

## Frederick Progressives

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March 11, 2018

# 2018 Questionnaire for Democratic Central Committee

Dear Jay Smathers, 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](http://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](mailto: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](http://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?

What separates me most from the other candidates for DCC is that I see the Democratic Party as fundamentally broken. It can no longer address America's most urgent problems because it's become captured by donors who are literally profiting from not solving those problems. The future is a party built from engaged voters instead of corporate money.

I am shocked more candidates running for these DCC positions are not openly acknowledging this reality. Since it is a 12 member board I actually wish I did not stand out so much in this regard. I don't think it will help the party to pretend nothing is wrong.

My Resume/Bio - I'm a retired scientist seeking fundamental reform of the party.

Although I hold a PhD in Physics, but I actually have undergraduate degrees in Economics and Political Science. I read a lot about politics and history, and keep up w/ politics in great detail.

I worked in corporate management at Motorola Semiconductor in Austin TX. I worked closely with every level of employee, from the factory floor to R&D to overcome issues related to the design, manufacture and testing of computer chips for various devices including the G5 Apple computer and original BlackBerry smart phone.

I was fortunate to be able to retire in my forties. I became a stay at home dad to raise my two daughters. Additional wealth was not as important to us as spending time with our young kids. It angers me that fewer and fewer families even have the option of one parent being a full time parent.

When younger I had many types of jobs including -waiting tables, hotel front desk clerk, security guard, and loading UPS trucks. I know what it is to work for a living paycheck to paycheck.

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

***This is the most important question on your list to ask people running to reform the Democratic party.***

The word progressive right now is popular and people define it differently, so it's important to know exactly what one means by this term. I do not use the term to mean I only support social justice / human rights -to me economic and environmental justices are just as important as social justice. *A political force built on only one of these three legs will never be a dominate force for good in society.*

For the Democratic party to benefit America, as it did from 1930-1980, it must fight as aggressively for economic and environmental justice as it does for social justice. This will never happen unless the party changes how it operates. The party today cannot address economic and environmental issues because doing so would cost their donors trillions of dollars in profits –*which is exactly why their donors donate.*

Some Democrats -party officials, elected officials, lobbyist and consultants are profiting personally from the extreme levels of money in politics today. Others find it hard to imagine how a party can compete with Republicans without corporate money. Still others have yet to see the connection between the donor money and the lack economic and environmental policy offered by the party. Such people make up what I call the establishment.

A “progressive” in 2018 is similar to an abolitionist in 1855. Abolitionists were forcing people to recognize a hard if not obvious truth –slavery had to end. Abolitionist had a long hard fight -starting before the nation was even founded. By 1855 enough Americans had realized the injustice of slavery was not going it away –it was actually growing. American slavery was clearly a more brutal injustice than is todays domination of the political process by the 1%. But the injustice of having the 1% make the laws we all must live by is very real -and this problem is also not just going to go away. It has been getting worse every election cycle for decades.

To me a “progressive” in 2018 sees the fight for justice this way –that America is at a tipping point in history where we must once and for all get money out of politics –or at least one party. I am running for a seat on the DCC to help more democrats recognize how and why the party must change to a party rebuilt around small donations that engages voters with the substantive issues that matter in their lives. That reform will allow the Democratic Party to win more elections and do more good for society.

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?

A stronger stance on environmental justice will bring greater Green party support and energize more Democrats. Ending the excessive military spending and endless wars will bring more Libertarians to support Democrats. Aggressive emphasis on unions, jobs, healthcare and economic opportunity (including a return to trade policy -still used by countries like Germany, France and South Korea -that puts American jobs first) will bring more independent voters, Democratic Socialist and even working class Republicans to support the Democrats.

None of these changes can be made as long as those who fund the democratic party are literally profiting from not making those changes. As a member of the CC I can push for the party to rebuild itself without the influence of corporate money. This will allow the party and its candidates to back policies the American public want and need.

I should add I have observed something alarming since entering this race -about how changes to the party are made and the role CC members play in that process. Some incumbents are telling the public that CC members have no power over the party (at the state level or nationally). I have read the MD Democratic party by-laws and this is not true at all! The DCC members are “the governing body of the state party”. CC members also send the delegates to the national party –those delegates define how the national party operates. *The fact is there is no other authority, except the CC, that has any power to change the Democratic Party.* It is outrageous the public (and other candidates new to the process) are being misled in this manner. I believe many members of the Democratic Party desire fundamental change, and their sitting CC members are literally pretending they have no ability to change the party. I believe this is being done to discourage more active voter participation in the party for the purpose of maintaining the status quo. –This is astonishing!

To return to your question, -if elected my voice and votes locally and statewide will be to rid the party from its dependence on corporate money and influence - so that it is free to pursue real justice for all people. Adopting the policies that truly matter in peoples lives and therefore winning more elections will bridge the current divides more than anything else. Making the needed changes to reform the party in this way is something that CC members, and only CC members, can do *-even if other candidates tell you in this questionnaire otherwise.*

4. How would you promote diversity within the Party?

Social justice in America is tied to the success of the Democratic party. What Democrats can do to best promote tolerance and diversity in 2018 is to become the dominant force in American politics that they used to be. That will not happen until they once again focus on economic and environmental justice as much as they focus on social justice.

