



PLATFORM OF THE DEMOCRATIC
PARTY OF ARKANSAS
2016-2018

DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF ARKANSAS 2016-2018 PARTY PLATFORM

PREAMBLE

The fundamental principles of the Democratic Party of Arkansas are the promotion of individual freedom, equality of opportunity, community empowerment, a healthy environment, and a vibrant democracy. All are essential if Arkansas is to reach its full potential.

A spirit of individualism is at the root of the unmatched success of the American experiment and has been a defining characteristic of Arkansas since the state's founding 180 years ago. That individual initiative generally works for the benefit of society as a whole. True individual freedom requires a community where all can flourish, achieve, and work toward success. Our party celebrates individual initiative and entrepreneurialism and balances those principles with the good of the community. We believe that society is healthiest when all are contributing to a project larger than themselves. The Democratic Party of Arkansas believes that the community has the greatest responsibility to step in to take care of those who are most vulnerable in our society.

The Democratic Party of Arkansas is also committed to equality of opportunity for all Arkansans. First and foremost, this involves the Party's commitment to work to remove legal structures that treat individuals inequitably based on their socioeconomic status or group membership. Removing legal barriers alone does not rectify patterns of social inequality; the Party is therefore committed to working proactively to ensure all Arkansans have a fair shot. This means offering an excellent and affordable education to all. It means providing every Arkansan with access to high-quality health care and ensuring access to affordable housing. Only with these basic rights will we see all Arkansans able to flourish in the economic and social arenas.

Arkansans have a responsibility to participate fully in their democracy in the voting booth and through using their constitutionally protected freedoms of speech and association to make their views on controversial issues known to their fellow citizens and their elected officials. Government has a responsibility to serve the people of the state in an ethical, responsible manner through using their tax dollars wisely, valuing the input of all citizens, respecting citizens' civil liberties, and operating ethically. This combination of an engaged citizenry and a decent and dignified government will ensure the promotion of the common good.

The Democratic Party of Arkansas respects the diversity of opinions its members hold. While recognizing that there are some within our party who, for reasons of personal conscience, may disagree on some of the specific issues as stated within this platform, we recommend the following guided by these principles.

ETHICS

We expect and demand the highest ethical standards in government and support full and fair discussion of issues. We support the goals of the Ethics Commission and the Democratic Party's longtime commitment to good government and responsible stewardship of the citizens' trust. We reaffirm our belief in transparency, accountability, public accessibility to government, and citizen participation.

Because public servants enter into a sacred trust with citizens, government has a responsibility to serve the people of the state in an ethical, responsible manner, valuing the input of all citizens, respecting those citizens' civil liberties, and operating ethically. State government has a responsibility to use citizens' tax dollars wisely, always recognizing that the buildings and lands of the state are owned by the people rather than those who happen to be in power at a given moment. The combination of an engaged citizenry and a responsive, fair-minded government will ensure the promotion of the common good.

In the wake of the Supreme Court's decision in *Citizens United*, there is urgent need for campaign finance reform. Arkansas Democrats led efforts to make our elections more accountable to the people by passing a constitutional amendment prohibiting corporations from making campaign contributions. Arkansas Democrats will continue to develop and support transparency laws that will let Arkansans know the forces behind attempts to buy our elections. We are committed to further action to ensure that elections are funded in a fair and equitable manner, and we call for an end to the campaign finance system currently at work that causes so many Arkansans to doubt the health of our democracy.

EDUCATION

Education is central to the sustainability of our nation's democracy and is the foundation upon which the success of Arkansas depends. Democrats believe that all Arkansas children have the right to a high-quality education, regardless of race, economic status, gender, religion, disability, national origin, immigration status, sexual orientation, or gender identity. Building upon our investment in the education of our students, the Democratic Party believes that we must be committed to putting policies in place that will result in our graduates making their lives in Arkansas rather than choosing to live elsewhere.

The future of Arkansas demands that we hold education as our most important civic and economic development initiative. A world-class educational system—one that moves seamlessly from pre-kindergarten through adulthood—will make our democracy stronger and help develop jobs to make Arkansas competitive with other states, as well as on the world stage. Democrats are committed to making Arkansas a knowledge and educational hub for the 21st Century.

