



DEMOCRATS ABROAD

The 2008 Democrats Abroad Platform

as adopted at the Democrats Abroad Global Convention, Vancouver, Canada, April 13, 2008

PREAMBLE

We are millions, uncounted. We are teachers, entrepreneurs, businesspeople, and retirees. We are college students on junior-year-abroad programs. We are men and women serving our country in Iraq and Afghanistan. We are diplomats; we are Peace Corps volunteers. And we are taxpayers, both at home and in our countries of residence.

We are voters from every state across America—and the District of Columbia—voting from more than 160 countries around the globe. We are Americans living abroad.

Yet no matter where we live, as Americans we care deeply about the future of our country. We have witnessed the destruction of the World Trade Center and the devastating impact of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. We have endured diminishing respect for the moral standing of America in the world. We have deplored the billions spent on an unwarranted war and the inadequate care for our returning servicemen and women. We have experienced the ripple effect of the U.S. subprime mortgage crisis, and the shrinking incomes of households across America. We feel the impact overseas of a falling dollar. We share the every day worries of the millions of Americans without health insurance.

How America resolves its problems affects each of us as Americans, and as citizens of the world. Solutions are not to be found in executive orders and filibusters, but in dialogue. Solutions are not to be found in an army that is overstretched and underresourced, but in a military properly trained and equipped. Solutions lie not in unending war and torture, but in sound diplomacy. Solutions must not curtail our civil liberties, but uphold and honor our Constitution. Real solutions do not waste our natural resources in the short term, but conserve them for the long term. Solutions do not lie in even more tax cuts for the few, but in opportunities for all.

“Our strength as a nation depends on upholding our fundamental values”

Our strength as a nation depends on upholding our fundamental values so that we can successfully surmount our problems, and contribute to a world that offers the benefits of freedom and cooperation.

As Americans, as Democrats, and as Democrats Abroad, we stand united together to support our Nominee, promote our democratic values, and affect the changes set forth below.

ISSUES AFFECTING AMERICANS ABROAD

Like our compatriots at home, Americans living outside the United States seek to address the nation’s manifold and deepening problems created by the Republican administration since 2001. But we also face distinctive problems and challenges that should be acted upon by a Democratic administration and Congress. Democrats Abroad seek constructive solutions to the following:

1. Census of Americans Abroad

Estimates of Americans living abroad range from 4.3 to 7.2 million, a huge but imprecise number. An accurate count of all Americans living abroad not only would ensure that our voices be heard in Washington but also would be in the national interest. The test of census-taking procedures performed by the Census Bureau in 2004 in France, Mexico and Kuwait was not successful; as a result, once again Americans abroad, except for armed services personnel and government employees and their families, will not be included in the 2010 Census. We:

FAVOR the urgent development by the Census Bureau of new procedures for counting all Americans abroad.

FAVOR the testing of the new procedures in a number of foreign countries by 2013 at the latest.

FAVOR the inclusion of all Americans abroad in the 2020 Census.

2. Voting From Abroad

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 is the primary means available to us to participate in the American democratic process. In close elections our absentee votes from abroad can make the difference between victory and defeat.

The Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA) was adopted to address a plethora of problems in voting domestically as well as to eliminate some of those faced by absentee voters from abroad. Implementation of HAVA has been hampered to date by lack of appropriations and the immensity of its task. Serious obstacles are still faced by overseas civilian citizens in registering, casting their votes and having them counted. We:

FAVOR the implementation of simplified and uniform procedures in all U.S. jurisdictions for registering to vote and casting absentee ballots from abroad.

FAVOR the extension of the right to vote in the fifty states and the District of Columbia to Americans residing abroad who have never lived, or have not lived long enough, in the United States to establish voting residency, by allowing them to register to vote at the legal voting residence of one U.S.-citizen parent.

FAVOR the elimination of any requirements for the notarization of signatures of Americans abroad for ballot requests and for “official” ballot return envelopes.

FAVOR the elimination of various state administrative rulings and procedures that are non-essential to ensuring voting validity but have the effect of disenfranchising voters abroad.

FAVOR the rapid passage of H.R. 4173, the "Overseas Vote Act," and H.R. 4237, the "Overseas Voting Practical Amendments Act of 2007," which would resolve the problems mentioned above.

FAVOR the immediate and full funding and implementation of HAVA.

FAVOR allowing the use of Federal Write-In Absentee Ballots for primary elections for federal office.

FAVOR the submission of Federal Post Card Applications (FPCA) by web-based communications.

FAVOR mandatory and timely notification of rejection of Federal Post Card Applications (FPCA).

FAVOR establishing a minimum interval of 45 days between transmittal of ballots to voters abroad, and the deadline for voted ballots to be received by local election officials.

FAVOR fixing the deadline for the receipt of ballots from abroad at close of polls on election day, so that ballots from abroad would be counted simultaneously with domestic ballots, thus ensuring that votes from abroad would be taken into account in the announcement of the results of the election.

FAVOR the elimination of postmark and date-stamp requirements for ballots from abroad to be counted.

3. Americans Abroad Caucus

Americans abroad have common legislative concerns, but they have no common representation in Congress. There is thus a need to have a Caucus in Congress that specifically addresses questions of policy and practice for Americans abroad. We:

APPLAUD Representative Carolyn Maloney (D-NY) 's initiative creating the Americans Abroad Caucus in Congress, support the representatives who have joined, and urge Representatives from states with significant residents living abroad to join also.

4. Citizenship Transmission

The right for Americans abroad to transmit their citizenship to their children born abroad is severely restricted. The periods of U.S. residency prior to the birth of a child abroad required to transmit U.S. citizenship to the child are different for an unwed American mother, an unwed American father, and an American parent married to a non-American. Many Americans abroad do not learn of the requirements of the law until it is too late. As a result, each year several thousand children of Americans abroad are denied U.S. citizenship, and some are born "stateless," that is, without any nationality or citizenship. We:

FAVOR legislation enabling every American parent to transmit U.S. citizenship to his or her children born abroad without any prior U.S. residency requirement.

FAVOR making the above change retroactive to include children under the age of 18 who were born abroad to a U.S.-citizen parent.

FAVOR a provision in such legislation guaranteeing that no child born abroad of a U.S.-citizen parent will ever again be stateless at birth.

FAVOR restoring U.S. citizenship to persons born abroad who lost it by failing to meet residency requirements in a section of the Immigration and Naturalization Act that was repealed in 1978.

5. Social Security, Medicare and Healthcare

Several important laws and regulations relating to U.S. Social Security either discriminate against Americans abroad or affect them unfairly. Moreover, present Medicare legislation does not allow eligible Americans abroad to receive Medicare benefits outside the United States, even those who have contributed to Social Security throughout their working lives and have thus earned the right to receive Medicare benefits. This denial of benefits can cause real hardships. We:

FAVOR the extension of Medicare benefits to all eligible US citizens wherever they live in the world so that provision of local health services for retired overseas Americans is ensured.

FAVOR changing laws and regulations that do not allow some Americans abroad to contribute voluntarily to Social Security.

FAVOR replacing the much harsher Foreign Work Test, applicable to Americans abroad, with the Annual Earnings Test, so that all Americans are subjected to the same rules regardless of residence.

FAVOR passage of legislation that would abolish the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) or at least change its effect on Americans abroad who receive small foreign pensions.

FAVOR elimination of the provision that now cuts off Supplemental Social Security Income (SSI) for persons who live outside the United States for more than 30 consecutive days.

FAVOR elimination of the withholding tax on Social Security.

FAVOR survivors' benefits for nonresident foreign spouses of U.S. citizens.

FAVOR negotiation and full implementation of totalization agreements with all countries that have social security programs, with a view to giving Americans abroad the option of crediting to U.S. Social Security their payments to equivalent programs of their countries of residence.

FAVOR making healthcare insurance portable and non-discriminatory and available to Americans and their families who are returning to live in the US after living/working abroad.

FAVOR making any universal healthcare plan take into account Americans abroad and their families.

