

Frederick Progressives

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March 11, 2018

2018 Questionnaire for Democratic Central Committee

Dear Tony Soltero, 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?

I am a Central Committee incumbent running for re-election. In my 12 years on the Central Committee I have served as treasurer, during which time we have quadrupled our fundraising revenue. I am a lifelong dedicated Democrat, committed to progressive values. I have been active in various local political campaigns, most notably that of Kip Koontz for Frederick City Alderman in 2005 and 2009. I participated in the Howard Dean presidential campaign in 2003, before I was on the Central Committee, and also worked in the Barack Obama campaigns in 2008 and 2012. I have been active in phone banking and canvassing in every election cycle since joining the Committee. As a native Spanish speaker, I have been the Committee's liaison to the annual Latino Festival in Frederick. In addition, I am a board member of the Frederick Center (our local county GLBT support and advocacy organization).

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

I consider myself to be a progressive. I do wish to make a distinction between "establishment" and "centrist"; the former term is better applied to entrenched institutions, whatever their political leanings, while the latter is a political philosophy. Progressives differ from centrists in that they approach issues by first asking "What is in the best interest of the public?" and work from there; centrists tend to approach issues by focusing on "How can we address this issue with minimal impact to the status quo?", which often leads to compromised and relatively ineffective solutions to problems. A centrist tends to be loyal to the established system, and is willing to tweak it (but not too much) in order to accommodate the public interest; a progressive focuses on what's best for the public, and is willing to question and overhaul the established system to accomplish this if necessary.

To oversimplify a bit, a progressive tends to evaluate solutions to problems along a "working/not working" axis; a centrist (or a conservative) looks at the same through an "ideologically correct/incorrect" axis. (The War on Drugs is probably the best illustration of this.) I believe that the former approach is vastly more effective.

I am a progressive because I believe that government is supposed to work for the general public interest, not for the narrow requirements of special interests. I believe that the most important thrust of progressive policy is the pursuit and implementation of broad-based economic justice. This is essential to the minimization of social pathologies like crime, drug abuse, unemployment, racism, and family breakdown. Gainfully employed and prosperous citizens rarely commit violent crimes, are much more likely to maintain stable families, and are much less prone to be susceptible to the easy scapegoating of marginalized groups (racial minorities, immigrants, GLBT people) pushed by reactionaries in our society and (sadly) elements of our government.

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?

In my 12 years on the Central Committee, we have evolved from a fairly monolithic group to a much more diverse organization that incorporates all components of the Democratic Big Tent. We have centrists, old-school New Deal/Great Society Democrats, and modern progressives all represented in the Committee. We are an ideologically diverse Committee, and each member brings his political community to the table. Per our bylaws, we cannot as a Committee influence the primary election (as individuals, of course, each one of us is free to support whoever he or she desires), but we encourage all candidates to run and cultivate support from their constituencies, as this ultimately makes our final nominee stronger. We are not affiliated with the Democratic National Committee; we focus on county politics and on getting Democrats into local offices. But we will support each and every Democrat who comes out of the primaries, whatever his or her political philosophy.

As a Committee member, I am well aware that the Democratic Party's final nominee (for whatever office) will not be everyone's first choice. I will do everything possible to ensure that Democratic primaries are open and fair, and that every candidate has an equal opportunity to get his or her message across.

4. How would you promote diversity within the Party?

When it comes to "diversity" in the sense of inclusiveness regarding race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation, I have been part of a Committee effort to reach out to different elements of our community. I have been instrumental in ensuring that the Frederick Democratic Party has a presence in the various annual events and festivals throughout the county, such as Frederick Pride and the Latino Festival, and do my best to communicate that everyone is welcome in the Democratic Party.

When it comes to "diversity" in the sense of political ideology, we need to make sure that every Democratic candidate in the primary election is treated with respect, and that all candidates have the same access to Committee resources, whatever their position on the political spectrum. As mentioned above, we have a very politically diverse group on the Committee at the moment.

