

Frederick Progressives

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March 15, 2018

2018 Questionnaire for Democratic Central Committee

Dear Josh Cramer, Candidate for Democratic Central Committee:

Frederick Progressives, as a chapter of Progressive Maryland, is a grassroots community organization that acts for social and economic justice by developing civic leaders and cultivating allies in order to advance economic, racial, and environmental equity, and to change our economic system for the benefit of all people in Maryland.

Learn more at www.ProgressiveMaryland.org

Progressive Maryland supports candidates who will work to build a society and economy that works for all Marylanders, with special emphasis on traditionally marginalized groups—low and moderate income residents, people of color, women, LGBTQ+, and all oppressed and exploited people. Elections can have an enormous impact on our work to reduce inequity and to improve the lives of residents all over the state. It is our responsibility not only to advocate for residents but also to empower them to engage in the political process at every level, from member-led canvasses to trainings for our members who wish to run for office.

To be considered for Frederick Progressives & Progressive Maryland's endorsement, please return the completed questionnaire by email to FrederickProgressives@riseup.net no later than 5 P.M. on Friday, March 23, 2018. Your responses will be available to the public at www.FrederickProgressives.com

Sincerely,

Josh Cassell
Secretary - Frederick Progressives
(301) 928-0697

1. What professional experience, personal experience, education and or training do you possess that makes you a qualified candidate for a member of the Central Committee?

For the past 10 years I have worked as a high school history teacher in Washington County. During that time I became very active with the Washington County Teachers Association (WCTA). For several years, before joining the Democratic Central Committee, my colleagues elected me to serve as a building representative for Smithsburg High School. My duties were to make Association members aware of WCTA organizing and activism opportunities, professional development opportunities, attending rep. council meetings, and receiving organizer training. In the summer of 2016 I attended the Mid Atlantic Regional Organizing Institute, a week long training in Columbus, Ohio where I received intense training in organizing. Also in 2016, I served on the WCTA Apple Ballot Recommendation committee. This afforded me the opportunity to interview all of the candidates running for Board of Education in Washington County, and determine which candidates our local would campaign for in the 2016 elections. I was also a contributing writer for the Maryland State Education Association's online *Newsfeed* and *Action Line* Magazine. In the articles I wrote or contributed, I explained the problems associated with Betsy DeVos as Secretary of Education, challenged Governor Hogan on education policies that have hurt students in Maryland, and noted the importance of supporting public schools and unions.

When considering things that specifically qualify me for the Democratic Central Committee, I was appointed to the FCDCC in March 2017 from a field of 18 candidates. In that year I have learned a lot about the inner workings of our local Party. I have taken every opportunity to learn from my more experienced colleagues, but they have also been open to my ideas and perspective. In the year I have served on the FCDCC I created and host the Frederick Democrats Podcast (on Soundcloud and Itunes) and serve on the messaging and campaign subcommittees. I organized a forum during the 2017 Frederick City Primaries. My activities with the FCDCC in 2017 brought new energy into the local Democratic Party, made for an exciting, yet very positive Democratic primary contest, and a solid ground game that resulted in Frederick City electing its first Democratic mayor in 16 years, and for the first time, perhaps ever, the Democrats won the mayor and all five aldermanic seats.

I am also the cohost of the popular progressive social club, Drinking Liberally: Frederick, MD. DL provides progressive minded people here in Frederick the opportunity to network, meet and greet with local elected officials and candidates, or just relax and enjoy the company of fellow progressives during these tumultuous times. We need to make politics enjoyable so that our local activists don't burn out. DL provides us with the opportunity to recharge.

As for my education, I graduated from Brunswick High School and then earned an AA from Frederick Community College. I then transferred to Shepherd University where I earned a BA in Secondary Education with a concentration in Social Studies. Then I completed an MA in Applied History at Shippensburg University. My thesis is on African American views of Theodore Roosevelt's Presidency 1901-1909. I was also admitted to the Phi Kappa Phi national academic honor society.

2. What, in your opinion, differentiates traditional/establishment/centrist parties and progressives? Do you consider yourself to be a progressive, and why?

I most certainly consider myself a progressive. I am a progressive Democrat because I believe the Democratic party has been the most successful at achieving progressive goals.

