



2020 Platform DRAFT

28 April 2020

Preamble

As American patriots and Democrats living abroad, we call upon the American government to represent our values, uphold our rights and strive towards the fundamental dignity of all people.

We bring an invaluable point of view as Americans living on foreign soil. Our experiences abroad expose us to different peoples, laws and customs, and teach us to have empathy and respect for those who are different. Living away from home expands our sense of the possible and gives us a better understanding of international best practices when evaluating American domestic policies. We experience challenges and situations that bless us with a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the distinctly American values of optimism, diversity, courage and freedom. As individuals and as a group, we are resilient, resourceful and unafraid to face the unfamiliar.

We share our experiences of living internationally, so that the Democrats everywhere can better fight for the egalitarian principles of the Democratic Party described throughout this platform, for the benefit of all Americans and the world.

Our 2020 DA Platform seeks to address the following:

1. Who we are as Democrats Abroad – what are our political priorities and what distinguishes our perspectives on them?
2. What are our values as Americans – how does our philosophy, influenced from our experience living abroad, apply to all relevant issues back home?
3. What should our elected officials do to address our unique circumstances and priorities?

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Americans Abroad

Americans living outside the United States face a unique set of challenges in our engagement with U.S. Government officials, departments, agencies, and more broadly in our use of all services offered to American citizens. As non-resident Americans, we require fewer services than domestic residents. We place a very modest burden on our Government and pay fees for all the services provided to us by U.S. Government agencies and departments. We should not be expected to tolerate policies and regulations that impose inordinate and unjustified bureaucracy, unreasonable costs, wait times, emotional and physical hardships, or other burdens that put our well-being and that of our families at risk.

We are no different from Americans who live in the United States and we are an important constituency group. Like all other American constituencies, we seek a relationship with our Government that is mutually respectful and consistent with U.S. laws, traditions, and norms. We seek constructive engagement with Congress and the Federal Government in addressing our needs and meeting our obligations as Americans.

We also seek to end all discrimination against Americans living abroad in voting rights and other rights of Americans which are either denied or restricted to Americans living abroad, in the transmission of citizenship to our children, in social security, in the availability of citizen services, and in taxation.

Fair Representation of Americans Abroad as a Constituency

There is inadequate recognition of Americans abroad as a constituency group with unique and pressing concerns in areas such as taxation, voting, citizenship transmission, family visas and more.

In 2007, Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney established the Americans Abroad Caucus. We urge Senators to do the same and to establish a Special Committee on Americans Abroad to focus on the concerns of this important constituency. Likewise, we support establishment of a Commission on Americans Abroad to undertake an in-depth study of these critical issues and report findings and recommendations to Congress.

More House Members also need to recognize and prioritize Americans abroad as an important constituency by joining the Americans Abroad Caucus and supporting the establishment of a Commission on Americans Abroad.

Our Voting Rights

As Americans abroad, we are proud of our citizenship and vigilant in guarding our right to help elect our President and members of Congress. Our right to vote in Federal elections is the primary means available to us to participate in the American democratic process. In close elections, our absentee votes from abroad can make, and have made, the difference between Democratic victory and defeat in State and Federal elections. Over time, Congress has enacted a range of legislative remedies for the problems we face in participating in the U.S. electoral process. Unfortunately, some of those solutions have not been fully implemented by the States.

We call on all election officials of the 50 States and the District of Columbia to document and report all votes received from Americans abroad and counted (or not).

We seek additional legislation to require State election officials, at the beginning of each election year, to automatically send to Americans who reside abroad, and who have voted in the previous election, documents enabling them to register to vote and/or request absentee ballots. Further we support the establishment of a single nationwide online system to confirm that Americans abroad are still living abroad and seek ballots for the current election year.

We call on all States and territories to simplify absentee ballot requests for U.S. military and civilians abroad and to enfranchise U.S. citizens born abroad who have reached voting age without having resided in the United States.

We support the alignment of all States' voter registration requirements, voter registration deadlines, and ballot request and ballot return deadlines, and the right of all military and civilian voters abroad to vote for all offices and initiatives on the ballot, even if the voter is living abroad indefinitely.

Finally, we support voting by secure email-returned ballot, or other verifiable and safe electronic voting, in order to facilitate electoral participation by Americans who live where postal services are unreliable.

Transmission of U.S. Citizenship

Foremost in importance for many Americans abroad is ensuring that our children born outside the United States have certainty concerning their entitlement to U.S. citizenship. The right for Americans abroad to transmit their citizenship to their children born abroad is severely restricted and unfairly applied. As a result, each year thousands of children of Americans abroad are denied U.S. citizenship, and some are born "stateless," that is, without any nationality.

No child of a U.S. citizen parent should ever be stateless at birth or denied U.S. citizenship, regardless of where they were born. We support the right of every American parent to transmit U.S. citizenship to their children and support reasonable retroactive changes granting U.S. citizenship to children born abroad to a U.S. citizen, including a naturalized U.S. citizen.

Moreover, we cite the 14th Amendment's provision of birthright citizenship and believe that all persons born in U.S. territories, including American Samoa, or born abroad to a U.S. citizen, should be recognized as "natural born citizens."

Social Security, Medicaid and Medicare

After our children, Americans probably worry most about our seniors and those with special needs. Several important laws and regulations relating to the U.S. Social Security system either unintentionally discriminate against Americans abroad or are simply inequitable. The social security benefits of all Americans, regardless of place of residence, should be protected.

In order to safeguard the retirement age income of Americans abroad we support eliminating provisions that confiscate a large part of the social security retirement benefits of Americans who have lived and worked outside the U.S. and thus outside the Social Security system, eliminating cuts to supplemental Social Security Income for persons who live outside the U.S. for more than 30 consecutive days, and subjecting all Americans to the same Annual Earnings Test rules for calculating the monthly Social Security benefit. We call on the Government to reach totalization agreements with all countries that have social security programs in order to eliminate double taxation of income for the purpose of establishing social security benefits.

We also support access to Medicaid and Medicare for all Americans wherever they may live.

Access to Citizen Services Abroad

The interests and concerns of Americans abroad are rarely considered when U.S. Government agencies reduce or, worse, eliminate services provided at U.S. Consulates and Embassies. We call upon all U.S. Federal departments and agencies to consult with affected American communities abroad before deciding whether to close a Consulate, change Consular hours of operation, or reduce or eliminate services or change local policies, procedures, rules, and visa fee reciprocity schedules, all of which affect American citizens and their immediate relatives abroad.

Congress must provide adequate funding of U.S. Citizen Services Sections (USCSSL) in U.S. Embassies and Consulates so that Americans can obtain routine services such as notarization and passport renewal with little delay and little cost. The Department of State should establish an independent USCSSL citizen advisory group to confer with USCSSL on matters that come under their purview, as well as online resources to help USCSSL better fulfill its mission. In compliance with requirements under the Americans with Disabilities Act, U.S. Government facilities abroad should be accessible and barrier-free for those with disabilities.

Representation by Attorneys

U.S. citizens and U.S. Legal Permanent Residents must have the right to in-person representation by U.S.-licensed attorneys at all U.S. Government facilities abroad and U.S. border points of entry, just as such representation would be allowed if the person were in the United States. Prohibiting such representation is discriminatory, unjustified, and disastrous, resulting in gross violations of the rights of U.S. citizens and U.S. permanent residents living abroad.

U.S. Military Veterans

We recognize and celebrate the service and sacrifice of members of the U.S. military whether in active service or retired abroad. We believe that, as allowed by military regulations, Status of Forces Agreements should permit the use of U.S. military facilities by U.S. veterans residing abroad. We also support an increase in the weight limit on packages that may be sent or received through the U.S. military postal service by military retirees abroad.

Taxation

American citizens living abroad are subjected to discriminatory, unfair, costly, and abusive practices resulting from the U.S. Tax Code. While this subject is detailed in the separate plank Taxation, we wish to underline that certain U.S. Federal requirements, which apply to all Americans, irrespective of where they live and even if they are abroad indefinitely, and who pay taxes in their country of residence are overly burdensome, do not reduce tax fraud, and result in many adverse and most likely unintended consequences. They include but are not limited to the requirements to report all foreign bank accounts, for some taxpayers twice, through separate channels, even if such accounts are in their country of residence; to report all income regardless of where it is earned even if they pay income and other taxes in their country of residence; and to pay costly tax advisors to comply with U.S. tax filing obligations. Banking services and investment choices are also often restricted or denied.

Arts and Sciences

We support ambitious public and private investments in science education, research, and technology. Policy decisions must be based on scientific, evidence-based research, and scientific institutions must be independent from Government interference. The arts and humanities, while different from sciences, are no less important to the advancement of our country. They contribute jobs to a thriving U.S. economy, are useful in promoting diplomatic relations and cultural exchange, and are enjoyed by millions of Americans, cultivating mental well-being and happiness.

Supporting Science

We must restore scientific integrity to positions where qualified staff that have been replaced by political appointees, or simply lost. Positions involving science must be filled by people with scientific qualifications and relevant experience, not by campaign donors or political lackeys.

The United States Government must strive for transparency in all aspects of scientific funding and promotion. Applied sciences are important and must be funded, but a robust funding increase must also be directed towards basic science, which creates the knowledge underlying innovation. Funding must be substantially increased to the National Science Foundation (NSF), National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), and other Government research institutions.

To address the reproducibility crisis in science – which plays a large role in the increasing public distrust of science and must be addressed head-on – the Government should promote reproducible research, including explicit funding of replication studies and training in good research practices. We encourage open-science practice whenever possible, including open-access publications and open data. The Government should coordinate scientific data-sharing on a large scale, to enable the dissemination of the most accurate and up-to-date information among scientists and with the public.

We support the promotion of interdisciplinary scientific research, which is often difficult to get funded through traditional means, yet often produces important results. We support diversity among scientists, including further funding for scientific research at Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic-serving institutions, Tribal Colleges and Universities, and other “minority-serving institutions.” We also support international collaboration and sensible policies on immigration and knowledge-exchange to bring the best science and scientists to the United States, including students, researchers, and entrepreneurs, which has a demonstrated positive effect on the U.S. economy.

Science Policy and Funding as it Relates to Climate Change

Scientific evidence should serve as the basis for political decisions on reacting to climate change. We must participate with the international community in developing international climate accords. Investments in research and development of next generation clean technology, renewable energy, and climate solutions must be increased by several orders of magnitude.

Supporting the Arts

We support freedom of expression in the arts, within the United States and throughout the world. Public funding for arts and humanities, including education, must be increased, especially including minority and under-represented groups. Funding for the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), and the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities should be increased, as should funding for the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) and National Public Radio (NPR).

As Americans living abroad, we often witness how the arts are supported in other countries. The United States must be an active participant in and contributor to the international arts community and we support increased funding to that end. State Department programs abroad, including via the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs, should promote American artists and showcase the broad range of cultural influences in the United States

Arts and Sciences in Education

The K-12 curriculum must be anchored in the liberal arts, as well as the arts and humanities more generally, and in science, including climate change and computer skills. Besides a foundation in western history and government, it should also include non-western history and arts. Education funding must be increased, especially for socio-economically disadvantaged students.

Post-secondary education in both arts and sciences must be affordable for everyone.

Children and Families

Raising a child well should not be a privilege reserved only for well off Americans. America's children all deserve adequate nutrition, nurturing, healthcare, education, and opportunities regardless of gender, race, background, creed, or zip code. Families must be supported by the Government policies that ensure that there are no children in the United States who are deprived of these basic ingredients for a healthy and productive life.

