

Whatcom Democrats 2008 Platform

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PREAMBLE

As Democrats and as citizens of the United States of America, we support the rights guaranteed by our Constitution which support personal freedom, social and civil justice, privacy, security, and economic opportunity. Because we recognize that all power ultimately rests with the people, we adopt this Platform to ensure that voters and candidates for public office understand and support our goals:

- Making a single-payer, healthcare system available to all
- Taking responsibility for our environmental and educational legacy
- Ensuring our security by rebuilding the reputation of the United States as a equitable and just nation
- Restoring an ethical and healthy economy that offers job opportunity for all
- Reversing the erosion of civil liberties in our country
- Recognizing that diversity strengthens our nation.

This Platform reflects our desire to take our nation in a direction that many of us have been striving for years. Let us come together for the future, using American creativity, hard work and good will as we honor those who have come before us.

AGRICULTURE & FORESTRY

Agriculture and Forestry are industries of vital importance to Whatcom County. We recognize the role of farmers and foresters as stewards of the land and support programs that ensure the sustainable production of high-quality foods, the preservation of family farms and agricultural lands, the protection of our forests and promotion of environmentally sound & sustainable harvesting methods, and the enhancement of rural communities.

We Call For:

- Assuring that the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan is consistent with provisions of the Washington State Growth Management Act;
- Prohibiting subdivision of land in agriculture and forestry, since this ultimately leads to sprawl and lost viability of resource lands;
- Ensuring farmers' rights to use their land for farming in perpetuity by protecting them from encroaching development and guaranteeing them water and electricity;

- Expanding the Purchase and Transfer of Development Rights programs in Whatcom County as a means to protect farm and forest lands;
- Encouraging a sustainable small farm economy;
- Legalizing the growing of industrial hemp;
- Increasing state and federal labeling of origin, genetically modified food and cloned food;

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

We believe that government has the responsibility to help alleviate social conditions that contribute to crime. Authorities, communities and individuals must work together for safety, preventing crime and making neighborhoods livable.

We Call For:

- The restoration of voting rights to felons;
- The Release of all imprisoned political activists who have not committed violent crimes;
- The reduction of mandatory sentencing for persons convicted of possession of drugs and low level dealers;
- An end to the profit motive of the prisons and prison privatization;
- The end of racial/ethnic profiling;

ECONOMIC JUSTICE, LABOR & ECONOMY

Including Consumer Protection, Housing, Jobs, Rural Opportunity, Social Security, Trade, Wages and Benefits, and Workplace Protections

Economic justice for working families is essential for the realization of a democratic society. We believe in the resurgence of workers rights, government oversight, and good corporate governance.

We support or affirm:

Consumer Protection

- The abolishment of offshore bank and corporate secrecy systems that allow bank accounts or companies to be registered without listing the names of the owners;
- Opposition to any Superstore Wal-Mart in Whatcom County;
- Changing the US Bankruptcy Law so that pensioners and employees with pension benefits in company-owned pension plans be first in line as creditors above all others when a company files for bankruptcy or reorganization under the bankruptcy laws;
- Passing legislation to regulate payday lending business practices and provide fair and reasonable consumer protections for Washington customers, including longer loan repayment periods and fair interest rates;

Housing

- A major increase in funding for assistance and construction of affordable and low income housing, with a priority for home ownership;
- Democrats elected to serve the needs of the people will support restoration of HUD affordable housing budgets, Department of Agriculture rental and housing monies, and the National Housing Trust Fund Act;
- Democrats will support low-interest Federal program loans to low-income first-time home buyers;
- Opposing the use of Eminent Domain for the purpose of increasing government's revenue base;

- Encouraging the use of owner-occupied accessory dwelling units in neighborhoods that have voted to allow them;

Jobs

- Provide living wage jobs to unemployed Americans by offering work to rebuild and restore national infrastructure;
- Support rebuilding and restoring homes in the Southeast U.S. from the damage caused by hurricanes;
- Creating job stimulation programs at the local, state and federal levels by focusing on small and local businesses;
- U.S. government shall reduce outsourcing of jobs overseas, be prohibited from sending publicly financed work offshore, and refuse tax breaks to any U.S. corporations that shut down factories or services or otherwise reduce employment in the U.S. and move those jobs overseas;
- For jobs exported overseas, companies must contribute the monetary equivalent of those employees' federal taxes to the state higher education system in the state from which those jobs were lost;
- Student loans should be forgiven for workers who are entering the job market but making less than poverty level income and who have children;
- Regulations that prevent the use of prison labor for private gain.