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

I have traditionally believed that Democratic candidates should be chosen by Democratic voters, and that opening up the primary to non-Democrats exposes the process to gaming and manipulation by those who might not have the best interests of the party in mind. That said, the candidates selected by the party's voters will have an impact on the lives of all citizens, whatever their political affiliation, and it's not unreasonable in that regard that independents have a say in determining party nominees. I would support reform that would allow independents to vote in primaries as long as the new voting structure doesn't make the process vulnerable to manipulation by hostile outside forces. At present, though, any independent can temporarily register as a Democrat for the purposes of voting in the primary; that doesn't force the voter to support any particular candidate in the general election.

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?

My main issues of interest are economic justice, education, and GLBT equality. The actual organization of specific issue campaigns falls outside the Committee's purview (though as private citizens, working with other individuals or groups, we can certainly do that) but we can serve as facilitators for linking issue groups with specific candidates (after the primary, of course).

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?

We have accomplished a lot of this during my years on the Committee, but a great deal of work remains to be done. We have coordinated with leaders of local communities to increase voter registration, and while we have had some success, many challenges remain, especially with the Latino community, given the current political climate. Part of what we do is help localize the party's message in order to relate to Frederick County voters. As a member of the messaging committee, I have contributed to that effort, and it worked out exceptionally well in 2014 when we won various county-level races in what otherwise was a dismal election cycle for Democrats.

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

As treasurer, ensuring that the Frederick County Democratic Party has enough funding to run competitive races is always a major concern. Outside of finances, I believe that coordination with local campaigns so that we can present a unified, coherent, and effective message is paramount to success in the election cycle. I would also add that in the long term, our most critical goal should be to continue to expand the donor base so that we are primarily sustained by many small donors, which will have a greatly positive impact on our officeholders' commitment to the general public interest. Good policy is good politics!

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?

As a progressive and a citizen of Frederick County, my main interest is in getting strong, effective, forward-thinking leaders in elected positions throughout the County. My values align primarily with the Democratic Party, which is the main reason I have served in this county-level Party position over the last twelve years. The celebrity aspect of politics has never interested me much; I just want good government. I feel we have made enormous progress as a party in recruiting quality candidates and officeholders, and we have outperformed the state party in the last couple of election cycles. I would be extremely honored to gain the endorsement of Frederick Progressives and Progressive Maryland, but whatever your decision, I will never cease to believe in progressive values, and would be thrilled to work with the group in the future.

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, if asked
• attending meetings?	Yes, as available
• meet with our leadership group?	yes
• give updates on shared goals?	yes
• writing letters to endorse a labor organizing drive?	yes

Other:

I have been a resident of Maryland since 1986 and have lived in Frederick County since 2002. I am a graduate of Rice University in Houston, TX and work as a software engineer in Tysons Corner, VA. I grew up in Puerto Rico and am fully bilingual in English and Spanish.

My progressive values originate from multiple sources. While I was raised in an upper-middle-class environment, the stark wealth inequality in Puerto Rico and its impact on the island's quality of life (for everyone) was inescapable, and helped forge a sense of social and economic justice in me. I attended a Jesuit high school where concern for the needs of the poor and marginalized members of society was constantly emphasized, and that experience contributed heavily towards my worldview.

I joined the Democratic Party because I wanted to make a difference, and the Democrats have traditionally represented the interests of the common person. I understand that sometimes the leadership of the party has drifted from these moorings and embraced corporatism, with disastrous electoral results. But I still believe that the rank-and-file of the Democratic Party has the best interests of America in mind, and strives to create the kind of just society we made great strides towards building in the middle of the 20th century, when Democrats enjoyed their greatest success. The Democratic Party still has a sound infrastructure that we progressives would do well to avail ourselves of, and I am running for the Central Committee so that there is one more progressive voice as part of that infrastructure.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address your questions.