Democrats Abroad supports ratification of the U.N Convention on the Rights of Children, as every other of the 193 members of the United Nations has done. Many members of Democrats Abroad living in other economically advanced countries have had the benefit of best practices in those countries. We believe that the United States would benefit from adopting paid parental leave, free universal childcare, free school meals, free access to healthcare including mental health, and family leave to care for ill dependents. We also believe that protections for children and families should apply equally to same sex and transgender partnerships.

All parents deserve an opportunity to support and bond with their children after birth, and all children deserve quality childcare. We advocate to extend policies to all American workers that provide both parents with at least 12 weeks of paid parental leave. Children adopted by American parents should be immediately granted citizenship, without mandatory waiting periods.

We support programs, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), which should be expanded – that ensure that infants have access to necessary sanitary products such as diapers. To help the neediest families, the Child Tax Credit should also be expanded and pegged to the inflation rate. The Government must reverse restrictions on nutrition programs that make it harder for families to meet their children's dietary needs. Conditions that unduly restrict Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits for families with children must be eliminated.

All children should have access to a high-quality education in a safe and supportive learning environment. Early childhood education and universal preschool are essential elements of a modern education system. We support programs like Early Head Start and ensuring families have equal access to childcare.

Good, safe public schools should be available to every child. We also support expanded investments in early childhood education and universal preschool. Public schools must have resources and guidance to provide healthy meals to students, including breakfast. We support guidelines for the National School Lunch Program that will improve the diets of America's children, especially those who come from food-insecure homes.

The inability to afford menstrual hygiene products should never be a barrier to a child's attendance at school, as it is today for 20% of girls in the United States. We support free menstrual products for those who need them.

Access to education must be enhanced by improvements to labor laws, community safety, healthcare, and housing assistance to ensure that all parents, regardless of income level, can provide a nurturing environment for their children.

Consumer Protection

We support the right of consumers to fair treatment under law, and legislation to require, and tax incentives to reinforce, global best practices in consumer protection. We support full funding for the Bureau of Consumer Protection under the Federal Trade Commission and for the independent Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. We support their power to monitor the safety of new products and to penalize bad actors, while also stressing the importance of Congressional oversight over both Bureaus.

We support public education on consumer rights and curbing the use of forced arbitration clauses in “shrink wrap” or “click to agree” consumer contracts that are not negotiated. Antitrust regulations must be robustly enforced to protect smaller businesses from monopolistic ones and to prevent price-fixing of food, housing, medicine, and other products and services essential to public health and well-being. All consumer products must have clear labeling that identifies their safe use. Food-safety standards must be aligned with global best practices.

Advertising, Data, Privacy

Advertising in all media, including the Internet, must be robustly regulated for accuracy. Companies must be transparent with terms and conditions, and penalized for hiding exclusions in product warranties. Companies must attest that their marketing is not misleading, confusing, or false.

We support data and digital privacy legislation like the European Union’s General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the creation of a Federal data protection agency to oversee its implementation and to help prevent online harassment, fraud, theft including identity theft, and other social engineering scams. Consumers' right to privacy must be protected, including the right to be forgotten and the right to control the way that their data collected is used.

Companies and organizations must be required to ask for explicit consent to retain any personal data, including any identifying information or media, and to automatically delete such data after a reasonable amount of time. They should be prohibited from selling such data or using it for purposes other than those for which it was collected.

Financial Protection

Consumers must have thorough, transparent, comprehensible information about financial instruments and their risks. The terms and conditions of retail loans must be clear and understandable, and banks must cap fees for overdrafts, credit cards, and other consumer transactions. Commercial conflicts of interest must be disclosed.

Criminal Justice

Living outside the US makes us no less concerned that the laws of our country are respected to protect the safety and well-being of our fellow American citizens. The fair administration of justice is paramount in protecting our nation's Constitutional rights and liberties.

Policing and Law Enforcement

The current criminal justice system provides neither safety nor justice to all Americans. Racial bias and profiling have led to over-policing of communities of color, often in the name of "the war on drugs" or "the war on gangs." This over-policing accounts for disproportionately high levels of incarceration among Native Americans, Black Americans, Hispanics, and other minority groups, creating negative socio-economic impacts in these communities. These circumstances are aggravated by the underrepresentation of minorities in law enforcement careers and the personal prejudices of some law enforcement officers. Consequently, trust and respect between law enforcement officers and civilians are diminished, further hampering law enforcement that is both effective and fair.

To restore trust and promote fair policing, all law enforcement personnel must be committed and accountable for upholding the rule of law fairly and justly. Adequate funding must be provided for the training of law enforcement officials at all levels, prioritizing instruction on racial and ethnic bias and sensitivity. Additionally, more minority police officers must be recruited to better reflect the communities being served.

Further, ongoing monitoring of law enforcement activities must be reinforced by requiring the use of body- and dashboard-cameras while on duty. Oversight of law enforcement bodies should be conducted by independent, community-controlled, and well-funded civilian boards. Appointment of a special prosecutor through the US Department of Justice will ensure that the investigation and prosecution of law enforcement officials is conducted fairly and impartially. Qualified immunity should not apply in circumstances involving constitutional or human rights violations.

Apart from racial and ethnic profiling, criminal justice across the nation is negatively affected by a lack of training to deal appropriately and fairly with social issues that manifest as law enforcement challenges. This is seen in the uneven approach to poverty and homelessness, mental illness, domestic violence, truancy and lapses of vehicle and drivers' permits. Moreover, the focus on targeting gangs, drug use, and truancy among youths in communities of color has created a "school-to-prison pipeline." Law enforcement training must include a deeper understanding of social problems that require law enforcement intervention and research-based solutions in response, emphasizing violence avoidance and de-escalation. Investments should also be made in community services based on research that identifies the root causes of criminal behavior.

Justice System

All too often, the court system compounds the injustice when "equal justice under law" is not extended to all defendants. Bail set above the ability to pay means that many non-violent offenders are kept in jail, thus missing work and depriving families of income. Lack of competent counsel leads to unjust convictions. Plea bargaining, one of many tools used by prosecutors to

lighten the load on the court docket, encourages the innocent to plead guilty to escape an even harsher sentence.

As a result, incarceration rates in the US are the highest per capita of any developed country. The private prison industry now referred to as “the prison-industrial complex,” drains tax dollars from public coffers while providing substandard facilities, food, healthcare, and rehabilitation services to the incarcerated. Private prison companies must be banned entirely, and prison operations returned to the states and local authorities to manage in the public interest.

Americans deserve a justice system that treats prisoners with dignity and protects the vulnerable, including immigrants and asylum seekers. Detention and prison operating standards must, at a minimum, match internationally recognized standards for the treatment of prisoners. The illegal use of cruel and unusual punishment, such as extended solitary confinement, must be stopped. In the same vein, the death penalty must be abolished once and for all.

The public defender system must be adequately funded so that all those accused, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or socio-economic status, can exercise their rights to due process, a fair trial, and competent counsel. Cash bail must be replaced with a just, equitable system that presumes innocence over guilt. The appointment of a defender general as a counterpart to the solicitor general to represent the rights of criminal defendants is a necessary step to ensure a more equitable justice system.

Mandatory-minimum sentencing and ‘three strikes’ mandates, set by the 1994 crime bill, limit prosecutorial and judicial discretion, and must be repealed. Penalties for certain narcotics-related crimes, and other “victimless” crimes, must be reviewed, reduced, and more rehabilitation options made available.

Cannabis use (both medicinal and recreational), propagation, and sales must be legalized at the Federal level. Those currently incarcerated for nonviolent cannabis-related offenses should be immediately released and the records of those convicted in the past should be expunged.

The goal of prison should be to rehabilitate prisoners so they can integrate into their communities when released. This requires, at minimum, opportunities for education and job training as well as appropriate psychological counseling and mental health services. Prevention and treatment for addiction, substance abuse, and other mental health issues must be prioritized above incarceration.

As a community, we need to build stronger systemic support to help former prisoners rebuild their lives and reduce recidivism. This includes “banning the box” on job applications, which forces former prisoners to identify themselves and is a discriminatory hiring practice. Once former prisoners have served their sentences, all of their civil rights should be restored, including unconditional voting rights and the right to seek and find gainful employment.

Democracy and Elections

Democrats Abroad believes in transparent democratic processes and the rule of law, and we oppose the influence of undocumented big money and gerrymandering in elections. We support efforts to combat disinformation and methods to ensure election integrity and accessibility while ending voter suppression.

End Citizens United and Lobbying

The 2010 Supreme Court decision of Citizens United, has enabled super PACs and dark money organizations to funnel hundreds of millions of dollars into our politics. Further, corporate lobbying yields unfair access and outcomes for those with money spent to influence issues. We believe that the influence of big money in politics must be curbed, in order for fair and democratic representation to thrive.

Democrats Abroad takes the position that every organization that makes election-related expenditures should be required to promptly disclose the identities of their donors. We urge the passing of a constitutional amendment to abolish the doctrines of corporate personhood and the payment of money equaling political speech.

We recommend ensuring that everyone paid to influence the Government by lobbying elected officials or Government departments and agencies registers as a lobbyist, imposing stricter disclosure rules, developing a system for recording lobbying expenditure by corporations, ending "regulatory capture" and enacting legislation to close the revolving door between Government and lobbyists.

Disinformation, False News and Media Literacy

Disinformation undermines professional journalism, including standards of accuracy, objectivity, and separation of opinion from factual reporting, and thus threatens democratic elections and ideals. A functioning democracy requires that independent professional journalism freely perform its "watchdog" role and scrutinize politicians and elections. We need fair and balanced political reporting, and urge creation of a time limited commission to revisit the fairness doctrine and how to balance free speech and the need for an informed public.

The perpetrators of disinformation promote fraudulent news to prey on the vulnerabilities, partisan biases, or ignorance of recipients whom they hope to enlist as amplifiers and multipliers. Disinformation undermines legitimate expertise on health, science, social issues, and political life, and impedes understanding across communities.

We call for robust action to combat fraudulent news and its effects at all levels, including: increased protection for the privacy of personal data, national media literacy education programs to teach the public about how to think critically, recognize and report on fraudulent news, and the create constructive content, and strengthened regulation and scrutiny of social media companies, which must provide transparency in their policies and take responsibility for fraudulent news on their platforms.

National Census

The national census should include every person living in the United States, regardless of citizenship or immigration status. Democrats Abroad endorses the fair and accurate administration of the national census, supports keeping confidential the information participants submit, urges the omission of citizenship status questions from the current and future census, and opposes politicization of the census.

Anti-corruption

To restore public confidence in our Government and deter future wrongdoing, we call for the Justice Department to investigate corruption during the current administration and to hold Government officials accountable for any illegal activities.

Voter suppression

The voting rights of Americans have been eroded through morally corrupt methods. State and local legislators have passed legislation or enshrined procedures which create barriers to voter registration, limit or eliminate early voting, unfairly and unjustifiably purge registered voters and impose new restrictions on registered voters. These practices have disenfranchised thousands of voters, in particular African American, Latino, young voters, and those with felony convictions who have served their time.

Democrats Abroad calls for strengthening the Help Americans Vote Act (HAVA) and the Voting Rights Act (VRA) in order to restore protections for voters in States which have historically discriminated against minority communities. We support expanding existing protections to ensure that electoral policies and practices do not discriminate against minority populations by preventing them from voting. We support all measures to ensure access and ease of voting including making Election Day a holiday, automatic voter registration, same day registration, vote by mail and expansion of electronic voting. We call for standardizing voter registration requirements across States, and for national requirements for computerized voter databases compliant with unified data security standards.

Gerrymandering and Prison Gerrymandering

Pervasive gerrymandering has rendered thousands of voters voiceless. Gerrymandering allows politicians to choose their voters and determines the outcome of many elections before any vote is cast. Redistricting maps have made Federal, State, and local elections non-competitive and undermine communities of color.

