

Report of the Democratic Party of Virginia Resolutions Committee Fall 2001

Introduction

The Democratic Party of Virginia is united in its dedication to electing to public office leaders of character, integrity, ability and vision. Through our party and these leaders, we work to protect our constitutionally established rights and freedoms that provide us with opportunities to improve our lives. We work to organize all of our citizens through a democratic government to achieve together those beneficial ends that we cannot achieve individually. We believe, as did our party's founder, Thomas Jefferson, "That government is the strongest of which every man feels a part."

We are a Party of values and ideals. We believe in building strong families and communities. We believe in the liberty of the individual. We believe in the separation of church and state. We believe in a strong national defense. We believe that we should work together through a democratic government to preserve our liberties, ensure public safety and health, and provide everyone with the best possible educational opportunities. We work to make our environment clean and safe because clean air and water are essential to the health of all Virginians and so business and commerce will prosper and create good jobs.

We are the Party of inclusion. The Democratic Party welcomes persons from all walks of life, of all ages, races, religions, and sexual orientation. This is a nation of immigrants and descendants of immigrants who have enriched our society and have made significant contributions to our culture and character. We welcome our new immigrants and the ethnic diversity that they bring to our party and our country. The Democratic Party honors people with disabilities and supports their goals of equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living and economic self-sufficiency.

To realize our ideals of liberty, justice and equality for all, we affirm our support for equal rights for women, including the right to reproductive choice free from government interference. We respect the right of privacy and believe that the intimate details of adult lives and relationships should not be the subject of government regulation. We affirm our historic commitment to civil rights and honor those persons who made the dream a reality. The Democratic Party has always been the party of Virginia's vision – the trustees of a better future for all.

This year, we commend our candidates Mark Warner, Tim Kaine and Donald McEachin for offering the Commonwealth the strong leadership its citizens deserve. Our candidates offer a path of innovation, cooperation and accountability that will return fiscal integrity to Virginia government while increasing economic opportunity for all Virginians and protecting our rights and values.

Improving and Safeguarding Education

We recognize that in today's society, education is the key to opportunity. The public education system is one of Virginia's most valuable assets, preparing our children to become responsible adults and citizens, and equipping them with the knowledge and skills to compete in tomorrow's job market. We believe that schools should be provided with the resources and assistance to rise to the expectation of Virginia's citizens.

It is not only children who are in need of education, but adults as well. Virginia Democrats support job training and retraining programs that make available the skills adults need to compete for jobs in the New Economy. We encourage assistance for technology-oriented adult learning classes to help provide citizens access to the high-tech career market in Virginia. We believe in expanding affordable Internet access to every home and public library, computer center and school in Virginia in hopes of closing the digital divide. We support providing more opportunities for continuing education for adults because education is the fault line that separates those who will prosper from those who cannot.

Virginia's schoolteachers are underpaid and overworked. There is a shortage of qualified teachers and public schools increasingly face competition from the private sector in attracting and retaining them. We believe that teachers should be treated as professionals and compensated fairly. We support increasing teacher salaries to move towards and exceed the national average to recruit and retain the best teachers. Quality instruction is necessary to enable students to meet higher standards. We believe the Standards of Learning (SOLs) should continue to be refined, and that multiple indicators of performance evaluation should be utilized. -

No child should be forced to attend classes in a classroom with four wheels rather than four solid walls. Because the state has not fully met its obligation to K through 12 education, fiscally stressed local governments do not have the resources or the ability to generate the revenue necessary to meet all the education needs of our children. Virginia Democrats support and encourage efforts to provide more state funding for school construction and renovation. We support the return of all lottery profits to localities for use in public education and oppose school vouchers and other tax credit programs for parochial and private schools. We also support innovative approaches in education including promotion of public school choice and good use of education technology.