Rural Opportunity

- Reducing the wage gap between the urban and rural areas of the state;
- Subsidizing farmers to raise crops for companies to produce environmentally friendly alternative fuel components, as well as creating a tax incentive for those companies;
- Farmer's right to earn an adequate income and preserve farmland;
- Actively prohibiting telephone and cable companies from discriminating against rural communities in building broadband networks and establishing a goal of universal broadband by 2010 by identifying gaps in availability in price and speed.
- The legalization and growing of industrial hemp;

Social Security and Support

- That the Social Security System shall never be privatized, and the return of full benefits to age 65;
- That any reform of social security should ensure that disabled, dependent, and survivor benefits are maintained in a fair, equitable, and universal manner;
- The restructuring of the Washington pension system to give all current and retired members an active role in the governance of that system;
- Incentives, including targeted tax credits, to businesses that provide family wage jobs with adequate health care programs and pension benefits.
- Providing welfare support to qualified families for the first five years of a child's life.
- Incentives to employers to provide and support family friendly and quality of life policies and programs in the work place, such as onsite daycare.

Trade

- That environmental and economic policy must be developed jointly so that a healthy environment can be maintained to support a future healthy economy;
- Withdrawing from the WTO, NAFTA, and CAFTA and replacing those agreements with fair trade agreements that promote workers rights and the environment of all countries involved;
- Companies and nations doing business in or with the U.S. shall be required to adhere to the International Labor Organization Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work;

- Requiring private contractors who benefit from government contracts to have their headquarters in the U.S., to have been free from felony or other criminal convictions for at least ten years, and to have a majority of their profit-making production carried out in the U.S.;
- Balanced foreign trade (no trade deficits);

Wages and Benefits

- That all employers provide a living wage to their employees and an automatic increase in the minimum wage connected to the Consumer Price Index, also retaining COLA;
- Recommitment to the Fair Minimum Wage Act, and a minimum hourly wage for all workers in Washington State of at least \$7.25 per hour;
- Returning contracting work rules to the previous dollar limit or higher;

Workplace Protections

- The right of all workers to a safe and healthful work environment including the disclosure of toxic substances in the workplace;
- A workers' bill of rights that includes but is not limited to basic rights of association, fair trade, free speech, due process, unions, and a 40-hour work week;
- Workers' rights to organize, use arbitration, and when necessary, strike to resolve disputes;
- Employers shall not replace striking workers;
- Stop abusive mistreatment of employees at work. We affirm the rights of workers to dignity at work without risk of health-harming mistreatment and abuse. We support State legislation and City/County ordinances to compel employers to prevent and correct these abuses.
- The enforcement of ergonomics rules written by Labor and industries, and their original timeline;
- Global abolition of child labor

EDUCATION

“Education is the cornerstone of a healthy democracy.” It unites students of diverse experiences, abilities, and backgrounds for the common purpose of learning and ensures our nation’s bright future.

It is the paramount duty of the State to provide ample funding to support high quality and appropriate education for all children. We call for a renewed commitment to make public education a priority in Washington State. We must ensure access to educational opportunities for all students and foster respect for the diverse cultural communities of Whatcom County.

