

Frederick Progressives

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March 11, 2018

2018 Questionnaire for Democratic Central Committee

Dear Mari Lee, 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?

Here is why I am a qualified candidate for the Democratic Central Committee.

Professional experience

I've been actively involved in local politics since 2009. At that time, I filed for office and immediately got engaged on several fronts helping the local chapter of Organizing for America in 2009/2010 and attending several Central Committee meetings. I also joined the Women's Democratic League of Frederick County (WDL) and the United Democrats of Frederick County (UDFC). Though I was not successful in my race in 2010, I remained actively involved by continuing my membership in both local Democratic clubs and have been serving as secretary for both for the last four years. In January 2012, I was appointed to the Central Committee, and after being elected by Democratic voters in 2014, I was able to retain my seat.

Per the State and local Party by-laws, the role of the Central Committee is to build the local Party, raise awareness of Party principles, and promote the election of qualified Democratic candidates. Since my appointment back in 2012, I've worked tirelessly on the front line and behind the scenes to do exactly these things. Specifically, for the last six years, I've staffed the Democratic tent at various community events throughout the year, worked to increase our visibility, and phone banked several shifts on behalf of candidates and the Party. For the last four years, I've served as one of three volunteer and outreach coordinators for the local Party/Central Committee. In that role, I respond to all new volunteer requests, notify volunteers of upcoming events, maintain communication with them throughout the year, recruit new volunteers, and record and track volunteer activities and hours. In election years, I also reach out and maintain communication with our candidates to keep them abreast of our events, and how we can promote them as candidates in Frederick County. In addition, I maintain the Central Committee email account, maintain our website - frederickdemocrats.org, send out Party email alerts via MailChimp, maintain the Party Twitter account, serve as the editor of our monthly online newsletter The Banner, and much more. I spend between 15-25 hours (sometimes higher in election years) per week doing these tasks equaling thousands of volunteer hours on behalf of the Central Committee.

Personal experience

I am a Democrat because I believe the Democratic Party is the only party who stands up for, believes in and continues to persist on equal opportunity, goodwill and a better quality of life for all people regardless of political affiliation, social status, race, culture, religions, abilities, and more. Because of my strong belief in that belief, I am fiercely committed to being engaged politically by exercising my civic right to vote, which I have done in all elections since I was 18, advocating for causes/issues important to me as an individual, and as a current member of the Central Committee – continuing to do the work of the Party under the authority of our bylaws while also preparing for the future – today.

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

In my opinion, the differentiation is traditional and establishment individuals tend to want to maintain status quo; centrists are willing to move past status quo in certain aspects; and progressives seek reform of the status quo.

I am a liberal with progressive tendencies. Why? I think social programs and the economy should be boosted through government funds to bring relief to the working class and those in poverty in immediate circumstances, but I also want to see regulations set, and laws passed that evenly levels the playing field.

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?

The Central Committee can

- Engage in meaningful conversations to find common ground/shared ideas between the base and the groups mentioned.
- Collaborate on potential joint efforts and help promote those efforts.
- Host joint social networking events at least bi-annually.

How I would facilitate the bridge building

- Personally, reach out to the groups mentioned to host meetings to share and discuss concerns on all ends.
- Maintain communication.

4. How would you promote diversity within the Party?

I would seek to create a Diversity Ad Hoc committee comprised of various local diverse members of the Party to build relationships, share ideas and discuss issues. Quarterly reports, if not monthly, would be posted on our website, as well as included in our online newsletters distributed to our database.

I would also seek to create an award that is specifically geared to recognize a diverse individual for their efforts promoting the principles of the Party through community advocacy or activism. The Ad Hoc committee and Central Committee in tandem would be tasked with promoting nominations, but the Ad Hoc committee would receive all completed forms, review and select the top two using defined criteria and submit both to the Central Committee for selection. Then the honoree would be recognized annually at our Party Gala, along with the honorees of the awards we currently give.

We would continue to promote various diverse community events on our Facebook page, and participate as we can.

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

Not at this time. I currently think that party nominees should be chosen by registered members of the party.

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?

You will read in my answer to Q8 that I see voter engagement and increasing voter participation as the most critical function of the Central Committee. As part of a voter engagement plan, I plan to help revive the Rapid Response team. This “team” consisted of volunteers who would write letters about Democratic topics or in response to a certain issue. Through utilizing this approach, and in collaboration and coordination with local Democratic clubs, progressive groups, and other like-minded outside groups with an interest in the issue, we could mount an aggressive campaign on important shared issues through letter writing campaigns, letters to the editors, phone calls, call-to-action via social media, etc.

Some of the issues for me personally are protecting voter rights and expanding access, voter participation, universal health care, increasing the minimum wage, net neutrality.

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

How I will reach out:

- I will contact various organizations (i.e. churches, committees, etc.) to determine how we can support their efforts with voter registration, education, and/or absentee ballots.
- Set up "listening sessions" in diverse communities to hear issues they may have with the party and work to bridge the gap.
- Attend a meeting or event of these organizations on a rotating basis to show our commitment to be involved in diverse communities and form sound relationships.
- Use the services of the local diversity ad hoc committee (explained in question 4) to help with reaching communities, as well as with other ideas.

Means to improve voter turnout:

- Same first bullet mentioned above.
- Continue with the Rides to the Polls that we do for all residents who may need a ride.
- Targeted canvasses (door knocking and phone banking).
- Collaborate and coordinate efforts with local Democratic clubs to improve voter turnout.
- Same last bullet mentioned above.

Hopefully through these actions and ideas, and others that may come to be, we will help to increase their participation in the Party and improve voter turnout.

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

The most critical function as I see it is two-fold - voter engagement & increasing voter participation. It takes both to get Democrats elected up and down the ballot for good local and State government, and nationally as well.

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 do hope to receive Frederick Progressives/Progressive Maryland's endorsement, but if that does not happen, it will not affect my willingness in any way to work with the progressive groups. We are all working to engage the voters on several common issues, so whether it's through an endorsement or not, I commit to collaborate on how best to do that.

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

● cosponsoring legislation?	
● testify in support of legislation?	
● write an op ed?	
● speaking at progressive events?	Yes, as I can. (and attending as I can)
● attending meetings?	Yes, as I can.
● meet with our leadership group?	Yes
● give updates on shared goals?	Yes
● writing letters to endorse a labor organizing drive?	

Other:

Circulate events and issues on social media.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts with your organization. As a Central Committee member, I am committed to helping bridge the gap between progressive groups, those disenfranchised and the local Party within the scope of our Party building, voter engagement, and work to get Democrats elected to office. Whatever may not be within the Central Committee's capacity, I commit to help toward bridging the gap as a private citizen.

Mari Lee