

Chester County Democrats: **Our Values and Issues**

The Democratic Party of Chester County believes we must clearly define our views, and present a vision for the future.

We believe we must acknowledge that people of all political persuasions care deeply about our country, as well as share many essential common values. Unfortunately, those shared values are often forgotten amidst the typically reactive nature of partisan rhetoric.

We believe that the foundation of all of our positions and actions must rest upon shared core values that allow us to work together to pursue a better physical, mental and social **quality of life** for all Chester County residents, as well as for all Americans. Those core values include respect for others, and the importance of maintaining the opportunity of the American dream.

The principles listed below reflect our belief in the core values of the American Dream: the opportunity for all to earn and receive respect, to enjoy the degree of privacy or public life that we choose, and to have a fair opportunity to achieve happiness and material well-being.

Make Democracy Representative Again: The Role of Government

There is a delicate balance between government helping us when we need it and government impeding us from achieving our goals and potential. Government should reflect the best values this country has always stood for, encouraging all of us to join together to solve the problems that face us, bringing us together, not dividing us.

We call for:

- J Taking big money out of politics, we call for overturning the Citizens United decision, by constitutional amendment if necessary, to end the influence of unlimited and secret political contributions that broaden the imbalance of power.
- J Political redistricting by an independent citizens commission, and an end to gerrymandering, which perverts the elective process. Districts should be, in the words of the PA constitution, compact. Legislators should respond to a sense of community, not to a muddle of individuals fragmented by partisan priorities.
- J Accountability: elected officials who disrespect their constituents through baseless claims and misrepresentation or by avoiding addressing issues or the public in person should be identified and called out, including in the media.

- J Communication: Public officials must be able to clearly communicate to taxpayers how public funds are being used for the public benefit.
- J Fiscal responsibility: it is unacceptable for federal and state budgets to be held hostage by ideologues. Public money belongs to the people and should be allocated in a timely fashion for the benefit of "we the citizens."
- J Combating voter suppression, as attempted through partisan-designed, un-American voter ID requirements.
- J Automatic voter registration and the opportunity for early voting helps all citizens participate.
- J Public posting of gifts to legislators, punishment for conflicts of interest, and increased experimentation with public financing of campaigns.

Health care is a human right

All Americans deserve access to affordable preventative and restorative health care that promotes wellness. Basic care should be available to every family and individual, regardless of wealth or status, whether for a child with asthma, a sibling with mental health issues, or a parent with dementia. Medical professionals and patients, not insurance companies or the government, should be free to choose the most suitable treatments.

- J The current system encourages administrative overhead and perpetuates duplication, waste, high prices, excessive marketing expenses, exorbitant profits by drug companies, and health discrimination. If the country won't limit these abuses and move toward a more efficient single-payer (Medicare for All) system, then our state should do so.
- J Pregnancy and abortion are personal health issues. We support the widest access to women's reproductive healthcare, contraception and education. We will defend a woman's right to legal abortion as a personal freedom to control one's own body, health, and future, without the interference of government in their personal lives. We support fair funding for pre-natal and maternal care, paid family leave, day care, and adoption services.

Quality Education for all

Americans deserve a high level of public investment in quality education, both academic and vocational. Quality education creates fair opportunity, a better-educated workforce, and a potentially more discerning electorate. Additionally, our economy's competitive global advantage can only be achieved if we endeavor excellence at all levels of education.

Per the PA constitution: "The General Assembly shall provide for the maintenance and support of a thorough and efficient system of public education to serve the needs of the Commonwealth." What could be clearer?

- J The state and the local taxpayers should take equal responsibility for financing public K-12 education, and the state should not dictate curriculum and excessive testing.
- J State support for higher education has become insufficient. All Pennsylvania families should be able to afford to send their children to state universities and technical schools without concerns of suffocating debt.
- J Early (pre-school) learning is paramount for the success of our communities and should be accessible to all.
- J Non-profit public charter schools often complement our public school districts, but they must be academically and financially accountable, while not being overly hindered by overly restrictive budgeting regulations. Precautions must be made so that the interests of non-profit public charter schools and public school districts are not pitted against each other, and so that the charter schools do not drain the resources of public school districts. Private and religious schools are important to many families but should not receive funding in the form of vouchers, etc., which pull away resources and can detrimentally impact the efforts of public school districts.
- J All levels of education need to emphasize computer and internet literacy.