We Call For:

- Full funding for pre-K through higher education including adult vocational and basic skills education;
- Immediately repealing the so-called “No Child Left Behind” Act;
- Eliminating the use of costly, high-stakes tests such as the WASL to assess student learning or school performance;
- Presenting scientifically accepted theories of the origin of species and the universe in all public schools;
- Providing more alternative education programs and community involvement efforts;
- Restoring support for the creative and performing arts, career & technical education, and physical education;
- Teaching citizenship with emphasis on the political process and the Constitution;
- Ensuring that all facilities are well-maintained, safe and secure;

- Promoting a safe environment at school for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans-gendered (LBGT) students;
- Providing salary, benefit, and retirement plans for public educators commensurate with other professionals with similar experience and backgrounds;
- Cost of living increases for K-12 and higher education employees;
- Creating the option for teachers in their first five years to write off 20% of outstanding student loans per year;
- Putting part-time public educators at all levels on the same pay/benefit scales as full time faculty;

ENVIRONMENT, ENERGY & TRANSPORTATION

The Environmental, Transportation, and Energy Policy of the United States of America shall have as its goal to create a future that has a vibrant, healthy Nation with energy sources and transportation systems that have little or no negative environmental impact on the planet as a whole, and that preserves healthy habitat to protect endangered and at risk species. The government shall implement actions that will reverse the trend of global climate change by large scale reduction of green house gas emissions, to include; *(1) research, development and swift implementation of non-polluting and renewable energy systems such as solar, wind, geothermal, and tidal power, and (2) responsible creation of efficient and clean transportation.*

We Call For:

- Reduction of human activities that cause global climate change and ratify the Kyoto Accord;
- Continued ban on oil drilling and exploration in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge;
- Taxation systems that reward industry that is environmentally clean;
- Create a significant financial and legal deterrent to prevent industry or government entities from degrading the natural environment;
- Monitoring and reducing factory farm contamination of our air, water and food,
- Clean up and elimination of the Hanford site as a repository of nuclear waste;
- Renewable energy sources for any state approval process for new power facilities;
- New construction and industrial updates to require renewable and energy-efficient technology;
- Preservation and restoration of historic wild salmon runs for long-term sustainability;
- Adoption of State and National forest policies that favor select cutting over clear cutting;
- Federal transportation policies that create clean and safe transportation powered by renewable energy;
- Requirement that electric utilities to produce at least 20% of their power from clean, appropriately-sited renewable resources by 2020;
- Policy of reuse and recycling of clean fresh water at the residential, agricultural, commercial, governmental and industrial levels;

FOREIGN POLICY AND WAR ISSUES

We believe that the United States must be strong and sure in its own defense while being equitable and just in resolving conflicts among and between other peoples and nations of the world. We assert that diplomacy, dialogue and non-violent means of resolving conflict are most in keeping with the goals and principles of our nation and must therefore be the first resort of our government.

We assert that our principles, aspirations and interests are best advanced by making the rights, liberties and wellbeing of the peoples of all nations, ethnicities and groups our principal concern. In pursuit of those aims we assert that fair trade consistent with sound policies for protecting our world's environment and the rights and welfare of workers, whether American or foreign, should be our nation's policy in trade.

We Call For:

- The United States to begin a speedy but responsible end to our occupation of Iraq, including permanent bases, but not Afghanistan, which is a viable and legitimate NATO effort;
- The U.S. to provide robust support for the men and women serving in our military for their sacrifice and to commit to a fully-funded Veterans Administration, expanded coverage to all veterans—not just low income veterans, state-of-the-art medical care for returning wounded veterans, expanded psychological support for transitioning veterans and post-traumatic-stress disorders, and sufferers of acute brain trauma.
- The United States to support non-violent and humanitarian initiatives aimed at rebuilding civil society in Iraq and Afghanistan, rehabilitating and repatriating those refugees displaced by war and supporting true self-determination to the Iraqi and Afghani peoples;
- The United States to work cooperatively with the United Nations, pay our financial obligations to that body and ratify human rights conventions;
- Strengthening international institutions and diplomacy as the surest ways to prevent acts of terrorism and resolve international conflicts;
- The United States to categorically reject the policies of “first strike” and “preemptive war”;
- A U.S. declaration to prioritize dialogue and diplomacy over sanctions or military action;
- The U.S. to call on all governments to end production, stockpiling, testing and use of nuclear weapons;
- Reducing nuclear weapons through multilateral, negotiated and verifiable reductions;
- Increased federal funding for world hunger, the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the treatment and eradication of other communicable diseases worldwide;
- The United States, as a signatory to the Geneva Conventions, to acknowledge that those Conventions have the force of U.S. law and that violation of those constitutes war crimes;
- Our nation to respect our laws and traditions and oppose all forms of torture or “extraordinary interrogation techniques” for any reason and on all persons;
- Our nation reject the practice of “extraordinary rendition”;
- Ratification of the International Treaty on Land Mines, the Law of the Sea Treaty and the treaty bringing the United States within the International Criminal Court; Restoration of United States participation in the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty;
- Immediate end to the Cuban embargo and establishment of normal diplomatic relations with Cuba;
- U.S. renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and withdrawal from the World Trade Organization and the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA);
- An equitable policy affirming the rights of the Israeli and Palestinian peoples to live in separate states, determine their own governments, and live their lives in a peace free from random attacks;
- Federal policy opposing the death and injury to civilians in Israel and Gaza and working with both sides to seek peaceful resolution of this conflict;
- Terminating the Western Hemisphere Institute for Security formerly known as the U.S. Army School of the Americas;
- U.S. elimination of excessive spending from the military budget;
- U.S. elimination of the use of outside contractors for support services;
- An immediate end to the use of private mercenary forces to supplement our armed forces;
- The United States to work within the international community to establish the right to pursue international criminals regardless of regional or national borders;

