

Benton County Democratic Platform 2018

Adopted March 24, 2018

01 – Preamble

Benton County Democrats find purpose in the words of the preamble to the Constitution:

We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

We believe in American values such as liberty, equal justice under the law, human rights, tolerance, community, empathy, equality, opportunity, and interdependence for the common good of the people in the world we share. We believe in freedom of religion, and separation of church and state. Theocracy is unamerican.

02 – Energy, Environment & Agriculture

Our continued existence as a species is dependent on the preservation of a healthy home planet. All people, including future generations, have a natural right to clean air, water, and food, all products of a healthy natural environment. Wise environmental decisions reflect the true triple bottom line of financial, environmental, and social costs. The struggle to protect our planet’s health intersects with struggles for social justice in all its forms. Policies and market incentives that allow environmental damage without remediation are short-sighted. We see open research as best informing the prioritization of concerns, and international collaboration as the only approach to effectively address the climate crisis threatening the health of the planet.

Benton County’s abundance of energy, historically hydroelectric and nuclear energy, and now solar and wind energy as well, is essential to the prosperity of the Pacific Northwest. We see the future as favoring low-carbon forms including solar, wind, and advanced nuclear energy, with both point-source and distribution through next-generation smart grids. We should pursue energy research, such as that conducted at the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, and massive battery technology to support baseload, especially from renewable energy sources. While we transition from carbon-based fuels, energy conservation, pricing based on true triple bottom line costs, and continued use of hydro and nuclear as low-carbon power generation can balance the electrical grid.

Agriculture is a major determinant of the environmental condition and produces the food that sustains us. We must preserve family farms, invest in the infrastructure that enables efficient agriculture and healthy rural communities, and encourage sustainable agricultural practices to ensure availability of high-quality affordable food. Support of the agricultural labor force by including agricultural labor protections in compensation, worker safety and health, organizing, and unemployment laws will encourage its availability. Immigration, workplace abuse, migrant housing, healthcare, and schooling of the children of agricultural workers are also issues that need to be addressed if our food is to be fairly produced. Food security and agricultural prosperity devolves from development of agricultural markets and trading relationships, and from market and regulatory incentives for sustainable agricultural practices. We oppose monopolistic practices in agriculture, such as extreme consolidation of farms and food processing because it jeopardizes food security. Research at land-grant universities like Washington State University will have a critical role to play in agricultural adaptation to climate change. Rural access to high speed, high capacity internet is the revolutionary investment of this time, like the Rural Electrification Act of yesterday.

03 -Law, Justice, Human Rights & Civil Rights

Our people expect their government to fairly protect the civil, property, consumer, and judicial rights, and provide for public safety of everyone in a fair and respectful manner. Our government shall recognize the inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights of all human beings as set forth in the United States Constitution, the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, and the Washington State Constitution.

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Equal justice for all under the rule of law is the basis of a democratic civil society. Justice is accomplished through a system of laws reflecting the decisions of We the People via our elected representatives, enforced by law enforcement officials, and upheld by the courts. We expect trials to be fair, transparent, and speedy. To be effective, the law is respected, and no person or corporation is above the law; therefore, elected representatives, law enforcement, and the courts are held to a high standard. Perversion of justice such as falsification of evidence and perjury, discrimination, interference with elections, or undue influence over legislation or courts, subverts the basis of our democratic civil society. Delegation of incarceration to for-profit enterprises is susceptible to corruption and exploitation of prison populations.

04 –Commerce & Economic Development

Our enterprises include manufacturing, agriculture, and trade – buying and selling products under market capitalism. One of government’s roles is to support a business climate favorable to successful private enterprise, with protection from unfair and destructive business practices. Unfettered capitalism can lead to monopolies and cartels. Unregulated markets can be co-opted by special interests resulting in market failures. Markets should be as free as possible while remaining fair to all market participants and stakeholders. A clearly stated framework of rules and regulations under which honest enterprises that benefit the people can operate and prosper will deliver a system of regulations that neither stifles commerce nor allows exploitation.

We recognize that the role of government in commerce is to invest in institutions and initiatives which provide those benefits which private investment by itself cannot do well or completely, timely to meet a crisis, or at all. Examples of such initiatives are basic research, infrastructure development, advanced energy research, protection of agriculture, natural resource protection and development, disaster recovery and relief, universal healthcare, public education, incarceration, and national defense and security. The benefits from these governmental investments contribute to the general welfare.

05 –Economic Equity & Corporate Power

Extreme economic inequality is a driving issue of our time. We believe that the most successful economies are sustainable and exhibit a narrow range between the poor and rich, feature widespread availability of living-wage jobs, fair taxation, and protection of property rights. Competition is fair and open. Laws protect against fraud, deception, monopoly, and governmental favoritism.

Corporate personhood may be a necessary legal fiction, but corporations are constructs, not human beings, and not entitled to protections in the same way that human beings are. Corporations are not entitled to free speech. When corporations and extremely wealthy people apply their consolidated economic power to the political arena without constraint, it results in oligarchy. All financial and in-kind contributions to political activities, direct or indirect, must be completely and immediately made public. Corporations are expected to conform to societal norms of ethical behavior as embodied in law.

06 – Education & Information Media

The backbone of our democracy is a universal public-school system (pre-K through post-secondary, whether academic or trade). It is designed to develop informed, reasoning, and thoughtful citizens who are critical-thinking lifelong learners. Such citizens are prepared to participate in and contribute to our economic and civic society. They can absorb and assess information from media in all forms. All students have the right to attend schools where their personal safety and well-being is assured. No student with aptitude and diligence should be denied an education because they can’t afford it.