FAVOR provision of easy to access, affordable, quality medical care for our Veterans living overseas who do not have access to regular VA hospitals.

6. Taxation

Prior to 1962, the U.S. government, like that of almost all other countries, applied the principle of "residence-based taxation," which means that income taxes are paid by individuals to the country in which they reside. Although other countries still adhere to this system, the United States in 1962 introduced "citizen-based taxation," which made American citizens residing abroad subject to taxation by the U.S. government in addition to the country of residence. Although the blow of dual taxation was softened somewhat by a limited foreign earned-income exclusion (Section 911 of the U.S. Tax Code) and some credit against U.S. income tax for taxes paid to a foreign government, citizenship-based taxation nevertheless continues to cause hardship for and discrimination of Americans working abroad. We:

FAVOR restoring residence-based taxation, thereby placing American citizens residing abroad in the same position as citizens of all other industrialized countries, which do not tax their nationals residing abroad.

If such a policy change cannot be adopted immediately, we:

FAVOR the retention of Section 911 and the implementation of the following changes to reduce existing tax discrimination against Americans abroad:

(A) Allow pensions earned from work abroad to qualify as foreign earned income (as was the case prior to 1963).

(B) Simplify the calculation of the foreign tax credit by allowing individual taxpayers to group all foreign income together.

(C) Require Americans abroad to pay U.S. income tax only on income derived from U.S. sources.

FAVOR reinstating the marital deduction for bequests to foreign spouses of American citizens, which was eliminated in 1988.

FAVOR eliminating artificial currency exchange gains and losses when no currency has been exchanged for purposes of reporting capital gains and losses.

7. Freedom of Movement

Americans abroad face undue restrictions in returning, or simply traveling, to the United States with their foreign-citizen spouses, partners and family members. We:

FAVOR simplifying and expediting procedures for obtaining permanent U.S. residence permits and citizenship for non-American spouses and close family members of U.S. citizens.

FAVOR providing all US citizens living abroad with equal immigration opportunities for their immediate families without regard for the nature of their employer.

FAVOR providing the immediate family members of US citizens living abroad who are seeking US visitor visas (B-1 and B-2) the maximum visa validity (currently 10 years) irrespective of the reciprocity tables applicable to the family members' country of residence.

CALL FOR passage of the Uniting American Families Act, which would change immigration law to give U.S. citizens with same-sex partners the same legal treatment as heterosexual spouses, so that American citizens can be united in America with their same-sex foreign-citizen partners.

FAVOR Congress removing from the Immigration and Nationality Act the language inserted in 1993 to bar HIV+ visitors and immigrants, as well as the Department of Health and Human Services removing HIV/AIDS from the list of diseases that bar entry to the U.S.

8. Other Governmental Services and Benefits

The interests and concerns of Americans abroad are rarely considered when American laws and regulations that provide essential governmental services are adopted or changed. We:

FAVOR consultation by the State Department with the affected local American community abroad before deciding whether or not to close a consulate.

FAVOR extending the operating hours of consulates to facilitate their access by Americans seeking to obtain various State Department services.

FAVOR making all U.S. government facilities abroad barrier-free for those with disabilities.

FAVOR payment of U.S. unemployment benefits to Americans abroad who would be eligible to receive such benefits if residing in the United States.

FAVOR legislation requiring the application of all U.S. labor and employment laws to American citizens and "green card" holders working abroad for the U.S. government or its contractors.

FAVOR full implementation of the Americans With Disabilities Act for Americans employed abroad by American companies.

FAVOR the renegotiation of Status of Forces Agreements that restrict the use of military facilities to those residing within the host country, with a view to permitting military retirees living in other countries to use all facilities allowed by military regulations.

FAVOR an increase in weight limit on packages that may be sent or received by military retirees abroad through the military postal system.

AMERICAN FOREIGN AND DEFENSE POLICY

Since September 11, 2001, the so-called global "war on terror" has served as pretext for unilateral and military action without due regard for legal process and international cooperation. Trillions of dollars have been spent without conducting an effective war against terrorism. Democrats Abroad deplors this situation and calls for the rejection of decisions taken by the Bush administration that have done moral, legal and political harm to both the United States and other nations.

1. A Global Good Neighbor Policy

We:

FAVOR a constructive U.S. foreign policy that fosters engagement, rejects arrogance, and creates opportunities for dialogue rather than limits or shuts them down.

FAVOR cooperation, negotiation, diplomacy, reciprocity and mutual respect that will widen contact and interaction with other nations.

DEPLORE rhetoric that restricts negotiation with legally elected leaders of countries with which the U.S. has differences.

FAVOR U.S. approval of and participation in the International Criminal Court in The Hague.

APPLAUD efforts to make America a country that promotes international understanding and collaboration with other nations.

OPPOSE unilateralism and the pre-emptive military policy that has alienated our allies and created a more dangerous world.

FAVOR expansion of foreign aid for health and humanitarian purposes, enhancement of institutions combating world poverty and promoting sustainable development.

FAVOR action to exercise moral leadership, including:

- Rapid and effective responses to stop genocide even in countries of little strategic importance to the US.
- Diplomatic efforts to end the violent suppression of Buddhist monks and other peaceful demonstrators in Burma and the unconditional release of these peaceful prisoners.
- Diplomatic efforts to support United Nations General Assembly resolutions requiring cessation of all practices that deprive Tibetans of their fundamental rights and freedoms.
- Establishment of a proactive concerted response, not limited to diplomatic and humanitarian efforts, to end the civil war and genocide in Darfur, Sudan.

2. U.S. State Department

As the U.S. spokesperson to the world, the State Department must have the resources necessary to fulfill its mandate in the development, and implementation of U.S. foreign policy. We:

APPLAUD the diplomatic work of U.S. embassies and consulates throughout the world.

FAVOR full funding of embassies and consulates.

FAVOR increased staff and mobility.

PROPOSE instituting programs for improved interaction with local populations.

FAVOR creation of an Advisory Committee within the State Department to promote non-violence as an international organizing principle in order to foster peaceful coexistence, disarmament, and respect for international treaties.

3. Int'l Agreements, Treaties & Obligations

If the US is to be considered a reliable partner it is incumbent upon the U.S. to fully honor all past treaty commitments. It is further incumbent upon the U.S. to sign and implement important treaties fostering human rights, protection of the environment, and global cooperation. With regard to trade treaties such as NAFTA, the U.S. has long been committed to free and fair trade, particularly if said treaties are regularly reviewed and updated. We:

OPPOSE imposition of trade barriers, tariffs, sanctions or other trade-distorting measures that are in contravention to relevant trade agreements.

OPPOSE U.S. withdrawal from international treaties to which it has already agreed.

FAVOR repeal of the American Service Personnel Protection Act of 2002, popularly known as the "Hague Invasion Act," with the exception of those provisions that ensure the best possible legal defense for a U.S. service member charged by the International Criminal Court in the Netherlands. The "Hague Invasion Act" authorizes the use of military force to free any American held by the Court and/or to penalize any member of the Court.

FAVOR implementation of the long list of existing treaties involving control of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and similar weaponry, as well as manufacture, sale and distribution of small arms and anti-personnel land mines, and clearing of anti-personnel land mines in all areas of past conflicts.

FAVOR U.S. support of the United Nations, including payment of all past and current dues and assessments.

4. Debts and Sanctions

The inequality in the distribution of the wealth and produce of the world has resulted in a large group of poor nations that are burdened by debt and frequently suffer under sanctions. We:

FAVOR debt relief to enable debtor countries to start genuine social and economic development and to help address the massive inequalities that currently distort U.S. global relationships.

FAVOR development by the U.S. government, in cooperation with the United Nations, of appropriate mechanisms to ensure that debt relief translates into social, economic and health improvements for citizens rather than serving to sustain corrupt regimes.

OPPOSE the use of trade and economic sanctions whenever they may be counterproductive politically, or will result in inhumane and widespread suffering among the citizens of the affected nation.