It is difficult for me to label the Democratic party a strictly progressive, centrist, or traditional political party. I believe the Democratic party is the Party of the People and represents the 99%. We are dedicated to ensuring America works for everyone, not just the billionaire class, and that regardless of one's socioeconomic status, we seek ways to provide opportunity for people to reach their potential and thrive.

3. What can the Central Committee do to bridge the gap between the different groups of voters, such as Progressives, Libertarians, and Democratic Socialists and how, as a Committee member would you facilitate that bridge building?

I don't think the Democratic party can be successful without bridging the gap between the various wings of the party and bringing unaffiliated voters to the table. My plan is to use my experience in union organizing to work as a liaison between the local Democratic party and the various progressive political and activist groups that formed or found new vigor following the 2016 presidential elections.

I would like to work with these groups to develop a system for the 2018 gubernatorial elections where the Democratic party and local activist groups coordinate with one another to recruit and direct volunteers for canvassing efforts to promote our mutually endorsed Democratic candidates.

4. How would you promote diversity within the Party?

I think one of the great achievements of the current FCDCC is that we worked to help elect, for the first time in Frederick City history, two African Americans to serve on the Board of Alderman concurrently. I think when one considers the Frederick City Board of Alderman we helped to elect, it is a Board that better reflects the makeup of the City than previous Boards. As a member of the FCDCC campaign subcommittee, some of my current duties include identifying and recruiting qualified candidates, not just to run for office, but to serve as campaign managers and treasurers. To improve our efforts in the future, the Central Committee can redouble our efforts reaching out to underrepresented communities in Frederick County and identify leaders in those communities who might be well qualified candidates for elected office or to work with other campaigns.

5. Would you support expanding the Primary to include independent voters and how would you advocate for that change in Maryland?

This is not something the FCDCC would have the authority to make happen. This is really an issue for activist groups such as Frederick County Progressives to campaign for and lobby our elected officials in Annapolis to do.

If you are asking my personal view on the issue, I support efforts that encourage rather than discourage voting. I feel confident that more voters align with the Democratic party and our values, and that is why Republicans are trying to deny and dilute the vote through voter ID schemes and gerrymandering.

6. As a Central Committee member how do you plan to organize issue campaigns to engage voters on important progressive issues? What are some of those issues for you?

Even before being appointed to the FCDCC, after the 2016 elections I immediately began reaching out to anyone in the local progressive activist community. My plan was to take my skills and experience in organizing and build a grassroots campaign to do exactly what the question is asking. In March 2017, when I was appointed to the FCDCC, I turned those efforts towards working with progressive activist groups and serving as a liaison between the FCDCC and various grassroots progressive organizations. My plan, which I have already begun putting into action, is to form a coordinated organizing effort involving the FCDCC and progressive activist groups to coordinate a canvassing campaign for our mutually endorsed or supported Democratic nominees. I believe the 2016 elections taught the party a valuable lesson, the party needs reorganization and needs to redefine how it operates. I believe a crucial component to this, especially at the local level in Frederick, is to coordinate with groups like FCP to help get Democrats elected.

7. How will you reach out to diverse communities and increase their participation in the Party? What means will you employ to improve voter turnout?

To reach out to diverse communities, I go to them. Since becoming more involved in community activism I have tried to get out to every group and organization I can. I haven't been able to get to every group, yet, but I think it is essential that Democrats reach out to as many residents in Frederick County as possible. Last summer the state party engaged in a massive canvassing effort, of which the FCDCC was a leader. We knocked on hundreds of doors and talked to voters in just about every community and neighborhood in the county, asking their thoughts on the Democratic party, what we are doing that they like, and what we need to do differently or better. The information we received from those efforts will help us immensely in reaching out to our diverse communities.

I also think voters need more information on the candidates. They need a reason to vote for them. That is why I created the Frederick Democrats Podcast. Local radio is dominated by conservative voices who intentionally mislead and misrepresent the facts about the Democratic party, its candidates, and elected officials. We, as a party, needed a way to counter the Republican "alternative facts" and give voters, the facts. Secondly, with my FCDCC colleague Lauren Beacham, we created a chapter of Drinking Liberally in Frederick. DL meets at Cafe Nola every Wednesday from 7-9PM. Through DL we have given liberals and progressives a chance to commiserate with one another over the week's news, but more importantly, we are networking. Several attendees of DL are new to Frederick, new to getting politically engaged, and some, since attending DL, have taken on active roles such as campaign managers and treasurers. Some have even become candidates themselves. Another benefit of DL is that Lauren and I have been inviting candidates and elected officials to join us, and they do! We don't give candidates and elected officials a microphone or a stage, instead, they engage in one to one conversations with voters. We have been able to connect voters with congressional, gubernatorial, and local candidates, giving voters access that is often difficult to achieve.

