



## Voicing Our Values—Declaration of Progressive Values

This is an addendum to our book, [\*Voicing Our Values: A Message Guide for Candidates\*](#). The purpose is to help lawmakers, candidates and activists understand how to use values to persuade voters to embrace progressive policy solutions. We encourage you to adapt the language to your own voice and personalize it with your own knowledge and experience.

Less than a decade ago, ultra-conservatives seemed to have a monopoly on political values. The media thought that values were something derived from a religious code of conduct and that they justified the anti-choice, anti-gay, anti-science mores of the right wing. Fortunately, Americans knew better.

Values are ideals. In politics, they are words or phrases that describe the kind of society we are trying to build. The stereotypical conservative values are small government, low taxes, free markets, a strong military, and family values. What are ours?

The short answer is: freedom, opportunity and security for all. When you're talking about an issue where government has no proper role—like free speech, privacy, reproductive health, or religion—proclaim your commitment to *freedom* or use a similar value from the chart below. When you discuss an issue where government should act as a referee between competing interests—like court proceedings, wages, benefits, subsidies, taxes, or education—explain that your position is based on *opportunity* or a value from that column. When you argue about an issue where government should act as a protector—like crime, retirement, health care, zoning, or the environment—speak about *security* or a similar value.

| Say . . .                          |  |                                     |
|------------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| Freedom<br>or similar values:<br>↓ | Opportunity<br>or similar values:<br>↓ | Security<br>or similar values:<br>↓ |
| Liberty                            | Equal opportunity                      | Safety; protection                  |
| Privacy                            | Equality under law                     | Quality of life                     |
| Basic rights                       | Justice; equal justice                 | Employment security                 |
| Fundamental rights                 | Fairness; fair share                   | Retirement security                 |
| Religious freedom                  | Level playing field                    | Health security                     |

“Freedom, opportunity and security for all” is an accurate and politically potent description of what we stand for. The right wing favors these principles for some—the affluent. Progressives insist on providing freedom, opportunity and security to all Americans.

Progressives also stand for other values like compassion, cooperation, communalism, generosity, and mercy. But those evoke negative stereotypes associated with “liberals,” so they don’t work well with persuadable voters. Freedom, opportunity and security project our strength; we accept the responsibility to extend freedom, opportunity and security to all while conservatives shirk that responsibility. By arguing for “personal responsibility” and opposing freedom, opportunity and security for all, it’s the conservatives who are short on values.

Political values are not just talking points. They help us explain to our fellow citizens what we stand for and what we’re trying to accomplish. Instead of presenting voters with a laundry list of issue positions (as candidates have done for years), progressives should lay out policies in a manner that illustrates and gives depth to our values.

Here is one way an individual or political organization could do so:

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**Declaration of Progressive Values**  
(This version highlights state and local policies)

*As progressives seek popular support for our policies, it is crucial that we convey the values that underlie our political philosophy. Three pillars support our common vision for the role of government:*

**First, progressives are resolved to safeguard our individual freedoms.** For two centuries, America has been defined by its commitment to freedom. We must fervently guard our constitutional and human rights, and keep government out of our private lives.

**Second, progressives strive to guarantee equal opportunity for all.** America’s historic success has come by providing all citizens, not just the privileged few, with the opportunity for a better life. We must vigorously oppose all forms of discrimination, create a society where hard work is rewarded, and ensure that all Americans have access to the American Dream.

**Third, progressives are determined to protect our security.** To make us truly secure, America must not only stop domestic criminals and foreign invaders, it must also promote our health and welfare. While forcefully continuing to protect lives and property, we must strengthen programs that insure the sick and vulnerable, safeguard the food we eat and products we use, and protect our environment.

Our progressive values differ fundamentally from those of conservatives. While conservatives work to protect freedom, opportunity and security only for a select few, progressives accept the mission and responsibility to extend these protections to all Americans, and to preserve them for future generations.

Our progressive values of freedom, opportunity and security mean that:

1. **Progressives stand for decent wages and benefits for working Americans.** Our economy should provide the opportunity for all hard-working individuals and families to enjoy life. Therefore, we support legislation to increase the minimum wage, guarantee earned sick days, and create viable pensions for all.
2. **Progressives stand for affordable, high-quality health care for all.** The security of comprehensive health insurance should be a right, not a privilege. Therefore, we support full and vigorous implementation of the Affordable Care Act and call for it to be strengthened with a public option.
3. **Progressives stand for a public education system that is the best in the world.** Every child should have an equal opportunity to learn. Therefore, we support legislation to invest in our children's education through smaller class sizes, more after-school initiatives, and universal pre-K programs.
4. **Progressives stand for a clean, safe environment.** We must conserve our natural resources both to secure our own health and well-being, and to fulfill our responsibility to future generations. Therefore, we support legislation to reduce air and water pollution, including greenhouse gasses, and encourage both energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy.
5. **Progressives stand for the elimination of discrimination.** Discrimination against anyone diminishes freedom for everyone. Therefore, we support legislation to eliminate the practice of racial and ethnic profiling, ban discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity, and guarantee marriage equality.
6. **Progressives stand for real security for the most vulnerable Americans.** We must protect the security of our nation's children, elderly, disabled and disadvantaged. Therefore, we support legislation to make healthcare, child care, elder care, companion care and housing programs more accessible, efficient and effective.
7. **Progressives stand for the protection of privacy.** For Americans to be truly free, the government must stay out of our private lives. Therefore, we favor legislation to keep abortion safe and legal, and ensure access to all reproductive health services.
8. **Progressives stand for a criminal justice system that focuses on security instead of retribution.** Tough sentences alone don't make us safer. We also need to prevent crime with more programs for at-risk youth, education and rehabilitation. Therefore, we support legislation to strengthen deterrence programs and stop the cycle of addiction by requiring rigorous treatment instead of incarceration for non-violent drug crimes.
9. **Progressives stand for a tax system where everyone pays their fair share.** Instead of following the principle of equal opportunity for all, tax policies often deliver an unfair share of benefits, breaks, and loopholes to wealthy special interests. Therefore, we support legislation to eliminate wasteful tax subsidies and tax breaks that are both unfair and not worth the cost.

10. **Progressives stand for an inclusive, open government.** Every American must have an equal opportunity to participate in our democracy. But average Americans are increasingly shut out by the influence of big money in politics. Therefore, we support laws that protect our fundamental right to vote, and measures to reduce the influence of money in the political process.

For much more discussion of how to talk to voters about a wide variety of issues, see our book, *Voicing Our Values: A Message Guide for Candidates*, which is available at [www.progressivemajorityaction.org](http://www.progressivemajorityaction.org).

#### **Sources for more information about progressive values**

- [American Values Project](#)
- [Center for American Progress](#)
- [FrameWorks Institute](#)
- [Hero's Handbook](#)
- [Institute for America's Future](#)
- [Message Matters](#)
- [Opportunity Agenda](#)
- [Topos Partnership](#)