

2004 Vermont Democratic Party Platform

As Approved by the 2004 Platform Convention, September 26, 2004

PREAMBLE

Vermont Democrats base our beliefs on the principles that define and unite our society: democracy, individual liberty, and equal treatment under the law as guaranteed by the United States and Vermont Constitutions, equal opportunity for everyone to achieve and to prosper, personal responsibility, respect for all families, the importance of community, and the preservation of civil society.

1. FEDERAL POLICY

In the past four years decisions at the Federal level have begun to have dramatic negative impact on Vermont and Vermonters. It is beyond the scope of this platform to address all policy issues at the national level that affect Vermonters. However, the following policies at the federal level are of dramatic and urgent concern and affect our ability to shape a constructive future for Vermont's people.

a. Tax Cuts/Deficit:

Tax cuts under the Bush/Cheney presidency have disproportionately benefited the wealthiest citizens and corporate taxpayers. These tax cuts have helped turned three years of Clinton surpluses into federal deficits as far as the eye can see. The tax cuts and resulting deficits are being used to justify cuts in vital programs from transportation to antiterrorism efforts; from health care to affordable housing.

We support reversing the federal tax cuts, especially for the wealthiest taxpayers, and returning to a policy of fiscal responsibility. We support full funding for programs that support working Vermonters and the vulnerable in our society. We recognize the need for investment in the infrastructure that is vital to economic well-being.

b. The War in Iraq:

We strongly condemn the deceptions and false claims that were used to justify the war in Iraq, and the failure of the Bush Administration to understand the history and the cultural and religious forces at work in that region. We support an active policy to include the United Nations Security Council and other United Nations member states concerning future actions in Iraq. We advocate that the financial and political commitment to stabilizing and securing Iraq be a joint and cooperative effort by members of the United Nations Security Council and other United Nations member states.

We offer our support and appreciation to the men and women and their families who have served and are now serving in Iraq. We advocate that all military personnel and veterans be recognized for their courage and service and that they be provided with full medical, emotional and financial support.

c. Outsourcing:

The Vermont Democratic Party calls upon its Congressional delegation to oppose the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) and similar trade agreements until a new trade policy that protects the environment, workers' rights, and the health of local communities is adopted at the Federal level.

d. Environment:

The Bush Administration record on the environment is a disaster for the United States and Vermont. A firm commitment to cleaning up our air, water, and land and to addressing global climate change is essential. Strong environmental protection is vital to a healthy economy.

e. Energy:

The Bush/Cheney energy policy reflects the positions and interests of fossil fuel corporations. There must be a commitment to sustainable energy investment, energy efficiency, and developing the distributed and renewable energy resources that can make our energy more affordable, our nation more secure and our economy stronger in the 21st century.

f. Health Care:

The Federal government should support the provision of health care as a right for all Americans. It should support states in developing innovative strategies to provide quality, affordable universal health care. It should provide for the safe re-importation of prescription drugs, and encourage reasonable and affordable pricing of drugs for all Americans.

g. Affordable Housing

The Federal Government should restore cuts made by the Bush/Cheney Administration in funding for Section 8 and other programs to subsidize low-income housing.

h. Education:

The Federal government should fully fund its long-unfunded mandate for special education. It should encourage innovative state approaches to promoting improved education, school accountability, and most importantly, educating students to be informed, thoughtful citizens, innovative and productive workers, and caring members of their communities..

No Child Left Behind should either be abandoned or revised to make it useful to schools and fully funded.

2. BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES:

We believe that the areas of education, health care, housing, and other essential human services need to be considered as essential components to build healthy communities in

Vermont. In these areas, the issues of funding, access, quality and effectiveness are all intertwined.

a. Children and Childcare:

The future of Vermont resides in our children. All programs, policies and regulations should be viewed in the context of how they will affect Vermont's children. In order to allow parents to work, and in order to build a better future for our children, we will implement programs that promote the delivery of affordable, quality childcare.

b. Education:

Education builds the future for Vermont and all Vermonters. It is our best investment. All children have the right to have an equal opportunity to a quality education, regardless of where they live. We support strengthening education programs for early childhood; we support affordable and accessible higher education; and we support continuing education for adults. We endorse strategies to provide choice among secondary schools in public education that preserve community-based schools. In accordance with the Vermont Constitution, public funds must be used solely to support non-sectarian schools.

c. Health Care:

Vermonters have the right to accessible, quality, affordable health and dental care, mental health care, long-term home and institutional care, and substance abuse treatment. We are proud of the success Vermont has had under Democratic leadership in extending health care services to most Vermonters, especially our children.

Mindful of the continuing lack of a satisfactory health care system in our country, we believe that Vermont should take the lead in reducing costs and improving services by instituting a universal health care system based on the following principles:

- Every Vermonter covered without regard to age, income, employment, or medical condition.
- All appropriate and necessary services covered including prescription drugs and long-term care.
- Free choice of health care providers.
- Cost to consumer based on ability to pay.
- Accountable to the public for financial performance and for quality of service.

