



**District of Columbia
Democratic State
Committee**

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2008 DC Democratic State Committee Platform

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PREAMBLE

The District of Columbia Democratic Party proclaims that all DC citizens must have the same rights as every American citizen and taxpayer. We reaffirm the rights of over half a million individuals/citizens to vote for the government of their choice. We retain the faith of our contemporary heroes Franklin Delano Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., -- that a vision of social justice is the driving engine in our government. We affirm that the will of the people for self-governance, political enfranchisement and respect for one's choices must be the everlasting goal for the Democratic Party. If we are to enjoy the peace and prosperity of a just society, Democrats must be prepared to stand up and fight for justice. To that end, we adopt and reaffirm the 2002 National Democratic Platform statement. "We believe all Americans have a right to fair political representation- including the citizens of the District of Columbia, who deserve full self-governance, political representation and Statehood." We therefore, call upon the National Democratic Party to make this commitment a reality.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

In the District and across the nation, the housing needs of low-to moderate-income families are growing rapidly. In the last decade, major changes in social policies and an expanding economy led to an increasing number of families who are spending more than half of their income on housing. Although much of the funding for affordable housing comes from the federal government, federal investment has fallen over recent decades. At the same time, the District has assumed an increasing amount of discretion in administering federal housing programs.

Democrats recognize the growing unmet need for affordable housing as a barrier to moving people from welfare to work and out of poverty, and as a significant obstacle to economic growth. We know that the District's Federal housing entitlement programs have remained relatively flat over the past five years while home prices have escalated. But Democrats also expect our city government to work harder to ensure that there is adequate and affordable housing and apartments for renters as well as homeowners. The Democratic Party heartily supports measures, which ensure the availability of housing affordable to people of low to moderate income. Gentrification and the significant change in public housing have seriously strained the supply of affordable housing in the city.

The District of Columbia has aggressively pursued the federally funded Hope VI program as a way of changing the face of public housing in the city. At several District sites, large congregate public housing developments have been replaced with mixed income housing and more are planned. Some opportunities exist for residents of the former public housing development to return once for the Hope VI project has been completed. However, because a number of the former residents do not meet the conditions required for return or may not have the financial wherewithal, or both, they are left to find other options. And even though Section 8 vouchers are provided to facilitate locating alternatives, all landlords do not readily accept such vouchers.

The District has implemented several tools to increase access to housing for low-to moderate-income families and to increase the development of affordable housing by utilizing the Low Income Tax Credit Program, which provides tax incentives for developers to build and preserve affordable housing units. Some of the programs that Democrats have supported are: 1) Housing Production Trust Fund; 2)

Housing Purchase Assistance Program (HPAP) for low-and moderate income families by providing now or low-interest down-payment and closing cost loans, housing counseling and credit counseling; 3) Assisting low-and moderate home-owners to pay for home improvements through the Department of Housing and Community Development Single Family Residential Rehabilitation Program.

The city government has gotten out in front of the problem locally by creating a dedicated funding source for the Housing Production Trust Fund, which in FY 2003 and 2004 has added \$45 million in local funds to produce housing for our most vulnerable populations, such as very low, and low-income residents, those who rent to people who have special needs.

The Democratic Party supports tax incentives for developers to build and preserve affordable housing; use of federal programs; dedicated funding sources such as the Housing Production Trust Fund; the Housing Purchase Assistance Program and other similarly creative measures which ensure a place for people to live in the District of Columbia irrespective of their financial means.

The Democratic Party supports measures, which enable senior citizens to remain in their homes and not become "priced out" because of rapidly rising property values. This includes property tax caps, homestead exemptions and other approaches which permit older residents who have devoted their lives to the growth and development of the city not to be displaced because the taxes with their homes no longer are affordable to them.

The Democratic Party also supports the regulation of corporations that involve themselves in the act of predatory lending. Many of these corporations are involved in the continued degradation of the American working class and therefore predatory lending must be curtailed

BUDGET AUTONOMY

We support the Budget Autonomy Act of 2007 introduced by Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC) to end discriminatory and unnecessary congressional review of the District's budgetary laws which cleared a major hurdle last year when it was passed by the DC Oversight Subcommittee in the US House of Representatives. This legislation is second only to voting rights in importance to the city's self-government and independence. Congresswoman Norton already achieved more budget autonomy for the District with two provisions passing in 2006: passage of the Mid-year Budget Autonomy Act, no longer requiring D.C. to bring any new funds here mid-year to be a part of the federal supplemental; and under an agreement with the appropriators, allowing D.C.'s budget to be reported out on time with spending at next year's levels.

