

The Platform of Democrats Abroad

PREAMBLE

WE ARE AMERICANS who live abroad, just across the border in Canada or Mexico, or in Europe, Latin America, Africa, Asia, Australia and the Pacific. We are uncounted, though we are estimated to be at least six million strong. We are students and teachers and business people. We are missionaries, journalists, retirees, members of the Foreign Service, U.S. Government personnel, and the spouses of foreign nationals. We are the servicemen and women who stand ready around the world in defense of world peace, from the Balkans to Korea.

No matter where we live, we are just as committed to helping America fulfill its destiny in the New Millennium as are Americans at home. The issues that matter to Americans living in Paris, Texas, are the same as those that matter to Americans living in Paris, France. Americans overseas and Americans at home are one nation, devoted to the common good, seeking to make our country healthier, stronger, and more vibrant, but also seeking a world of friendship and peace, a world more equitable.

Since 1993 we have watched with pride as the Democratic leadership, in the White House and in Congress, has turned America around. The economy has bounced back from recession. The Federal budget is in balance for the first time in three decades; Social Security and Medicare are viable for future generations to enjoy. We have drawn on America's remarkable diversity, vastly enhancing the status of women and minorities, to bring hope and opportunity to communities from coast to coast. Nevertheless, we know full well the serious challenges still facing our country.

America is the acknowledged leader in world affairs, called upon in every crisis. Yet Democrats Abroad are well aware that Americans cannot go it alone. We believe in the role of international organizations and regard it as imperative that the United States honor its obligations to them. We see how other countries cope with their domestic problems, sometimes with astonishingly good results.

Democrats Abroad are unofficial ambassadors to the world. We represent an America whose ideals and values have inspired mankind since 1776. We hope that we do not bring the arrogance that often goes with power. Instead, we bring a fresh perspective to the debate on policy, both foreign and domestic. We stand united with the Democratic Party in its goal to insure that all Americans, no matter where they live, have the opportunity to achieve their fullest potential.

We will carry our message to the Party in Los Angeles and to the Nation in the 2000 election.

SUPPORTING AMERICANS LIVING OVERSEAS

ALTHOUGH WE LIVE ABROAD, the millions of overseas Americans continue to play an important role in the affairs of our home country, from filing income tax returns in April to voting in November. Because of our unique position, many federal policies affect us differently than they affect Americans at home. Democrats Abroad support policies from Washington that make it possible for Americans overseas to help move our country forward.

The Census

Living in other parts of the world makes Americans abroad no less American. We are Americans in every sense of the word, and yet when it comes to the decennial census, we are all but ignored. The U.S. Census Bureau counts aliens, convicted felons and persons committed to mental institutions, who do not have the right to vote—and yet Americans living abroad, who do have the right to vote, are not counted.

We believe that including Americans overseas in the census must be a top priority for the Department of Commerce. To that end, we strongly support efforts like the Rockefeller-Maloney bill which provide for a special census of Americans living permanently or temporarily abroad in 2003.

Embassies and Consulates

Democrats Abroad strongly support America's ongoing engagement in the world, promoting American ideals, safeguarding America's place in the international community and respecting the obligations inherent to our position as world leader. U.S. embassies are not only key resource centers for Americans overseas, but in some countries and in some cases, they are literally life lines.

We support increased funding levels for diplomatic and consular facilities and cultural programs, above and beyond funds spent for security, to insure effective diplomatic services around the world. We strongly oppose any further consulate closures.

Taxes

Democrats Abroad believe that it would be in the best longterm economic interests of the U.S. to conform to prevailing international tax procedures which recognize the principle of residency rather than citizenship in the definition of taxable income. The United States is unique in the world in that it taxes its citizens for money earned abroad, even if that money is not repatriated to the U.S. Democrats Abroad believe that American citizens working abroad should pay U.S. taxes only on that portion of their income that either comes from U.S. sources or is brought to the U.S. We continue to support Section 911 of the Internal Revenue Code, which provides for an earned income exclusion for American citizens paying tax to a foreign government.