Therefore, the Democratic Party believes it should be a priority to provide a universally accessible, high quality pre-kindergarten program. In order to ensure a strong finish, children must have the opportunity to begin their education early, laying the basic foundation for a better-educated citizenry and workforce. The DPA recognizes that quality pre-kindergarten has a positive ripple effect throughout our education system as a whole and the academic life of any single student. We are committed to making sure no four-year old will ever be placed on a waiting list for pre-K in Arkansas. Our party recognizes that failing to ensure our children are ready to learn when they start school substantially increases the risk of them failing in school or not finishing school at all.

The Democratic Party celebrates progress toward an adequate and equitable K-12 education system over the past few years, but we must be diligent in not allowing Arkansas's education system to fall behind. The Democratic Party believes that true commitment to high-quality education requires serious dedication, expectations, and funding.

The success of our educational system hinges on our teachers. Teachers work hard to fulfill a most sacred and vital role of helping our children learn the skills and values needed to become effective citizens. To make Arkansas an educational powerhouse, then we must recruit the best and brightest to the teaching profession, raise teacher pay, and demand quality instruction. We believe that a continued commitment is essential to recruiting the most talented individuals to enter the teaching profession. Democrats believe teacher pay must be competitive with neighboring states, and Arkansas must employ expanded mentoring programs to enhance retention of our best teachers. While we recognize that teachers need to be evaluated fairly and held accountable, we support giving educators the support and professional development they need to be successful. The Democratic Party also recognizes the vital role education support professionals play in educating our children, and we must provide salaries and make sure benefits are available that recognize their worth.

The availability of high-quality teaching must be available ensured to students in all parts of the state, including the use of new technology that prepares students for the careers of the future and programs to assist with this goal in rural and underserved areas of our state.

Arkansas Democrats believe that forcing school districts to rely solely on property tax revenue leads to gross disparities in rural and underserved communities. All our children, regardless of zip code, deserve a high-quality education and funding levels that make this a reality.

Using the established state educational standards as the basis for such evaluation, we believe that it is vital that we know that our schools are producing desired results. We believe that Arkansans are best served by schools that inspire students to pursue the full range of academic inquiry that values and encourages creativity and critical thinking, a vibrant and vigorous curriculum, and practices not based solely on "teaching to the test."

High quality afterschool and summer programs can be powerful tools in helping to close the achievement gaps that we too often see in our state by enhancing the learning that happens

during the school year, keeping our young people safe, and aiding working families, including low-income families, in the care of their children.

We believe that public funds should be used only for public schools. Therefore, the Democratic Party opposes the use of vouchers, as we believe this would undermine the public education system in Arkansas. In addition, we believe that public schools in the form of charter schools must not be handed over to unaccountable corporations.

Parental involvement is a crucial determinant of a individual children's success in school. Therefore, we advocate measures that will empower parents with the tools and the opportunity to be active, respected participants in the education of their children.

The Democratic Party is committed to creating and maintaining a safe, welcoming school environment, a necessity for successful teaching and learning. Such an environment must be free of bullying of any kind. Therefore, we also believe that our education system must ensure respect, discipline, and order in the schools.

Democrats are presently leading efforts to establish statewide best practices for students with disabilities, and the Democratic Party is committed to providing high-quality special education.

Finally, so that they may learn to their full potential, it is crucial that students come to school healthy and ready to learn. Therefore, we advocate the implementation of an integrated school health system so that the health coverage of our youth, especially those eligible for the ARKids program, can be increased. In addition, we recognize that food insecurity has a negative impact on students' health, well-being, and success in school. Thus, the Democratic Party supports continued funding for comprehensive school nutrition programs. Finally, we support accessibility of public school students to comprehensive, accurate, age-appropriate sex education, including information to help stem the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and to prevent teen pregnancy. Through these and other programs, we believe that future generations of Arkansans will see an improved academic performance and decrease in dropout rates.

In addition to our commitment to traditional public education at the elementary and secondary levels, we believe access to college, career-technical education, and other postsecondary educational opportunities must be more accessible and affordable. Every student who wants to attend college or participate in other postsecondary training opportunities should be able to do so regardless of zip code or economic status. Our party is fully committed to maintaining and expanding scholarship programs that provide students with opportunities to pursue college and/or careers after high school and encourage talented Arkansans to make their lives in Arkansas.