We call for independent redistricting commissions. Where lawmakers retain control over redistricting, we encourage bi-partisan efforts to create district maps. A strengthened Voting Rights Act should ensure protections when redistricting plans infringe upon or disparately impact citizens based on race and all communities which are subjected to discrimination.

Prison gerrymandering occurs when the Census Bureau counts prisoners as residents of the prisons where they are incarcerated rather than at their pre-incarceration addresses and state legislatures use this Census data to draw their district maps. These practices artificially inflate the voting power of the districts where prisons are located, creating unequal voting power. Many correctional facilities are in rural, largely Republican and predominantly caucasion areas, but many prisoners come from urban, often Democratic communities, and are minorities.

Democrats Abroad believes that prison gerrymandering harms our democracy and violates the Voting Rights Act. We urge the Census Bureau to stop counting prisoners as residents of prisons and urge individual states to cease prison gerrymandering.

Election integrity and fair representation

Democrats Abroad believes in free and fair elections. We support all measures which create fairer election outcomes, including the National Popular Vote Compact to abolish the Electoral College, the elimination of caucuses in Presidential primaries, and Ranked Choice Voting. We urgently call for legislation mandating transparent, statistically-based, verifiable Federal election audits. A functioning democracy requires independent and professional journalism to freely perform its "watchdog" role and scrutinize elections and politicians. We need fair and balanced reporting in our elections, and seek a time-limited commission, to revisit the fairness doctrine, and how to balance free speech, and the need for an informed public, in the digital age.

We support Statehood for the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

Electronic ballot returns for Americans abroad

The Help America Vote Act (HAVA) promoted accessibility, including expansion of electronic systems as a means of improving the Uniformed and Overseas Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA) ballot return rates. Over thirty states allow UOCAVA voters to return ballots using a digital communication method (email, fax, or a web portal). While documented intrusions into local election offices and political organizations in recent election cycles have amplified cybersecurity concerns, the risk of malicious tampering targeting UOCAVA ballots using digital communication is minimal. Current methods to minimize risk include support for paper balloting systems and post-election risk-limiting audits. We seek secure online ballot return options for UOCAVA voters in states that require mailed or faxed ballot returns, and note its urgency during health pandemics, where social distancing is a priority.

Economic Policy

Democrats Abroad supports economic policy that protects, preserves, and grows our economy sustainably and inclusively. Our Government must provide support mechanisms so that American workers can succeed and build happy and prosperous lives.

Free and open markets can coexist with social welfare systems. The United States can simultaneously embrace the principles of capitalism and fulfill our collective responsibility to care for each other's well-being.

Our economic engagement around the world should be defined by win-win rather than zero-sum policies. We must resume our traditional role in building and leading economic cooperation among like-minded countries.

Response to COVID-19

Given the dramatic impact of COVID-19 on the U.S. economy, we advocate:

Preventing mass unemployment

The economic shutdown due to the pandemic has exposed a serious weakness in the American economy, vulnerability to mass unemployment, with surging joblessness undoing a decade of repair since the 2008 financial crisis. We should institute ways to avoid future economic disruption, including automatic fiscal and employment stabilizers which are common in other countries.

Ensuring security of critical equipment and technology

The U.S. reliance on global supply chains needs to be adjusted to take into account national security. The Government should consider domestic production of certain critical equipment needed for disease outbreaks, as well as development and adoption of advanced technologies to protect the well-being of the American population.

Protecting long-term credit-worthiness and economic health

This crisis has resulted in an enormous expansion of monetary and fiscal stimulus, raising U.S. Government debt to levels not seen since World War II. While these actions are necessary to prevent a depression, they raise the longer-term risk of U.S. indebtedness, which can have negative domestic and foreign policy implications. Additionally, once the COVID-19 crisis has passed, emergency interventions into companies and markets will need to be evaluated to determine how they impact the long-term health of the U.S. economy.

Economic Investment, Infrastructure, and Jobs

One of the greatest challenges facing the American economy is geographic divergence in prosperity. Economic opportunity and wealth have coalesced around urban centers and the two coasts in recent decades, leaving behind large areas of underdeveloped “left behind” regions in rural and landlocked areas. In addition to the economic divide, this has exacerbated the fracturing of American identity along rural and urban lines, threatening our shared sense of purpose and community.

Roots to this economic divide include globalization policies and a long decline in Government investment in education, health services, and physical and digital infrastructure. Government investment is needed to revitalize America’s economically lagging regions and transform them into self-sustaining centers of economic dynamism.

The fossil fuel industry and some other industries also face obsolescence or downsizing as a result of automation and other technological changes. We need strategies for investment that will provide meaningful jobs for American workers.

The Green New Deal lays out a plan for the “greenification” of the U.S. economy with a goal of net-zero greenhouse gas emissions through a fair and just transition for all communities and workers. We support the passage of the Green New Deal or similar legislation that would introduce a sweeping 10-year infrastructure plan combined with the creation of millions of high-wage jobs.

We support investment in U.S. transportation infrastructure – much of which has fallen into disrepair – including highways, bridges, tunnels, and waterways, and regional and national mass transit. Infrastructure investment should use both public and private partners, and include a national infrastructure investment vehicle to expand funding while participating in financial results.

We support establishment of a national service requirement for American youth and opportunity for the unemployed to contribute to State and local Governments, education, health care, national parks, and the foreign service, for example. The economic benefit to our country would be complemented by patriotic benefits to communities and professional benefits to individuals.

Automation and globalization have left American workers feeling threatened or betrayed. Policy options vary from guaranteed minimum wage to trade wars. We should not feel threatened, but rather embrace emerging opportunities using nimble fiscal policy, workforce mobility, and a commitment to supporting and training our workforce.

Supporting Unions

Labor unions have been at the heart of the Democratic Party since the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) backed Franklin Delano Roosevelt in the 1936 New Deal Coalition. And the importance of unions cannot be overstated. Union membership and influence are highly correlated with middle class job creation, social mobility, and lower levels of economic inequality. The ability of workers to collectively bargain for improved working conditions and wages and benefits must be preserved and renewed.

We call upon the Government to support public and private workers in exercising their right to organize and join unions, to facilitate certification of a union with a simple majority of eligible workers, and to reverse legislation, such as “right to work” laws, that puts undue hiring and firing power in the hands of companies at the expense of employees.

A Living Wage

Americans have the right to earn a living wage. Honest, hardworking Americans should not be forced to live on subsistence wages. Rectifying the minimum wage level across the country will have untold benefits, including stronger households, better social mobility, more robust U.S. consumption, and a more equal and resilient society. A higher minimum wage will benefit in particular the young, minority communities, and women, who are overrepresented at the lower end of the income distribution.

The Federal Government should raise the national minimum wage for all workers to \$15/hour, indexed to inflation.

Meritocracy, Economic Inclusion and Diversity

Equal opportunity and meritocracy are among the highest American ideals. The principles stating that we are all created equal and that each of us has an inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are enshrined in our foundational creed. Every American should have access to a level playing field. The U.S. Government should enable individuals and families to achieve the American Dream.

Ensuring the inclusion of women in the economy is of special concern, as economic growth is constrained by women’s lower participation in the labor market. The U.S. Government should encourage, incentivize, and invest in women from all backgrounds to become full participants in the U.S. economy. Efforts should encompass promoting financial literacy, recruitment into STEM fields and leadership roles, parental leave for both genders and affordable child care options, among other measures.

Similarly, discriminatory practices that have been employed against minority groups throughout history have been a constraint on American prosperity and must be addressed. We can and must do more to ensure equal economic opportunity, including ensuring access to higher education and decent housing and transportation, a fairer criminal justice system, and incentives for the private sector to treat all Americans fairly, regardless of background.

Wage Inequality

We endorse reduction of wage inequality between the top and the bottom as well as between genders and races. The average Chief Executive Officer now earns 287 times as much as the median worker in the same company, an increase of 940% since 1978. Greater pay data transparency and tax incentives for reducing inordinate pay gaps will be a strong first step in reducing wage inequality. We support self-disclosure of senior management and board-member compensation and analysis of management-to-median worker pay ratios.

Wage inequality is exacerbated by education, gender and race. We also support self-reporting of gender and racial pay-gaps; tax-break incentives for companies that can demonstrate significant improvement in pay gaps over a 4-year time frame; and tax penalties for those that show persistent gaps.

Fiscal Prudence

Trickle down economic theory and promises that “tax cuts pay for themselves” – repeatedly offered by Republicans to advance tax-cut legislation – have actually exacerbated income inequality, and ballooned budget deficits and the national debt, serving then only as an excuse for cutting Government services. The Government’s financial choices with respect to revenue and debt should reflect the discipline of a well-run business or household, while recognizing that sustainable debt levels reflect the commercial capacity and direction of the U.S. economy.

An Independent and Inclusive Federal Reserve

Independence of the Federal Reserve is essential to maintaining the smooth functioning of financial markets including global market confidence in the dollar as the principal reserve currency. We support the independent role of the Federal Reserve in managing the financial system with the dual priorities of full employment and low inflation. We also emphasize the need for the Federal Reserve to support the economic well-being of ordinary citizens (“main street”) as well as the smooth functioning of the financial markets, in such a way that minimizes wealth inequality and ensures social mobility.

Corporate and Financial Markets Oversight

U.S. shareholder capitalism has gone too far, leading to unreasonable levels of inequality and corporate control over politics and society. We support a legally enshrined broadening of board and corporate responsibility to include more stakeholders, including labor, consumers, creditors, local communities and civil society, as well as shareholders. Corporate governance laws should be changed to reflect equitable treatment of all these stakeholders, reversing the decades-long trend to prioritize and enrich shareholders only.

We call for regulatory review of big tech, which has grown enormously in power and influence since the advent of the Internet. Big tech provides services, from social networking to information searches, are now considered essential. Therefore, it profits from a captive consumer market, raising questions about individual freedom, privacy, and fairness. As this industry continues to grow and evolve, we call for more public oversight, including the enforcement of antitrust and tax laws.

Regulation of financial markets has improved since the 2008 financial crisis, but recent actions to undermine and roll back barriers to excessive financial risk-taking must be reversed. When the economy collapses due to financial bubbles, wealthier Americans fare better than most others, sometimes even profiting from the positioning of their financial assets. We urge the Government to ensure that proper oversight and rules are passed in order to protect the ordinary American worker, citizen, and consumer.

We advocate for more oversight over the shadow banking system as well as rating agencies, which continue to suffer from conflicts of interest and other inappropriate pressures. Additionally, we recommend the Government adopt a unified approach and craft a comprehensive financial regulatory framework covering all areas of finance, including formal banking, shadow banking, insurance systems, pension funds and derivatives, so that oversight is better coordinated and more effective.

Education

Education is a basic human right for which the Federal Government is ultimately responsible.

The core mission of public schools – besides successfully preparing students for entry into meaningful employment or higher education – is to develop critical thinking and to impart financial and economic literacy and an understanding of how our democratic society works.

Democrats Abroad supports policies that foster the development of Americans who are engaged, responsible, and resilient, equipped with the tools required for access to the American Dream. A strong education system is also essential to America's collective strength. Our public-school system – an investment in our nation's economic future – should be the envy of the world.

Pre-K, Primary, and Secondary School

Charter schools and voucher systems should not be allowed to undermine public education. Publicly-funded schools must be held to high standards. We support adequate funding for all public schools, particularly for rural and inner-city schools and those with a large number of special needs and minority students. Funding for public schools should support improvement in school infrastructure, as much of it is in poor repair and unsafe, particularly in schools that serve minority communities. Schools also often face shortages in equipment including technological resources, have understocked or nonexistent libraries, and are using out-of-date materials. All schools must have adequate up-to-date supplies. Schools and teachers should not be forced to compete with each other for access to needed materials and equipment.