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Throughout our history, the District has had a one-of-a-kind fiscal relationship with the federal government. Our current financial structure was established in 1974, when Congress granted the District Home Rule. This structure was modified slightly with the Revitalization Act in 1997.

Furthermore, the improved fiscal situation should not mask the fact that the District of Columbia has several long-term structural fiscal problems.

COMMUTER TAX

Democrats believe that one of the ways to help solve our structural imbalance is through a federally funded commuter tax. The District of Columbia needs a commuter tax and Democrats support any proposed bill that would allow this to happen. A commuter tax bill would allow the District government to tax the federal government two percent for commuters who work in the District of Columbia but live outside of the city.

Due to congressionally imposed taxing restrictions, the District loses millions in tax revenue annually. The District of Columbia Self-Government Reorganization Act of 1973 (known as the Home Rule Act) and earlier Congressional action have made DC the only state-level taxing authority that is prohibited by law from taxing the income of non-residents who do not live in the city. 62 percent of every dollar earned in the city are paid to people who do not live in the District. Fifty-six percent of the District's land is exempt from property taxes. Approximately seventeen percent of the sales transacted in the District are not subject to sales and user tax.

Finally, in as much as the U.S. Congress and the President have acknowledged the federal government's financial obligations to the District of Columbia, we the citizens, call upon the federal government to be fair in its dealings with the District. We also call upon the federal government to assume unconditionally, its financial obligations to the District of Columbia with the Findings and Conclusions of the study conducted by The General Accounting Office in 2003.

CONGESTION TAX

Like the capitol city of London, we believe in a congestion tax to protect the environment, reduce carbon emissions, ease traffic congestions, improve air quality, enhance public health and help to preserve and reduce the cost of our transportation infrastructure. All non commercial vehicles would be charged a fee to enter into our existing business districts from 7:00 AM until 8:00 PM, Monday through Friday. Vehicles registered to District residents would be exempt.

CRIME

One of the primary responsibilities of government is to provide for public safety. While crime has affected every person in the District of Columbia, the poor and disadvantaged have been the greatest victims. Residents of the most impoverished neighborhood face crime rates far beyond that of affluent areas. As Democrats, we demand a government that aggressively prosecutes and appropriately incarcerates all who commit violent crimes or possess illegal firearms. We will not tolerate revolving door justice. Democrats support the current work being done at the Civilian Complaint Review Board, which provides a resolution to constituent complaints regarding their treatment by police officials.

There is no issue on which DC residents have less say than the prosecution of local crimes. By referendum in 2002, 82% of DC voters approved an independently elected, non-Federal D.A. to prosecute local criminal and civil matters within Washington, DC. Like every other local jurisdiction in the country, it is time to establish an independent Office of District Attorney for the District of Columbia.

We also believe that government must reduce the crime rate by attacking root causes- substance abuse, joblessness, and lack of personal responsibility, social inequity and violence in the media. Democrats support more community policing, enforcing of truancy laws and assignment of more police officers on our streets.

Protecting our most vulnerable citizens deserves special attention. We need tougher penalties against sexual predators of children. We should move aggressively to shut down fraudulent telemarketers who target the elderly. We believe that we must overcome objections and reenact a strong new law to combat violence against women. And, if you commit a violent crime in front of a child, you should pay an even higher price for it.

Violence in the home is often the silent terror in lives of millions. Democrats believe in addressing domestic violence directly. We have to make sure that all battered people have the legal protection and support they need to be safe in their own communities, and to keep their attackers away. By stopping domestic violence, democrats believe we can break the cycle of violence. We know that when children grow up in abusive families, they are more likely to become abusers themselves.

Democrats also know that all District of Columbia residents are better off if we can stop crime before it claims new victims. That is why we are committed to sound and proven crime prevention strategies. We are equally committed to solid investments in children and youth, in job creation and in skills development as antidotes to crime.

Democrats also believe in protection for victims through victim's assistance programs. We need a criminal justice system that both upholds the Constitution and reflects our values. Too often, the courts bend over backward to protect the rights of criminals, but pay no attention to those who are hurt the most: the victims and their families. Victims must have a voice in trial and other proceedings, their safety must be a factor in the sentencing and release of their attackers, and they must be notified when an offender is released back into their community. They must have a right to compensation from their attacker.