Social Security

Democrats Abroad believe that, for the large and continually growing number of American citizens living overseas who are retired and living on fixed incomes, there should be no undue or unfair economic hardship placed on them as currently exists in the Social Security system. Many Americans living overseas, because they worked in positions which did not pay into Social Security, have found themselves penalized by the Windfall Elimination Provision and the Government Pension Offset.

We support proposals developed by Democrats Abroad to reduce the impact of the WEP and GPO. We support totalization agreements that allow retired American citizens living abroad on fixed incomes the option of crediting the U.S. Social Security system any payments that they have been required to make into the social welfare programs of their countries of residence. Social Security payments should certainly not be taxable in the U.S. and in the country of residence.

Health Care

Because Medicare benefits are not available abroad, many seniors living overseas lack access to adequate healthcare. We believe that all

Social Security, Medicare and CHAMPUS laws and regulations currently in place should be reviewed by the U.S. government with the aim of insuring provision of local health services to the maximum extent practicable for retired American citizens living abroad.

Labor laws

We support changes in labor laws to require every U.S. government agency abroad and every U.S. government contractor abroad to obey all federal racial and other discrimination laws when employing U.S. citizens or U.S. legal resident (Green Card) holders.

We believe that the U.S. government should, by bilateral treaties or other multinational means, work to assure that the spouse of any U.S. citizen who has received a valid foreign work permit should also receive a valid work permit.

People with Disabilities

We believe that the U.S. Government should implement, to the extent practicable, in its employment policy overseas, all provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act, including hiring and promoting of employees and making U.S. Government facilities overseas barrier-free to persons with disabilities.

THE UNITED STATES AND THE WORLD

INTERNATIONAL POLICY is too important to be entrusted to a president inexperienced in foreign affairs, nor should it continue to be frustrated by an isolationist Senate leadership. We regard it as essential that Al Gore be elected President and that the U.S. Senate be controlled by the Democratic Party so that the United States can continue working for peace and democracy throughout the world.

Nuclear Test Ban Treaty

Democrats Abroad favor ratification of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, which was supported by virtually every Democratic Senator and opposed by every Republican one. Ratification of the CTBT should be part of a program to reduce the number of nuclear weapons to the minimum required for deterrence and eventually to the total worldwide elimination of nuclear weapons.

We favor Nuclear Non-Proliferation and oppose Congressional proposals to allow low-level testing by the U.S. Army, as well as the creation of systems that would violate U.S. obligations under the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. We support policies and actions that will lead to global stability and nuclear, chemical and biological weapons disarmament.

Debt Relief

In order to enhance the effectiveness of aid funding to developing countries and improve their prospects for GNP growth, Democrats Abroad support immediate debt relief for the world's poorest countries.

Foreign Aid

As Americans who live and work abroad, we recognize the important role played by U.S. foreign aid through the U.S. Agency for International Development, the World Bank and regional development banks, and by many multilateral organizations, in addressing the problems of poverty, ill-health, low educational levels and poor governance systems existing in many developing countries. We support continued assistance to the developing world, with emphasis on (a) health and family planning services; (b) income generation programs; (c) support for education; and (d) systems of governance which promote democracy.

Democrats Abroad emphatically reject the repeated attempts of Congressional Republicans to tie foreign aid funding to unrelated anti-abortion clauses. Such actions undermine U.S. credibility in foreign affairs and divert attention from the important foreign aid goals of developing stable allies and trading partners around the globe.

International Affairs Budget

The United States spends a very small percentage of its gross national product on foreign activities such as embassies, government contractors, like the Agency for International Development, and related non-governmental organizations. Democrats Abroad believe that the U.S. should increase the amount of money it commits to overseas activities, with two specific goals in mind: security and meaningful overseas development.

International Bodies

In addition to unilateral diplomacy, the U.S. has a critical role to play in the United Nations and its specialized agencies. We favor enhanc-

ing the role of the U.S. in the United Nations and related agencies, including restoring U.S. membership in UNESCO. We support honoring all such fiscal obligations. In addition, we favor U.S. participation in peacekeeping operations under UN auspices.

Trade Sanctions

Democrats Abroad support efforts to bring about a normalization of relations with Cuba.

Democrats Abroad oppose the third-country, extraterritorial application of economic sanctions.