Pre-K programs such as Head Start are essential to level the playing field for children of color and the poor. As the achievement gap grows between our nation's richest and poorest students, special attention should be paid to alleviating or eliminating factors that cause enormous disparities in the quality of education available to poor and minority students.

To facilitate learning, schools must be safe, orderly environments, including psychological safety. We oppose the militarization of our nation's schools and arming teachers with guns as a solution to school shootings. Overly strict school discipline, such as zero-tolerance policies, unnecessarily criminalize students for minor rule-infractions and often unjustly target students of color, students with learning disabilities, and students with a history of abuse or neglect. We oppose discriminatory application of discipline and favor additional counseling and support services for vulnerable students.

We must ensure that curricula are current and include more Black, Hispanic, Native American, Asian American, and the history of other minority communities. We must ensure adequate funds for special needs, physical education, art, music, and language programs.

The utility of standardized testing must be carefully evaluated. School curricula must be focused on the love of learning and the cultivation of critical thought, as opposed to passing tests. To overcome the achievement gap, more teachers of color must be hired, culturally appropriate teaching methods used, and mentorship programs increased. Secondary schools should offer education in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) as well as apprenticeships.

To improve teaching standards and classroom conditions, we support increased funding and scholarships for teacher training and degrees, loan reduction or forgiveness, salaries commensurate with comparable professional areas; mentoring and support programs for new teachers, and access to health insurance, including mental health services, and pensions.

Student Loan Reform

At over \$1.6 trillion, total student loan debt in the United States is larger than both auto loans and credit card debt. While the rate of return from attending college has shrunk, the cost has widely outpaced inflation over the past 30 years. Students who lack the means to pay for their education upfront can face decades of loan payments, with many unable to pay even the interest, so that their debt grows.

Since most student loans are Federally guaranteed, lenders have loose credit requirements and schools have little incentive to suppress tuition increases. This negative feedback loop has exacerbated student loan debt to the point where millions of Americans cannot lead normal lives and our economy is undermined.

We support simplified, automated, income-based student loan repayment plans, with payments capped as a percentage of income, and the balance forgiven after a reasonable period of time. Unlike other consumer debt, such as credit card and mortgage debt, student loans cannot currently be discharged in bankruptcy. We support the discharge of student loan debt in the event of bankruptcy.

The Federal Government must reduce the interest burden on Government-guaranteed student loans to zero and must require private student lenders to abolish prepayment penalties, to ease refinancing through third parties, and to provide pricing transparency.

Parent PLUS Loans – Federal loans with relatively high interest rates – help parents fund undergraduate education for their children. We support eliminating Parent PLUS borrowing or capping it as a percentage of direct Federal loans.

The terms and conditions of student loans must be clearly explained before loans are granted. Federal Government Pell grants for education should be more available, indexed to inflation, and widely advertised to high school students.

College Costs

We support reforms to control the rising cost of a college education, including rules and taxes for college and university endowments, a mechanism to reward them for holding tuition and other costs down, and limiting their access to Federal student loans if they do not. We support creation of a searchable database across all colleges and universities allowing prospective students to see graduation rates, employment rates, and income levels by major field of study.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities

The Federal Government must especially support colleges and universities that play unique and vital roles in their communities, including Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Minority Serving Institutions.

Promoting Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)

The Government should appoint an entity to assist in the creation, recognition, and adoption of college-degree equivalency-certifications across STEM areas of study including biology and the physical sciences, computer science, engineering, and mathematics.

Environment and Energy

Climate change is the central challenge of our time. To limit the frequency of extreme weather events and maintain ecosystems, we must limit greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and achieve climate neutrality before 2050 so that temperature increase does not exceed 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. This will require the United States to meet ambitious targets for reducing GHG emissions by 2030 and 2040 as well. Bold action from our Government and spirited international cooperation will be necessary to achieve these critical goals. Environmental and economic policy should work together to ensure that we evolve towards a healthy economy which has a positive environmental impact.

Climate change is a serious threat to public health. Though it will impact poorer social economic groups and women more strongly, thus magnifying existing socio-economic inequalities, it will affect all sectors of society through excessive heat and cold, poor air quality; food and resource insecurity, spread of disease-carrying vectors, and more frequent and greater natural disasters, including floods, droughts, and inundation of water tables.

Reduction of GHG emissions must be addressed through investments in energy efficiency, a carbon tax and elimination of fossil fuel subsidies, increased use of renewable energy technologies such as wind, solar, and geothermal, and investing in energy-storage technologies including those employing green hydrogen. The Federal Government should invest at the Federal, State, and local levels to create renewable energy projects, climate-resilient infrastructure, and energy efficient buildings, transport systems, and industrial processes.

It will also be necessary to remove CO₂ from the atmosphere and safely store or transform it. Research on natural carbon sinks as well as industrial methods for removing CO₂ from the atmosphere should be supported.

CO₂ can also be sequestered agriculturally, sustaining long-term soil health. The Government should support organic farming, permaculture, and agroforestry, all of which increase carbon sequestration in the soil.

The United States must rejoin the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement and work with other nations to not only meet but exceed its goals. The Pentagon's efforts to address climate change as a national security threat must be supported.

The Government should fund development of climate-change-related disaster-mitigation technologies and policies that address the risk of flooding, water shortages, sea-level rise, and extreme weather events. The Government should also urge the States and private educational institutions to include climate science and solutions at all levels of education.

Energy and Sustainability

Dangers from fracking are becoming increasingly obvious and well-documented. Congress and State Governments should place a moratorium on new fracking permits and demand stricter regulations on existing fracking wells, including complete transparency on the chemicals used. Methane leaks from fracking wells and infrastructure must be reduced. There should be a moratorium on new permits for offshore (including Arctic Ocean) drilling. fossil-fuel drilling and pipelines should be banned from National Parks, National Forests, National Monuments, and National Wildlife Refuges.

Mountaintop removal for mining of coal and metals should be banned, and strip-mining should be subject to more stringent land-restoration requirements. As coal and other fossil fuels become a much smaller part of our energy portfolio, the Government must ensure a just transition into new occupations for workers in these industries.

Motor vehicles and airlines are major sources of carbon emissions which should be strictly regulated. Methods such as electrification to eliminate carbon from transportation should be encouraged.

Public transportation produces far less carbon emissions per person-mile than individual motor vehicles. The Government should encourage cities and states to create or expand public transportation systems and to develop more walkable and bikeable neighborhoods.

Environmental Protection Agency and Toxic Pollution

The original monitoring, analytical, and enforcement capacities of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) should be restored and strengthened. The EPA should be empowered to lead and enforce efforts to monitor and remove existing environmental toxins from the environment, including chemicals and plastic, electronic, and other harmful waste.

To support the EPA's work, Congress must require polluters to pay for restoring degraded environments and enact strict standards reducing the amount of water used by power plants and limiting the amount of toxic pollutants they discharge.

Given the documented negative health effects of herbicides containing glyphosate, Congress must phase out their use and restrict the use of growth and other hormones, antibiotics, and artificial food additives that introduce potentially harmful biochemical agents into the food and water supply. The Clean Water Act and the Safe Water Act must be enforced in all sectors, including agriculture, to protect streams, ponds and wetlands. Public water systems should be tested and treated for lead and other contaminants.

To prevent the introduction of new toxins into the environment, registering and testing new chemicals for toxicity must be required prior to their deployment, similar to requirements under the European Union's Registration, Evaluation, Authorization, and Restriction of Chemicals Act (REACH).

Other Environmental and Waste Management Protections

Congress must strengthen the Endangered Species Act and the Senate should ratify the 1992 U.N. Convention on Biological Diversity. Congress should protect primordial forests and require sustainable forest management. Coral reefs need stronger protection, and destructive fishing practices such as bottom trawling that harms them should be banned.

Our industrial agricultural system produces waste in such volumes that it becomes an environmental problem. Runoff of excess fertilizer and pesticides from farms pollutes our drinking water, causes toxic algal blooms in our lakes, and causes dead zones in the Gulf of Mexico. Concentrated animal feeding operations or "factory farms" produce so much concentrated animal waste that some inevitably pollutes ground water while producing methane plumes which pollute the atmosphere. Government should support more sustainable agricultural methods that minimize use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers while building soil health. This will reduce pollution while improving the health of our agricultural workers and consumers by limiting exposure to chemical contaminants in food.

Plastic waste is a global problem; the disposal of plastic waste into nature should be prohibited, as should single use plastics. Technologies to recycle all plastics, including complex plastics, should be deployed widely. Electronic waste recycling should be mandatory. A nationwide system of recycling could be set up following the inspiration of the European Union's Waste of Electronic and Electrical Equipment Directive (WEEE).

Foreign Policy

The primary goal of U.S. foreign policy should be advancing the interests and well-being of the United States and its people. But Democrats Abroad opposes an isolationist foreign policy and retreating from the world. We benefit when we are safe, can travel freely, and are able to enjoy cultural and commercial opportunities abroad as well as at home and when our companies can compete freely and fairly in foreign as well as domestic markets.

The key to those objectives is strengthening alliances and partnerships, and encouraging and supporting democracy around the world. The United States is safest and most prosperous when we act abroad in accordance with our values, when we stand as a leader among allies, and respect commitments made to our partners. The United States should not engage in assassination attempts of foreign leaders and should not invade any country that has not committed a hostile act against the United States.

Protecting America's interests requires using a combination of both soft and hard power to address diverse evolving challenges. Effective diplomacy is essential in facilitating our political, economic, and security goals. The Department of State requires increased funding to restore its effectiveness, while our military must remain a credible force respected by geopolitical adversaries.

Keeping America Secure

Our military must be ready to defeat threats to national security from hostile foreign powers. But readiness also means assessing security vulnerabilities due to climate-change and working to eliminate reliance on fossil fuels. It means prioritizing the health and well-being of military personnel and their families, and of our veterans who served our country with honor and bravery. It means attracting and encouraging diversity in the military, so that our Armed Forces reflect the nation and make use of all available talent, including members of the transgender community and LGBTQ communities who would like the opportunity can serve with dignity and respect.

Readiness means rebuilding relationships with other members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and with other allies and partners around the world by re-affirming our belief in collective defense. Readiness means ending unnecessary wars. For almost two decades, we have used the post-9/11 Authorization for the Use of Military Force (AUMF) to wage a “forever war” against Islamist terrorists and others. Putting our troops in harm's way should come only in response to direct threats to our national security interests and only after proper debate in, and approval from, Congress. We support a responsible drawdown of deployed forces and repeal of the AUMF.

Restoring Diplomacy and Alliance Leadership

Some of our greatest victories have come through wars not fought, partly due to the hard work of our diplomatic corps, patriotic civil servants who often serve in harm's way, advancing our national security and diplomatic interests. Recently diplomacy has been relegated to the sidelines, and the Department of State has been hollowed out. We call for a properly funded Department of State staffed with competent professionals and functioning as a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy.

We are concerned about fraying relationships with our allies, some of which have stood by the United States since the founding of our country. A strengthened State Department will be needed to rebuild trust through formal and informal diplomatic dialogue.

We call for robust reengagement in thoughtful multilateralism. We can better protect our security and other interests by refusing to prop up authoritarian and corrupt Governments and by leading with values, such as open communication, the free flow of information and ideas, and support for democratic institutions.

From climate change to pandemics to economic crises, global challenges require diplomatic collaboration with countries that are not necessarily long-time American allies. We must coordinate with all G20 members and others on these challenges.