Democrats believe that no student in Arkansas should have to incur massive debt in exchange for an education. Our party is committed to student debt relief. Students should have the ability to refinance their student loans, and students who dedicate their working lives to public service should have their debt forgiven.

The Democratic Party supports the Arkansas DREAM Act. We recognize it is not fair to force young people who have lived in our state for years and graduated from our high schools to pay out-of-state tuition rates simply because of their legal status. The Arkansas DREAM Act would allow these students to pay in-state tuition prices at our public colleges and universities.

An educated and well-trained populace is essential for the state to compete for higher paying jobs. It has been estimated that 14 percent of Arkansas adults lack basic literacy skills and 19 percent do not have a high school diploma or GED. A significant number of adults in our communities desire to learn English as a second language. There are twice as many English language learners in our public schools as a decade ago, and the need for adult English literacy programs has correspondingly increased. Adults with low reading or English literacy skills often cannot effectively negotiate the health care system, fill out job applications, support the educational development of their children, manage their finances, or participate fully in the democratic process. They experience greater difficulty both in finding and retaining employment and face significant obstacles that can prevent them from being engaged members of their community. Adult literacy services are provided by a network of county-level literacy councils. These organizations offer free instructional tutoring to adults who want to learn to read, write or speak English better. Libraries offer children and adults opportunities to learn to read via tutoring and other programs.

In addition to supporting literacy, libraries allow others to learn technology and information skills. Whether developing skills to succeed in school, looking for a job, exploring possible careers, having a baby, or planning retirement, our citizens turn to libraries to help them lead better lives. Libraries serve people of every age, education level, income level, ethnicity and physical ability, and are essential to a democratic society. For many, libraries provide resources they could not otherwise afford.

Community colleges attract students from all backgrounds and educational levels. The open access and affordability offered by these institutions appeals to student populations who have been characterized as low-income, first-generation, minority or working adults. Sixty-five percent of all American jobs by 2020 will require some form of post-secondary degree or credential, but the current rate at which colleges and universities are awarding them falls short. Increasingly, businesses and policymakers are turning to community colleges to help fill these workforce gaps and educate the growing student body.

The Democratic Party of Arkansas supports adequate funding of adult literacy programs, public and school libraries, education and life skills for adults with developmental disabilities, and community colleges towards the goal of increasing literacy, educational advancement, job training, and community and civic participation.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, OWNERSHIP AND OPPORTUNITY

Gainful and productive employment is the cornerstone of the Arkansas economic system, and the Democratic Party of Arkansas honors the hard work of workers and responsible actions of businesses, especially small businesses, that together create jobs and grow our economy. Key to a healthy economy is a healthy, educated, and financially secure workforce, which creates an environment where business can thrive and produce those jobs that secure a strong middle class.

The Democratic Party is committed to policies that promote and reward responsible business growth and which also benefit workers and their families throughout the state with well-paying jobs. We do not believe in corporate welfare. We oppose Republican efforts to take our hard-earned dollars and give them to the richest corporations. We do not support rewarding companies that ship American jobs overseas with special tax breaks and loopholes. We encourage companies to create jobs here in Arkansas and supporting policies that promote job growth in Arkansas and that promote American-made products.

Each region of our great state should benefit from Arkansas's business friendly climate and should be supported in accordance with its specific needs for economic development, job creation, and an enhanced personal and familial quality of life. We are especially concerned about the persistent economic challenges facing certain regions of our state, especially the Arkansas Delta, and support a focus on providing sustainable opportunities for the residents of those areas.

Responsible business growth will require expanding entrepreneurship, developing our existing businesses, recruiting new business, funding the state's infrastructure and increasing higher education and other postsecondary opportunities and programs for adult learners.

Arkansas Democrats believe that severe economic and income inequality is hurting Arkansas families and our country. We strongly advocate that workers and their families be supported by fair compensation through a living wage and provision of benefits. The Party believes that Arkansas workers deserve a raise. Consistent with our values, the Democratic Party successfully led efforts in 2014 to raise our minimum wage from \$6.25 to \$8.50. Working families in Arkansas deserve a minimum wage that more adequately helps them raise a family and live a life with dignity. Therefore, Democrats believe it is time to raise the minimum wage to \$12 per hour and tie any raise to inflation to ensure that all Arkansas workers are fairly compensated in the years ahead.