It is easy to understand why today's Democrats focus almost exclusively on social justice, -our donors allow us to talk about those issues because they don't threaten their profits.

Expanding the focus of the party to aggressively defend all Americans from exploitation by the 1% will radically improve the perception of the Democratic Party and all the things it stands for. The fight for human rights will no longer be tied to a party that appears weak and rudderless on so many other important issues. When the Democratic party's light dims, the worst aspects of human nature come out from under the rocks and cracks -and that is evident in the extremism on the right today.

Turning the moral light for America back on, and scaring the bigots back under their rocks, begins with getting corporate money out of the Democratic party.

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

100% absolutely. I would point out to other DCC members who vote on such rules that studies have shown cross voting to intentionally skew opposition party results has been shown to have a negligible impact. (That is the only argument for closed primaries).

I support open primaries or same day party registration (you can choose your party as you vote in the primary). The latter has the advantages of expanding the party membership.

I also support rank choice voting

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?

Regarding how to engage more voters, I think this is less about organizing strategies and more about selling a better product. Offering policies that improve people's lives is the best way to get engaged and loyal voters. Everyone must come to understand that those policies almost always reduce the profits of those funding the party, which is precisely why corporations fund the party -to prevent those policies. That funding must end so our policies can improve.

The majority of money spent in campaigns goes to political consultants and TV aids. The consultant payments involve jaw dropping corruption when you look in to it. Tens of millions of dollars routinely disappeared in the last election without explanation of any service provided. The state and national party force candidates to use specific consultants and I support stopping that practice.

The age of broadcast TV is ending, the internet has revolutionized how we communicate. There simply is no longer any need for large amounts of money in political campaigns. Modern technology makes connecting with every single voter, literally in a personal manner, essentially free. Bernie Sanders was totally ignored by television, the New York times and the Washington post in the first half of the primary campaign. During that time he closed at 40 point gap. Then they could not ignore him and he was smeared daily in all the traditional press for the next two months. IN the last two months he still rose in the polls closing another 15 points and in the end he got 47% of the vote. The lesson here is good policy organizes people and sells itself, even if all of the traditional media is against you.

This change terrifies so much of the corporate world and explains the total intransigence at the top of the Democratic party. But the change is here already, a party free of corporate corruption that can offer up laws that actually help people is the future. If the Democratic Party does not lead this change, it will be swept aside by it.

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?

Honestly, my opinion here is a tricky thing for a straight white male like me to advance. I believe the fight in American politics today is more between economic classes, than between those of differing genders, race or sexual preferences. I am not belittling these issues and I am sure I have much to learn in this area, and I am eager to learn.

But everyone must recognize that in 2018 the biggest problem in America is what MLK was focusing on near the end of his life -the problem of economic justice. The 1% seeking to exploit society really does not care about your race, gender or sexual preference. Voter support and turnout for the Democratic Party will skyrocket -with support from all communities -if the Democrats can seriously bring the 1% to heel by enacting those policies into law that make our economic landscape more just.

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

If elected I intend to throw myself fully into beating Republicans in every race in the County. That is a primary function of any CC member and my dedication to that purpose cannot wait until the party is reformed. That fight must be waged before, during and after the party is reformed.

But my goal -my motivation to serve - is add another voice and vote to efforts to rid the party of corporate money and influence. This will be a hard fight, and everyone supporting this reform will have a critical role to play. The goal is institutional change to the party -permanent change that return's the Party's voice to its members -not its corporate donors. I will work hard to help more Democrats adopt this struggle as their own.

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

None. I am very appreciative to FP & PM for the candidate forums you held and the questions you asked the DCC candidates - both here and during those forums.

I wish members of your group were running for the DCC. It only takes \$10 and 5 minutes paper work to get on the ballot (although the deadline is past for this term).

I seriously challenge your members (and other progressive groups) to field candidates for all 12 Frederick DCC seats by the next gubernatorial primary. You answer to the voters -not the current party officials. You become those party officials via elections like this and you should!

Why should those who put the social good front and center not be running one of America's two parties?

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

● cosponsoring legislation?	Not possible for dcc member
● testify in support of legislation?	As a citizens and yes if the DCC allowed it
● write an op ed?	As a citizens and yes if the DCC allowed it
● speaking at progressive events?	As a citizens and yes if the DCC allowed it
● attending meetings?	yes
● meet with our leadership group?	yes
● give updates on shared goals?	yes
● writing letters to endorse a labor organizing drive?	If the DCC allowed it

Other:

The DCC position is not a public office, it is a position within the MD Democratic Party, and sitting members must abide by the state rules or they can be removed from their position. We must be impartial in primaries between democrats; we must never support non-democrats (even privately) in general elections.

For example the party by-laws state publicly supporting a candidate who is opposed by a Democrat (like putting a bumper sticker on your car for the opponent) is grounds for dismissal from your DCC seat. This may extend to supporting policies not endorsed by the state party.

So a DCC member who wants to see the party fundamentally reformed (as I do) will need to pay attention to what specific policies they can publicly advocate, and to what extent such a member is allowed to publicly advocate as a private citizen.

Thanks for your efforts Frederick Progressives!