Preventing Nuclear Proliferation

We support measures caps on the number of nuclear weapons of current nuclear powers and measures to prevent the development or acquisition of nuclear weapons by other nations. We support new arms-control discussions and forging a new Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran.

The United States should partner with South Korea, China, and other countries in pursuing denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. At the same time, we should recognize the potential for more limited security gains such as limiting the number of North Korean nuclear weapons and the range and number of North Korean missiles. Reducing sanctions in exchange for these measures would increase the security of the United States, South Korea, and Japan, and could establish a diplomatic track with Pyongyang leading to a more comprehensive agreement.

Investing in Foreign Students

While learning about American values firsthand and experiencing the free flow of ideas, foreign students bring new perspectives, often to the benefit of American foreign policy. Yet, for the first time in 15 years, foreign student enrollment has dropped in the United States, adversely impacting American influence abroad. We should increase investment in public diplomacy initiatives that bring foreign students to the United States.

Living Our Values: Supporting Democracy

The United States should stand with those seeking to advance personal liberty, freedom of expression, and democratic political representation. We cannot abide by hate crimes or discrimination based on race, ethnicity, national origin, sexuality, or religious belief.

Providing Development Assistance Abroad

It is in our national interest to remain the leader in global development assistance. By providing assistance targeted at supporting women and girls, increasing business opportunities, expanding human rights, and responding to global security challenges, we can benefit people around the world while furthering our own security and other interests.

We call for an immediate end to the Mexico City policy (“global gag rule”) that prevents Federal funding for non-Governmental organizations that provide reproductive counseling and planned parenthood services. We call for legislation protecting development funding so that there is consistency over time and it is not easily jeopardized by changes in administration.

Regional sections

Latin America

Stability in Venezuela and the Northern Triangle countries (Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras) is fundamental to the security of the United States, and we should provide humanitarian aid which does not require or warrant intervention and should not be an attempt at covert regime change. Such aid can be provided through multilateral channels such as the United Nations, the Red Cross, or other assistance operations when requested by the affected nation. Continued recognition and respect for democratic Governments will improve diplomatic relations and stability for the Latin American region.

The Declassification Diplomacy Project on Argentina, a historic effort to shed light on human rights abuses there, should serve as a model for rectifying and improving relationships in Latin America and around the world.

Cuba poses no significant threat to the United States and it is time to lift all sanctions on the Cuban people and the restrictions on Americans traveling to visit. Aggression against Cuba is one way the United States undermines its own ability to multilaterally negotiate within the World Trade Organization and the U.N. Security Council, and the sanctions do nothing except hinder travel and business throughout the region, and the world.

Europe and Eurasia

For more than 80 years the transatlantic alliance between the United States and its Western European partners has been a powerful foundation for the advancement of peace and prosperity based on common values and objectives. It is in our national interest that Europe be a strong, unified, stable leader in the world.

We must defend foundational elements of democracy that have been in decline in some European countries over the last decade, including threats to a free press, free and fair elections, and the rule of law. We must support moderating and progressive democratic forces when they reemerge.

The massive upheaval across the Middle East since 9/11 has had dramatic consequences for Europe. In particular, the rise of the Islamic State and the civil war in Syria have produced massive numbers of refugees and immigrants putting pressure on Europe, with serious political, economic, and cultural implications in many countries.

These refugees are both a practical and a humanitarian challenge that should be addressed collectively through global cooperation including American commitments consistent with our history of compassion and support for those seeking refuge and opportunity.

Turkey is a powerful force in the region, a key to addressing the refugee crisis, and a critical actor regarding America's security interests in the Middle East. We support cooperation with our European partners in rebalancing strategic objectives while working to restore human rights and the rule of law in the region.

Middle East

We support a U.N.-led effort in Libya, with U.S. financial and diplomatic backing. Key to this is reopening the U.S. embassy. And we should work with the U.N. to stem the human toll in Syria while continuing to maintain troops in the field working with the Syrian Democratic Forces.

Iran, through its pursuit of nuclear weapons and support for terrorist groups such as Hezbollah, is a destabilizing force in the region and beyond. We cannot permit Iran to acquire nuclear weapons, which could lead to a regional arms race and threaten U.S. security and that of our allies. Curtailing Iran's nuclear ambitions should be done diplomatically, led by the United States, in partnership with the permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, Germany, France and the European Union.

Conflicts in the region may be deep-rooted and longstanding but they are not unsolvable if the United States respects the interests of all sides and commits to assisting parties in coming to the negotiating table. Israelis and Palestinians deserve to live in peace and security, and the United States should seek to enable both sides to negotiate a just settlement. Long-standing U.S. friendship with and commitment to the State of Israel does not mean we should support policies that are illegal under international law or that violate democratic norms.

Central and South Asia

Our continued engagement in Central and South Asia is important both for keeping the world safe from terrorism and for ensuring the continued exercise of democratic freedoms in the region. We must continue to engage with the Taliban to ensure a peaceful end to what has become an endless war, but we must do so in concert with the Government of Afghanistan to ensure that it is ultimately successful. Continued engagement in Afghanistan, whether against terrorism or otherwise, must be on the basis of shared values of democracy and human rights, with special attention paid to ensuring legal protections for women.

We must continue to partner with the Government of Pakistan in the fight against terrorism, but we must also ensure that assistance is contingent on protections for women, ethnic and religious minorities, and other historically mistreated populations.

We must deepen ties with the Government of India but demonstrate to the people of India that we support the rights of all citizens, regardless of religion or creed, and believe they should be treated with equality and respect before the law. We must support freedom of the press, freedom of movement, and all forms of legitimate democratic dissent. When engaging with the Government of India, we must be firm in our commitment to these values, while also making clear that we will support India against acts of terror and against hostile foreign encroachment

in the Indian Ocean region.

East Asia and Pacific

Multilateral engagement and dialogue, including perhaps internationally recognized resolution mechanisms, are necessary to forge peaceful solutions to disputes of sovereignty and borders. To ensure freedom of navigation and trade through international waters, parties with interests in the Asia-Pacific region should reaffirm international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which we call on the U.S. Government to ratify.

We support the rule of law and the protection of vulnerable communities such as the Rohingya people who have suffered at the hands of the Burmese military, resulting in mass refugee expulsion and other grave violations of human rights. We also support the right of free expression, as exemplified by developments in Hong Kong's civil society.

Africa

Our policy toward Africa must be grounded in equality and mutual respect. To that end, we should immediately end the unjustified and discriminatory travel bans against Eritrea, Nigeria, Somalia, Sudan, and Tanzania. We recognize that parts of Africa face unique security challenges, and we support African Governments in the fight against Islamist terrorist groups across the continent.

The nations of the global south, and particularly Africa, have too often been marginalized in international organizations. We endorse a greater role for Africa in those that impact the continent. The African Union is vital in amplifying African voices on the world stage and should have a seat at the World Trade Organization, an expanded G20+, and the International Monetary Fund.

Africa is the continent with the youngest population in the world, and we recognize the need to create millions of new jobs there each year. When it expires in 2025, we support extension of the African Growth and Opportunity Act providing tariff free access for most African products to the U.S. market.

International Organizations

International organizations historically championed by the United States continue to serve as the basis for a rule-based order increasing global security and prosperity for all. The United States must continue this tradition of engagement by fully meeting our financial obligations to the U.N. and its related agencies and to defense partnerships such as NATO.

We must strengthen institutions such as the World Trade Organization that the current Administration has attempted to derail. We call on all nations to return to full engagement with these organizations, and we denounce unilateral actions that defy U.N. directives or other treaty obligations.

Gender Equality

True gender equality means that all people should have equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities regardless of their gender. It requires that the interests, needs and priorities of all people are taken into consideration and treated equally, while recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men as well as trans and non-binary persons.

Democrats Abroad underlines the fact that women, their interests, needs, and priorities, be given equal consideration. Women are more frequently affected by gender discrimination than men, and women of color, lesbians, trans women, poor women, teenage girls, and women with disabilities most affected by policies and practices that discriminate based on gender.

The Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) and International Treaties

Democrats Abroad supports the Equal Rights Amendment. It will eliminate the legal distinctions between men and women and possibly non-binary persons by enshrining gender equality in the U.S. Constitution as its 28th Amendment. Without it, we rely only on a legally insecure patchwork of contradictory protections, created by Congress, the States, and the Courts, against wage, divorce, property ownership, pregnancy, employment, and career advancement discrimination. As required by the U.S. Constitution, 38 States have ratified the ERA, and the U.S. Constitution should now have a new 28th Amendment.

Adherence to international treaties which support women's rights would be another important sign of commitment of the United States to uphold and maintain women's rights. We therefore support the ratification by the Senate of the U.N. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which the United States signed in 1980 but the Senate has failed to ratify and which has already been ratified by 165 other countries.

Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights and Justice

Democrats Abroad are committed to protecting and advancing sexual and reproductive health rights, and justice in the United States. We believe unequivocally that every human being living in the United States should have access to quality, affordable sexual and reproductive health care services, including birth control methods and safe and legal abortions, regardless of where they live, their economic status or their insurance coverage. We will continue to fight against Republican efforts to defund and otherwise restrict sexual and reproductive health services, which provide critical health services to millions of poor people.

Individuals as well as families have the right to make the decision to have a child. Such rights should include the right to a safe and healthy pregnancy and childbirth, the right to adopt a child and the right to health and support services during pregnancy and after the birth of a child. They should also include adoption and social support services, without discrimination including parental leave for both parents. We oppose Republican efforts to defund and restrict sexual and reproductive health services.

Pregnancy discrimination must stop. Policymakers must ensure that pregnant individuals are not penalized in their work and careers as a result of their pregnancy. Pregnancy should not be a legally permissible excuse not to hire, to justify firing, or to deny otherwise merited promotions.

Federal agencies and courts play a crucial role in interpreting our legal protections and civil rights. As a result, executive and judicial nominees will shape our legal rights and ability to access them far into the future. Nowhere is this more apparent today than upholding the Supreme Court decision of *Roe v. Wade*. We will fight for and support the nomination of judges and Federal agency executives who have a positive record of upholding reproductive health rights, and justice.

Federal and State laws and policies, such as the Hyde Amendment, which bans the use of Federal funding of reproductive health initiatives and institutions, including restrictions on the funding of contraception and abortions, and which impede women's access to contraception and abortion must be overturned.

We condemn and shall combat all acts of harassment, intimidation, or violence towards reproductive health providers and their staff and patients.

We support legislation that extends affordable preventive health care to women, which prohibits discrimination in health care based on gender, and which addresses the discrimination and meaningful access to sexual and reproductive health care services, including those based on gender, age, sexual orientation or gender identity and expression, race, income, disability, and other factors.

Gender-based Violence, Harassment, or Abuse

Gender-based violence is violence that is directed at an individual based on their biological sex or gender identity or gender expression. It includes physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, and psychological abuse, threats, coercion, and economic or educational deprivation, whether occurring in public or private life. This includes, harassment, or abuse, including both female genital mutilation and child marriage.

Sexual violence and harassment and other sexual, physical, emotional or psychological, including verbal, abuse, threats or coercion, and even economic or educational deprivation based on an individual's sex or gender identity or expression – is deeply rooted in harmful gender norms and inequality and has epidemic proportions in the United States, impacting mental and reproductive health and violating rights, including in some cases, the right to choose if, when, how, and with whom to engage in sexual activity.

Specific communities face disproportionate rates of gender-based violence, including – such as Native American women, who are much more likely to be raped or murdered by a partner than other women in the United States. Transgender people are also at grave risk and need to be protected through legislation.

Through legislation such as the Violence Against Women Act, we are committed to ending gender-based violence, harassment, or abuse wherever it occurs, whether in our homes, streets, schools, military, or wherever.