5. Foreign Aid

U.S. foreign aid plays a critical role in securing good will for the United States in the global community. America's long term security depends on a world where poverty is eradicated and the innate dignity of individuals is protected. We encourage stability, not by force or threat but by reaching out to the vulnerable, striving to relieve suffering, and promoting social and economic development, education, health, family planning, democracy and human rights. Where these true democratic values thrive, the U.S. is more secure and the global economy more robust. We:

DEPLORE foreign aid that is distributed as a *quid pro quo* for strategic political or military advantage, such as hosting a U.S. airbase, and military, anti-terrorism and law-enforcement assistance.

OPPOSE the "Global Gag Rule" and its proposed extensions, which censor the provision of family planning and public health information around the globe, which restricts scientific research, and results in the cruel denial of healthcare, in unwanted pregnancy, unnecessary childbirth-related deaths in the thousands, and the spread of HIV/AIDS to impoverished women.

OPPOSE State Department control of U.S. development assistance, which creates short-term goals that undermine U.S. ability to support long-term development of stable, prosperous states, and FAVOR the management of such assistance by a separate, independent US AID Program.

RECOGNIZE our moral obligation to assist the world's most vulnerable people—the 2.7 billion who struggle to survive on less than two dollars a day—and who suffer from desperate poverty and a crushing need for basic necessities, by enacting policies that provide aid based on their needs, in a manner that is neutral, impartial and will serve to end bias in the provision of foreign aid.

APPLAUD the generosity of the American people and their desire to end extreme poverty in the world. We call for an increase in the low level of US foreign aid for overseas development assistance to increase to a percentage of the U.S. GNP.

FAVOR joining the international community's support for the achievement of the UN Millennium Development Goals.

FAVOR assisting nations that seek funding for civilian uses, social and economic infrastructure development, income generation, democratic reform and human rights improvements, particularly those that apply to women, and that target health, family planning and education.

FAVOR compliance with the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, which stipulates that "no security assistance may be provided to any country, the government of which engages in a consistent pattern of gross violations of internationally recognized human rights agreements and treaties."

6. Control of WMDs & Similar Weaponry

Weapons of mass destruction (WMD), encompassing nuclear, biological, chemical and radioactive weapons, continue to endanger the world, as do an entire category of similar weapons of multiple and mass death, including cluster bombs, land mines and various types of missiles, and chemical/biological/radiological/nuclear (CBRN) weapons materials. The danger is not only the possibility that terrorist groups and rogue states obtain such weapons or weapons materials, but also of their use by "ordinary" states. Currently eight "nuclear" countries around the world possess some 26,000 nuclear warheads, while many other states have the technology and the fuel cycle to develop nuclear weapons on short order. Our survival on this planet depends not on winning WMD wars but on avoiding them. We:

DEPLORE U.S. alliances with authoritarian regimes that spread nuclear technologies to terrorist and theocratic governments.

OPPOSE U.S. delivery of internationally banned and questionable weapons to the volatile Middle East region.

DEPLORE the modifications of guidelines for U.S. military operations made during the Bush-Cheney administration, significantly lowering the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons, and even assigning them a pre-emptive role against any perceived future threat.

OPPOSE U.S. continued pursuit of new nuclear capabilities and weapons, including "mini nukes" and "bunker busters," that blur the line between conventional and nuclear war and signal that nuclear weapons are not only acceptable to have but are usable, even against non-nuclear states.

OPPOSE U.S. maintenance of weapons delivery systems ready for instant-strike operations.

DEPLORE the Bush administration disregard of the "Negative Security Assurances" pledge not to launch a nuclear strike on any country not having nuclear weapons, or not allied with a nuclear power, as announced by President Carter in 1978 and remaining in force through the years until the end of the Clinton administration, which publicly renewed the U.S.'s adherence to it in 1997. We hereby call for passage by Congress of binding legislation to restrict the authority of the president to order such strikes.

FAVOR U.S. leadership of an international plan for phased reduction of nuclear weapons that will lead to their complete abolition.

URGE a U.S. declaration prohibiting nuclear strikes against non-nuclear-weapon states and a public pledge not to launch a first nuclear strike.

FAVOR U.S. agreement to routine international inspections of nuclear arsenals, weapons programs and enrichment facilities of all states, including international monitoring and policing of sales and supply of CBRN weapons materials.

FAVOR full funding and implementation of the 1991 Nunn-Lugar Act to safeguard nuclear weapons of the former Soviet Union from falling into the hands of others.

URGE a U.S. call to enforce the 1996 Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty to stop further development and testing of all nuclear weapons, including their introduction into outer space, as indicated in the 1967 Outer Space

Treaty prohibiting nuclear and other WMD in outer space.

FAVOR establishment of the International Nuclear Fuel Bank under IAEA for supplying enriched fuel for peaceful nuclear purposes, as guaranteed under Article IV of the 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).

FAVOR revival, full funding and implementation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, in force from 1972 until the U.S. unilaterally withdrew on June 13, 2002.

URGE passage of the draft global treaty to ban manufacture, stockpile and sale of cluster bombs, to be signed in Dublin in May 2008, to which over 100 countries have announced their agreement, with the exception of the U.S., China, Russia, Israel and France.

FAVOR clearing of anti-personnel land mines in all areas of past conflicts, including release by Israel of maps of land mines in southern Lebanon.

7. Supporting Our Military; Honoring Our Veterans

Democrats Abroad fully supports the men and women of our armed forces whose extraordinary service receives our deepest respect and gratitude. The U.S. spends nearly as much on its military as the rest of the world combined. This is a heavy burden on the economy and a questionable use of resources, particularly when it concerns programs we no longer need. The Pentagon continues to ask for record amounts for obsolete programs and insufficient sums for ongoing operations. We:

FAVOR clearer and more transparent budgeting by the Department of Defense, Department of Homeland Security and other sources of military expenditure in order to permit better Congressional oversight.

OPPOSE the use of emergency supplemental budgets for ongoing wars, particularly supplemental budgets that completely underestimate funds needed for the year, as occurred in 2007.

DEPLORE that the U.S. military relies on an unprecedented number of private contractors, often engaged without competitive bidding, resulting in a lack of accountability, heavy expenditure, and criminal conduct by contractor personnel, and demand a severe restriction of the policy of outsourcing critical security and military functions to private contractors.

FAVOR requiring the Department of Defense and the Department of Homeland Security to submit to the requirements of the Federal Financial Management Improvement Act, which demands control of projected and real expenditures by independent outside auditors.

FAVOR providing our military personnel with the training and resources needed to meet the challenges they are most likely to face in today's world: peacekeeping missions, anti-terrorist operations and emergency humanitarian actions.

URGE a thorough and critical review of the heaviest and most sophisticated programs, with a view to reducing or eliminating those which are no longer useful.

URGE a review of U.S. military bases worldwide in order to determine current and foreseeable utility, bearing in mind that closure of some bases may

affect U.S. veterans in the area, which must be considered in all its aspects.

FAVOR permanent statutory funding of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

URGE a full review of military medical facilities, current treatment and conditions for veterans, wounded and impaired military personnel that must lead to significantly improved new public policy.

URGE the implementation of a "No Veteran Left Behind" policy with the basic objective of assuring veterans a dignified return to civilian life

FAVOR full healthcare for veterans, their domestic partners and children.

FAVOR facilitation and expedition to citizenship for immigrants who have honorably completed their U.S. military service

FAVOR the right of every veteran to an appropriate military funeral.

FAVOR cessation of the "don't ask, don't tell" policy and abolish discrimination against homosexuals in the Armed Forces.

8. The U.S. and the Middle East

The U.S. invasion and near destruction of Iraq, which was based on the false premise of the existence of weapons of mass destruction and ties between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda, has destabilized the entire Middle East. The long-term violent Israeli-Palestinian conflict has become one of the central problems in the Middle East and this dangerous situation needs to be resolved for the sake of world stability and the peoples of the region. Afghanistan, following the overthrow of the Taliban regime by the U.S., is now experiencing a flawed democracy, a steady increase in the power of the Taliban and other warlords and a return to severe restrictions on women's rights. We:

DEPLORE the U.S. invasion and continued occupation of Iraq, as it was based on false and fabricated information and has cost thousands of American, allied and Iraqi lives, and places a huge financial burden on the federal budget and the U.S. economy.

