities. We welcome all who share our vision to join in our effort.

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