Virginia Democrats recognize that teaching good values, the responsibilities of citizenship, family life education, and a well-rounded curriculum, must be an essential part of education. We believe that fine arts and physical education in addition to academic studies should be taught in our schools. We celebrate diversity in education, knowing that exposure to different cultures enhances character and repels prejudices.

Finally, Virginia Democrats strongly support the institutions of higher education that have been under attack in recent administrations. The new Governor should take partisan politics out of the College and University Boards of Visitors and ensure that each Board member's first priority is the advancement of the institution. We support adequately funded and affordable higher education. We support a comprehensive state effort to advance Virginia's research institutions. We recognize that Virginia's students deserve the very best faculty in the classrooms and laboratories and we must ensure those professors are properly compensated.

Economic Opportunity and Security For Virginia's Families

In the old economy, most workers could count on one job for life. They knew that hard work was rewarded with raises and steady jobs; they were confident the company would take care of them, their families, their health, and their retirement. Success was tied to the success of their employer: sacrifice when times were tough and a share in the wealth when times were good. In the new economy, the rules have changed. We need to find new ways to help working families find economic security: better training to help workers learn skills to get new and better jobs, and the security of good health care and safe pensions so they can take care of themselves and their families.

The Democratic Party of Virginia stands with the working men and women of Virginia, including those who have dedicated themselves to public service at all levels of government. We are convinced that the best way to help people lift themselves and their families out of poverty is to pay them a living wage. We also support the right of workers to form bargaining units and believe in the principle of equal pay for equal work. Agriculture remains a key component of our state's economy, and we will continue to be strong advocates for farmers and their families. We also encourage programs for diversification of crops to ensure the continued viability of family farms.

We support efforts to build and retain a qualified workforce through increased training opportunities, a commitment to career and technical education, a strong community college system, and a true system of lifelong learning. We encourage providing more quality training opportunities for people with disabilities, so they can learn the skills they need to live independent, productive lives. We strongly advocate continuing the progress made in moving people from welfare to work by strengthening child support enforcement, ensuring the availability of quality childcare, and expanding health care coverage. Further, we recognize that true self-sufficiency will only be realized if training and educational opportunities are provided.

We recognize the need to develop a statewide strategic economic plan and encourage regional economic cooperation. Moreover, we support targeted investment efforts to promote economic development projects in Virginia's inner cities and its rural areas. We also support efforts to strengthen Virginia's economy by attracting new business to the Commonwealth and promoting tourism to Virginia's natural attractions, historic sites, museums and cultural attractions.

The Democratic Party of Virginia also stands with those who have lost jobs through no fault of their own. For example, in the Martinsville/Henry County area, where employees have found themselves out of work due to the factory closures and layoffs, we supported efforts to provide higher unemployment benefits and help with health insurance that were opposed by Governor Gilmore. In the future, we support the establishment of an Economic Crisis Strike Force to assist communities facing such crises.

Returning Sound Fiscal Management to State Government

Virginia must never repeat this year's budget fiasco. Democrats support sound budgetary management, fiscal responsibility, a balanced state budget and the maintenance of Virginia's triple A bond rating. We recognize that Virginia has made a commitment to eliminating the burden of the car tax and we support the phase out of the tax, pursuant to a fiscally reasonable schedule. Virginians have a right to expect efficient, effective administration of state government operations. The inability of government agencies to implement programs on time and within budget must end. Virginia Democrats support the institution of performance audits to ensure effective implementation of state programs and services. We also support broader implementation of "e-government" which will encourage the best uses of technology to make government run more efficiently and allow citizens and businesses more cost-effective access to government information and services.

Protecting Virginia's Environment

All Virginians should be able to enjoy Virginia's natural heritage – and Virginians should be assured that the air they breathe is pure, the water they drink is clean, and the land they live on is safe from hazard. We understand that we have a sacred obligation to protect the earth and preserve our quality of life for our children and our children's children. We believe it is time that Virginia once again had a governor who

understood that obligation and will restore the protection of Virginia's natural resources as a priority. We also support adequate staffing of State environmental agencies and the selection of experienced environmental professionals who will fairly and uniformly enforce the State's environmental laws.

