

Albany County Democratic Platform

Approved by Democrats assembled in convention April 9, 2016

“We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this CONSTITUTION for the United States of America.”

- Preamble to the U.S. Constitution

This platform has been developed around three principles that the Albany County Democrats believe offer the most important guidance for public policy and legislation in 2016. This platform embodies our commitment to:

Integrity

Opportunity

Sustainability

Recognizing the ease with which broad concepts can be agreed upon, but set aside when it comes time to translate the abstract into the practical, we provide select examples of each of these as guidance to ourselves and our candidates, officers, and elected officials.

Integrity

Albany County Democrats recognize that the basic integrity of constitutional government and public policy at all levels is the foundation upon which our society is built. We reject the view of “government” as “them vs. us”. Government in the United States of America is the collective will of the people in a democratic society, working together to secure and improve the lives of all citizens. All participants should be confident that the fundamental processes of election, appointment, legislation, administration, and enforcement are sound and faithfully adhered to.

Rule of Law. We promote an unflinching dedication to the rule of law - the same law for everyone - including the founding principles of checks and balances and the separation of powers between the legislative, executive, and judicial branches, as mandated by the U.S. and Wyoming Constitutions, and including the faithful execution of the laws, as written, by competent and objective executive-branch agencies.

Civil Rights. We endorse the freedoms embodied in the Bill of Rights, while recognizing that our desires for personal, financial, and national security do not trump our commitment to respect and protect the lives, individual rights, and privacy of our fellow citizens. We believe that the ideal of equal protection under the law for every citizen has not been realized and that our representatives at all levels of government must be diligent in their efforts to guarantee that protection for every citizen.

An effective intelligence gathering apparatus is important to our country’s security, but there must be responsible oversight and control in order to protect the constitutional rights of our citizens.

Equality. As people of the Equality State, we support legislation that fully affirms the rights of all people to marry, work, secure housing, and attend school, regardless of gender identity, sexual orientation, or family status. We support state legislation, city ordinances, and public school policies that prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender identity or sexual orientation.

Elections. We recognize open and fair elections as the cornerstone of a democratic society and embrace the Declaration of Independence proclamation that governments "derive their just powers from the consent of the governed". To preserve the integrity of that consent, we endorse the objectives of the Voting Rights Act, oppose efforts to restrict voting access, and support full transparency and accountability in the funding and conduct of campaigns for public office. We decry the Supreme Court ruling that corporations are to be treated as "persons" with respect to First Amendment rights and urge Congress to take what action is necessary to establish constitutional limits on corporate and special interest financing of campaigns.

To improve the connection between the chosen Democratic presidential candidate and the grass-roots members of the party they will represent in the General Election, we urge the Democratic National Committee to reduce or replace the "super-delegate" contribution to the national convention selection process.

Juvenile Justice. We support a comprehensive system of juvenile justice that focuses on rehabilitation and the unique aspects of juvenile psychology.

Incarceration. We recognize that too many people are in prison for too long and too often, at a financial and psychological cost disproportionate to the enhancement of public safety. That only 7% of federal prison population are persons convicted of violent crimes demonstrates that alternative forms of punishment and rehabilitation should be creatively pursued.

We strongly oppose the privatization of correctional institutions. We recognize that the financial burden of incarceration is rightfully borne by the people of the state and oppose forcing incarcerated persons to bear that burden.

Marijuana: We believe our communities would benefit by legalizing, regulating, and taxing marijuana products, and that it is counterproductive to commit public resources to incarcerate and otherwise punish adults involved in marijuana markets.

Public Discourse. We appeal to all elected representatives to embrace the long-term public welfare as their guiding vision rather than seeking short-term political victories. We decry the abysmal state of public policy discourse in the U.S., in which participants resort to distortions of the truth, vilification of those promoting alternate points of view, and contempt for critical thinking in a no-holds-barred struggle for political advantage.

We object to the negative rhetoric directed toward civil servants at all levels of government and applaud the hard work and dedication of the public-sector employees who teach our children, safeguard our communities, protect our environment, and provide other services that allow us to function as a society.

In our increasingly complex society there is an inherent tension between personal liberty and a government tasked with serving the common good. We encourage our government and our fellow citizens to show restraint and patience when that tension arises. Open and respectful discourse provides an arena in which good ideas and credible analyses may come from many sources and perspectives. We appeal to all participants to reject the endless chaff of political theater and turn their attention to a sober and considerate evaluation of critical public policy issues.