The Democratic Party supports policies that create equal opportunities for all Arkansans. Women have the right to the same pay as men when performing the same work. The Party, therefore, adamantly supports equal pay for equal work for all. Moreover, we think it is crucial that the families of our state have access to paid parental leave upon the birth or adoption of a child. In addition, we will not tolerate sexual harassment in the workplace. We also support the right of workers to organize and bargain collectively without fear of intimidation. Our party

advocates that the state meet or exceed its present goal of increased business opportunities for women, minorities, and veterans. The Party further calls for an end to discrimination based on race, ethnicity, gender, disability, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, and gender identity in employment and business.

AGRICULTURE

The Democratic Party of Arkansas recognizes the importance of a vibrant farm economy to the citizens of Arkansas and understands that supporting farming families is vital to supporting our state's economy. Agriculture makes up 25 percent of Arkansas's economy and provides one of every five jobs in our state. Additionally, the Party agrees that our state and our nation are best served when the agriculture sector is based on a family-farm system. A federal Farm Bill is a key part of ensuring Arkansas's farming families receive the support they need. We, therefore, firmly believe our congressional delegation must fight for a Farm Bill that works for all Arkansas farmers.

We recognize that farmers, as long-time stewards of the land, enhance the stability and entrepreneurial vitality of our rural economy. We strongly support the development and implementation of federal farm and fair trade policy that benefit all farmers.

We support a farm policy that embodies a safety net concept. This net serves as a tool that will allow our efficient, productive farmers to weather the financial hardship caused by economic and natural disasters. The Democratic Party of Arkansas acknowledges that a healthy farm economy will result in cultural, environmental, and economic benefits important to our entire state.

Furthermore, we recognize the need for a coherent and strong national and international farm policy that encourages the expansion of exports of Arkansas agricultural products in the global market. In a world in which the need for renewable energy sources is growing each day, biofuels derived from natural products like those grown in the fields of Arkansas have great potential for enlarging Arkansas's agricultural economy. The Democratic Party encourages our state and federal political leaders to support efforts toward these goals.

TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The proactive development of a strong system of transportation infrastructure—in the form of ports, bridges, highways, airports, and light rail—is crucial to prepare us for the economic challenges of the 21st Century. Good roads improve interstate and intrastate commerce, build tourism, shorten the distance between families and friends, strengthen public safety and enhance our overall quality of life. We must look to responsible and prudent highway financing programs to meet the ever-changing needs of our state and take into account local communities' thoughts and wishes. The Democratic Party believes the state government

should be aggressive in developing plans for infrastructure projects that will benefit the rural and underserved communities as well as the urban and suburban centers of the state.

In an era of increasing fuel costs and environmental threats from climate change, creativity in the development of transportation programs, including mass transit, that do not rely solely on the fossil fuels and traditional passenger automobiles should be encouraged within state government.

The Democratic Party of Arkansas supports the development of high speed wired and wireless networks to all homes and businesses so that everyone, especially rural and underserved areas, can access, upload, and download content at high speeds and fully participate in e-commerce. We support increased consumer choice through the encouragement of expanded competition in areas that are served by a single Internet service provider.

ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY

Arkansas is the Natural State, and it must remain that way. In all environmental matters, we must consider ourselves caretakers of the land. The Democratic Party of Arkansas believes that we should look for balance in allowing commerce to fairly and sustainably reap the benefits of our natural resources while preserving and restoring the condition of those resources.

The Democratic Party of Arkansas accepts the scientific evidence that global climate change is caused by carbon pollution and linked to more chaotic and extreme weather phenomena. Global climate change poses a danger for the entire planet and human race, causing rising sea levels and the potential for dramatic upheaval. Climate change threatens our way of life in Arkansas, holding the potential to devastate our agricultural sector, drive up costs for the basic necessities of life, and fundamentally alter our state's treasured, scenic wilderness and plentiful hunting and fishing opportunities. Arkansas Democrats are committed to solutions that combat global climate change.