We must also continue to pursue ways to lower the cost of prescription drugs.

d. Crime Prevention:

We must continue to protect our communities and provide safety for our citizens. We support programs that prevent crime through education, drug treatment, prevention and deterrence.

e. Housing:

Safe and affordable housing is one of the fundamental building blocks for our healthy communities. We will promote the construction of affordable housing, support the

construction of housing accessible to the elderly and people with disabilities, and work to uphold minimum housing standards throughout the state.

f. Human Services:

We have an obligation to all Vermont families and to all Vermonters to provide services that protect their well-being and preserve their dignity. We are proud of our many successful community-based services for Vermonters: early childhood education and health programs, Parent-Child centers, our network of mental health services, programs for older Vermonters, programs for people with disabilities, and community action programs. We will work to constantly improve the responsiveness and quality of Human Services programs.

3. ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY:

We believe that economic opportunity issues should be treated comprehensively, with business, government, labor and environmental groups working together. A healthy economy is necessary to support jobs and businesses, and to generate the public and private resources that make Vermont a special place to live. We believe that we must employ an economic strategy that incorporates our Vermont values and that seeks to build economic opportunity for all Vermonters. We recognize that addressing the health care crisis in Vermont is a critical part of a sound economic development strategy.

a. Economic Development and Job Creation:

Business, government, higher education, labor and environmental groups have the responsibility to work together to create the climate needed to foster economic development and the creation of well-paid jobs, including high tech jobs. We must support the development and growth of businesses of all sizes, but we must particularly work to develop the small businesses that are closely committed and connected to Vermont. We will implement programs that encourage the growth of business and job opportunities in the areas of the state where the local economy is struggling.

b. Agriculture and Forestry:

Agriculture and Forestry are vital components of not only our economy, but also our communities and our culture. We will implement programs that help to provide economic stability, that encourage diversification, that promote value-added enterprises and that foster environmental responsibility. In addition, we are committed to the continued viability of the family farm.

c. Diverse and Sustainable Economy:

Vermont already has a diversely developed economy. This diversity makes our economy more stable in the long run, instead of subject to the booms and busts of mill-town economies. We will continue to broaden the spectrum of economic sectors, and encourage the growth of entrepreneurial enterprises that create opportunity, meaningful work, and wealth. We will create strategies for future business development based upon a sound understanding of the forces that affect our economy..

We recognize the need to limit the growing power and economic concentration of multinational corporations, especially media conglomerates, in public life and enhance competition through active enforcement of antitrust laws and other measures.

d. Infrastructure—Transportation, Telecommunications and Energy:

Wise investment in infrastructure will produce a stronger economy in the future. We must maintain our transportation network and expand alternative and public transportation options. We must provide the mechanisms/incentives that will develop broadband telecommunications services throughout the state.

Vermont should develop a sustainable, affordable, renewable and efficient energy mix that will create jobs, help insulate Vermonters from fossil fuel price fluctuations, improve our environment, and strengthen our economy.

e. Job Training:

With the global economy in a constant state of flux, the need for employable skills is constantly shifting. In order to have a skilled workforce that will attract quality businesses with well-paid jobs, we will encourage and enable public and private investment that will provide job training to Vermonters.

Colleges and universities have the potential to be the engine to propel our society into greater prosperity. Further, they are important to local economies throughout the state. We must make a stronger effort to support these institutions and their students.

f. Livable Wage and Equal Pay:

Vermont employees are entitled to a livable wage. Consequently, we support an increase in the minimum wage with regular cost of living updates. In addition to wages, we recognize that childcare and health care benefits are important components of compensation. We also believe that equal work should be recognized with equal pay.

g. Regulatory Review:

We support the review of economic development programs in order to assess the successful components, to provide accountability, and to streamline the processes that are needlessly cumbersome and bureaucratic. We support the consideration of specific government organizational changes that will create links among agencies where there should be close working partnerships in policy and economic development.

4. PROTECTION OF RIGHTS:

Our laws and social institutions should protect individual rights and equality regardless of race, religion, national origin, gender, age, marital status, health status, sexual orientation, or disability.

a. Reproductive Education and Choice:

We support the right of all to receive complete and accurate information on family planning, pregnancy services, and the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases. We remain committed to the universal right of women of all ages to make personal, confidential decisions regarding abortion and other issues related to reproductive health, free from harassment and interference.

b. Workers' Rights:

Ensuring the rights of employees in the workplace is an appropriate and necessary function of government. We support worker's right to organize a union, bargain collectively for pay and benefits, work free from discrimination, and work in safe, healthy and fair conditions. We support Title I of the Americans with Disabilities Act.

c. Civil Unions:

We continue to support Vermont's Civil Unions law. We support full and equal rights for gay and lesbian couples.

d. Equality Before the Law:

This national goal, enshrined in the U.S. Constitution, remains unrealized. We support equal rights amendments to the Federal and Vermont Constitutions.

e. Native Americans:

We support measures to ensure the dignity, individuality, and cultural distinctiveness of Vermont's Native American peoples. We also support efforts to resolve the complex legal and public policy questions related to formal recognition of tribal status by the state.

f. Respect:

Respect for the dignity of others is a fundamental building block of healthy communities and a healthy society. We support programs aimed at instilling this principle at all levels, including those to combat sexual, racial, physical, cultural, and emotional harassment in our schools and workplaces.

5. SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT:

Effective environmental protection includes both respect for private property rights and a keen awareness of the public value of a healthy environment in enhancing our economy, public health, and quality of life.

a. Sprawl:

Our goal is to preserve Vermont's unique working landscape and quality of life while encouraging economic vitality in community centers. We support measures intended to: discourage wasteful land consumption; increase public awareness of the environmental costs of sprawl; promote downtowns and village centers; provide more transportation and housing choices; and conserve valuable farmland and forestland.

b. Environmental Protection:

We support the fundamental goals of Vermont’s land use planning laws and other foundations of environmental law such as the Endangered Species Act, which are aimed at preserving Vermont’s quality of life, the biodiversity of its ecosystems, and the purity of its air, soils, and waters. Accordingly, we also support the designation of a core ecological area within the Champion Lands.

c. Regulatory Process:

Environmental regulations must be enforced fairly and intelligently. We will work to ensure that state agencies are empowered and encouraged to work with businesses to help them comply with necessary regulations as efficiently and inexpensively as possible.

d. Sustainable Business:

We endorse the view that economic development can be carried out in harmony with effective environmental protection. As a first, obvious step toward these goals, we will ensure Vermont should make every affordable effort to attract and encourage environmentally friendly and sustainable businesses such as community-supported agriculture, environmental tourism, energy efficiency, renewable energy, organic farming, green building design, and sustainable forestry.

e. Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs):

We believe that biotechnology, like other revolutionary scientific discoveries in human history, holds great promise in a wide range of applications. Because this technology has the unprecedented ability to alter the very structure of life itself, and because credible scientific voices have raised cautionary concerns, we believe that proponents of this technology should bear the burden of proof that GMOs will not harm human health or the environment. This approach allows Vermonters the potential benefits of biotechnology, while protecting both Vermonters and the environment from potential risks.

6. EFFECTIVE AND EFFICIENT GOVERNMENT:

Democrats believe that government should be effective and responsive in protecting and enhancing the public interest. Government cannot and should not try to be the answer to all problems, but open democratic government is essential to protecting and enhancing the public good. Government can provide the context in which communities flourish, individuals grow and gain opportunity, and creative responses to our physical, social and personal needs are supported. Government provides basic services, and should do so with efficiency and fairness. It provides protection, stability, justice and equal opportunity.

a. Sound Fiscal Policy:

Sound fiscal policy is vital to the thoughtful and responsible operation of government and maintenance of social and environmental programs. The Vermont Democratic Party is the party of fiscal responsibility, with a proven record of sound fiscal policy. We have put in place many protections against revenue shortfalls. Sound fiscal policy is based on fair taxation—reasonably progressive overall, all forms of wealth taxed at moderate rates. We

must be willing to keep spending restrained, and to use resources to avoid harmful cuts when revenues are down. Our social programs must live within the resources of Vermonters through good economic times and bad.

b. Understand and Address the Major Cost Drivers:

We need to look at the areas of big government spending to find real economies and efficiencies. Too often government is saddled with “picking up the costs” that other sectors of the economy are unwilling to bear. We need to consider whether there are “least cost” ways of meeting transportation needs, whether prescription drug costs can be lowered, and whether, more generally, the big driving costs such as health care need a whole new approach, both to provide better service and to manage costs. Obviously the goal in a number of these efforts is not just to lower costs, but to find better service at lower cost.

c. A New Approach to Managing State Government:

Democrats believe in consistent, fair enforcement of regulations on the books and in continued improvement in coordination among state agencies. We believe that a top-to-bottom “performance review” of the functions of state government is necessary in order to find creative, smart new ways to make government run more efficiently on the resources we have. We believe that Vermont state government needs to work closely with town government.

d. Support for Campaign Finance Reform and Public Financing of Campaigns:

Democrats took the lead in passing the Campaign Finance law that has been upheld by the decision of the Second Circuit Court in a remarkable landmark decision. We should expand public financing law to include House and Senate legislative races, along the lines of the Maine model.

e. Voting Rights:

We support measures to encourage maximum voter participation. The Democratic Party supports a change to the Vermont Constitution that will promptly accomplish the election of a governor, lieutenant governor, or treasurer, and fairly reflect the will of the electorate if no candidate receives a majority of the votes.

We support full paper trails to verify voter choices in any electronic or “touch-screen” voting devices.

f. Transparency and Responsibility:

Concentrated economic power is inimical to democratic self-government. We support transparency in government and limiting the influence of large corporations and other entities in endangering the public interest.