A citizenry, informed by the free flow of information from an inquisitive and independent press, is fundamental to democracy. Governmental and corporate censorship suppresses the flow of ideas, whether executed through decree or economic practices. Monopolistic and discriminatory practices in the media business restrict the free flow of information and subvert democratic process. Net neutrality is essential for maintaining the free press.

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The source of information presented in media needs to be identified to allow consumers to evaluate bias and reliability. Intrusion into public discourse intended to shape elections or create chaos by entities concealing their identities is subversive. It is the role of government to identify and stop it.

07 - Foreign Policy

The United States has long held a position of leadership in the world. Our purposes are best served when we act in congruence with American values of freedom, democracy, human rights and equitable prosperity around the world. The world community needs us to work with a spirit of peace, cooperation, and generosity to support human welfare and civil rights.

Diplomacy and nonviolence must be our primary tools for conflict resolution, even as we maintain a strong defense capability. A multilateral approach, such as working through the United Nations and other multinational organizations, allows us to calibrate to the prevailing global perspective, secures our leadership, and enhances our influence. Isolationism does the opposite.

Integrating refugee populations will be particularly important as climate change further affect weather events, disease, food production, and water availability, with resulting political instability. We will need to cooperate with international efforts and foster a welcoming spirit.

08 - Government & Political Reform

Government derives its legitimacy from the people, to whom government answers. Government serves as the peoples' instrument to achieve ends that the people cannot achieve individually. We need to support the institutions of government so that they can do their jobs effectively. Checks and balances prescribed in the Constitution must remain effective to maintain an appropriate balance of power.

Good democratic government requires a robust, fair and transparent election process with a high degree of participation. Election authorities must ensure that all eligible voters have an opportunity to participate. We expect the voting process to be protected against hacking and manipulation. Paper mail-in ballots with effective auditing are preferable to voting machines, and a clear and timely process to remediate when fraud is detected is essential.

Reform of the caucus process would improve participation in the primaries.

09 - Human Services & Health Care

Health care and human services enable the workforce and promote the common welfare. Since health care is a basic human right rather than a commodity, affordable universal health care must be available, offering options not hindered by religious ideology.

Services must receive stable funding to reliably provide the basics of a dignified life for those out of the workforce due to disability, or in retirement. Employee- and employer-funded Social Security and Medicare are the fundamental programs of our safety net.

Government-supported health and medical research results belong to the public. When taxpayer-subsidized research and patents are given to private sector firms to use commercially, agreements on investment recovery and price control need to be reached. Government agency information should be based on unbiased research findings rather than industry promotion.

10 – Labor & Immigration

A strong economy depends on jobs with safe working conditions that provide fair compensation to workers sufficient to provide for the basic needs of any full-time worker, with minimum wage indexed to the cost of living. Every worker should have the right to organize and collectively bargain for their pay, benefits, performance

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expectations, and working conditions. Contractually limiting employees' future occupation, such as non-compete and non-disclosure agreements, is illegal and constrains competition to the detriment of the public.

We are a nation of immigrants from diverse cultures. We are strengthened by the bold ideas and hard work of newcomers. All immigrants should be afforded full human rights and a fair, safe, and timely path to legal status or citizenship. We need a humane immigration system that meets real economic and social needs, and an orderly controlled border. Temporary worker programs shall not be used to displace qualified citizens. Temporary workers must possess their visas and be able to change employment at will to prevent exploitation.

11 -Congress, Military & Veterans Affairs

The core task of the U.S. military is to protect the nation, as the Constitution stipulates. Our military must be adequately prepared to provide for our nation's defense and should never be subject to abuses of power by any branch of government. Congress shall authorize military actions as required by the Constitution, imposing taxes needed to fully cover their incremental cost, including conscientious care of casualties and their dependents for as long as required. All members of the military shall be treated with equal respect and fairness. Discrimination and sexual assault are inconsistent with military codes of honor. We support our troops and honor our veterans who act in the service of our country.

12 - Transportation, Flood Control & Irrigation Infrastructure

Investment in an efficient, well-planned, multimodal transportation system promotes a healthy economy, environment, and community. We support public-private partnerships to continually develop and maintain our transportation infrastructure only where strict controls prevent privatizers abusing public trust.

Impacts to flood control, transportation, energy production, salmon protection, and irrigation need to be carefully evaluated, weighing the costs and benefits, when considering any course of action regarding the dams.

13 - Tribal Relations & Sovereignty

Tribal governments make up a significant part of our national identity and community. Benton County must maintain lasting and respectful relationships with Tribal Nations, affirm their treaty rights and state compacts, and oppose all attempts to diminish tribal sovereignty, tribal culture, land and natural resources or the general welfare of tribes located within Benton County and the State of Washington.

14 – Specific to Benton County

Benton County contains many noteworthy features that establish it as an exceptional economic engine that includes unique contributions in science and technology, energy, and agriculture. These contributions can be magnified or diminished depending on policies established at the local, state and national level. In addition, legacy environmental cleanup challenges at the DOE Hanford Site demand financial and operations management consideration consistent with long-term needs. Benton County's unique position presents it with opportunities to further its development as an energy research and production center, a regional health center, a center for tourism, and more, while maintaining its historical roots and magnificent landscapes. The Benton County Democrats will work to promote the policies which will lead to this kind of future for Benton County.