We recognize the importance of efforts to develop a comprehensive statewide water strategy to ensure access to affordable clean drinking water for all Virginians, restore the quality of the waters in the Commonwealth with meaningful tributary strategies, reduce of nutrients entering our waters in excessive amounts from non-point sources or specific facilities, and protect our non-tidal wetlands. We support the vigorous pursuit of the goals of the 2000 Chesapeake Bay Agreement and its promise of improvement in this significant natural resource.

The Old Dominion is rightfully renowned for its scenic beauty, which is, along with its history, one of the primary attractions for the state's booming tourist industry. Virginia's reputation as a place of natural splendor is important not only to the state's economic future but to the quality of life of its citizens. Preservation of air quality and open space are more important than ever to maintaining this beauty for future generations and should receive additional support from both the public and private sectors. We support significant and reliable funding for open space and land conservation initiatives. We also support innovative programs that encourage farmland to remain in agricultural use. Finally, we support the efforts of local communities to encourage appropriate development by providing necessary information, technical assistance and funding and targeting of state economic efforts to projects in inner cities and rural areas to limit suburban sprawl.

Virginia currently is second in the nation in importing out-of-state trash. This reputation as one of the primary waste dumping sites in the United States is simply incompatible with Virginia's image as a place of natural beauty. Virginia Democrats support efforts to obtain federal authority to limit importation of garbage and other innovative and effective ways to address this issue.

The Democratic Party of Virginia believes that we can protect the environment *and* expand the economy. We support the reauthorization, funding and enforcement of federal and state environmental laws and programs that preserve and strengthen our commitment to protecting Virginia's natural resources. We challenge businesses and communities to take more initiative in protecting the environment and we want to make it easier for them to do so. We encourage all families and businesses to continue to recycle – and conserve energy – to help sustain our scarce resources and expect the government to assist in these efforts. Environmental protection should include more education on compliance for small and medium sized business, more streamlined permitting processes, and tough but fair enforcement for those who put human health and safety at risk.

Affordable, High Quality Health Care for All

The Democratic Party of Virginia is committed to ensuring that all Virginians have access to affordable, high-quality health care. From prenatal care to long-term care, from quality mental health services to the early detection of disease, Virginians of all ages are affected by our system of health care. We know that prevention is more cost-effective than emergency treatment, that Virginians need a voice in their health care decisions, that hard-working, lower income citizens need assistance with the costs of health care, and that the elderly and persons with disabilities of all ages should be able to live as independently as possible. We are committed to making these goals a reality.

Virginia Democrats believe that individuals should be empowered to make their own health care decisions, in consultation with medical professionals. The bottom line in health care should be the well-

being of patients, not the profits of Health Maintenance Organizations (HMOs). Virginia Democrats continue to support legislative efforts to hold HMO's liable for their treatment decisions.

Virginia Democrats recognize that access to prescription medication is critical to adequate health care and the rapidly increasing price of prescription drugs places a heavy burden on older Virginians, particularly those on fixed incomes. Virginia Democrats re-emphasize their support for efforts to provide prescription assistance to senior citizens.

Virginia Democrats also believe that we must honor our values and continue to protect and provide for the economic security of our parents, grandparents and family members. All Virginians deserve fair treatment so that they can maintain an adequate standard of living upon retirement. We therefore support efforts to fully fund the Social Security Trust Fund as well as modernize and continue Medicare as a comprehensive benefit program.

Reforming the Electoral Process

As Virginia Democrats, we have a responsibility to make our democracy work better. It is up to us to ensure that the process by which we nominate candidates is as open, accessible, and inclusive as possible. To this end, Virginia Democrats support a statewide state-administered primary method of nominating future statewide candidates. Primaries afford the maximum opportunity for participation by voters and strengthen our candidates by providing them with valuable campaign experience.