Foreign Affairs. While we recognize that different societies and cultures appropriately choose various configurations of government, we embrace the universal goals of democracy, self-determination, open government, civil and human rights, and the rule of law (national and international) in our conduct of foreign affairs.

Second Amendment Rights. The many deaths caused by the misuse and mishandling of firearms can and must be reduced. In recognition of Wyoming's long history of support for the right to keep and bear arms, we urge all parties involved in the debate over our country's struggle with gun violence to begin a legitimate and constructive dialogue on methods by which we can protect both our safety and our individual rights.

Opportunity

Albany County Democrats are committed to equal opportunity across our society. Government cannot guarantee outcomes, but we believe public policy should foster an economic, social, and institutional environment in which all individuals have the opportunity to pursue life, liberty, and happiness.

Employment. Opportunities for satisfying and justly-rewarded employment are basic to a stable and successful society.

We recognize that cooperation between business and government is essential for developing and maintaining employment opportunity in our increasingly complex economy. Private-sector employment is the primary source of prosperity in our society, but business will not thrive without strong communities marked by stable public infrastructure, effective educational services, a respected legal system, and a healthy workforce, all of which are supported by local, state and federal governments. A healthy economy should reward all of our citizens with an acceptable standard of living that will encourage them to stay and contribute to the future prosperity of Wyoming.

We respect and support the right of workers to organize and collectively bargain for fair wages, job security, and safe working conditions.

Wyoming's worker safety record continues to be the worst in the Nation. The State lacks authority to penalize employers for avoidable unsafe conditions or to require training for employees who work on dangerous work sites. Enforcement, education, and accountability are essential to create a culture of safety. We ask for legislation that will enhance workplace safety practices, employer incentives, and increase the enforcement ability of the Wyoming Occupational Health and Safety Administration.

Educational, training and employment barriers to women wishing to enter labor sectors predominantly occupied by men contribute to an on-going wage gap, the worst in the nation. We support open recognition of these conditions, as well as legal and societal efforts to address them. These efforts must go beyond merely requiring equal pay for equal work and include diversifying the economy, educating and training women and increasing the availability of childcare so that women will be better able to secure meaningful work in high-paying fields.

Health Care. The health of the public is contingent on a healthy environment, a healthy economy, and access to quality health care. The refusal of the Wyoming State Legislature to implement Medicaid expansion in our state continues to hurt our citizens and to hurt our economy. We support the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act as an important first step toward bringing basic health care to all Americans. We encourage our state government to implement the Medicaid expansion and focus on improving access to health care for all our citizens.

Ultimately, we favor implementation of a single payer system modeled on Medicare/Medicaid, paid for by the conversion from employer and premiums-based funding, tortuous cost-shifting, and hidden taxes, to straightforward payroll taxes and general funds.

We object to the politicization of women's health care. While we respect the religious faith of all people, anti-family planning beliefs should not be forced on society as a whole, nor should they restrict access to comprehensive sex education, pregnancy prevention services, or the full range of reproductive health care options. Women in every county in Wyoming should be able to choose, and have access to, those options, including abortion.

Mental health is important to the health and safety of the individual and the safety of our society as a whole. We encourage inclusion of mental health care in all health insurance plans, including Medicare and Medicaid. We support treating drug addiction via medical intervention rather than criminal prosecution.

Education. A fully-funded system of education that provides for the needs of every student is critical to the current and future success of our students, our communities and our state. Along with a fiscally strong investment in a diverse educational system is the need for world-class standards that allow our students to be competitive in a global marketplace of ideas and jobs. The Wyoming State Science Standards Review Committee worked for a year on developing excellent science standards that will benefit everyone. As Democrats, we urge all parties involved to work for the quick approval and implementation of these standards.

We believe that the K-12 model of public education is no longer sufficient to keep our students competitive in the national or global economy. We encourage a significant move toward K-16, i.e. four years of publically-funded post-secondary education. We support an educational system of the highest level that guarantees equal access for our children to receive both the skills necessary to be successful in the 21st century job market and to embrace their duties as citizens of a free country with intelligence, commitment, and critical thinking.