Our state faces many other environmental challenges such as wetlands conservation, forestry management, protection of public waters, management of commercial animal waste, solid waste disposal, recycling procedures, sustainable agricultural methods, the overuse of fossil fuels, and other conditions which cause noise, air, and water pollution. As we develop commercial waterways and permit industrial facilities, we must protect and sustain the hunting, fishing, and recreational areas that are wonders and economic drivers for our state.

Arkansas can benefit from developing a green economy. This new industry can simultaneously provide jobs in every area of the state that cannot be outsourced and will allow us to leave the Natural State in a better condition than we received it, a legacy to future generations.

The Democratic Party believes that the exploration of independent, renewable energy sources--especially cleaner biodiesel fuels, wood waste, solar, wind, and other fuels--should be

encouraged and promoted. In particular, a shift to increased usage of clean energy presents a unique opportunity for Arkansas. Arkansas Democrats support policies that will put our colleges and universities at the forefront of developing safe, profitable, clean energy. It will have beneficial effects on our environment and a favorable impact on agriculture, jobs and the economy of Arkansas.

Energy efficiency and weatherization programs are critical steps in energy conservation and lessening dependence on foreign oil. Expanding recycling programs and adding new programs supporting new sources of energy are important steps in preserving the beauty of the Natural State. A robust Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality is essential to protecting our state and ensuring our health.

HEALTH CARE

The Democratic Party is dedicated to guaranteeing health security for all Arkansans and to containing health care costs for families and businesses.

Arkansas Democrats seek to improve the quality of health care in our state. We support policies that lower health care costs for all Arkansas, guarantee access to health care for all, improve our hospitals, and ensure that the University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences is a world leader in delivering health care and in research.

The unparalleled success of Arkansas' Medicaid Expansion implementation, "The Private Option", estimated to save over 1,000 lives a year, has made it possible for over 200,000 Arkansans to gain private insurance coverage, many receiving coverage for the first time. The Private Option further advances health care security by relieving our already struggling hospitals of the burden of uncompensated care, often provided through emergency room visits, the most expensive kind of care.

The Democratic Party supports the continued funding of the Private Option because it is critical for individuals and families and the economy of our state, particularly in rural communities. In addition to saving rural hospitals, it will continue to lower health care costs, save jobs, keep health centers close to communities, encourage competition in the insurance marketplace, and prevent a tax increase on Arkansas business.

Working families must be able to continue to receive health insurance when they change jobs or when someone in their family gets sick. Our party believes that all Arkansans should have the security of accessible and affordable health care, including mental and dental health care, as well as a choice of health care providers. We are dedicated to expanding health coverage for those that without access to high quality, affordable health care. We believe in providing encouragement and assistance to small business owners to provide health insurance to their workers at a reasonable price. health care must be made more affordable and accessible to all Arkansans.

There also must be improved access to quality health care in Arkansas. The Democratic Party supports programs to expand and improve rural and underserved care systems. We acknowledge and are committed to vastly decreasing the disparities in our health care system, especially in rural and underserved areas of our state.

Patients suffering with a variety of severe health issues, including HIV/AIDS and cancer, find that medical cannabis relieves their symptoms—often when nothing else provides them relief. Therefore, the Democratic Party of Arkansas supports the development of a responsible medical marijuana program that will receive patients in need of such relief the freedom to access this remedy.

We support the creation of paid family leave programs to help Arkansas families. The Democratic Party believes workers should not have to leave a seriously ill family member or a newborn baby behind because they cannot afford to miss a paycheck. Paid parental leave is linked to lower infant mortality rates and better health for both infants and mothers. Family-friendly policies such as paid leave result in economic benefits to employers, including improved recruitment, retention, and morale of employees. Providing paid family leave will undoubtedly make Arkansas a more attractive place to work and raise a family.

Our party supports providing pregnant workers with an unmistakable right to reasonable accommodations. Although many women can continue working safely throughout their pregnancies without the need for any modification to their jobs, some women find that at some point during pregnancy particular job activities -- such as lifting, bending, or standing for long periods -- may begin to pose a challenge. Many women could continue to work without risk to themselves or their pregnancies with slight job modifications. In the absence of such accommodations, they may face an impossible choice between the health of their pregnancies and their jobs. We believe that no woman should have to choose between the health of her pregnancy and her paycheck.