VIEW the continued U.S. military occupation of Iraq as a source of continued destabilization and sectarian violence in that country, breeding anti-U.S. sentiments around the world and making U.S. goals more difficult to attain.

FAVOR setting a defined timetable for bringing U.S. combat troops home rapidly, while launching a robust diplomatic effort to build an international support structure for stability in Iraq and the region, as indicated by the bipartisan Iraq Study Group (ISG), which recommends that every country with an interest in avoiding a chaotic Iraq, including Iran and Syria, should be included.

FAVOR provision of funds needed in Iraq for reconstruction, development, and refugee assistance, as well as targeted training economic development and employment opportunity for the Iraqi people in order to bring hope.

OPPOSE maintaining permanent military bases in Iraq.

DEPLORE lack of recognition U.S. officials have shown in honoring thousands of U.S. and Iraqi lives lost.

SUPPORT the majority of Israelis and Palestinians in their longing for peace and belief in justice, and view the conclusion of a just resolution to the long conflict between the two parties as a necessary condition for world peace and stability.

FAVOR the development of a package of economic, social and political incentives in place of military aid as an integral part of a constructed formula, for the benefit of the Palestinian people and the State of Israel, to begin at a time certain and to continue or be suspended based on benchmarks for progress, following the conclusion of an agreement by the Palestinian people and the State of Israel to cease and desist all acts and rhetoric of violence and the development or expansion of settlements, and to publicly and mutually respect each other's right to exist.

FAVOR the U.S. serving as an honest broker in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict while maintaining a single standard when condemning violence, pressing Israel to stop expansion of settlements and the separation wall and both parties adhering to international law.

FAVOR an even-handed proactive U.S. commitment to a peace process, predicated on Palestinian recognition of the State of Israel's right to exist and Israel's recognition of the Palestinian people's right to an independent, sovereign and viable state within internationally recognized and secure borders, in the belief that this will lead to true peace and prosperity.

FAVOR greater U.S. involvement on the basis of a constructed formula to be facilitated by the U.S. in close cooperation with other interested nations, the UN and the European Union, as well as official, legitimately elected leaders and representatives of the Palestinian people and the State of Israel and those who have been instrumental in working for peace in the region, without interference or influence from private, self-interested U.S. lobbies.

FAVOR recognition of relevant prior agreements by both the Palestinian Authority and the State of Israel.

FAVOR the establishment of a permanent ambassador assisted by a team of researchers and negotiators as a resource, stationed in both the Palestinian Authority and the State of Israel, to assist in the resolution of relevant issues as they arise.

FAVOR U.S. supporting and respecting Lebanon's sovereignty and independence.

DEPLORE that despite the painful lessons from the Iraq war disaster, the Bush administration appears to be following the same course with regard to Iran, and call for stopping any moves towards a military attack on Iran.

CONSIDER that the repercussions of a war with Iran would be even more horrific than that with Iraq, stirring up even more fury in the region and throughout the world, further isolating the U.S.

FAVOR a policy that deals with Iran's enrichment of uranium and alleged aid and assistance to the insurgency in Iraq through diplomacy and direct U.S. talks with the government of Iran.

FAVOR U.S. promotion of human rights, security, political and economic development and reforms in Turkey.

APPLAUD Turkey's involvement in U.S. attempts to resolve diplomatic, economic and political problems in the Middle East, including the emergence of a stable, prosperous and democratic Iraq, and Turkey's similar actions in Central Asia, Black Sea region, the Caucasus and the Balkans.

9. Latin America

The U.S. has had an embargo for more than four decades against Cuba, stretching over the entire period of Fidel Castro's regime. It is clear that travel restrictions combined with business and trade embargoes are at best useless and at worst counter-productive in encouraging Cuba, or any nation, to become more democratic and free. In addition, we now see unfortunate border passage problems with our immediate neighbors, Canada to the north and Mexico to the south, resulting in long waits at the border and greater controls, sometimes leading to restriction of movement across these friendly borders. Of further concern is the apparent lack of interest in developing closer and fairer relations with the countries to the south, as witnessed by treatment of Columbia, even to our own economic detriment. We:

FAVOR normalizing relations with Cuba, and call for an immediate lifting of all trade and economic sanctions and the ban on U.S. citizens traveling to and from Cuba, which inhibits American citizens' ability to travel to and conduct business in all countries throughout the region.

FAVOR opening a dialogue with the government of Cuba that leads to a more constructive, 21st-century relationship.

OPPOSE the construction of the barrier along the border of U.S. and Mexico.

FAVOR the immediate passage of the Free Trade Agreement with Colombia, which will provide alternatives to the illegal drug industry and create jobs for Colombians displaced by violence perpetrated by illegal armed groups. The proposed U.S.-Columbia Free Trade Agreement will also give a significant boost to the U.S. economy, opening new markets for U.S. companies at a time when the economy is struggling.

10. Terrorism

Terrorism is a worldwide scourge, and attacks upon the United States must have a vigorous and unrelenting response. While recognizing this threat, it should nonetheless not be used as a cover for aggression and curtailment of civil liberties. We:

FAVOR government policy decisions based on a full and public review, including the widest possible disclosure of documents to ensure that improper conduct for political advantage is avoided.

FAVOR U.S. actions against the occurrence and spread of terrorism that use "soft power" to regain the support of citizens and nations around the world.

FAVOR efforts to combat terrorism that not only address actual occurrences of terrorism, but also address conditions that terrorists exploit to spread chaos and confusion.

FAVOR U.S. policy toward the Middle East and other sources of terrorism that promotes self-determination, peace, and human rights,

FAVOR a U.S. policy based on internationally recognized legal processes to investigate and prosecute terrorists in national and international courts.

DEPLORE Bush administration spokespeople linking the words "Middle East" and "terrorism," in recognition of the fact that terrorism originates in many non-Arab and non-Muslim contexts and that this linkage erases the many progressive actors in the Middle East from U.S. discourse and engagement.

AMERICAN DOMESTIC ISSUES

1. Education, Arts and Sciences

Education is the key to lifelong success and fulfillment, as well as a human right. Quality education strengthens citizens, invigorates democracy, and creates opportunity for all. Quality education must be available to every child from his or her earliest years. We must do more to proactively develop a population that is globally aware, globally sensitive, globally responsible and globally competitive. Well-funded innovative public schools, higher education, adult education and retraining programs are essential for meeting the challenges of the 21st century. The federal government and the 50 states must invest more strategically and effectively in education in order to foster innovation, and skills necessary for the US to thrive. We:

DEMAND that the federal government fully fund all mandated education programs, notably the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, known as "No Child Left Behind." Unfunded mandates do not work, especially if state and local school boards do not or cannot provide their share of funds to schools.

FAVOR restoration of public funding for education for states that have recently cut back spending.

PROPOSE increases in public funding in all states for better salaries for teachers, the hiring of more teachers, reductions in class size, and for the maintenance of school buildings.

FAVOR adoption of Senator Dodd's "No Child Left Behind" Reform bill (S. 1194), which calls for a reduction in class size to help students learn, and

for new assessment of student learning and school performance.

FAVOR more attention to equal opportunity in teacher hiring practices, thus ensuring better representation of the diverse age, ethnic and gender groups in American society in our schools..

FAVOR Internet access and training in new computer-based technologies, in all public schools, which will allow students from all backgrounds to join the information revolution and knowledge economy, and strengthen our global competitiveness.

FAVOR preschool programs that allow local community agencies to work closely with parents and educational providers to ensure children's health and dietary needs are met, and, if needed,

bilingual English-language tuition to ensure that all children entering kindergarten have adequate knowledge of English.

DEPLORE anti-immigrant sentiment in our schools and skills-based training programs.

FAVOR more rapid integration of immigrant workers and students into tax-supported educational programs and schemes.

OPPOSE any Constitutional Amendment mandating or permitting organized prayer in public schools

OPPOSE federal funding of homeland security education curriculum in public schools for lack of clear mandate.