Democrats further believe in the eighth amendment and thus believe that it is cruel and unusual punishment to try juveniles as adults. The penal system of the United States is based on the premise of rehabilitation and therefore believes that juveniles have the ability to be rehabilitated only through the juvenile system.

EDUCATION

Democrats support full-funding for the District of Columbia public education at all levels, including early childhood education, special education, before and after school programs and vocational and physical education programs. We support public chartered schools as well as transformational schools to help educate our children and youth. We believe that providing a quality public education must be a high priority if we are to achieve a competitive work force. Real

independence and self-respect for our generation and our children's future demand that educational programs come first, we believe the status quo in public education is unacceptable.

Education is not just about test scores, but also about passing on our values to the next generation of American citizens. Our children and teachers deserve schools of safety and classrooms free of fear. We should have a zero-tolerance policy against guns in school. Each school should institute strict, firm and fair discipline policies that are agreed upon on the first day of the school year at a meeting of teachers, parents and students. We should expand the Family Leave Law to make sure parents can attend these meetings and all parent-teacher conferences without being scared they will lose their jobs.

Democrats believe in "second-chance schools" where kids expelled from school and those headed for trouble can get the concentrated help, services and guidance they need to get back on the path to success.

Democrats believe that everyone involved in the education system should be held accountable. Accountability means we will no longer tolerate mediocrity and no longer allow failure. Accountability applies to states, school districts, schools, teachers, students and parents. Everyone must do their part. Nobody can shirk his or her responsibility. Consistently bad schools should be shut down. No excuses. No exceptions.

Teachers should be accountable for what goes on in their classroom. New teachers who answer the call to join this honorable profession should get the mentors and professional support they need to make the transition into teaching- and then should have to pass a rigorous and fair test before they step foot into a classroom.

The Mayor, City Council, Board of Education, Superintendent of Schools and school board should be held accountable for reducing drop-out rates, increasing graduation rates and raising student achievement by working together with teachers, school principals and parents.

Democrats assert that the elected and appointed Board of Education, teachers, student representatives, elected government officials, parents and volunteer citizens meeting together in public sessions is the best means to achieve excellence. We demand that all schools have physical facilities that are safe, healthy and conducive to learning. We cannot expect our children to learn all that they need to know in classrooms that are overcrowded, with teachers who are overburdened and with textbooks and technology that are out of date. We need to invest in our schools and our children's futures.

Democrats believe our public libraries are a great resource. We support increased funding, particularly to extend hours of operation.

Democrats believe that educational standards must be brought up to national standards of academic excellence. However, we oppose national standards that dictate testing as the only means for student advancement such as the "No Child Left Behind" legislation.

We strongly request that school authorities enforce the right of every child to be in a classroom that is conducive to the learning process. Democrats also support further reduction in classroom size to improve learning and discipline. Democrats believe that the right of students to learn must take precedence over students who disrupt the classroom.

Democrats believe that the School Board should ensure that children with disabilities are not blocked from having access to a free, appropriate education and that the doors to our public schools are not closed to children with special needs. We must, finally, live up to the Federal government's promise to communities to help them defray the expenses of educating children with special needs. We must assure that schools have the resources to meet the challenges of increasingly diverse student populations with programs for the English language learners, including bilingual education, to close the achievement gap. We oppose language-based discrimination in all its forms, including the provision of education services and encourage so-called English-plus initiatives because multilingualism is increasingly valuable in the global economy.

In order to create a world-class educational system for all students, we must allow experimentation in our public schools to find out what works. The Democratic Party supports expansion of charter schools, magnet schools, transformation schools, site-based schools, year-around schools and other nontraditional public school options.

Democrats appreciate the many contributions private schools make in educating District children, primarily those which serve disadvantaged children. We oppose any government dollars being diverted to private schools. Our position has not changed. Opposition to the current Congressional action to establish vouchers for private schools in the District of Columbia has been reaffirmed. We believe that the public school system should be more accountable to the citizens of the District of Columbia, and that the citizens, especially parents of children in public schools, should have a voice in the operation of schools.

We support a governance structure for the public schools that best meets the educational needs of our children and youth. That governance structure must clearly communicate lines of authority, minimize the power struggles of the poor, avoid the kind of micromanagement we experience in the congressional relationship to the District and empower educators to educate while holding them accountable for improving student performance.