As for increasing voter turnout, I think the Democratic and progressive base is really energized. I believe a blue tsunami is possible. But the tsunami won't happen without a coordinated effort between the local Democratic party and progressive activist groups such as FCP. That is why I want to work with groups such as this one, to launch a massive coordinated effort, including canvassing, to promote our mutually endorsed and supported Democratic nominees.

8. What do you see as your most critical function as a Central Committee Member?

I think this is a really important question. Let's face it, the FCDCC race typically doesn't get a lot of attention. But it is really important that Democratic voters consider the make up of their Central Committee. There are 12 positions, 6 women and 6 men. I think each Central Committee needs at least one person skilled in the following:

- 1) Organizing
- 2) Fundraising
- 3) Event planning
- 4) Muscle- loads of energy, physically strong
- 5) Repore with elected officials
- 6) Communications

I have years of experience in union organizing. I also do a lot of communications work as the host of the Frederick Democrats Podcast and as an admin on the Frederick County Democratic Party Facebook forum page. At event functions I also set up tables, chairs, pick up and drop off materials, and set up our tent and literature at events such as In the Street, Frederick Pride, The Great Frederick Fair, and carnivals across the county. I also really enjoy canvassing. I think Frederick County is a beautiful place and I enjoy walking through our neighborhoods and getting to opportunity to listen to residents of Frederick County and hear their concerns and how they would like the Democratic party to work for them. And somehow, at our Plowman-Fisherman events, I have become the defacto bartender. Which is actually great because then I know I'll get to talk to just about everyone!

9. If Frederick Progressives /Progressive Maryland does not to endorse you for this race, would that affect your willingness to work with the group in the future on important issues?

I think the times in which we find ourselves call on each of us to do everything we can to work together towards restoring our democracy. Our nation was attacked by Russia, and the president's campaign, if not the president himself, may very well have colluded with the Russian government to take power, and advance their personal business interests rather than the interests of the American people. As an educator, I have seen the horrible effects of Trump's rise to power trickle all the way down to the classroom. The Republican party, under Trump, has become a sanctuary for white supremacists, xenophobes, and those seeking to deny basic human rights to the LGBTQ community. We have seen rollbacks on the ADA, attacks on the ACA, and instead of focusing on the real causes of economic uncertainty, here in Frederick and across the country, the Republicans in power have told their supporters to blame immigrants and refugees. We currently have a Republican governor who buddies up with Betsy DeVos, who is actively working towards busting teacher unions and depriving our public schools of their funds so that she and so-called "school reformers" can take our tax dollars away from our students and pocket it for themselves. Maryland's schools under the previous Democratic administration were ranked the best in the nation 5 years in a row, since the Republicans took the governor's mansion, our schools have dropped to 6th and are continuing to nosedive. Locally, we see a slate of Board of Education candidates, infamously dubbed "The Hate Slate," whose goal is to eliminate policies such as 443, and promote anti-science and right wing ideology, white supremacy, and intolerance into the classroom. We

have a Frederick County courthouse, managed entirely by elected Republicans, far too long grown presumptuous of their positions, permitting them to get away with a culture of increasing inefficiency.

In short, yes, I will work with any progressive organization that seeks to restore our democracy and respects the value of human dignity and freedoms, regardless of endorsements.

13. Would you be willing to support Frederick Progressives priorities by:

• cosponsoring legislation?	Yes
• testify in support of legislation?	Yes
• write an op ed?	Yes
• speaking at progressive events?	Yes
• attending meetings?	Yes
• meet with our leadership group?	Yes
• give updates on shared goals?	Yes
• writing letters to endorse a labor organizing drive?	Yes

Other: I want to thank the Frederick County Progressives for recognizing the importance of the FCDCC race and providing candidates the opportunity to participate in forums, provide answers to your questions, and to endorse candidates the organization deems the best to move forward with our progressive goals.