OPPOSE the teaching of creationism, intelligent design, or any other programs understood to comprise the notions of creationism, within the science curriculum in public schools.

FAVOR the adoption of education policies and curricula that promote stronger awareness and appreciation of current events, global affairs, geography, foreign cultures, traditions, and foreign language in order to help the US in the increasingly globalized world.

OPPOSE school voucher or tax-credit programs that divert public funds to private schools.

FAVOR legislation to provide full funding through bonds to build and renovate public school buildings and playing fields throughout the country.

FAVOR improved federal funding for programs of financial aid for students in higher education.

FAVOR improved federal support for international exchange and cooperation programs for students, skilled workers and professional people, in order to widen and enrich American knowledge of other countries and cultures.

FAVOR more objective, fact-based news coverage on Voice of America, Armed Services radio and other U.S.-funded, globally based broadcasters, not only to improve our nation's image but also as a contribution to the liberalization of cultural values in the global commonwealth.

FAVOR improved funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the National Endowment for the Humanities, as these organizations are critical to the encouragement of cultural and creative expression in our country.

FAVOR freedom of expression in the arts.

FAVOR increased funding for the National Science Foundation and additional grants and tax credits for universities and businesses for specialized training programs. We must enable more private sector stakeholders to invest and prepare American workers and professionals for the challenges presented by new markets and technologies.

2. Economy and Tax Issues

As Democrats, we believe the federal government must guide and manage the economy in ways that protect and provide for the public good. The federal government should (A) manage the budget in a fiscally prudent manner, (B) preserve and improve our country's material infrastructure upon which our lives and our economy depend, and (C) provide the means essential for every citizen to

pursue opportunities for lifelong success and happiness. The federal government must also (D) encourage corporations and financial institutions to embrace improved ethical standards and, in spite of the current loss of U.S. competitiveness in some sectors, (E) respect the longstanding commitments of our country to free and fair trade, and provide regulatory oversight to avoid bubbles in the green economy.

A. Managing the Nation's Budget. *In 1993, President William Jefferson Clinton devised the largest deficit-reduction plan in U.S. history. He left the Oval Office eight years later with many items in surplus and a strong dollar. Since 2001, the Republican administration of George W. Bush has turned inherited budget surpluses into a series of deficits estimated at many trillions of dollars. Given that the deficit imposes severe constraints on federally funded programs, and that tax breaks for the rich, together with military spending for an unwinnable war in Iraq, are major factors in the current federal deficit, Democrats Abroad believes restoring fiscal responsibility to be among the highest priorities of our party. We:*

FAVOR the immediate repeal of fiscally unsound tax cuts, including the capital gains and dividend tax cuts, which have unfairly transferred a greater share of the tax burden to lower-income workers.

FAVOR renewed efforts to control and gradually to reduce the federal budget deficit.

FAVOR reducing the military budget, excluding veteran retirement benefits, and investing the resulting dividends in job-retraining and job-creation programs, thereby enabling American workers to compete more effectively in the new global labor market.

OPPOSE the use of emergency supplemental budgets, or executive transfers of funds from other parts of the federal budget, to fund ongoing wars.

OPPOSE any further use of federal tax rebates of the kind enacted in 2008 in order to "stabilize" the economy and the value of the US dollar, both of which have been weakened in recent years by excessive military spending, poor fiscal management, inadequate regulation of the financial sector and waning private sector confidence in our economy and its economic potential.

B. Maintaining the Nation's Infrastructure. *In August 2007, one section of a downtown Minneapolis, eight-lane steel-arch bridge, built in 1967 and used by 140,000 cars each day to cross the Mississippi collapsed. This was a wake-up call. Our transport networks, cities, and housing stock, are vital to our economic well-being and urgently require renovation. We:*

FAVOR federal assistance for the regular inspection, repair and modernization of integrated urban transport systems. This assistance should include a federal works and jobs creation program and, insofar as possible, employ recently unemployed, retrained industrial workers.

FAVOR comprehensive expansion and modernization of the national rail network, as well as the integration of Amtrak passenger and freight services, with a view towards cost reduction of rail-based transport and enticement of more road and air travelers to trains.

FAVOR expansion of light-rail transport as a means of reducing the use of cars.

FAVOR federal support for research into alternative fuel use in integrated mass transit systems.

FAVOR a federally regulated, state-coordinated strategy for avoiding costly foreclosures on viable home loans and mortgages when banks or commercial lenders enter receivership.

C. Ensuring Opportunity for All. *36.5 million Americans lived in families with incomes below the official poverty line as of December 2006. The reduction of poverty, income inequality, unemployment and underemployment must be high priorities for the next presidential administration and Congress. Success in each area is essential to the process of restoring respect for our country in the world. We:*

FAVOR raising the basic federal minimum wage in step with current and scheduled increases in a large number of states, including Colorado, Delaware, District of Columbia, Illinois, Kentucky and many others, and the index linking of the federal minimum wage to inflation.

DEPLORE the fact that three states, Georgia, Kansas and Wyoming, have a basic minimum wage per hour that is lower than the federal minimum wage, and that five states, Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina and Tennessee, have no minimum wage at all.

OPPOSE attempts to deny the Earned Income Tax Credit to working families in order to pay tax credits awarded to the wealthiest claimants.

FAVOR resources to ensure that no child live below the poverty line and improved child support for single-parent families especially those living on incomes below the official poverty line. This support should include full funding of the Federal Case Registry and National Directory of New Hires to facilitate tracking of parents who fail to pay court-awarded alimony and child support.

FAVOR improved provision of childcare for low-income working families and expanded, improved training programs for childcare providers.

FAVOR retention and enhancement of the 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act to provide employees with 24 hours of unpaid leave per year to participate in school activities directly related to the educational development of their children, or to take or accompany their children, or elderly relatives, to medical and dental appointments.

FAVOR providing tax incentives to businesses that provide on-site child care centers for working parents, compensated healthcare coverage, flexible work schedules, job sharing and on the job training with internship and apprenticeship programs.

FAVOR strengthening of Equal Pay legislation to ensure that workers receive equal pay for equal work and to eliminate pay discrimination against women.

OPPOSE all forms of sexual harassment in the workplace.

OPPOSE the slashing of funding for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, which monitors reasonable levels of environmental health and safety for workers.

FAVOR expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit and more active efforts by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to inform eligible Americans, including Americans abroad, of how they might claim this credit.

OPPOSE the hiring of permanent workers in place of lawful strikers and all attempts by employers to reduce or deny overtime pay or other benefits to workers in pay negotiations.

FAVOR the award of tax concessions or credits to small businesses, especially those owned by women and individuals from economically disadvantaged groups, including disabled persons.

FAVOR federally supported job training and job-creation schemes for workers of all ages. This will help to protect and strengthen the national labor force as it attempts to meet the challenges presented by globalization and emerging new markets for goods, services and labor.

D. Strengthening Corporate Transparency and Accountability. *Certain American businesses, including airlines, banks, communications firms, and others, increasingly shirk their corporate responsibilities to employees, workers and shareholders. We:*

FAVOR legislation that mandates improved accounting and auditing practices. This will enable stakeholders, to restore confidence and pride in America's largest corporate enterprises.

FAVOR full funding of company pensions, and legal sanctions against firms that undermine retirement security through mismanagement or fraudulent use of pension funds.

FAVOR fully portable pensions.

FAVOR tax credits to assist families that budget for retirement by expanding access to tax-deferred IRAs or 401(k) retirement savings accounts.

FAVOR initiatives to make it easier for private pension plans to be provided by small businesses.

E. Supporting Free and Fair Trade. *The United States has long been committed to free and fair trade as a means of stimulating growth and improving consumption in our economy. Democrats Abroad recognizes the appeal that trade barriers and other restrictions on free trade might have, for example, in reducing the short term loss of jobs at home, but protectionist measures also result in rising prices for consumers and restrict or preclude job gains. We:*

FAVOR a federally funded review of the impact of NAFTA on the U.S. manufacturing economy and employment. This review would identify competitive and uncompetitive industries as well as commercial trends, including patterns in capital investment, leveraging, outsourcing and re-exporting.