Health education and an emphasis on living well are vital to the future of better care in Arkansas. We support furthering existing health literacy campaigns designed to meet people where they are and are focused on preventive care, aimed at reducing overall health care costs in Arkansas. The Democratic Party also supports creating new health literacy campaigns and research aimed at preventing future problems in public health.

Arkansas Democrats are committed to eradicating the scourge of lead poisoning and other pollutants that have a detrimental effect on the health of Arkansans and can lead to rises in disease, crime, and other ills.

The Democratic Party recognizes the necessity of growing our overall health care workforce, especially among those that are a part of general health care teams. We, therefore, support the creation of programs that will help address current shortages, prevent any future shortages and create jobs.

The Democratic Party supports programs that recognize the right of Arkansans with disabilities to obtain health care that allows them to be as integrated as possible into their communities and jobs. Arkansas must enact the Community First Choice Option, which will provide people with disabilities greater access to being served in their communities and reduce the waitlist for such services, help balance the budget, and will not raise taxes.

Arkansas Democrats believe we must treat mental health issues with the same care and seriousness that we treat issues of physical health and support a robust mental health workforce. Recognizing that maintaining good mental health is critical to all people, including young people's health and development, we will work with health professionals to ensure that all children have access to mental health care. We must also expand community-based treatment for substance abuse disorders and mental health conditions.

We must confront the epidemic of drug and alcohol addiction, specifically the opioid crisis, by vastly expanding access to prevention and treatment, supporting recovery, and helping community organizations. The Democratic Party is committed to assisting the thousands of people struggling with addiction in our state to find and sustain healthy lives by encouraging full recovery and integration into society and working to remove common barriers to gainful employment, housing, and education. Those individuals, as well as the economy of Arkansas's communities, will benefit from such efforts. We will continue to fight to expand access to care for addiction services, and ensure that insurance coverage is equal to that for any other health conditions.

Our ultimate goal is to ensure that all Arkansans have the opportunity to access high quality, affordable, and confidential health care, regardless of their location or economic status and without requiring guardian, judicial, parental, or spousal consent or notification.

SOCIAL SECURITY/MEDICARE/MEDICAID

Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid are all Democratic creations. The Democratic Party of Arkansas continues its longtime support for all of these programs that have meant so much to us as a people. For a very large population of Arkansans, these programs are life-sustaining and central to a decent quality of life.

A promise of Medicare is to ensure that all beneficiaries, even those in rural and underserved communities, have reliable access to dependable health care. Democrats believe the same should hold true for prescription drug benefits. No Arkansan should have to choose between medically necessary drugs and food or other necessities.

Medicare and Social Security are promises made by one generation to the next. Seniors who have worked their whole lives and paid into Medicare and Social Security deserve the retirement security these earned benefits provide. We oppose any steps to turn Medicare over

to insurance companies and/or Social Security over to Wall Street and oppose raising the retirement eligibility to age 70. The DPA considers such steps a breach of the promises of Medicare and Social Security.

We oppose cuts in state and federal programs for public health and well-being, especially to provide tax cuts to America's wealthiest citizens. We urge that state and federal budgets be prioritized to avoid detrimental cuts to Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and veterans' programs. In particular, we recognize that Medicaid provides life-sustaining coverage for many who are seriously disabled and in need of costly, ongoing care. We urge that our state to continue funding safety net Medicaid programs.

TAXES

Arkansans deserve fairer taxes. For the same tax rate to apply to a worker making \$34,000 and a person making \$340,000 is inconsistent with our Arkansas values. We must give careful consideration to tax policy that is fair to working families and one that maintains a balanced state budget, while protecting essential state services such as education, Medicaid, and public safety.

Moreover, we believe that the recent flurry of tax cuts benefiting the wealthiest Arkansans threatens our commitment to the basic services of this state, including an adequate educational system mandated by the state Constitution. We therefore are concerned about additional revenue decreases in the immediate future, with the exception of the creation of a state Earned Income Tax Credit and a further reduction of the state sales tax on groceries, efforts which promise to create a fairer Arkansas tax system.

Because we must adequately balance revenues and essential state services, the Democratic Party of Arkansas believes such fair tax cuts can be matched to economic growth so that they do not threaten the continuance of vitally important state services.