Democrats reaffirm our support for the University of the District of Columbia (UDC) as the nation's only urban land grant university, which, by law, serves a unique and essential role of providing a quality post-secondary education to the citizens of D.C. We must continue to support this university and make sure that the Student Tuition Assistance program also remains in place.

EMPLOYMENT

We believe in the dignity of labor and fair wages for all. DC Democrats reaffirm support for laws that prevent and punish all violations of Equal Employment Opportunities for citizens, sexual harassment and all forms of discrimination with regard to religion, race, sex, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability and national origin. We support people's constitutional right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness- and opportunities to share economic resources. We believe that every resident in the District of Columbia who is of able-body and sound mind should be able to earn a living wage. We also believe in the rights of those persons who may have a disability to be able to earn a living wage.

D.C. Democrats agree with the statement made by the late Senator Hubert Humphrey (D- MN) who said, "that the best social program is a job". Good jobs at respectable wages for D.C. workers are

a priority. The District must provide employers with a workforce that is educated, skilled and work ready. In this connection we support user friendly, competent and efficient delivery of services. In turn employers must provide a living wage, access to health care and innovative ways for the working poor to have low cost child care when needed. Democrats call on the DC Council to explore enacting this principle into law for all significant DC government contractors.

In the private sector, Democrats believe in supporting small businesses and entrepreneurs that are making the new economy grow. Strengthening small business is a vital component of economic innovational and the creation of jobs for residents in the District of Columbia.

The District of Columbia continues to attract developers in the metropolitan DC market when the city faces periodic downturns in the economy. It is important that the District residents be able to survive brief periods of unemployment without devastating economic losses. Unemployment insurance programs are important elements in meeting this goal and should not suffer drastic cuts.

The District government cannot take a “laissez-faire” attitude toward job creation and retention. The District government must be an active player in keeping existing jobs and bringing new jobs to DC. The District must work more closely with Congress and the federal government in keeping federal jobs, particularly agency headquarters, in the District of Columbia. Democrats call on the District Government to more aggressively outreach to public and private sector companies to relocate in the District of Columbia.

Democrats believe there are many ways the District government can encourage employers to locate in the District. Creating new and innovative ways for businesses in the District to be licensed is one of the ways the District government can be helpful with getting new businesses in the city. The creation of the Master License Business Program and the Local Small Business Disadvantage Enterprise (LSBDE) has helped to streamline and centralize the issuance of building permits and opportunities for small businesses to contract with the District government.

ENVIRONMENT

The Democratic Party favors clean streets, alleys, curbs and gutters in all neighborhoods of the city. We believe the employment of incarcerated citizens and homeless persons in his effort will provide meaningful work and some compensation to those persons. Democrats also demand strict consumer and zoning regulations that require businesses to avoid trash dumping, air pollution and garbage storage within neighborhoods. Trucks and buses in the city’s populated areas must also be regulated to minimize health and safety risks.

Democrats believe that protection of the natural beauty of our city is of critical importance. Existing laws, such as the Environmental Safety Policy, must be enforced; and our elected officials must be ever vigilant regarding threats to the quality of our waterways and fresh air.

Democrats support laws to reduce water pollution, which currently makes all three of our major waterways, the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers and Rock Creek, unsuitable for swimming or fishing. This is especially so for the Anacostia, for which we have a \$3-billion cleanup plan, now unfunded.

Democrats also support laws to abate air pollution, which exacerbates the ever-increasing problem of asthma and causes hundreds of deaths in D.C. each year. In DC, a nonindustrial city, air pollution is largely caused by power plants, three of which are located on Capitol Hill or points east, and vehicular emissions, which have been inadequately regulated by the federal government. Democrats applaud the DC Council which for passing the "Clean Cars Act of 2008", which mandates that DC join several northeastern states from Maine to Maryland in adopting the California tailpipe emission standards, which are stricter than the standards that apply to the rest of the country.

Democrats advocate environmental justice, which recognizes that the health effects of pollution are disproportionately visited upon racial and economic minorities. In D.C., pollution levels tend to be higher in NE and SE. Further, unwise land use planning in D.C. has led to the location of more power plants, water pollution sources, and more trash transfer stations on the east side of the City.

DC Democrats advocate improving the quality of drinking water, which has been uneven because of poor management by the Army Corps of Engineers and WASA and because of past use of lead to fabricate water delivery piping systems.

DC Democrats support open space preservation. Washington was historically blessed with an abundance of park land; too often we have turned it over to commercial use (e.g., Benning Road power plant) or allowed its resource values (e.g., the tree canopy, wetlands) to decline.