FAVOR sanctions against U.S. companies shifting production lines overseas in order to evade fair and reasonable standards of pay and conditions of work, or who employ child or indentured laborers.

FAVOR federally supported programs to protect our labor force and enhance our skills base, by providing retraining, especially in communities facing high unemployment and hardship due to factory closure. This will prepare us with new jobs in the green economy and globalized markets.

FAVOR efforts to develop new markets abroad for U.S.-made products and services.

FAVOR ongoing attempts to ensure better protection of intellectual property rights in those parts of the world that do not respect these rights.

FAVOR respecting the rules and regulations of the World Trade Organization, among them the requirement that the United States and the European Union gradually reduce subsidies.

OPPOSE imposition of new trade barriers or tariffs, other price-distorting measures.

FAVOR restoration of stability to global exchange rates for the dollar and other major currencies, because rapidly fluctuating rates of exchange have a deleterious effect on jobs, terms of trade and global prosperity.

3. Healthcare

Healthcare is a human right and a core element of the Democratic Party's compact with the American people. More than fifty years after Harry S. Truman inserted "Universal Health Insurance" into the platform of the Democratic Party, the United States is duty-bound to achieve what every other advanced, industrial nation has achieved. We:

FAVOR the provision of Universal Health Care for every American man, woman and child wherever they live.

DEPLORE that 47 million Americans currently lack health insurance and many millions more have inadequate coverage, meaning that they cannot afford to fall ill, and that thousands of infants are born each day without health coverage in the U.S.

DEPLORE that federal funds for Medicare, Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program, which together constitute the only safety net for millions of uninsured, chronically ill and elderly citizens, have been subject to federal budget cuts, and that more cuts may be on the way.

REGRET that the United States spends a significantly higher percentage of its GDP on healthcare than any other affluent democracy, but still lags behind on such crucially important social development indicators as life expectancy and infant mortality.

OPPOSE legislative efforts to privatize Medicare and FAVOR the repeal of the initial steps toward privatization included in the Medicare Modernization Act of 2003.

FAVOR reduced, fairer prices for prescription drugs for everyone, and restoration of the right of the federal government to negotiate drug prices on behalf of Medicare recipients.

FAVOR nationwide regulation, already adopted in several states, of pharmaceutical company marketing campaigns, which restrict unethical practices, such as the giving of gifts and promotional incentives to healthcare practitioners.

FAVOR quality assurance and cost-control measures in the administration of universal healthcare, with a view to containing overall health costs and, if possible, gradually reducing costs per capita.

FAVOR a Patient's Bill of Rights with legal guarantees to protect the rights of patients to confidentiality in relation to medical treatment, health status and genetic predisposition.

FAVOR legislation that restricts or eliminates the right of private health insurers to discriminate against those employees or clients with current or previous health conditions.

FAVOR federal healthcare coverage for contraception, sex education and pre- as well as postnatal care.

FAVOR development of a national program to combat Alzheimer's disease, which would increase funding for research into treatment, allow access to care for Alzheimer's patients under the age of 65 and provide financial assistance to families struggling to care for afflicted family members with Alzheimer's.

FAVOR federal funding of stem-cell research.

FAVOR consultations of the kind organized in Washington, D.C., in December 2006 by Senator Ron Wyden (D-Oregon) among all possible government and private providers involved in the development of Universal Health Care.

4. Electoral and Legal Systems

The Bush administration, like the Nixon administration, will go down in history for its damaging disregard of law and due process. In the face of electoral incompetence, manipulation, fraud and disenfranchisement within several states it stood mutely. It encouraged and condoned unlawful political interference and judicial activism within the federal court system. It ignores pandemic malfeasance within our corporations and financial services industry as well as criminality in our prisons, shockingly brought to light by photographs from Baghdad's Abu Ghraib prison.

A. Elections and Representation. *Free, fair and verifiable elections are necessary for a vibrant and truly representative democracy. To ensure that the will of the people is accurately represented in Washington, election campaigns and elections must be better organized. We:*

FAVOR strong enforcement of the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act and, ultimately, full public financing of all presidential, senatorial and congressional elections.

FAVOR adoption of legislation regulating the length of campaigns for federal office together with regulated, equitable access to free advertising and debate in the national media.

FAVOR an amendment to the Constitution that will establish the right of all citizens of the US irrespective of place of residence or permanent domicile, to vote in federal elections and to have their votes verifiably counted.

FAVOR legislation and an amendment to the Constitution allowing residents of the District of Columbia to be represented by one voting member of the House of Representatives and two voting Senators (with no commensurate loss of representation to the existing states).

FAVOR an amendment to the Constitution to abolish the indirect election of the president by the Electoral College and to allow direct elections.

DEPLORE the use by President Bush of executive signing statements in order to thwart and ignore the will of Congress.

FAVOR the right of residents of the U.S. Commonwealth of Puerto Rico to vote for President without prejudice to their future independence or statehood.

FAVOR more delegate positions for Democrats Abroad at the Democratic National Convention and the awarding of one full vote for each delegate.

FAVOR legislation mandating transparent, statistically significant, verifiable audits.

FAVOR national requirements for statewide computerized databases of registered voters, including that databases be subjected to testing under Election Day conditions prior to Election Day, and paper backup of these electronic databases.

FAVOR suspension of the use of all electronic "touch screen" voting machines until security and technical problems are resolved and a paper audit trail accompanies their use.

FAVOR legislation requiring that US citizens whose names have been deleted from voting rolls be notified in writing at least 45 days before the state's registration deadline to ensure that such voters have an opportunity to re-register.

APPLAUD AND FAVOR the initiatives taken in some states to allow same-day registration, Party run Internet voting, simplified postal voting and early/weekend voting in elections.

FAVOR legislation making Election Day a national holiday, at least in every even-numbered year.

B. Criminal Justice. *A criminal justice system with overcrowded prisons that exists to punish criminals, rather than to rehabilitate holds little promise for crime and recidivism reduction. Tragically, nearly one in every hundred Americans, excluding children and the elderly, live behind bars, where they are subject to the loss of dignity and rights, including the right to vote. American rates of incarceration are the highest in the world and several times higher than most industrialized democracies. The United States is the only major democracy that still applies capital punishment: 38 states have it; 12 have banned it. Although the number of executions has declined to 100 per annum, in any given year 3,000 prison inmates*

live on death row. Because we are concerned that prisons are becoming our new ghettos, we:

APPLAUD the courage of Governor George Ryan, who in January 2003, out of concern to ensure equal justice for all, commuted the sentences of 171 prisoners on death row in Illinois, knowing that many of the convictions and sentences were not safe, or just.

FAVOR abolition of the death sentence. Life imprisonment without parole is not only more humane, it is less costly to taxpayers.

FAVOR federal government ratification of the Second Protocol to the United Nations International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as a means of informing the world community of our commitment to the abolition of the death penalty.

FAVOR a nationwide moratorium on executions despite the Supreme Court judgment on lethal injection. Executions are particularly difficult to justify when legal processes are marred by error and discrimination on racial or socioeconomic grounds.

OPPOSE the decision taken in February 2008 by U.S. military prosecutors to seek the death penalty for six detainees facing trial under the special rules devised for the Guantánamo Bay war-crimes tribunals.

OPPOSE the withdrawal of rights to habeas corpus in the 2006 Military Commissions Act in the firm and certain belief that the Writ of Habeas Corpus is fundamental to the rule of law. Habeas Corpus protects the practice of presumption of innocence and protects rights to legal defense.

APPLAUD the independent Commission on Safety and Abuse in America's Prisons, whose report "Confronting Confinement" (June 2006) with its recommendations for improving the operation of

correctional facilities reflects the best, humane values of our criminal justice system.

OPPOSE privatization of any prison or any other correctional institution.

OPPOSE mandatory minimum sentences that curtail judicial discretion.

