

Ministries and Social Concerns

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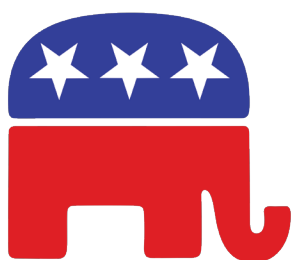
Election Year: Study Party Platforms

Every four years each major party, Democratic and Republican, develops a “party platform,” which articulates the guiding vision, values and principles of that party in terms of what government is for and how it should serve the people.

While legislators are not bound by their party’s platform, a study by Stephen F. Austin State University professor Lee Payne found that, over 25 years, members of Congress in both parties voted in line with their party platforms 82 percent of the time.

This makes the examination of these platforms a good exercise in voter education. Below are excerpts from the 2016 Republican and Democratic Party platforms. The excerpts were chosen because of their connection to core principles of Catholic teaching and the natural law. You are encouraged to read the platforms in their entirety – [Republican here](#), and [Democratic here](#).

The Diocese of La Crosse does not endorse parties or candidates.



Republican Party Platform Excerpts

We the People

We are the party of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. The Declaration sets forth the fundamental precepts of American government: That God bestows certain inalienable rights on every individual, thus producing human equality; that government exists first and foremost to protect those inalienable rights; that man-made law must be consistent with God-given, natural rights; and that if God-given, natural, inalienable rights come in conflict with government, court, or human-granted rights, God-given, natural, inalienable rights always prevail; that there is a moral law recognized as “the Laws of Nature and of Nature’s God”; and that American government is to operate with the consent of the governed (p. 9).

In a free society, the primary role of government is to protect the God-given, inalienable rights of its citizens. These constitutional rights are not negotiable for any American. We affirm that all legislation, regulation, and official actions must conform to the Constitution’s original meaning as understood at the time the language was adopted (pp. 9-10).

The Judiciary

The rule of law is the foundation of our Republic. A critical threat to our country’s constitutional order is an activist judiciary that usurps powers properly reserved to the people through other branches of government.... We are facing a national crisis in our judiciary. We understand that only by electing a Republican president in 2016 will America have the opportunity for up to five new constitutionally-minded Supreme Court justices appointed to fill vacancies on the Court. Only such appointments will enable courts to begin to reverse the long line of activist decisions — including *Roe*, *Obergefell*, and the *Obamacare* cases — that have usurped Congress’s and states’ lawmaking authority, undermined constitutional protections, expanded the power of the judiciary at the expense of the people and their elected representatives, and stripped the people of their power to govern themselves (p. 10).

Defending Marriage against an Activist Judiciary

Traditional marriage and family, based on marriage between one man and one woman, is the foundation for a free society and has for millennia been entrusted with rearing children and instilling cultural values. We condemn the Supreme Court’s ruling in *United States v. Windsor*, which wrongly removed the ability of Congress to define marriage policy in federal law. We also condemn the Supreme Court’s lawless ruling in *Obergefell v. Hodges*.... In *Obergefell*, five unelected lawyers robbed 320 million Americans of their legitimate constitutional authority to define marriage as the union of one man and one woman (p. 11).



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The First Amendment: Religious Liberty

The Bill of Rights lists religious liberty, with its rights of conscience, as the first freedom to be protected. Religious freedom in the Bill of Rights protects the right of the people to practice their faith in their everyday lives. As George Washington taught, “religion and morality are indispensable supports” to a free society. Similarly, Thomas Jefferson declared that “No provision in our Constitution ought to be dearer to man than that which protects the rights of conscience against the enterprises of the civil authority.” Ongoing attempts to compel individuals, businesses, and institutions of faith to transgress their beliefs are part of a misguided effort to undermine religion and drive it from the public square. As a result, many charitable religious institutions that have demonstrated great success in helping the needy have been barred from receiving government grants and contracts. Government officials threaten religious colleges and universities with massive fines and seek to control their personnel decisions. Places of worship for the first time in our history have reason to fear the loss of tax-exempt status merely for espousing and practicing traditional religious beliefs that have been held across the world for thousands of years, and for almost four centuries in America (p. 11).

Our First Amendment rights are not given to us by the government but are rights we inherently possess. The government cannot use subsequent amendments to limit First Amendment rights. The Free Exercise Clause is both an individual and a collective liberty protecting a right to worship God according to the

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dictates of conscience. Therefore, we strongly support the freedom of Americans to act in accordance with their religious beliefs, not only in their houses of worship, but also in their everyday lives (p. 12).