Wage gap and Wage Parity

Women are paid 81% of what men are paid. Including other factors such as racial bias, disability, and age discrimination, the wage gap can be even greater. Rooted in an array of factors, including bias against working mothers, occupational segregation, and in some cases direct pay discrimination, the gender wage gap is harmful to women's economic security and should be illegal and disincentivized with stiff penalties.

Women's Representation in Leadership and Politics

With the goal that corporate boards and elected officials should more closely reflect the demographics of the U.S. population, which is 50% women, we endorse measures to increase the representation of women on boards of private companies and in leadership positions in Government and at all levels of the political process.

Healthcare

Understanding that healthcare is the highest concern for many Americans – including many of our families and friends living in the United States, Democrats Abroad advocates for high quality, equitable, and affordable healthcare for all Americans and legal immigrants, which we regard as a fundamental human right. We advocate a comprehensive reform that can withstand assault from for-profit interests, in particular insurance and pharmaceutical companies; and avoiding patchwork solutions that are more vulnerable to piecemeal attack and dilution.

We support Medicare for All as the preferred method for achieving these goals. Healthcare coverage should include preventive care and holistic health promotion, reproductive health and abortion services; pre- and post-natal care, pediatric and gender affirming care, dental, vision, and mental health care, and rehabilitation and end-of-life palliative care. We support retraining and a just transition for insurance administrators whose jobs might be at risk from such reform.

With healthcare costs continuing to rise in the United States, many American families, even those with healthcare insurance, live on the brink of financial disaster due to high premiums and unpredictable out-of-pocket costs at point of care. High unemployment caused by the Covid-19 pandemic has further exposed the inherent vulnerability of employer-based insurance. Even before the pandemic, improvements made by the Affordable Care Act (ACA) have been undermined by for-profit interests and many Americans remained uninsured or underinsured.

Medical debts are reported to be the leading cause of personal bankruptcies in the United States. Horror stories abound of Americans having to appeal to family, friends, and the wider public through crowdfunding campaigns as an emergency source of life saving financial aid. Americans living abroad with pre-existing conditions often find themselves becoming healthcare refugees, unable to return to the United States because they cannot afford healthcare, or would be priced out of healthcare insurance.

Democrats Abroad believes that such access to high quality, equitable and affordable healthcare would be best enabled by a single payer system. Research into Medicare for All has consistently shown that it is the best way forward to control costs. Single payer healthcare has a proven track record of providing better value for money to its beneficiaries than the existing private healthcare system.

We have seen how well Medicare has controlled costs better than private insurance, that it has lower administrative costs than private plans. We have also seen how private healthcare market forces have not led to competition as advertised, but instead have resulted in collusive industry practices, and the rise of healthcare monopolies. These facts are supported by extensive research and the burdensome experience of Americans.

Our members have personal experience of how universal coverage improves physical, financial, emotional, and psychological health. Democrats Abroad is therefore in a unique position to advocate for comprehensive healthcare reform, as many of us have the good fortune to live in countries with single payer healthcare or other systems that provide universal coverage.

The United States spends more per capita on healthcare than any other industrialized nation on Earth, yet – despite world-class care in many instances – we have worse overall health outcomes. Controlling healthcare costs is critical to achieving universal coverage. We advocate a range of strategies to reduce costs, including allowing the Federal Government to directly negotiate drug prices with pharmaceutical companies, and single payer healthcare insurance to streamline administrative costs. Attention must also be paid to collusive practices and the rise of monopolies in the healthcare industry.

It is also imperative for the United States to drastically improve its healthcare system both to protect our own citizens from pandemics and to do our part in global response. We must study best practices in other countries, including effective deployment of digital technology while ensuring privacy and confidentiality, stronger testing and tracking capabilities; and stockpiling personal protective equipment as well as medical equipment and supplies.

Immigration Policy

Democrats Abroad live and breathe the gift of living across borders. We understand deeply how immigration benefits societies and results in resilient communities in the United States and around the world.

We have watched in horror and despair as the U.S. Government has disregarded human rights and made xenophobia, racism, and cruelty central to immigration policy. We recall when the United States succumbed to such bigotry with the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882), Mexican repatriation (1929-36) and the turning away of refugees during World Wars I and II.

Once, the Democratic Party led transformative legislation to change course, restore justice and extend opportunity to immigrants across the globe with the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. Striving for a “more perfect union” reflects both the foundational creed of the United States and Democratic Party principles. We must now act again to protect the rights of current and future immigrants.

We support four overall goals: removing discriminatory and unjust systems, reuniting families, attracting immigrants with needed knowledge and skills, and welcoming those fleeing catastrophe, violence, or oppression.

Removing Discriminatory and Unjust Systems

People in the United States should be treated equally under the law. Immigration status must not be a license to violate our constitutional principles or basic human rights.

Immigration policy must not discriminate based on protected characteristics such as sex or sexual orientation, gender or gender identity, race or ethnicity, and national origin or religion, like the registration of Muslim men after 9/11 and the 2017 so-called “Muslim ban”. We condemn the policies of eugenics, white nationalism, or white supremacy. “Country-caps” should be re-evaluated to reflect current immigration patterns and not misused as a way to restrict demographic change.

“Dreamers” who were brought to the United States as children and grew up as Americans should have a swift path to citizenship.

Many immigrants, including children, are being kept in unsafe and unsanitary conditions, often in privately run immigration detention centers with little to no oversight, resulting in mismanagement, exploitation, and blatant violations of human rights. Convicted criminals should be imprisoned through the criminal justice system, not the immigration system, but we should never imprison anyone solely for lack of paperwork. No child should ever be held in a detention center. Immigrants should be released to sponsors or, in a worst-case scenario, entered into a tracking program as their immigration case is being processed.

Deportation can be a death sentence. There should be an immediate moratorium on all deportations and a review of those authorized under the current Administration, with hearings to allow revocation of any unjust deportation orders. Those at risk of being deported should have access to the immigration courts with right to legal representation and right to appeal.

Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has become increasingly militarized in ways that make us less safe. The U.S. Government already has many agencies for detaining dangerous individuals. There is no need for ICE to carry out raids within the United States to operate without warrants, or to use military grade weapons and vehicles. ICE field operations should be abolished, and the U.S.-Mexico border should cease to be a militarized zone. The wall, which is a waste of time and resources, harms the environment, leads immigrants into hazardous crossings, and exacerbates violence and exploitation must be eliminated.

Immigrants may have difficulty communicating with border officials and can find themselves in lengthy and traumatizing detention proceedings due to inadequate services. Welcome centers should be established at border stations with interpreting services and legal assistance as well as assistance for the disabled.

Invalid or lapsed immigration status should not be a crime. The immigration system has sufficient deterrents already, including fines or delays in normalizing status.

“Sanctuary cities” and other sanctuary spaces, such as hospitals, houses of worship and courts should be off limits for immigration enforcement. The U.S. Government must stop retaliating against communities for enacting sanctuary-city policies that make them safer by encouraging immigrants to feel free to contact the police.

Reuniting Families

Families belong together; reunited families create stable communities. Immigration policy that separates family members creates trauma, compromising mental health, and prevents building a stable life in the United States. Children should never be separated from parents or caregivers and guardians. Every effort must be made to reunite families that have already been separated and, if children cross the border alone, to identify family members for placement.

We must also remove barriers that prevent or delay spouses of US citizens from obtaining lawful permanent residence. Among these barriers are the “3- and 10-year bars,” provisions of the law which prohibit applicants from returning to the United States if they depart after having previously been in the country illegally. Many people who qualify for green cards through spouses and relatives are caught in a Catch-22; Under current law they must leave the country to apply for their green card abroad, but as soon as they depart, they are immediately barred from re-entry. The 3- and 10-year bars must be eliminated.

Visas for family members of Americans and permanent residents should have lower fees and be easier to obtain and issued in less than a year.

Marriage equality is the law of the land. Treating the children of legally married same-sex couples as born “out of wedlock” for purposes of denying them citizenship is illegal and unconstitutional. Children born to married same-sex spouses where one is a U.S. citizen should be recognized as citizens from birth.

Attracting Immigrants with Needed Knowledge and Skills

For immigrants with needed knowledge and skills – from farm workers to caregivers and nurses to engineers, and including students, knowledge experts, and entrepreneurs – the United States should have an active recruitment and retention campaign, including a path to citizenship.

Many student and work visas are expensive, difficult to obtain, and do not create an easy path to citizenship. If they even permit work, many restrict the types of work authorized. These circumstances create an immigration experience fraught with anxiety and prone to exploitation. Recent graduates are left with no options at the conclusion of their Optional Practical Training (OPT) job.

Simplifying immigration visas, allowing and encouraging work, and providing a path to citizenship for students and workers would create a vibrant and resilient economy while enriching communities.

Welcoming Those Fleeing Catastrophe, Violence, or Oppression

We live in a global and interconnected world largely shaped since WWII by the United States and we should accept responsibility for providing safe harbor for those harmed in the process. We were once a beacon of hope, welcoming those fleeing catastrophe, violence, or oppression worldwide, and we must become that beacon again.

America's strength is often drawn from those who struggled the hardest to get to the United States. Asylum seekers and refugees should be welcomed while their claims are adjudicated, not turned away, incarcerated, or sent to third countries to wait. Temporary Protected Status should continue to be an option for those fleeing natural disasters, armed conflicts, and other catastrophes. If the home country remains dangerous with the expiration of this status, there should be a way to stay in the United States.

Human trafficking victims and others who find themselves in the United States. should not be afraid to contact the police or the U.S. Government and should know that they will not be deported for reporting crimes against them.

Media and the Internet

The ability to freely send and receive all types of information via electronic media – whether for work, education, cultural enrichment, or leisure – has become central to the lives of most Americans. The internet has proliferated our methods for communicating with one another, while innovations spurred by digital connectivity have created new communities and brought existing communities closer. However, many Americans have been left on the other side of the digital divide, unable to take advantage of this flood of communication and content. And some Internet platforms abuse these vital societal arteries. Democrats Abroad demands that lawmakers combat this danger and guarantee access to free-flowing and fair media for all.

Internet platforms have reduced inefficiencies and provided many benefits for society but some have made misjudgments in their fervor to be content agnostic. The United States and the rest of the world have seen a rise in the propagation of illegal, hateful, or otherwise harmful content. Many companies– which rely on monetizing attention and tend towards monopolistic behavior – have unduly profited from this kind of content. Platforms must take responsibility and address these failings rather than hiding in the “safe harbor” legislation that currently protects them. We support regulation to hold them legally responsible for illegal, hateful, or otherwise harmful content and promote aggressive steps to assure the removal of such content.

The dominance of some of these platforms also necessitates Government action to ensure that they treat content providers fairly. We demand net neutrality and we support a new fairness doctrine to all online platforms and service providers, thereby ensuring that content providers are given exposure equitably rather than buried in algorithms that promote content produced by the platform itself. Alternatively, we must invoke antitrust regulations to mitigate the anti-consumer effects of the Internet and media consolidation.

Digital rights are human rights. This understanding corrects the imbalance of power between technology companies and consumers and ensures that consumers can be compensated for their data which is at the heart of many digital business models.

The telecommunications companies that enable our connectivity to Internet platforms must also ensure that legal content is never blocked and must remain neutral to the provider concerning the type of content provided. If they choose to prioritize certain types of content to better manage congestion, such as over mobile networks, this possibility must be offered on fair terms to all customers without regard to size or ownership or conflicts of interest. We also advocate for faster and more resilient connectivity, such as the deployment of 5G mobile networks.