In the face of very challenging times, Arkansas Democrats have, across the decades, responsibly balanced the state budget and continued to provide services necessary to for the people of our state. With the prosperity of Arkansas uppermost in our policy positions, Democrats will continue to be good stewards of our tax dollars as we respond to the needs of our state and promote the middle class.

OUR MILITARY, OUR VETERANS, AND OUR NATION'S SECURITY

We believe that the peace and prosperity of our nation is assured by the maintenance of a powerful and capable military. We believe the single most important element in our military is the individual soldier, sailor, marine or airman, and that it is absolutely critical that we keep faith with those who defend us.

Since 9/11, many veterans, including those in National Guard and those who are Reservists, have served multiple deployments. To honor the men and women who serve our country, state and federal policy should demonstrate respect for the sacrifices made by military veterans and their families by ensuring a smooth transition from military to civilian life and providing benefits to honor their service. Therefore, the Democratic Party of Arkansas believes our state officials and congressional delegation should support funding to make sure our stated commitments to veterans are honored by our actions, not merely by our words.

We support the continuation and enhancement of veterans benefits, including post-military training; medical, with increased access to mental health services; and disability. The Democratic Party supports continued placement of outpatient clinics in rural and underserved areas as a means of providing increased access to health and wellness programs for veterans and their families. We call for stringent enforcement of State and Federal laws guaranteeing returning service members the right to return to their previous jobs without delay or loss of seniority. We demand interstate cooperation to enable the successful transition of families forced to move from one locale to another, including changes involving public education, job searches, and health care continuity.

Arkansas should demonstrate its support for veterans and military families and communities. We support policies that require accountability for the fiscal and physical oversight of federal and state sponsored homes for veterans, and we demand that in the event of closure of such facilities, all due respect must be given to honoring the wishes of the veterans affected. We insist that our military members on active duty and in the Reserve receive fair pay and allowances. They must be the best organized, trained, and equipped fighting force possible. We encourage city, county, state, and federal elected officials to review present benefits and determine how they can be enhanced.

Homelessness among veterans is an issue that must be addressed. Veterans have sacrificed to make sure we are secure in our homeland. They deserve not to be homeless in the land they have served. Therefore, the Democratic Party will work to put in place and implement policies to address homelessness among our veterans and to make sure no veteran has to live a life of homelessness.

We believe that in maintaining a strong military. In a complex world, our Nation's security depends on the wise and deliberate use of diplomacy and adherence to a foreign policy that rightly views war as the very last resort of civilized nations.

JUSTICE

Our party believes that lifting people out of poverty with opportunity, education, and jobs is the long-term strategy for deterring crime.

Citizens must be allowed to live, work, and play safely. The Democratic Party of Arkansas supports a justice system that is fair, timely, and properly punishes those convicted of crimes. We respect the daily sacrifices made by those who protect us and provide order. While those who commit crimes must be held responsible for those offenses, we also advocate restorative justice programs dedicated to rehabilitation and alternative sentencing and effective reentry policies so that anyone convicted of a crime many have the opportunity to become or return to being fully productive contributors to society with the economic benefits that arise from that.

The Democratic Party believes in effective, smart responses to crime. To that end, Democrats support evidence-based policies that save taxpayers' money while punishing but rehabilitating some nonviolent offenders in a manner that has a proven track of success. We pledge to continue to uphold the laws and hold offenders accountable.

Our party believes our communities are undoubtedly safer when law enforcement and the people they serve work together. Building and maintaining community trust is the cornerstone of effective policing. We believe it is on all of us to speak out about disparities in our criminal justice system -- just as it is on all of us to stand up for those who put themselves in harm's way to protect our communities.

Our party will always act in the best interest of victims, communities, taxpayers, and especially on behalf of women, children and families. Domestic violence affects women, children, and families in a particularly egregious manner. We support policies and practices that stop domestic violence and make our homes safer places. We wholeheartedly support the Violence Against Women Act as a key component for making Arkansas a safer place for women, and we steadfastly oppose any effort to water down or repeal the Violence Against Women Act.

We support steps to protect women against domestic violence, and we support steps to empower victims. We do so by supporting the state's Domestic Peace Fund and by providing law enforcement better training, more tools, and adequate resources.