FAVOR the immediate repeal of "three strikes, you're out" laws, which result in excessively long sentences for nonviolent offenders

FAVOR the creation of federal and state programs for economic planning, and development in local neighborhoods with high incidences of delinquency and criminal activity, as well as research on recidivism, improved training for high-crime area police forces, community policing, and training programs for nonviolent offenders recently released from prison or on parole.

OPPOSE the incarceration of juveniles with adults and note with concern the understaffing and closing of juvenile correctional institutions in Texas and elsewhere.

FAVOR a lowering of sentences for non-violent drug possession and support the Biden legislation (S.1711) which would eliminate the sentencing disparity between crack and powder cocaine.

DEPLORE systemic gun violence in America, and the failure to finally address these issues especially the presence of guns in schools.

SUPPORT bills proposed by Senator Edward Kennedy (D-Massachusetts) and Representative Xavier Becerra (D-California) requiring manufacturers to insert microstamps in all handguns favored by gang members, criminals and gun traffickers, making it easier to trace bullets and shells left at crime scenes.

CIVIL AND HUMAN RIGHTS

1. Women's Issues

About half of the world's population is female, with issues that transcend nationality, race, ethnicity and sexual orientation. Democrats Abroad affirms the rights of women to empowerment in every aspect of their lives, including physical safety, self-determination of reproductive rights, and equality of opportunity. We:

CALL FOR the ratification by the United States of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), an international bill of rights for women that has been ratified by 165 countries around the world, and which the United States signed in 1980 but the Senate has failed to ratify. The U.S. is the only industrialized nation that has failed to ratify, and has joined the ranks of Iran and North Korea by its refusal.

FAVOR the reopening of the White House Office for Women's Initiatives and Outreach to ensure that women's rights receive the coordinated, serious attention they deserve.

CALL ON the United States government to support international efforts to define rape as a war crime and bring prosecution in appropriate cases.

CALL ON the United States Congress to reinforce the Violence Against Women Act for 2005. We propose that the entirety of the \$3.9 billion authorized in 2005, but never allocated, be released to allow the effective application of the Act. Priority must be given to educate and enable the general public to combat domestic violence.

SUPPORT the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women around the world, including the right to education, healthcare, legal protection and legal standing before the law.

ENDORSE the creation of a comprehensive federal program to support women in the areas of family and medical leave, and access to family planning and contraception.

FAVOR welfare reform that does not penalize women with children, and women who become pregnant while receiving public assistance, including a commitment to include family planning, emergency contraception and abortion for women in all national healthcare plans and a commitment to provide high-quality sex education and confidential reproductive healthcare for adolescents.

DEPLORE the serious erosion in the U.S. of a woman's right to choose as guaranteed by *Roe v. Wade*, and condemn any and all attempts to restrict a woman's right to safe, legal, affordable abortion procedures.

ENDORSE unequivocally the right of women in the United States of America to bear children, practice birth control and obtain safe, legal abortions regardless of economic, religious or racial status. We believe that a decision whether to terminate a pregnancy is a private matter outside the scope of government intervention. We further believe that all women should have unfettered, free access to quality information from doctors and others regarding reproductive choices.

DEPLORE the "Global Gag Rule" and its proposed extensions, which censors the provision of family planning and public health information around the globe, resulting in the denial of healthcare to impoverished women (approximately 1,600 of whom die from pregnancy- and childbirth-related causes each day), the spread of HIV/AIDS and restricts scientific research into women's reproductive health issues. We call for its immediate reversal in order to allow U.S. foreign aid again to support these vital global public health needs.

2. The Rule of Law at Home and Abroad

Democrats Abroad calls for a reaffirmation of the U.S. Constitution, and the separation of powers that have been eroded during the Bush administration. These erosions have weakened the rule of law and essential protections against terrorism and tyranny. We call for reaffirmation of America's international commitments, including the Geneva Conventions and their prohibitions against torture and guarantees of protections for prisoners of war.

Democrats Abroad believes that the United States can and must rebuild its moral authority and credibility abroad by upholding the US Constitution and its honored principles. We must consistently apply our commitment to universal human rights abroad and at home. We:

CALL ON Congress to immediately revoke all provisions of the misnamed "Patriot Act" that infringe upon basic Constitutional rights and liberties, and to replace the Act with legislation that specifically addresses gaps in the current security system of the United States to protect against terrorism without compromising constitutional rights.

CALL ON Congress to reject the extension of the Protect America Act 2007 or any similar legislation amending the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act ("FISA"), that fails to maintain judicial oversight of the Executive Branch for wiretapping of American citizens at home and abroad.

URGE Congress to enact legislation that explicitly prohibits so-called rendition on the part of U.S. military, security and intelligence services, and that governs military tribunals to ensure fairness when judging so-called enemy combatants including Guantánamo detainees, who are in some cases as young as 13 years old.

URGE Congress to reject all forms of torture, including so-called waterboarding.

URGE Congress to demand accountability from, and where necessary to indict, all those, including those at the very top of the command chain, whose policies condoned, allowed, or encouraged the practice of torture and violation of international conventions and who have been involved in systematic assaults on all human rights and civil liberties as described above.

URGE Congress to reject the role of religion or "faith-based" institutions of any kind in the forming of national policy, in keeping with the First Amendment's ban on the establishment of state religion.

3. The Public's Right to Information: Misuse of Presidential Power

The First Amendment of the Constitution and the Freedom of Information Act guarantee the American public's right to have information about its government, and the 1978 Presidential Records Act gives ownership of a president's records to the United States. These records are to be managed by the National Archives and opened to the public twelve years after a president leaves office.

George W. Bush has blatantly violated this right by signing Executive Order 13233, which gives ex-presidents nearly unlimited discretionary authority to prohibit release of their papers, and the papers of a predecessor, even when the predecessor has

authorized his papers' release. This misuse of presidential power violates the public's right to information. We:

CONDEMN Executive Order 13233, because it radically encroaches on the public's access to documents produced in the public interest, at public expense, by officials elected by the public.

CALL ON Congress to approve the House-approved bill to undo this assault on openness and to override any potential presidential veto and, until Executive Order 13233 is inoperative, to deny all funding for the National Archives for use in the planning, management or transfer of U.S. government documents to the proposed Bush Presidential Library at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas.

4. Promoting Equal Rights

Democrats Abroad affirms the U.S. Constitution's guarantee of equal protection under the law and abhors discrimination based on race, ethnic or national origin, gender, religion, age, disability, gender identity or sexual orientation. Racism, sexism, homophobia and other forms of discrimination continue to be a serious problem in the United States, and where such discrimination exists in laws it must be addressed forcefully and decisively. We:

CALL FOR renewed vigor in the enforcement of Federal and State laws prohibiting discrimination based on race, ethnicity, national origin, gender, religion, age, sexual orientation and disability.

CALL FOR powerful enforcement of laws protecting women and girls, such as those prohibiting forced child marriages, those providing effective HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment programs, and those protecting women's and girls' safety.

CALL FOR a strong and renewed commitment to the development and implementation of policies and programs that facilitate and ensure full participation of people with physical disabilities into society, including all levels of education and the workplace.

CALL FOR passage of the Matthew Shepard Act, which expands federal hate crimes laws to include violence based on sexual orientation, gender identity, gender, and disability.

CALL FOR removing all restrictions and sanctions to openly gay and lesbian people serving in the U.S. military and eliminating the "don't ask, don't tell" policy that undermines the U.S. military by dismissing qualified service members on the basis of sexual orientation.

CALL FOR passage of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA), which would prohibit discrimination against employees on the basis of sexual orientation.

CALL FOR revocation of the Constitutional amendments passed by 26 states that ban same-sex legal unions in violation of the U.S. Constitution's guarantee of equal protection.

CALL FOR the revocation of the Defense of Marriage Act of 1996, which bars same-sex couples from receiving any of the federal protections afforded married couples, including Social Security, Medicare, family leave, healthcare, disability, immigration and military service.

FAVOR the legal recognition in all 50 states of civil unions that extend state-based marriage rights and responsibilities, such as inheritance and tax benefits, to any two consenting adults in a committed relationship, whether gay, lesbian or heterosexual.