News media hold a particularly important role in our democracy and suffer from claims of misinformation and disinformation. The commercial incentives for news production must ensure its integrity rather than give way to viral misinformation. At the same time, elected officials must refrain from undermining news outlets, which causes as much damage as misinformation itself. We call for increased funding for public news media to offer reasoned alternatives to profit-driven ones.

None of these incredible advancements in communications and media make a difference for those who remain on the other side of the digital divide. We demand that lawmakers improve access to the Internet and increase media literacy training for all ages across the country, especially in disadvantaged communities.

Military and Veterans

History has taught us about the futility of armed aggression, its inability to solve problems, and its utter inhumanity. It inevitably involves civilian casualties which jeopardize the relations necessary for finding real solutions. Diplomatic efforts must always be favored first in resolving international crises because American blood is our most precious resource. Democrats Abroad supports a strong defense of the United States and its vital security interests, but we advocate that military force be used as a last resort.

Diversity in Our Military

Our Armed Forces – especially leadership at the most senior levels – must become more diverse, better reflecting the gender as well as ethnic and religious composition of our country. All capable Americans – including transgender people – should be encouraged to join the United States military, and we support gender equality initiatives such as those that led to the opening of the Army Infantry, Armor, and Special Operations Units to women. We denounce the continued prevalence of sexual assault in the military, which an astounding 25% of military women report. The Department of Defense must protect military sexual assault survivors and remove sexual assault prosecutions from the chain of command and military tribunals to civilian jurisdictions. Additional funding for outreach, recruitment, training, and retention of young people for our Armed Forces must be provided.

Supporting and Honoring our Troops, Military Families, and Veterans

We fully support the members of our Armed Forces, whose service and dedication deserve our deepest respect and gratitude, as do the contributions and sacrifices of their families. Our service members must have abundant high-quality training and resources both to meet traditional challenges and to conduct anti-terrorist operations, peacekeeping missions, and emergency humanitarian actions.

To recruit and reward high quality service members, Congress should increase wages and benefits for those in active service and, as an incentive for service, veterans' benefits as well. While military spending cannot be unlimited – and waste, fraud, and abuse must always be combated – any budget reductions should not adversely impact our military members and their families.

We call for strong measures to facilitate the military-to-civilian transition.

We adamantly denounce any diversion of military construction funds appropriated by Congress and vehemently oppose the use of any military funds to build a border wall.

Honoring Our Veterans and Our Troops

We call for the provision of full health care for veterans, their domestic partners, and their children and for reimbursement of any costs incurred by receiving emergency care outside the United States.

Accompanying dependents must be provided with high quality educational opportunities to facilitate a change of duty station and to enable access later to institutions of higher learning. Military dependents must be exempt from taxes on survivor benefits.

Immigrants must be granted American citizenship that was promised them in return for military service. We condemn their unjustified deportation and we condemn denying certain citizenship rights to dependents of U.S. personnel deployed overseas.

We call for strong measures to facilitate the military-to-civilian transition, including guaranteed funding of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), including the Veterans Health Administration (VHA), which must never be privatized. Such funds must never again be sequestered. We call for increased Veterans Administration funding and resources to address veteran homelessness, including collaboration with community-based nonprofit groups providing transitional housing. We specifically support efforts to improve the plight of African American, Native, Hispanic, and women veterans who disproportionately experience homelessness. We call for compensating African American veterans or their dependents for benefits denied them despite their service in World War II.

We applaud measures and institutions which encourage veteran employment, and support increased VA funding to that end.

We salute the continued success of the post-9/11 GI Bill in extending benefits to an increasing number of veterans and active military, including access to education and support services for career advancement for spouses and other family members.

We call for the provision of full health care for veterans, their domestic partners, and their children, and for reimbursement for any costs incurred in receiving emergency care outside the United States.

We call for linking VHA medical requirements to contingency planning for U.S. military combat commands and for expanding VHA funding to strengthen its network of medical centers and state-supported nursing homes. Increased VHA funding should focus on returning soldiers' mental health care and reducing wait-times for veterans seeking medical attention. Health care delayed is health care denied and can contribute to suicide.

We favor awarding the Purple Heart, along with relevant additional care and benefits, to all injured military personnel suffering from properly verified mental or brain injury incurred during military service, including post-traumatic stress (PTS), the treatment of which should include the use of medical marijuana instead of opiates.

We salute the widely available treatment for military sexual trauma (MST) for all genders. We call for curtailing the heightened documentation threshold currently necessary to determine eligibility for disability compensation for post-traumatic stress (PTS) based on MST. Compensation for MST is a rightful veteran benefit.

We call for quality health care and compensation for all veterans who suffer from cancer due to military service-related radiation or chemical exposure.

We recognize every veteran's right to an appropriate military funeral, and we support increased funding for national cemeteries.

We call for renegotiation of collective bargaining agreements at the VA as ordered by the Office of Personnel Management, and we call for enabling employees to report mismanagement, employee abuse, and any other abuse. We support efforts to secure VA employee rights, and we call for the withdrawal of Executive Orders curtailing representational work during official time and requiring unions to rent space.

Other Issues

The United States must never again be the first to use a nuclear weapon. We support the reduction and elimination of nuclear weapons and the negotiation of treaties to that end. We also support U.S. ratification of the Ottawa Treaty on anti-personnel mines.

We call for comprehensive review of the worldwide network of U.S. military bases to assess their utility to protecting U.S. vital interests, bearing in mind however that the effects of any base closure must include those on American veterans residing nearby.

The outsourcing of critical security and military functions to private contractors should be curtailed. If not, they must be subject to strong oversight.

International Traffic in Arms Regulations issued by the Department of State's Directorate of Defense Trade Controls must be strictly observed.

Unmanned aerial vehicles (drones) used as attack platforms often bring disastrous consequences both for civilian populations in target areas and for their remote operators; this practice must be re-evaluated on moral and ethical grounds.

The environmental burden of military facilities both at home and abroad must be reduced or eliminated.

We denounce diversion of military construction funds appropriated by Congress for other purposes to build a U.S./Mexico border wall.

Security

All Americans, no matter where we live, should be able to live in peaceful communities, free from the threat of violence and terrorism, but securing America is a complicated and ever-evolving mixture of policy priorities, technology, and law enforcement that involves coordination across a number of agencies. Democrats Abroad stresses the need for evidence-based implementation of security measures to respect for the rule of law, human dignity and civil liberties.

Borders

Ensuring the integrity of our nation's borders is important, and we support providing the appropriate agencies with necessary resources and technology to secure them, but such measures should not include ineffective solutions that frivolously waste our nation's resources, such as border walls. Further, we believe that enforcement of immigration laws should be conducted with compassion, without mass detentions and the separation of children from their parents and guardians, and without denying access to adequate food and medical services.

Gun Violence

Democrats Abroad supports strong gun control. Members of Democrats Abroad are keenly aware of the unique "American-ness" of gun violence, a public health issue with more than 15,000 deaths in 2019. Research on policies to prevent gun violence should include funding research through the Center for Disease Control (CDC), other public health agencies, and universities.

Gun control measures should include banning the manufacture or import, sale and possession of high-capacity magazines and bump stocks and of military-style semi-automatic weapons – including programs to manage those already in private hands – and strictly control the sales of other weapon peripherals and ammunition.

We also endorse other common-sense gun-control legislation such as thorough, universal background checks, with no exceptions for friends, neighbors, or family members. Stricter prohibitions on firearm ownership should be established for domestic abusers, the mentally ill, and other high-risk individuals. Better coordination between local, State, and Federal law enforcement agencies is required to strengthen enforcement of gun control laws. "Stand Your Ground" and "Open Carry" laws should be repealed.

Terrorism

It is the responsibility of the U.S. Government to protect Americans from the risk of terrorism. Terrorism is not a monolithic threat, but it does require a multi-faceted approach. While supporting efforts to eliminate State-sponsored terrorism and attacks that originate from cells funded and trained overseas, we note that terrorist attacks originating from domestic hate groups and individuals have increased dramatically in the last decade. We support devoting more law enforcement field agents and resources to combat white nationalist, racist, anti-Semitic, and anti-Government groups and propaganda. Funding cuts for countering domestic terrorism must be reversed, and the Department of Homeland Security staffed with qualified professionals who understand the diversity of threats we face.

Balancing Civil Liberties while Protecting against Cyber Threats

Democrats Abroad has members who have experienced being surveilled and understand the danger in mass surveillance. We believe that when it comes to policy on digital communications, balance is needed between cyber security and protection of private communications.

Safe private communications are fundamental to the ability of people around the world both to protest and to advocate for and support democratic governments. Placing backdoors into hardware or software increases the likelihood that authoritarian governments, hackers, illegitimate non-state actors, and criminals can compromise communications.

Future Proofing our Defense Capabilities for Climate Change

The 2019 US Worldwide Threat Assessment highlighted climate change as one of the principal worldwide threats to America's national security. A domestic climate defense infrastructure program is also urgently needed to address demographic and economic implications of continuing climate change. With respect to sea-level rise, this must include addressing key vulnerabilities in coastal communities including major metropolitan areas such as New York, Miami, and Los Angeles.

Social Welfare

Democrats Abroad believes that every citizen has the right to pursue self-fulfillment through their labor, and that equal access to opportunities is the best way to ensure economic growth and progress. We support policies to provide a baseline of support and security so that all Americans have their essential needs met, including housing, healthcare, food, and clean water. We further affirm every American's need for other essentials of a safe and secure life, such as legal and environmental security, community inclusion, information technology, transportation, educational resources, and employment and entrepreneurial opportunities.

Social Security

Social Security is the most successful and impactful welfare program in United States history. Its universality has ensured that it is politically stable. Its evident success in improving the general well-being and economic solvency of our communities makes it a model for future programs. To maintain Social Security's viability for the future, we support fully funding the Social Security Administration and oppose attempts to cut benefits or make them income or wealth-tested or otherwise more difficult to access.

On behalf of Americans living outside the United States, we urge the following adjustments:

- Negotiate and implement totalization agreements with countries that have similar pension programs if no such agreement is already in place;
- Eliminate the provision that cuts off Supplemental Social Security Income after 30 consecutive days outside the country; and
- Replace the harsh Foreign Work Test, applicable only to Americans abroad, with the Annual Earnings Test, so that all Americans are subject to the same rules.

Unemployment Benefits

Every so often, an economic crisis leads to loss of employment for hardworking Americans. More often, some Americans lose their employment through normal economic activity as businesses change or fail. The necessity to help people as they transition through economic uncertainty to better opportunities has long been accepted. We urge reforms to broaden the reach of unemployment benefits to all workers and to make applications more streamlined and benefits equal to what is needed to access basic necessities and survive with dignity.

Basic Needs

Housing and rental assistance, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and others programs create opportunities for people in difficult circumstances while increasing the wellness of our communities. Yet for decades they've been ridiculed and stigmatized, underfunded and fragmented, and bureaucratically walled off from the very people they should help by burdensome requirements such as work requirements for SNAP recipients. We support greater access to these programs for all citizens in need.

Housing Policy

Homelessness, which afflicts over half a million Americans, and racial disparities in homeownership require urgent attention. Access to adequate and affordable housing should be an inalienable right, as it is a crucial pillar of American economic strength. We are committed to eliminating homelessness in the United States. We support directing Federal funds to State, local, and community programs for the homeless, specifically for construction of low-income permanent housing, for housing vouchers with preference for those currently homeless or at great risk, and for mental health and related services for the homeless.

Homeownership has long been the most important way to build wealth for most Americans, but racial disparities remain shockingly wide. The 2008 housing crisis highlighted the collective impact of discriminatory practices employed against minority groups throughout United States history. We support solutions to tackle supply constraints on housing, including State and local programs focused on increasing minority homeownership.