The Fifth Amendment: Protecting Human Life

The Constitution's guarantee that no one can "be deprived of life, liberty or property" deliberately echoes the Declaration of Independence's proclamation that "all" are "endowed by their Creator" with the inalienable right to life. Accordingly, we assert the sanctity of human life and affirm that the unborn child has a fundamental right to life which cannot be infringed. We support a human life amendment to the Constitution and legislation to make clear that the Fourteenth Amendment's protections apply to children before birth. We oppose the use of public funds to perform or promote abortion or to fund organizations, like Planned Parenthood, so long as they provide or refer for elective abortions or sell fetal body parts rather than provide healthcare. We urge all states and Congress to make it a crime to acquire, transfer, or sell fetal tissues from elective abortions for research, and we call on Congress to enact a ban on any sale of fetal body parts (p. 13).

We affirm our moral obligation to assist, rather than penalize, women who face an unplanned pregnancy. In order to encourage women who face an unplanned pregnancy to choose life, we support legislation that requires financial responsibility for the child be equally borne by both the mother and father upon conception until the child reaches adulthood....We thank and encourage providers of counseling, medical services, and adoption assistance for empowering women experiencing an unintended pregnancy to choose life. We support funding for ultrasounds and adoption assistance. We salute the many states that now protect women and girls through laws requiring informed consent, parental consent, waiting periods, and clinic regulation (p. 14).

Choice in Education

We support options for learning, including home-schooling, career and technical education, private or parochial schools, magnet schools, charter schools, online learning, and early-college high schools. We especially support the innovative financing mechanisms that make options available to all children: education savings accounts (ESAs), vouchers, and tuition tax credits. Empowering families to ac-

cess the learning environments that will best help their children to realize their full potential is one of the greatest civil rights challenges of our time. A young person's ability to succeed in school must be based on his or her God-given talent and motivation, not an address, ZIP code, or economic status. We propose that the bulk of federal money through Title I for low-income children and through IDEA for children with special needs should follow the child to whatever school the family thinks will work best for them (p. 34).

We renew our call for replacing "family planning" programs for teens with sexual risk avoidance education that sets abstinence until marriage as the responsible and respected standard of behavior. That approach — the only one always effective against premarital pregnancy and sexually-transmitted disease — empowers teens to achieve optimal health outcomes. We oppose school-based clinics that provide referral or counseling for abortion and contraception (p. 34).

Title IX

We emphatically support the original, authentic meaning of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. It affirmed that "no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance." That language opened up for girls and women a world of opportunities that had too often been denied to them. That same provision of law is now being used by bureaucrats — and by the current President of the United States — to impose a social and cultural revolution upon the American people by wrongly redefining sex discrimination to include sexual orientation or other categories. Their agenda has nothing to do with individual rights; it has everything to do with power. They are determined to reshape our schools — and our entire society — to fit the mold of an ideology alien to America's history and traditions. Their edict to the states concerning restrooms, locker rooms, and other facilities is at once illegal, dangerous, and ignores privacy issues. We salute the several states which have filed suit against it (p. 35).

Protecting Individual Conscience in Healthcare

America's healthcare professionals should not be forced to choose between following their faith and practicing their profession. We

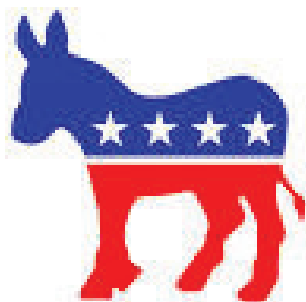
respect the rights of conscience of healthcare professionals, doctors, nurses, pharmacists, and organizations, especially the faith-based groups which provide a major portion of care for the nation and the needy. We support the ability of all organizations to provide, purchase, or enroll in healthcare coverage consistent with their religious, moral, or ethical convictions without discrimination or penalty. We support the right of parents to determine the proper medical treatment and therapy for their minor children. We support the right of parents to consent to medical treatment for their minor children and urge enactment of legislation that would require parental consent for their daughter to be transported across state lines for abortion. Providers should not be permitted to unilaterally withhold services because a patient's life is deemed not worth living. American taxpayers should not be forced to fund abortion. As Democrats abandon this four decade-old bipartisan consensus, we call for codification of the Hyde Amendment and its application across the government, including Obamacare. We call for a permanent ban on federal funding and subsidies for abortion and healthcare plans that include abortion coverage (p. 37).

Liberty to Captives: Combatting Human Trafficking

As an estimated 21 million people worldwide are trapped in modern day slavery, we are reminded to be vigilant against human trafficking in whatever form it appears. We will use the full force of the law against those who engage in commercial sexual exploitation and forced or bonded labor of men, women, or children; involuntary domestic servitude; trafficking in persons for the purpose of organ removal; and the illegal recruitment and use of child soldiers. Building on the accomplishments of the last Republican administration in implementing the Trafficking Victims Protection Act of 2000, we call for increased diplomatic efforts and accountability for foreign governments to prosecute traffickers, including penalties for any public officials who may be complicit in this devastating crime. We will highlight the need to stop slave labor, taking steps to prevent overseas labor contractors who exploit foreign workers from supporting military bases abroad or exporting goods to the United States. A Republican administration will strategize with partners around the world to prevent the demand for trafficking victims that makes exploitation lucrative and will prosecute sex tourists and domestic buyers to the fullest extent of the law. We will work at home and abroad to ensure that trafficking victims are identified among migrants, refugees, and our own citizens so they receive the

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rehabilitative care needed to heal and thrive (p. 53).