CONDEMN efforts to amend the Constitution to deny any state the authority to grant legal rights to same-sex couples and, in particular, strongly oppose the Federal Marriage Amendment, which seeks to amend the Constitution to legally define marriage as a "union between a man and a woman."

OPPOSE the use of Constitutional Amendments to remove civil rights rather than affirm them, as the framers of our Constitution intended in the Bill of Rights

APPLAUD the United Nations for enacting rules to grant UN staffers benefits for their gay or lesbian partners when their home country recognizes same-sex marriages or domestic partnerships.

FAVOR lifting the U.S. travel ban on HIV+ visitors and immigrants, an outdated and discriminatory act of Congress, which not only stigmatizes individuals but also prevents the U.S. from assuming international leadership on HIV/AIDS.

5. Children and Family Rights

Democrats Abroad affirms all children's right to legal protection that guarantees their health, welfare, education and safety and believes that America has a moral obligation to support these rights internationally as well as at home. We:

CALL FOR the passage of laws to ensure that no child falls below the poverty line, and to make the American workplace truly family-friendly. No family should ever have to choose between work and family emergencies.

FAVOR the passage of federal legislation guaranteeing paid maternity and paternity leave for all parents, and legislation similar to the Family and Medical Leave Act guaranteeing leave for parents, spouses, siblings, caregiver children, or committed partners in case of family emergencies.

FAVOR the immediate ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which obliges its signatory states to ensure adequate protection of children within their borders and recognizes the principles of the child's best interest, of equality before the law, of the rights and responsibilities of parents, of the child's right to be protected from economic exploitation and from work likely to be hazardous or to interfere with a child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development, and of subsidiary state assistance to families.

FAVOR the full implementation of International Labor Organization Conventions on Children's Rights, particularly the ILO Convention No. 138 related to minimum working age and ILO Convention No. 182 related to eliminating the worst forms of child labor.

FAVOR, when a child must work from economic necessity anywhere in the world, the enactment and enforcement of effective measures to ensure safe working conditions, healthcare and compulsory quality education.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Democrats must lead our nation in preserving the Earth - our only home. Actions taken in one part of the planet affect each and every other part of our global ecosystem. Therefore Democrats demand spirited international cooperation from our government to achieve mission critical goals of environmental sustainable development. We do this for our children and our children's children. The economy and the environment can be made to work together in harmony, each strengthening the other. This environmental crisis is an opportunity for America's mythic and grand 'can do' spirit to take hold, to innovate, and to lead by inspiration. We have great moral responsibility, and the world is waiting for us to return to our place on the global stage. We:

FAVOR a strong EPA that vigorously enforces the environmental laws of the United States of America.

FAVOR progressive "smart growth" policies that stimulate economic development, protect the environment and improve quality of life.

FAVOR the US government energetically commit the creative, scientific and capital resources to seek solutions to US environmental sustainability, and lead multilaterally to create positive actions in response to this looming crisis.

1. Climate Change

Democrats Abroad recognize the overwhelming scientific data that indicates human activity, particularly in the industrialized world, has contributed to dangerous levels of global warming. We:

DEPLORE the Bush Administration's outright renunciation of the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change in its entirety and its unilateral and irresponsible lack of response to or planning for global warming and climate change, despite the fact that the United States is the world's leading contributor to greenhouse gas emissions.

FAVOR working multilaterally with other nations by affirming our commitment to the Bali Action Plan, and work in a leadership capacity with the international community to champion a vigorous consensus document resulting from the 2009 UN Climate Conference in Copenhagen (The Copenhagen Protocol).

FAVOR that the U.S. Federal Trade Commission update the "Green Guide" and establish regulatory mechanisms for carbon offset marketing, credits, standardization, certifications and monitoring, and work multilaterally on the Clean Power Act mandating drastic reductions in carbon emissions from power plants.

FAVOR America's Climate Security Act of 2007 as a critical step for America to address climate change.

2. Energy Security & Reduced Dependence on Oil

Our tremendous energy needs, and our dependence on oil and gas have resulted in difficult, and worsening economic, political, and environmental consequences. We:

FAVOR Congressional action to close the "sports utility vehicle loophole" by classifying light trucks as ordinary cars, in order to subject these vehicles to the fuel economy standards that would save millions of barrels of oil a day.

FAVOR supporting national energy policies that provide major funding and sound fiscal incentives for clean energy research and development, including new materials, solar power, wind power, hydrogen, fuel cells, batteries and other electricity

storage devices, and carbon dioxide capture and sequestration. The development of clean energy technologies will also increase U.S. industrial and economic competitiveness and create new employment opportunities for Americans.

FAVOR the Renewable Portfolio Standard, requiring electric utilities to generate 10% to 20% of energy from renewable sources.

DEPLORE the deforestation of the Amazon rainforest for biofuel production.

FAVOR more compelling financial incentives to industry, as well as the general public, to invest and apply greater energy efficiency techniques and products. These would include green building products and designs for homes and commercial and public buildings and the retrofit of existing buildings with more energy-efficient equipment.

FAVOR implementing decoupling policies to use energy more wisely and modernizing and upgrading the electric power grid across America to reduce energy loss.

FAVOR offering Americans improved and diversified transportation choices by investing in infrastructure such as light rail systems, cleaner buses, national passenger rail (Amtrak), high-speed trains and other public transportation options.

FAVOR policies that coordinate the construction of walkable communities and public transportation hubs that offer incentives for those who build and buy homes located near public transit.

FAVOR federal support for research on alternative fuel impact, especially biofuels, on the environment and on the food chain and food prices.

APPLAUD the Kingdom of Denmark for committing to the target of generating 50% of energy supply from wind power by 2030 and support following this example for renewable energy generation.

3. Public Lands

America's National Parks, Forests, Grasslands, and Wildlife Refuges are national treasures that protect wildlife, are wondrous and integral parts of a healthy ecosystem, and pass our natural heritage to future generations. We:

DEPLORE the Bush administration's rollback of rules and regulations to protect more than fifty million acres of publicly owned National Forests, National Wildlife Refuges and National Parks. This unprotected acreage has been used for the private benefit of big timber and energy corporations.

FAVOR a moratorium on further releases of public lands. This includes the Florida Everglades, the Alaska Wilderness areas, and the Rocky Mountain west, to private business interests.

FAVOR a full review by the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior, the EPA and other interested agencies to find an objective, healthier balance between competing national environmental and economic interests.

FAVOR the preservation of our untouched forests from logging and development, including the Tongass National Forest in Alaska.

OPPOSE drilling for oil and gas in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and off the coasts of Florida and California.

4. Clean Air, Water and Land

To protect and improve the health of the American people and preserve future Americans' quality of life, we:

DEPLORE the Bush Administration's attempts to relax Clean Air Act pollution rules that require old, polluting plants to upgrade their facilities' pollution controls before they can further expand.

FAVOR the strengthening of the Clean Water Act in order to address today's diverse water quality problems.

FAVOR the Montreal Protocol worldwide timetable to phase out manufactured chemicals that destroy the ozone layer, and the enforcement that requires polluters to pay for restoring the environment they degrade.

FAVOR revitalizing and full funding of the Superfund Hazardous and Toxic Waste Cleanup Program.

FAVOR Agenda 21, the Global Environmental Program for the Next Century, adopted at the UN Summit in Rio de Janeiro and the principles of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg.

FAVOR a review of all domestic policies to insure that there is no longer discrimination against those at lower socioeconomic levels who are most vulnerable to landfills, and other environmental hazards, being placed in their minority and low-income communities.

5. Agriculture

FAVOR significant restrictions on the use of growth and other hormones, antibiotics, and artificial food additives that introduce potentially harmful biochemical agents into the food supply.

FAVOR policies that will sustain long-term soil health, protect biodiversity of seed stocks, and curtail the use of toxic substances and genetically engineered biological products.

FAVOR policies that encourage and support organic farming practices.

DEPLORE federal policies that divert food production into biofuel production and which may cause adverse global economic and environmental conditions.

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