Immigration. We support enforcement of federal laws on immigration, including the responsibility of employers to determine whether prospective employees are in the country legally. We oppose enactment of inhumane anti-immigration laws and practices targeting specific ethnic or religious communities and we oppose denying their rights through discrimination, harassment, exploitation and unlawful detention. We support a balanced and humane approach to deportations which does not disrupt and divide families and cause economic hardships for legal immigrants. We support improved, more efficient and expeditious federal laws and practices for those entitled to legal or full citizenship. We also recognize the important connections between illegal immigration and global economic conditions and therefore support US policies for trade, foreign aid, and international affairs that serve to broaden opportunities and stabilize economies abroad.

Sustainability

Albany County Democrats encourage a multi-generation vision for Wyoming, for America, and for the world. Our goal is the development and maintenance of social, cultural, economic, and physical environments in which we and our descendants can enjoy the peace, freedom, and community that will nurture and sustain our quality of life. The free market remains a democratic expression of personal priorities, but we recognize a critical role for government in supporting careful, well-informed planning with respect to the optimum application of public funds and governmental regulation. We recognize that sustaining our quality of life requires an increasingly long-term perspective that often conflicts with short-term budgets, corporate profits, and political agendas.

Economy. The long-term employment opportunities upon which the health of Wyoming communities depend are a function of a stable and sustainable state economy. The energy-resource industry will continue to be a critical source of employment and tax revenue, but should be guided by policies which modulate the pace of mineral production to reduce the attendant stress on public infrastructure, social services, schools, housing, workforce training, and the natural environment, and to optimize employment and tax revenues over the lifetime of the resources. At the same time, we must identify and nurture opportunities for economic diversification into manufacturing, service-sector, alternative-energy, and energy-efficiency industries, looking to a future in which mineral resources are but one of many anchors for our economy.

Natural Resources. At the state and local level, we celebrate the clean air, land, and water, the open spaces, abundant wildlife, and the world-class wilderness upon which the superior quality of life in Wyoming depends. We recognize the long-term importance of these resources to the sustainability of our agriculture, tourism, and recreation economies, and to the desirability of our communities for raising families, growing compatible business opportunities, and attracting investment. As assets held in common, Wyoming's natural resources require public policies aimed at long-term protection, public access, and the use of best available technologies to minimize the environmental impact of industrial activity. We recognize that the highest and best use of certain areas is to be preserved in their natural state for the benefit of current and future generations. In the context of federal public lands, we urge the maintenance of federal ownership and management and the assurance of no net loss of Wyoming's protected wilderness lands through congressional legislation.

Energy Policy and Climate Change. Our collective failure to recognize the danger of climate change and to take the steps necessary to reduce its impacts is bringing the world ever closer to disaster. Our nation must take the lead in switching from reliance on non-renewable resources to maximizing energy efficiency and developing multiple energy sources that are both renewable and non-polluting. Research and development to meet these goals will not only lessen the impact of climate change, but will cultivate industry's ability to provide sustainable employment for the future, improve our balance of trade, and reshape our global military priorities. While continuing to responsibly produce the traditional energy resources upon which Wyoming's economy is currently based, our State should provide leadership in the development of renewable energy resources while keeping in mind the protection of Wyoming's wildlife and open vistas, two of our most precious non-renewable resources. A future built on conservation and sustainable use of resources will ensure the prosperity and well-being of our state, our country, and our planet.

War and Diplomacy. We strongly support efforts to improve the global economic, political, and military environment in which US foreign policy is exercised by shifting our emphasis from projection of military power and authority to efforts to engage problems through diplomatic and humanitarian initiatives. We must continue working to recognize and understand the legitimate interests of other nations - their histories and cultures - so as to face problems in the spirit of cooperation and collective resolution.

Conclusion

Our County, our State, and our Country will be healthier, fairer, and stronger by following the principles and policies outlined above. We, as Albany County Democrats, support these principles and pledge to work cooperatively with our state government, local governments, and all other parties for a better future for all people. We encourage all citizens to take an active role in civic and social affairs through political participation, public service, military service, community engagement, and volunteerism. We invite everyone to join us and work to have our elected representatives implement legislation that ensure peace, prosperity, liberty, and justice for all. Against all opposition, we will continue to fight for opportunity, sustainability, and integrity.