DC Democrats are also proud of:

- The strongest "green building" ordinance in the country;
- The strongest tree-protection ordinance among major US cities;
- A pioneering ordinance, probably the first in the nation, regulating the transfer of hazardous materials by rail. Our ordinance was so good that a substantially similar federal law was passed last September.

Democrats further believe in the preservation of our building environment and architectural heritage. Economic development, which we understand is a necessity to build and maintain a vital growing city, must not be allowed to overwhelm our residential neighborhoods and devastate the character of our community. District zoning and landmark preservation law should be strengthened and enforced.

Seeing the rapid increase of asthma and other diseases and infections related to a decrease in air quality in less affluent neighborhoods. Democrats believe that the Clean Air Act must be upheld and strengthened. To strengthen this act it is our belief that the District of Columbia must join with other states, such as California, to adopt stricter air quality standards.

Democrats believe government officials should follow the policy of prudent avoidance regarding microwaves, antennas and towers in order to avoid adverse environmental health hazards and visual intrusions. The Democratic Party supports teaching environmental preservation at an early age- both at home and as a part of formal education.

GOVERNMENT REFORM

The Democratic Party supports strengthening the Mayor-Council form of government. Advisory Neighborhood Commissions (ANCs) are non-partisan; we believe they perform a vital role as elected officials in our present government. We support expanding the responsibilities of ANCs and the restoration of their approved funding. We support funding that would give ANC offices access to modern communications technology. In addition, we insist that recommendations of ANCs be given greater weight, as provided for in the original Home Rule Charter.

The Democratic Party supports continuing the September primary for D.C. elections, along with a separate primary in quadrennial years for Party officers. A small savings of dollars projected by those favoring a combined primary will not offset the potential creation of much confusion and increased voter apathy.

GUN CONTROL

Democrats oppose any legislation by Congress to liberalize our gun control laws in the District of Columbia. A shocking level of gun violence on our streets in the District of Columbia and in our schools has shown the American public the need to keep guns away from those who shouldn't have them. Democrats believe we should fight gun crime on all fronts- with stronger laws and stronger enforcement. That's why Democrats fought for and passed the Brady Law and the Assault Weapons Ban.

Democrats believe we need mandatory child safety locks to protect our children. We should require a photo license I.D., a full background check and a gun safety test prior to purchasing a new gun in America. We support more federal gun prosecutors, ATF agents and inspectors.

The Democratic Party fully supports the recently enacted hand gun ownership legislation forced upon us by the US Supreme Court including these provisions.

Continues to ban handguns in most places but creates an exception for self-defense in the home. The handgun ban remains in effect, except for use in self-defense within the home. Sawed-off shotguns, machine guns and short-barreled rifles are still prohibited.

Requires the Metropolitan Police Department to perform ballistic testing on handguns and makes such testing a registration requirement. The Chief of Police will require ballistics tests of any handgun submitted for registration to determine if it is stolen or has been used in a crime. Also, to serve as many residents as possible, the Chief will limit registrations to one handgun per person for the first 90 days after the legislation becomes law.

Clarifies the safe-storage and trigger-lock requirements. The legislation modifies existing law to clarify that firearms in the home must be stored unloaded and either disassembled secured with a trigger lock, gun safe, or similar device. An exception is made for a firearm while it is being used against reasonably perceived threat of immediate harm to a person within the home.

HATE CRIMES

Protecting all of our residents should be the primary purpose for adopting a federal hate crimes law. Over the past four years, we have witnessed the need for this legislation to be enacted. Here in the District of Columbia we have a biased crime law. Hate crimes are more than assaults on the individuals- they are assaults on the very idea of America. They should be punished with extra force. Protections should also include hate violence based on gender, disability, race, religion, sexual orientation and gender identity.

HEALTH CARE

We believe that every person should have access to affordable health care. We support quality health care whether it is managed care, private or public care. "The DCDSC supports the efforts of the Health Care for America Now! Coalition to provide quality, affordable health care for all"

Democrats applaud the recent success of our Delegate to the U.S. House of Representatives for increasing federal support of D.C.'s Medicaid cost. We support efforts to expand coverage so that every person has access to reasonable health care. We should make health care accessible for small businesses. We support a "Patient's Bill of Rights." We believe that licensed medical professionals- not accountants and bureaucrats- should make the medical decisions. It is time that we meaningfully address concerns about the quality of care and the decline of patient access, trust and satisfaction.