Democratic Party Platform Excerpts

Guaranteeing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Rights

Democrats applaud last year's decision by the Supreme Court that recognized that LGBT people—like other Americans—have the right to marry the person they love. But there is still much work to be done. LGBT kids continue to be bullied at school, restaurants can refuse to serve transgender people, and same-sex couples are at risk of being evicted from their homes. That is unacceptable and must change. Democrats will fight for the continued development of sex discrimination law to cover LGBT people. We will also fight for comprehensive federal nondiscrimination protections for all LGBT Americans, to guarantee equal rights in areas such as housing, employment, public accommodations, credit, jury service, education, and federal funding. We will oppose all state efforts to discriminate against LGBT individuals, including legislation that restricts the right to access public spaces. We support a progressive vision of religious freedom that respects pluralism and rejects the misuse of religion to discriminate. We will combat LGBT youth homelessness and improve school climates. We will support LGBT elders, ensure access to necessary health care, and protect LGBT people from violence—including ending the crisis of violence against transgender Americans. We will also promote LGBT human rights and ensure America's foreign policy is inclusive of LGBT people around the world (p. 19).

Appointing Judges

We will appoint judges who defend the constitutional principles of liberty and equality for all, and will protect a woman's right to safe

and legal abortion, curb billionaires' influence over elections because they understand that Citizens United has fundamentally damaged our democracy, and believe the Constitution protects not only the powerful, but also the disadvantaged and powerless (p. 25).

Combat Climate Change, Build a Clean Energy Economy, and Secure Environmental Justice

Democrats share a deep commitment to tackling the climate challenge; creating millions of good-paying middle class jobs; reducing greenhouse gas emissions more than 80 percent below 2005 levels by 2050; and meeting the pledge President Obama put forward in the landmark Paris Agreement, which aims to keep global temperature increases to "well below" two degrees Celsius and to pursue efforts to limit global temperature increases to 1.5 degrees Celsius. We believe America must be running entirely on clean energy by mid-century. We will take bold steps to slash carbon pollution and protect clean air at home, lead the fight against climate change around the world, ensure no Americans are left out or left behind as we accelerate the transition to a clean energy economy, and be responsible stewards of our natural resources and our public lands and waters. Democrats reject the notion that we have to choose between protecting our planet and creating good-paying jobs. We can and we will do both (p. 27).

Provide Quality and Affordable Education

Democrats know that every child, no matter who they are, how much their families earn, or where they live, should have access to a high-quality education, from preschool through high school and beyond. But the United States still lags behind other advanced economies in providing high-quality, universal preschool programs to help all of our kids get a strong start to their educations. Our schools are more segregated today than they were when Brown v. Board of Education was decided, and we see wide disparities in educational outcomes across racial and socioeconomic lines. A college degree or another form of post-secondary education is increasingly required for jobs that pay a middle-class wage, but graduation rates have stagnated for low-income students. And the high cost of college has required too many Americans to take out staggering student loans or put a degree out of reach entirely. We are selling our children and our young people

short. Democrats are committed to making good public schools available to every child, no matter what zip code they live in, and at last making debt-free college a reality for all Americans (p. 30).

Guaranteeing Universal Preschool and Good Schools for Every Child

We will ensure there are great schools for every child no matter where they live. Democrats know the federal government must play a critical role in making sure every child has access to a world-class education. We believe that a strong public education system is an anchor of our democracy, a propeller of the economy, and the vehicle through which we help all children achieve their dreams. Public education must engage students to be critical thinkers and civic participants while addressing the wellbeing of the whole child (p. 32).

We also support increased investments in afterschool and summer learning programs, which help working families, keep kids safe, and inspire learning at a time when many students are left unsupervised. We must find ways to encourage mentoring programs that support students in reaching their full potential. Mentoring is a strategy to ensure that children living in poverty have the encouragement and support to aim high and enter the middle class. We will focus on group mentoring, which is a low-cost, high-yield investment that offers the benefit of building a supportive network of peers who push one another towards success (p. 32).

We support policies that motivate rather than demoralize our educators. We are committed to ensuring that schools that educate children in poverty are not treated unfairly, which is why we will end the test-and-punish version of accountability that does no more than reveal the many opportunity gaps facing students from low-income communities (pp. 33-34).