GOVERNMENT AND ELECTION REFORM

The current domestic political climate increasingly requires that our government make a commitment to provide transparent representation, so as to assuage fears of a degeneration of democratic control over its actions. Our government must also recognize its duty to provide services vital to the public without making the availability of

those services dependent on the whims of a deregulated market, while simultaneously maintaining a fiscally responsible progressive tax base.

We Call For:

- State and federal public financing of political campaigns;
- Adoption of Instant Runoff Voting for national, state and local elections;
- Abolition of the non-democratic super-delegate system;
- Adoption of State delegate selection process where 50 percent +1 of committed delegates are a result of a state primary, and 49 percent are chosen by caucus polling;
- A voting system that provides a physical paper ballot verifiable by the voter while in the process of voting;
- Support for stricter laws for preventing gerrymandering in Congressional redistricting;
- Ending the use of political pressure to pervert scientific findings of government agencies, and ending the use of political criteria in the hiring and firing of U.S. Attorneys and other governmental employees.
- Greatly reducing the national debt with the installation of a national policy which reflects this goal.
- A tax rate for Corporations comparable to that of individuals;
- A progressive tax structure that includes deductions for student loan interest;
- Taxing of unearned income at the same rate as earned income;
- A tax credit for paid childcare;
- An expansion of Port of Bellingham commissioners from three to five;
- The participation and equitable representation of women in the Whatcom County judiciary;
- County or city building projects to result in no net loss of low cost housing;
- County provision of public restrooms and shower facilities at key locations;

HEALTH CARE

We believe the right to quality health care is a basic human right. We advocate the establishment of a comprehensive national single-payer health care system in which health care would be publicly financed and privately delivered.

We Call For:

- A national single-payer health care plan with privately-delivered services that cover all medically-necessary services;
- A health care system where decisions are made by health care professionals, patients and their families and that provides patients the freedom to choose their providers;
- Opposition to efforts to privatize Medicare;
- Congress to establish a drug benefit program directly administered by the Medicare Administration with the authority to negotiate drug prices
- Administration with the authority to negotiate drug prices directly with pharmaceutical companies;
- Until a national single-payer health care plan is established, full funding and expansion of veterans' health programs, including necessary and appropriate support for their families;
- A U.S. Food and Drug Administration that is independent of the pharmaceutical industry;
- An effective plan of treatment and education to address this nation's drug, alcohol and tobacco problems;
- Effective funding of mental health treatment;
- A comprehensive public health plan to educate and protect the public in the event of an epidemic;
- A Patients' Bill of Rights that protects the privacy of each patient's medical history;
- Restoration of funding and support for medical research, including expanded stem cell and fetal tissue research, based on scientific merit;

- Mandatory availability of employer-sponsored healthcare benefits to partners of eligible LGBT employees until such time as we have a single-payer system;
- Increased funding for mental health.