Democrats believe Medicare is worth fighting for- worth saving. Democrats also believe we should invest in biomedical research and continue to fight and conquer life threatening conditions- everything from cancer, AIDS, Alzheimer's, diabetes, etc. We must do more in fighting HIV/AIDS. Democrats continue to support the Ryan White CARE Act, the Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS program and incentives to return District of Columbia residents with HIV/AIDS to work.

Democrats believe in a smoke-free DC. We are committed to drastically reducing smoking in the District of Columbia and we support the rights of all employees- including bar and restaurant staff to work in healthy, smoke-free environments. No worker should have to get lung cancer or heart disease as a condition of employment. It is time that we address the effect of tobacco related illnesses on all segments of society.

We believe that preventative efforts can decrease the cost of health care to both the public and private sector. To this end, Democrats call for health education in the D.C. public schools; including teen pregnancy prevention, enforced mandatory immunization of communicable diseases of children and effective AIDS education, treatment and prevention, measures targeting at-risk groups. We support increased funding for programs promoting the prevention of drug abuse. We support domestic partnership for same sex and opposite sex couples who wish to have medical coverage for their partners.

As part of a comprehensive health care strategy, we support the development of more health care clinics and facilities in order to create a true continuum and array of options. Coupled with a strong health education program, this will reduce the inappropriate reliance upon hospital emergency rooms and other acute care facilities as a substitute for routine primary care.

HOME RULE

As Democrats, we demand a democratic government. Last year, Congresswoman Norton with the help of her allies in the District and around the country pressed the new congressional majority to make history in the 2007 by passing the D.C. House Voting Rights Act. The Democratic leadership got the bill to the floor soon after the Democratic majority took control and were successful in getting it passed in House with a vote of 241 – 177.

Following House passage, the Senate quickly brought the bill through committee and came within three of the 60 votes necessary for passage. With the critical 2008 election year to work with, Democrats strongly support the work of Norton and her allies who are increasingly confident of final passage in the Senate especially considering polls that show a strong 61 percent national majority for the bill.

Justice and American democratic principles demand that the District of Columbia's vote be counted in Congress. Democrats must rally more public support from the voters to stand up and demand a vote in Congress.

IMMIGRATION

The DC Democratic State Committee supports immigration reform which sees the immigrant community as a vibrant human resource for national economic progress while recognizing the need to secure our borders.

Immigration is the lifeblood of America, a bedrock value tied to our founding and one that constantly renews the greatness of our country. It is estimated that we have over 11 million undocumented immigrants in the United States, 1.7 million of who are children. As a result of our broken system, many families are forced apart, unable to reunite with their spouses, parents, children, and siblings because of a shortage of visas. Our current system allows unscrupulous employers to skirt our laws and exploit undocumented workers in the name of cheap labor. Our broken immigration system also impacts state social services, including placing a financial strain on local and state law enforcement.

The DC Platform Resolution favors comprehensive immigration reform designed to remedy the underlying causes of undocumented immigration while at the same time respecting the value that immigrants bring to society as hard-working, law-abiding taxpayers.

The DC Platform includes the support of:

- A temporary/guest worker program with significant labor protections and a path to permanency. A temporary worker program would create a legal path for foreign workers to enter our country in an orderly way. It would meet the legitimate needs of U.S. employers, and it would give immigrants a way to provide for their families while respecting the law.
- Strengthening our borders by shifting resources away from border walls that have proven ineffective and towards more effective solutions like increased cross-border cooperation with law enforcement and improved intelligence sharing that can decrease undocumented border crossing without an unnecessary military buildup.

- Harsh penalties for those who abuse and exploit undocumented workers. Comprehensive immigration reform must include programs and tools for employers to ensure that employers hire documented workers in a manner that protects documented workers from arbitrary firing. Such a system of programs and tools, when properly implemented, will lead to holding accountable those employers who are serious violators of labor and employment laws.
- Administrative reforms that will result in a more fair process for immigrants seeking entry especially for those who have been needlessly separated from their families. These reforms must address a reduction in family immigration backlogs.
- Decreasing the flow of undocumented immigration by examining the impact that current foreign policy, including trade policy and foreign aid, has on the lives of the millions of immigrants who cross our borders seeking to restore the livelihoods that were lost by the implementation of those policies.