Universal Basic Income and the Future of Welfare

We believe in the intrinsic worth and potential of every person. If the United States is to be a land of opportunity for all, we must provide a basic standard that does not deprive Americans of opportunities, respect, and dignity. We believe in social welfare that helps diverse individuals, families, and communities thrive and strive.

A universal basic income should provide a baseline of security and opportunity for all Americans to navigate life with confidence and dignity. The following principles should guide the development of welfare programs and policies:

- Evidence-based and Results Driven. Programs should be guided by evidence during planning, operation, and revision, with success evaluated frequently at local level using economic and human-wellness metrics such as health, individual achievement, and community and environmental well-being.

- Automatic and Proactive. Current approaches tend to be fragmented across many agencies, which puts a considerable bureaucratic burden on Americans who are poorly equipped to shoulder the extra administrative effort. Programs should be automatic and proactive to ensure that nobody falls through the cracks.
- Universal vs. Needs Based. Universal programs should be the default, rather than wealth or income tested or needs based ones, because they are more easily made automatic and proactive. Universal programs tend to require less administrative overhead. They provide a sense of solidarity and equality, and for that reason are often more politically and economically sound. Needs based programs should be limited, such as for persons with specific disabilities, disaster relief, and other exceptional cases.
- Proactive Needs Based Programs. People who are in need should not have to jump through hoops to get help. Effective care for people in need ensures that everyone is valued as a member of our communities. These programs must proactively find and support people with individual with special needs.
- Affirm Action Against Discrimination. Historically, some programs have not benefited all groups and communities equally. The poor and powerless tend to be victims of evolving stereotypes and racism, creating oppressive cultural cycles that feed into the intersectional issues of racism, sexism, and other social ills. We support equal access to all programs.

Taxation

Democrats Abroad is committed to tax policy equitable to all Americans that boosts economic opportunity and supports programs essential to national, community, or individual security and well-being while raising revenue from those most able to pay.

The U.S. tax system causes enormous personal and financial hardship for Americans living abroad. Americans abroad are unofficial ambassadors for American culture and values, and promoters of U.S. interests and business enterprises. This is a meritorious service to the nation and not one that should be “rewarded” with discriminatory tax treatment and onerous tax and financial-account reporting requirements.

We urge Congress to reform U.S. tax policy to level the playing field for Americans abroad, clarify and simplify our filing requirements, and avoid or eliminate loopholes exploitable for tax avoidance.

We support establishment of a Commission on Americans Abroad to address, among other things, issues in existing and proposed tax laws that harm non-resident citizens. We also support expansion of the leadership, membership, and undertakings of the Congressional Americans Abroad Caucus for the same purpose.

Citizen Based Taxation (CBT) vs. Residence Based Taxation (RBT)

The long-standing U.S. system of Citizen Based Taxation causes enormous personal and financial hardship for Americans living abroad, who are required to file annual U.S. tax returns reporting all earned and unearned income worldwide.

Because Americans abroad must meet tax requirements in their country of residence as well as the United States, CBT can result in their being double-taxed and some – such as retirees with foreign-earned pensions, and vulnerable citizens living on foreign Government social welfare – even subjected to punitive tax treatment of income generated outside the United States. The relief in the current tax code, such as the exclusion of a certain level of foreign earned income, and credit for foreign taxes paid, often does not zero out taxes owed to the United States.

The United States and Eritrea are the only countries in the world using CBT requiring their citizens living abroad to report and pay taxes on their worldwide income. In contrast, Residency-Based Taxation taxes citizens and residents where they reside and where they receive or earn income. In such a system, Americans abroad would pay taxes in their country of residence and, unless it were U.S.-sourced income, would not have to report or pay tax again on such income in the United States. It would be fair and simple.

We support Residence Based Taxation, which, if enacted by Congress, would remedy the vast majority of tax problems faced by Americans abroad while preventing the use of either real or fraudulent offshore residence for tax avoidance. Adoption of RBT would recognize the legitimate participation of Americans abroad in other economies, while not impacting the taxation of their U.S. sourced income.

In the absence of adoption of RBT, we support an increase in the amount of the Foreign Earned Income Exclusion and its expansion to include unearned income, social welfare, investment income, and capital gains already taxed locally.

Reporting Requirements

Because filing tax declarations for income generated abroad is inordinately complex and confusing, most Americans abroad are forced, at considerable personal expense, to engage specialist tax return preparers who understand both - or all of - the tax jurisdictions applicable to their American clients. This is an unfair burden borne by Americans abroad.

Additionally, mandatory foreign-financial-account reporting required by the Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act (FATCA) and the Report of Foreign Bank and Financial Accounts (FBAR), designed to discourage and apprehend those who would use offshore accounts to cheat on their taxes, compounds the burden borne by Americans abroad. Compliance can require many hours for each American taxpayer as well as the payment of fees for consulting experts. FATCA and FBAR are overly broad in their application, affecting every single American abroad with a bank account in their country of residence. And much of the effort is redundant as both FATCA and FBAR require reporting the same accounts.

Such multiple financial account reporting is also ineffectual. Wide research has shown that those who use foreign accounts to avoid U.S. tax typically keep income and assets in anonymous shell companies that they do not report. Realistically, no American living abroad hides assessable income in accounts in the country where they live and already pay tax.

The current system of mandatory financial account reporting has reduced or totally eliminated the access of many Americans abroad to even ordinary banking services and financial products where they reside. Banks unwilling to comply with U.S. account reporting demands have “locked out” Americans abroad by refusing services, including the opening and maintenance of regular checking accounts. Detailed surveys have proven that many Americans abroad are routinely refused access to even the most mundane banking services.

Adverse tax treatment, in conjunction with SEC restrictions, also causes unfair and unjustified saving and investment challenges for Americans abroad.

We support reform to exempt law-abiding Americans abroad and their banks from FATCA and FBAR reporting on accounts in their bona fide country of residence.

The 2017 Tax Reform

Further prejudice to Americans abroad resulted from the 2017 tax reform which purported to lower taxes for working class Americans, but made filing for many Americans abroad even more complex, arduous, and costly.

The 2017 law introduced two new taxes for Americans abroad who depend on their foreign registered businesses to earn income which supports their families and allows them to save for the future. These new taxes force many Americans abroad to undertake costly business reorganizations or close their businesses entirely and find a new means of providing for themselves and their families.

The 2017 law also placed a new tax upon some of the relocation benefits received by U.S. service personnel and diplomats accepting U.S. Government international assignments. This is not the first time that laws enacted without consideration for the impact they would have on Americans abroad have caused serious harm.

We support relief for Americans abroad from the punitive new taxes enacted as part of the 2017 tax reform.

IRS Support

Lapses in financial account reporting and/or filing erroneous tax returns can result in heavy penalties that are far out of proportion, especially when the lapse is attributable to ignorance of the reporting requirements. Such ignorance most often results from IRS neglect and poor or nonexistent communication to Americans abroad.

We support improvements to communication between the IRS and Americans abroad including email communication and IRS staff support in foreign countries where many Americans reside.

Tax Code Priorities for our 21st Century Economy

We do not subscribe to the “trickle down” economic-stimulus theory offered by Republicans to advance tax-cut legislation in 2001, 2003, and 2017. The repeated failed promise that tax cuts pay for themselves has actually ballooned budget deficits, dramatically increased the national debt, and exacerbated income inequality.

We support reshaping tax policy to focus on the country’s national priorities including supporting normal functioning of our Government’s activities domestically and abroad, facilitating investment in critical infrastructure, empowering our workforce to succeed in a rapidly evolving economy, and the support of families.

In line with our support for equitable taxation of all Americans and the redistribution of wealth concentrated to the degree that 0.003% of the population holds 13% of all wealth, we support a wealth tax.

We also support an inheritance tax on the generational transfer of wealth so that a portion of it can be reinjected into the economy of the community that facilitated wealth giving success.

We support a more progressive income tax to more effectively balances incentives for individuals and corporations while ensuring that businesses and the wealthiest among us pay their fair share.

We support a fundamental realignment of energy taxes, phasing out tax benefits and subsidies supporting electric power sourced from fossil fuels, and introducing a “carbon cost” mechanism to accelerate the transition toward green alternatives, perhaps dividing the revenue directly back into communities or to individual taxpayers.

We support simplified individual and corporate tax codes, with less reliance on subsidies and loopholes. To inspire investment and employment, support for growth industries must be balanced against mechanisms, such as exit taxes and retraining, to assist the repositioning of communities in transition from declining ones.

Trade

We live in an increasingly interconnected global community, and our economy is dependent upon effective trade between nations. Trade provides materials and customers for millions of American jobs, and, thanks to the growing accessibility of online commerce platforms, remains the largest market for American small businesses. Without well-regulated and inclusive trade, our economy and our leadership across the globe would suffer. The United States should continue to lead the world in ensuring that trade amongst nations is mutually beneficial and remains in concert with our values of utilizing a rules-based order.

However, we recognize that for millions of Americans, global trade has failed to live up to its promises. Insufficient mechanisms for addressing international trade disputes and corporate tax dodging have detracted from the advantages of globalization. Outsourcing supply chains has devastated American workers and communities and led to human rights abuses in countries without strong labor and environmental protections. We believe it is important for the United States to support free and fair trade, but within the scope of considering the domestic workforce, human rights, and the environment.

We support free trade agreements to the extent that they promote the economic interests of American workers. We support legal and economic incentives to increase export opportunities for small and medium-sized United States businesses in order to stimulate their economic growth, the employment of more workers, and their social responsibility in matters of labor rights and fair trade. United States companies that shift production lines and capital investment overseas to evade fair, reasonable, and safe standards of employment should face penalties.

We strongly favor trade agreements that empower and respect the rights of indigenous people. We oppose trade agreements with countries and companies that fail to uphold basic human rights conditions and environmental standards. The United States should take action to review past trade agreements to reassess their adherence to promoting environmental and social responsibility. In instances where previous agreements do not meet the need for robust environmental protections, the Government should work with foreign leaders and Congress to update these agreements in line with the tenants of the Paris Climate Accord.

Our country should take measures to aggressively identify and challenge trade that involves low cost items flooding our domestic markets. This endangers the financial viability of domestic producers and has been known to devastate entire communities. We find it appropriate to deploy retaliatory sanctions against foreign countries that demonstrably have participated in cyberespionage against United States businesses, extensive use of State support and investment restrictions, or policy interventions intended to manage the value of its currency.

To further protections against dumping and other unfair trade practices, the United States must resume meaningful engagement in the World Trade Organization. This includes ending the practice of refusing to nominate or approve of W.T.O Appellate Court Justices from taking office. This Court, the establishment of which the United States advocated for, must be reinstated and utilized to return the world to a rules-based economic system.

Those who are negotiating trade agreements on behalf of the people of the United States must have their best interests at heart. A Democratic administration must restore the ranks of the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) to its stature prior to the current Administration, and ensure that those negotiators are experienced civil servants and not corporate lobbyists. Additionally, these negotiators must meaningfully engage with the Labor Advisory Committee for Trade Negotiations and Trade Policy (LAC) to ensure that our workers are effectively heard in the trade negotiation process, and should be consulted early in the negotiating process to effectively integrate their concerns. USTR has served as an effective body to coordinate and negotiate trade relations across a robust Federal Government, and to best serve the American public, it must be restored to its former esteem, effectiveness, and culture of service.

Our trade relationships must be led by our values of fairness, honesty, and mutual benefit. The United States must renew our commitment to our existing trade partners to practice trade honestly, and to reverse the trend of implementing inexplicable tariffs against our allies. Restoring trust amongst our trade partners and honoring our existing commitments will empower us to build relationships with new trading partners and expand markets for American producers and consumers. Leading with our values will return the United States to its essential status as the most valued market and as an ally for all nations.