Democrats are committed to providing parents with high-quality public school options and expanding these options for low-income youth. We support democratically governed, great neighborhood public schools and high-quality public charter schools, and we will help them disseminate best practices to other school leaders and educators. Democrats oppose for-profit charter schools focused on making a profit off of public resources. We believe that high-quality public charter schools should provide options for parents, but should

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not replace or destabilize traditional public schools. Charter schools must reflect their communities, and thus must accept and retain proportionate numbers of students of color, students with disabilities and English Language Learners in relation to their neighborhood public schools. We support increased transparency and accountability for all charter schools (p. 34).

Ensure the Health and Safety of All Americans

Democrats have been fighting to secure universal health care for the American people for generations, and we are proud to be the party that passed Medicare, Medicaid, and the Affordable Care Act (ACA). Being stronger together means finally achieving that goal. We are going to fight to make sure every American has access to quality, affordable health care. We will tackle the problems that remain in our health care system, including cracking down on runaway prescription drug prices and addressing mental health with the same seriousness that we treat physical health. We will fight Republican efforts to roll back the clock on women's health and reproductive rights, and stand up for Planned Parenthood. And we will tackle the epidemics of substance abuse and gun violence, which each claim tens of thousands of lives every year (p. 34).

Securing Reproductive Health, Rights, and Justice

Democrats are committed to protecting and advancing reproductive health, rights, and justice. We believe unequivocally, like the majority of Americans, that every woman should have access to quality reproductive health care services, including safe and legal abortion—regardless of where she lives, how much money she makes, or how she is insured. We believe that reproductive health is core to women's, men's, and young people's health and wellbeing. We will continue to stand up to Republican efforts to defund Planned Parenthood health centers, which provide critical health services to millions of people. We will continue to oppose—and seek to overturn—federal and state laws and policies that impede a woman's access to abortion, including by repealing the Hyde Amendment. We condemn and will combat any acts of violence, harassment, and intimidation of reproductive health providers, patients, and staff. We will defend the ACA, which extends affordable preventive health care to women, including no-cost contraceptive supplies, and prohibits discrimination in health

care based on gender (p. 37).

We will address the discrimination and barriers that inhibit meaningful access to reproductive health care services, including those based on gender, sexuality, race, income, disability, and other factors. We recognize that quality, affordable comprehensive health care, evidence-based sex education and a full range of family planning services help reduce the number of unintended pregnancies and thereby also reduce the need for abortions (p. 37).

Protect Our Values

Our values of inclusion and tolerance inspire hope around the world and make us safer at home. The world will be more secure, stable, and peaceful when all people are able to reach their God-given potential and live in freedom and dignity. We strive to ensure that the values upon which our country was built, including our belief that all people are created equal, are reflected in everything our nation does. That is why we will promote peacebuilding, protect democracy, and champion human rights defenders. And we will seek to safeguard vulnerable minorities, including LGBT people and people with disabilities (p. 45).

Women and Girls

We believe the United States must continue to be a strong advocate for the rights and opportunities of women and girls around the world. Elevating their status is not just the right thing to do—it is also a strategic imperative that advances American interests in prosperity and stability. When women and girls are healthy, educated, and able to participate economically, their families and communities prosper, poverty decreases, and economies grow. And when women participate in conflict resolution and post-conflict processes, it improves the likelihood of securing sustainable peace. Democrats are committed to advancing the rights and opportunities of women and girls as a central focus of American diplomacy, development, and defense efforts and will continue to support the United States National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security. We will work to end the epidemic of gender-based violence around the world. We will urge ratification of the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (p. 45-46).

We will support sexual and reproductive health and rights around the globe. In addition to expanding the availability of affordable family planning information and contraceptive supplies, we believe that safe abortion must

be part of comprehensive maternal and women's health care and included as part of America's global health programming. Therefore, we support the repeal of harmful restrictions that obstruct women's access to health care information and services, including the "global gag rule" and the Helms Amendment that bars American assistance to provide safe, legal abortion throughout the developing world (p. 46).

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender People

Democrats believe that LGBT rights are human rights and that American foreign policy should advance the ability of all persons to live with dignity, security, and respect, regardless of who they are or who they love. We applaud President Obama's historic Presidential Memorandum on International Initiatives to Advance the Human Rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Persons, which combats criminalization, protects refugees, and provides foreign assistance. We will continue to stand with LGBT people around the world, including fighting efforts by any nation to infringe on LGBT rights or ignore abuse (p. 46).

Trafficking and Modern Slavery

We will stop the scourge of human trafficking and modern slavery of men, women, boys, and girls. We will use the full force of the law against those who engage in modern-day forms of slavery, including the commercial sexual exploitation and forced labor of men, women, and children. Building on the accomplishments of the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000, we call for increased diplomatic efforts with foreign governments to root out complicit public officials who facilitate or perpetrate this evil. We will also work to increase the provision of services and protections for trafficking survivors (p. 46).