In addition, we believe in supporting our law enforcement and pooling Arkansas's safety resources in a collaborative effort to protect children by keeping online predators off the Internet and educating children, parents and teachers about online abuse and the value of online safety.

Our party steadfastly opposes the scourge of human trafficking. We support strengthening and making more fair and comprehensive the laws that punish the perpetrators and that empower victims to be a part of the fight against human trafficking.

Our Arkansas Constitution provides that "Every person is entitled to a certain remedy in the laws for all injuries or wrongs he may receive in his person, property or character; he ought to obtain justice freely, and without purchase; completely, and without denial; promptly and without delay; conformably to the laws." The Democratic party of Arkansas opposes any and all limits on complete justice, and reject attempts to protect certain wrongdoers at the expense of those injured by their wrongs.

RIGHTS AND LIBERTIES

The Democratic Party of Arkansas has been prominent in the evolving process of empowering all Arkansans. The Party recognizes that simply removing legal barriers to inequitable treatment does not rectify time-hardened patterns of social inequality and inequitable institutional practices. In keeping with the progress and expansion of civil rights and liberties in our state and across the nation, we pledge to continue our fight against discrimination or deprivation of rights on the basis of race, gender, ethnicity, national origin, religion, age, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, gender identity, disability, or any other characteristic unrelated to ability. Arkansas Democrats support the movement to add prohibitions on discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity to our state Civil Rights Act. Our party supports marriage equality.

We reaffirm the constitutionally established right of privacy and choice. We also recognize that freedom and protection from violence or abuse, domestic and otherwise, is a fundamental human right.

At the vanguard of civil rights is the right to vote. Generations of Arkansans fought to expand this most basic right of our democracy. As such, the Democratic Party is unalterably committed to preserving voting rights. The Democratic Party adamantly opposes the Arkansas Voter ID law. Supported by no evidence of fact, this law needlessly and egregiously disenfranchises Arkansans, including veterans, the poor, the elderly, students, and people of color. The law imposes unreasonable limitations on the right to vote, limitations that have an unjustifiable discriminatory impact.

Arkansas Democrats support efforts to make voting more accessible to our citizens. Automatic and universal voter registration, voting by mail, recognizing Election Day as a state holiday, the presence of voting centers on college and university campuses, and other measures that increase turnout and strengthen our democracy are needed in our state and in our country.

The Democratic Party fully supports equal pay for men and women. We also reject institutional barriers, be they corporate or governmental, which do not allow full access to job opportunities based on race, gender, ethnicity, national origin, religion, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, disability, or socioeconomic status.

Arkansans are known for their welcoming nature and hospitality, and Arkansas Democrats believe that we must welcome the stranger. Our nation is a country of immigrants, enriched and made whole by diversity. Immigration reform that recognizes the strength that immigrants bring to our country while maintaining manageable levels of immigration is needed. We advocate for comprehensive immigration reform at the federal level that restores the rule of law and enhances the security for America and which is practical and humane in its approach toward undocumented individuals already in the United States.

Far too many African-Americans face a daily struggle for respect, recognition, and safety. The Arkansas Democratic Party commits to lead the charge in promoting policies and fostering a culture that make our country safe for all Americans.

The Democratic Party of Arkansas also recognizes that the freedom to exercise one's religion is a vital component of the liberties held by Americans. In particular, we recognize that individual and group prayer in schools is legal, while upholding the Constitution. However, we strongly feel that laws couched as promoting religious liberty not be used as a tool to allow and encourage discrimination against other Arkansans.

The Democratic Party of Arkansas believes in and supports the right to bear arms as set forth in the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. We promote strict enforcement of the law while ensuring the rights and responsibilities of gun ownership.

The Democratic Party of Arkansas supports the fundamental principles of the Equal Rights Amendment and supports the ratification of the federal Equal Rights Amendment by the Arkansas Legislature. We believe all citizens, women as well as men, deserve to be included in their country's constitution with all its legal rights and protections.

PUBLIC SERVICE

The Democratic Party of Arkansas believes that individual involvement is vital to the health of our democracy. Arkansans have a responsibility to participate fully in their democracy in the voting booth and through using their constitutionally protected freedoms of speech and association. We encourage all Arkansans to take an active role in civic and social affairs through any combination of military service, public service, political participation, community engagement and volunteerism.