Equal Rights: Fairness applied to everyday life

We must continue this country's founding principles of religious freedom and economic opportunity. We believe in fighting against discrimination in housing, education, employment, or law enforcement based on gender, age, disability, race, religion, sexual orientation/identity, or familial status. This country was founded on the beliefs of economic opportunity, and of freedom from state endorsed religion.

- J Our system of justice has become unjust for those who cannot afford skilled lawyers, who are imprisoned for debts they cannot pay, or who are caught up in exaggerated penalties for drug possession or use.
- J Marijuana should be legalized, and opiate dependency should be treated as a disease.
- J Immigrants have strengthened us, helping us become a diverse and vibrant mosaic. All humans, regardless of where they were born, deserve the same rights to freedom, justice, and due process. Human decency demands a legal path to permanent residency and citizenship for immigrants, whether documented or not, who have shown that they can live here productively.

- J We support the right of all Americans to marry, seek employment, and find housing without discrimination based on race, gender, familial status, gender identity, or sexual orientation.
- J Americans deserve efficient broadband access and an open internet, and service providers must not restrict equal access to all citizens.
- J The constitution gives Americans the right to own guns for self-defense, but government has the duty to protect its citizens from those who are irresponsible in their handling of firearms, who are mentally unfit to own guns, who would buy weapons capable of mass killing, or who incite or carry out violence against others.

Economic opportunity creates a fair and participatory society

There has always been, and there will always be a level of inequality in wealth and access to opportunity. But the economic pressure on our shrinking middle class has strained families, as well as the stability of our overall economy.

The chasm between the very rich and everyone else has rarely been so great.

Economic injustice breeds social and political injustice and instability, but it also impedes the more steady and sustainable flow of money that helps to ensure a more stable economy.

Experience shows that tax breaks for powerful corporations and the wealthy do not result in new job creation. Trickle-down economics is a failed philosophy.

- J Good jobs promote individual responsibility and social solidarity. A personal sense of powerlessness and dependency undermines democratic values.
- J The economy can't grow for all without adequate public investment in reliable transportation, internet access, and preparation for employment.
- J We support penalizing corporations for exporting American jobs.
- J Working class Americans deserve a livable wage. The federal minimum wage should rise to \$15 an hour, and then continually be adjusted to inflation. States and localities must be able to set a higher minimum wage based on special conditions like cost of living.
- J Veterans who have served our country faithfully should be supported when needed to properly reorient to civilian life, with access to job retraining, and necessary, efficient health care.
- J Working Americans flourish when labor unions are strong. Anti-union schemes harm American workers, families, and towns as well as state and national

economies.

- J We support tax reform that creates a just system, with shared sacrifice, asking the wealthy to pay their fair share, eliminating loopholes. Tax reform should not serve to reward the corporate elite and donor-class.
- J Our infrastructure is an embarrassment. It is government's responsibility to rehabilitate public transportation, highways, and bridges, beginning now.

A quality environment means a better quality of life

Per the PA constitution: "The people have a right to clean air, pure water, and to the preservation of the natural, scenic, historic and esthetic values of the environment. Pennsylvania's public natural resources are the common property of all the people, including generations yet to come. As trustee of these resources, the Commonwealth shall conserve and maintain them for the benefit of all the people."

- J We must aspire to a sustainable environment. Global climate change and environmental destruction threaten our very existence. We must follow, not deny, the findings of science and plan for a livable future for our descendants. We must prioritize public health and safety over corporate profit and require polluters to disclose and pay for the impact of the pollution they create.
- J Adequate open space must be preserved, including through national, state, and county parks. To allow people to overdevelop land, degrade natural spaces, and destroy endangered wildlife reduces our **quality of life**.
- J Renewable energy is not only an environmental imperative but a matter of national security and the future of our economy and job expansion in a competitive world.

The Four Freedoms enunciated by FDR in 1941 are still vital:

Freedom of speech
Freedom of worship
Freedom from want
Freedom from fear