HUMAN, CIVIL AND CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS

We respect the equality and dignity of all people and support and affirm all human rights as guaranteed by the US Constitution and written in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We honor and encourage the rich diversity of society and our party.

We support full and complete equality and seek to end all discrimination based upon age, color, creed, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender expression, gender identity, marital status, national origin, race, religion, and sexual orientation.

We fully support the right to observe any or no religion and honor all forms of religious and spiritual diversity. We adamantly support our American tradition of separation of church and state at all levels of government.

We Call For:

- The repeal of sections of the USA PATRIOT Act that limit or infringe upon the Constitutional rights, civil rights & liberties of U.S. citizens and others subject to the Act;
- Opposition and repeal of all laws permitting warrant-less domestic surveillance by agencies of the Federal government;
- The right of people of all sexual orientations and gender identities to marry and to obtain the full legal benefits provided by marriage;
- Opposition to any attempt at any level of government to define marriage;
- The development of a legally viable definition of "disability" in Washington State based on the Federal Americans with Disability Act (ADA) to protect the rights of people with disabilities;
- City and county governments to establish a position with authority to achieve full accommodation and accessibility for all people;
- Federal, state and county support for returning veterans who need government services, accommodation, and accessibility;
- Consistent county, state and federal efforts to involve people of color in the democratic process;
- Vigilant protection of the right of women's reproductive and medical choices without criminal repercussions to women and medical professionals;
- The right of people to be provided with contraception and accurate information about contraception and reproduction;
- County, state and federal funding for reproductive, family planning and AIDS HIV health services and education;
- Repeal of the Don't-Ask-Don't-Tell law

IMMIGRATION

We affirm that human rights and dignity are not dependent on legal status or citizenship and that all people are entitled to these rights and dignities regardless of country of origin or lack of documentation.

We believe that immigration is not an issue of homeland security but an issue of global displacement and disproportionate distribution of wealth to the global north. We require that the causal relationship between foreign and trade policy and the increase in undocumented immigration be addressed in all immigration legislation without further criminalizing or stigmatizing immigrants.

We Call For:

- Opposition to any law that limits access to housing, public services, fair working conditions, education, protection from unjust search, seizure or legal persecution, medical care or any other human right based on lack of documentation;
- Opposition to construction of a wall or barrier along any U.S. border;
- Opposition to authorization of state or local police to enforce immigration law or request information on legal status;
- Opposition to armed vigilantism or any violent action toward actual or perceived non-U.S. Citizens;
- Opposition to deportation or detention of any person that is a primary or sole caregiver for a minor child or disabled dependent regardless of citizenship status;
- Opposition to any legislation that would cause undocumented immigration to become a felony;
- Opposition to any law that would declare English the official language of the United States;
- Opposition to any legislation that imposes “quotas” for immigration based on national origin, level of education, specific skill or income level;
- Legislation that provides for improved access to citizenship based on educational attainment.
- A streamlined and expedited process of legalization for immigrants fleeing from areas of war, political unrest, genocide or economic and political refugees;
- Immigration reform which includes a path to citizenship for undocumented people already residing within the United States;
- a federal policy honoring the rights, welfare and healthy environment of all indigenous peoples;

TRIBAL RELATIONSHIPS AND SOVEREIGNTY

We affirm that local, state, and federal governments should respect the decisions of the Native American Nations and tribal governments, affirm their treaty rights, and oppose attempts to diminish their sovereignty and cultures.

We Call For:

- Local, state, and federal government recognition of the inherent sovereignty and treaty rights of American Indian tribal governments as self-determining and self-governing;
- Interactions between tribal and non-tribal governments to be held in an environment of mutual respect as government-to-government relationships;
- Local, state, and federal governments to help elevate the social, economic, and health status of American Indian people and tribes to a level at par with the status of other US and State of Washington citizens;
- Timely Congressional passage and signing by the President of the re-authorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act of 2007, along with full appropriations;
- National recognition of tribal lands that extend over the U.S./Mexico and US/Canadian border and the freedom of members of such sovereign nations to move within their lands without obstruction;