JUDICIAL SYSTEM

Democrats believe citizens who are incarcerated are entitled to have a trial by jury consistent with the laws of the District of Columbia. For more than 200 years the American justice system has been- and continues to be- a powerful force for positive change. Our jury system is an essential element in our remarkable success as a nation. The United States Constitution in Article II, Section 2 for criminal cases, and the 7th amendment for civil cases establishes the right to a trial by jury of one's peers.

The Courts, established by the Founders as independent from the give-and-take of the political process and other influences, remain the best forum for determining the merits of any lawsuit and the extent to which wrongdoers should be held accountable.

LABOR

The Democratic Party recognizes the right of all workers to organize, form and join unions without fear or intimidation. The party supports bringing labor to the table on all matters that effect working people in the District of Columbia by establishing a permanent labor caucus within the Democratic Central Committee

The Party supports establishing "Community Benefit Agreements" for all publicly funded economic development projects of \$200,000 or more which as a standards of affordable housing, local hiring and training, project labor agreements and labor peace agreements. The District of Columbia Democratic Party fully supports the "Employer Free Choice Act" and calls on all state Democratic Party central bodies to adopt similar platforms.

MENTAL HEALTH

Mental Health is an essential component of a healthy community and an individual's capacity to lead a full and productive life. Despite this, 20% of adults suffer from depression and 30,000 individuals commit suicide every year. Democrats believe in supporting families caring for loved ones, including adults with severe mental illness, by strengthening community mental health systems and providing a comprehensive, well-coordinated array of services and supports to all in need. We believe it is vital to ensure access to full mental health prevention, early assessment and treatment services to children, youth and families. Finally, it is urgent that we act to provide full parity between mental health and physical health coverage in our nation's health plan.

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Democrats believe that we must fight to ensure that people with disabilities (PWDs) can meet their full potential and participate accordingly in American society. For people with disabilities, the barriers against full personal development are pervasive and manifest both in physical and attitudinal ways. PWDs have the lowest average incomes, shortest lifespan, worst education achievements, and highest unemployment rates of any American citizenry group. Those living with a disability have difficulty finding affordable and appropriate accessible housing in which demand for such homes far outnumber supply.

Democrats support the concept of universal accessibility of buildings; that is all public buildings or housing units, built fully or in part with public funding, be constructed according to ADA guidelines. Currently, accessible units are built only according to housing laws on a percentile basis and are marketed in the housing market on a first come, first serve basis regardless if the buyer has a disability or not. Universal accessibility ensures that an optimal number of accessible housing units remain on the market.

Finally, the ADA guidelines need to be incorporated and applied in all zoning code criteria including districts designated as historic.

Democrats understand that the two largest disability groups are the elderly by age group and the developmental disabled by type of disability. Custodial care is often the most important element in addressing their needs. Group homes are often the best way to respond to many PWDs' housing and care needs. In this case, Democrats support a minimum standard that guarantees a healthy and dignified environment. If group homes are not required, Democrats support certified home visits programs as needed.

Democrats recognize that education is the method by which many PWDs achieve one of the primary goals of all Americans; the capacity of Independent Living. Democrats support the need for detection and competent response to a disability at the earliest age possible by certified personnel. Proven intervention strategies, both long term and immediate, should be shared process involving by all interested parties including family members.

With respect to employment, Democrats support awarding need based tax credits and grants to PWDs seeking employment or undertaking retraining programs. Given that the high cost of health insurance due to individual underwriting which often deters employers from hiring qualified PWDs. This situation

underscores the need for universal healthcare. Democrats support including PWDs in public health insurance programs such as those enjoyed by Congress.

PRO-CHOICE

The Democratic Party stands behind the right of every woman to choose, consistent with *Roe v. Wade*, regardless of ability to pay. We believe it is a fundamental constitutional liberty that individual residents of the U.S. - not government- can best take responsibility for making the most difficult and intensely personal decisions regarding reproduction.

We support contraceptive research, family planning, comprehensive family life education and policies that support healthy childbearing.

PROTECTING FAMILIES

Government does not raise children, families do. But, government can help make it easier for parents to raise their children in a wholesome, healthy environment that is safe from drugs and crime. Democrats support the Family and Medical Leave Law. Strengthening families means helping parents make time for their children. Creating affordable Childcare centers and options for all age children, including infants is one of the major crises affecting the District of Columbia parents. The government should continue to build partnerships with private industry and to increase childcare facility centers that would help subsidize what the government cannot pay for. Democrats support the new Family Court that has been established as part of the District of Columbia Superior Court system.