Although voting is a fundamental right of American citizenship and the Motor Voter law was intended to increase exercise of that right, there have been numerous problems in the implementation of the law. We support effective implementation of the law including adequate funding and training, forwarding of registration forms to local registrars and notices to voters whose applications have been denied. We also support efforts to make it easier for citizens to vote, including easing of restrictions on absentee ballots.

Virginia also must ensure that its voting systems and processes are fair and all votes are counted. We support a thorough review of Virginia voting procedures and equipment to ensure that votes are counted and, if necessary, recount processes are fair.

Democrats have an obligation to restore the public's lost faith in our political system. Virginia Democrats support prompt dissemination by the State Board of Elections and local Electoral Boards of campaign finance disclosure statements by electronic means. We also recommend appointment of a commission to develop specific proposals for reforming Virginia's campaign finance system.

Finally, the current process of restoring voting rights to offenders who have paid their debt to society is unnecessarily burdensome. We support streamlining of the process of restoring voting rights.

Keeping Citizens and Communities Safe and Secure

The maintenance of public safety is of paramount importance in a civilized society. Crime prevention is critical and Virginians support a commitment to education and economic opportunity as the best way to fight crime. We recognize, however, the need to provide our law enforcement officers with adequate training, equipment, resources, safety and compensation to fight crime. Individuals convicted of violent crimes must be separated from the rest of society.

Virginia Democrats also recognize that the U.S. Constitution guarantees equal treatment under the law and prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity or national origin in the exercise of police powers. The fair administration of justice is a primary bulwark of the freedoms that Virginians hold dear, and the public must be confident in this fact at every stage of the criminal justice process. Criminal

profiling on the basis of ethnicity, race or religion is abhorrent to our system of justice and such practices must cease.

Virginia Democrats support efforts for common-sense firearms safety legislation, including Virginia's one-gun-per-month law and the federal Brady Law, which have prevented thousands of criminals from obtaining guns. We endorse efforts to use technological advances, such as trigger locks, which minimize children's access to firearms. We also support the ability of localities to enact sensible and reasonable weapons regulations governing public facilities to ensure the safety of their own citizens. Virginia Democrats support the Constitution, including the Second Amendment, and recognize that Virginians have a state constitutional right to hunt and fish.

Crimes against individuals because of their race, religion, color, national origin, gender or sexual orientation are deplorable, and we support the adoption of protections against these types of hate crimes.

Transportation and Growth

The purpose of transportation is to move people and goods safely and efficiently. A balanced, comprehensive multi-modal transportation system is vital to the future well-being of the Commonwealth and essential to economic development. In addition, inadequate transportation infrastructure constitutes an important quality of life issue for thousands of Virginia citizens who are forced to spend hours stuck in their vehicles in traffic jams, time and resources that would be better spent elsewhere.

Recent administrations have failed to address Virginia's growing transportation needs. To provide a good transportation network to support our growing economy and to improve the quality of life for Virginians besieged by traffic and congestion, it is time for Virginia to address this serious issue that confronts the Commonwealth. More needs to be done to meet the state's current and future transportation needs, including providing long range planning and a stable, long-term, significant stream of revenue dedicated to transportation projects.

Along with building roads, Virginia needs to increase investment in alternative modes of transportation such as rail and public transportation, telecommuting, car and vanpooling, and other forms of ridesharing, and encourage commuter use of these alternatives. All have an important role to play in reducing congestion and increasing mobility.

Managing growth is another way to maximize the state's investment in transportation infrastructure. By placing new development near existing or planned transportation facilities, congestion can be minimized, sprawl diminished, and open space preserved. A comprehensive growth strategy should be an integral part of local land use planning policies and practices. Localities should have the necessary authority to implement land use policies that are appropriate to their communities.

Approved by Standing Committee on Resolutions, August 18, 2001