SENIOR CITIZENS

The District of Columbia Democratic State Committee will work to support and advance issues to enhance the quality of life for the elderly population residing in the District of Columbia.

We support grassroots efforts that demand action solutions from our elected official, business leaders and non profits that address our senior's major concerns such as quality and easily assessable health care. We also advocate for legislation that protects Social Security Insurance and the financial security of these valuable citizens. We strongly support rent control and the abatement of property taxes to retain those citizens who have carried our city during its leaner years. We support all efforts that provide protections from age discrimination and promote equal opportunity with humane treatment in job recruitment, training and appointments.

We stand for increased funding and the continuation of the "2006 Grandparent Caregiver Program"

STATEHOOD

The District of Columbia proclaims that all DC citizens must have the same rights as every other American. All Americans have the right to fair political representation, including the citizens of the District of Columbia, who deserve full self-governance and equal voting rights. Although partial enfranchisement options exist, "Statehood" is the only means available by which the dual injustices of denial of self-determination and political representation can be eliminated. The democratic rights granted to Americans in the Constitution of the United States, must be granted to the citizens of the District of Columbia as well.

STRUCTURAL IMBALANCE

Since 1997, external assessments of the District's fiscal system have concluded overwhelmingly that the District faces a structural problem, which was also cited in a 2003 GAO report on the District of Columbia.

Unlike other cities, the District of Columbia must pay for duties of a state, county and city. Democrats agree with the recent GAO report that stated because the District of Columbia is saddled with an inordinate burden because it has to perform state functions such as public safety, health and welfare, Medicaid and educational resources. Additionally, as the Nation's Capital, the District has the responsibility of supporting the federal presence and all of the not-for-profit organizations, universities and companies that locate here in order to do business with the federal government and foreign embassies. These services include, among others- traffic control, police and fire protection, and road maintenance. Increased demands for these services are exacerbated by national celebrations and demonstrations. Failure to address our unfair conditions will always leave the District of Columbia with a structural and financial imbalance. Therefore, we ask for reauthorization of the Federal Payment.

Furthermore, we seek to correct structural imbalances in our tax base that restrict income tax collections and prohibit the District from taxing 53% of its real property. 56% of the District's land is exempt from property taxes and 71% of the District's tax-exempt land is federal property.

TRANSPORTATION

We support comprehensive, efficient and fully funded (both regional and federal funding) public transportation. In a climate of record breaking gas prices and increased public transportation ridership levels, we implore the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) "METRO," and the DC Council to turn their attention to providing fuel efficient bus service within the District of Columbia. Service that not only provides transportation to the subway system for reaching the downtown employment centers, but also transportation that allows people to utilize the many businesses and visit neighborhoods located in areas not adequately served by any other form of public transportation.

Moreover, we ask for the inclusion of other forms of transportation including streetcars, bicycles, and pedestrian walkways and these alternative forms of transportation be included in all of the Districts transportation funding projects.

We call on the federal government to increase Metro funding for city improvement and maintenance of roads, streets and bridges. We demand greater oversight of Metro maintenance and operations to ensure safety and efficiency.

URBAN REVITALIZATION

Democrats believe that every community has the ability to prosper and grow and thus we believe that it is essential to equip these communities with the ability to grow through increased grants and government funds, specified particularly for urban communities. Democrats further believe that these funds should be utilized for the purpose of rebuilding and reconstructing urban communities. In additions, these funds should also work to bolster local businesses and business owners.

VETERANS

Democrats believe that all veterans put their lives on the line for Americans freedom and thus we believe that they serve high quality and speedy services. These services include but are a not limited to: quality rehabilitation and healthcare including mental health assessment and treatment for those veterans with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, affordable housing placement and loan guarantees, educational opportunities and tuition assistance and guaranteed job training and placement upon a return of duty.

Democrats further believe that the families of these “American heroes” are also patriots of this great nation. Thus, we believe in the continuation of benefits for these families are imperative and are necessary for upholding American freedoms.

VOTING RIGHTS

The District of Colombia Democratic State Committee supports greater ballot access by lifting the restrictions for absentee voting; and whereas, this should be immediately expedited by the DC government.

We also believe that party organizations should have the right to determine the manner in which nominees are chosen. Further, we believe only registered Democrats shall be allowed to participate in primary elections and the Democratic Primary victor shall become the standard bearer of the party.