Israel

Democrats Abroad continue to support economic and military aid to Israel, as in the past, guaranteeing that Israel maintains a qualitative military edge over its neighbors in order to maintain stability in the Middle East and provide Israel with the necessary means of self-defense. We believe that this commitment is an independent commitment made by the United States to its firm ally, the State of Israel, and that this commitment is not linked to the ongoing peace process between Israel and her neighbors.

Africa

Democrats Abroad believe the United States must pay special attention to the problems of Africa, through public and private initiatives, particularly in relation to the amelioration of famine and the AIDS epidemic. We call for U.S. leadership in negotiating peaceful and democratic solutions to the problems of Africa.

International Trade and Commerce

We believe the U.S. should continue its dual international role, on the one hand expanding free trade under such auspices as those of NAFTA and WTO, on the other hand promoting democracy in fledgling nation-states and human rights in non-democratic regimes. The 270 trade agreements signed in the last seven years testify to the success of this policy.

We favor the labeling of imports, to the fullest extent possible, with the country of origin and place of assembly. We oppose the export of American goods that are illegal for sale in the U.S.

International Tourism

Democrats Abroad believe that international tourism to the United States is a major benefit to the country, as it both boosts our economy and helps to foster an understanding of America among people from around the world. We favor the encouragement of tourism by foreign nationals within the U.S., and the study of such measures as the creation of a federal umbrella organization for tourism.

Child Labor

Democrats Abroad believe the United States must take a leading role in ending the scourge of child labor throughout the world. We believe this can be accomplished without inflicting hardship and worsening poverty where the child is the main bread winner. We support programs which strive to end the cycle of poverty by providing safe working conditions, health care and compulsory education.

Military Policy

The end of the Cold War does not mean the end of threats to the security of the United States and its allies. Democrats Abroad believe that the U.S. needs a strong defense policy, but that top priority should be given to improving the pay, training, and living conditions of American military and State Department personnel, especially those posted overseas.

Democrats Abroad believe the United States should review its policy on arms sales and cease selling arms to dictatorial regimes which use those arms to violate the human rights of its citizens, as determined in the annual State Department report to Congress.

Armed Forces Radio

The Armed Forces Network (AFN) of the Armed Forces Radio and Television Service (AFRTS) is a tax-funded agency of the U. S. Department of Defense. For several years, however, AFN has broadcast an overwhelming number of partisan, ultraconservative radio programs, such as Rush Limbaugh, James Dobson, Paul Harvey, and "news" items with commentary from the extreme right-wing USA Radio Network, with no programs supporting the Democratic Party as balance. AFN has consistently either ignored complaints from concerned citizens, including the officers and members of Democrats Abroad, or responded that news

programs from such sources as National Public Radio provide partisan balance to their programming. The programming is particularly disturbing in that its partisan attacks on the Commander-in-Chief are heard by U. S. Armed Forces throughout the world.

Democrats Abroad do not support censoring the extreme right-wing, partisan propaganda presented by AFN. But we strongly believe that the Democratic Party and its supporters must be given fair and equal time in tax-supported airwaves. We support an investigation by the Departments of Defense and Justice and/or remedial action.

Land Mines

Recognizing that land mines are not as effective in combat as once believed, and that they injure more civilian targets than military, Democrats Abroad support U.S. ratification of international treaties that limit or ban the manufacture, sale and deployment of anti-personnel mines. We support the destroying of stocks of land mines, and bringing sanctions against those nations still using them.

INSURING OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL AMERICANS

WHEN DEMOCRATS WON the White House in 1992, the annual deficit was \$290 billion, millions were jobless, and the optimism that characterizes Americans was nowhere to be found. Eight years later, the annual budget surplus is nearly \$80 billion, the largest in history; more than 18 million new jobs have been created, over 90 percent of which are in the private sector; real wages have risen by 6.1 percent; homeownership is the highest in history; and America's economy once again is the envy of the world.

As Democrats, our economic goals are twofold: To prepare our nation for the new, consistently changing, technology-based economy by investing in our people; and to do it without big government solutions or risky tax cut schemes that will punch a hole in the budget and return the U.S. to the days of spiraling deficits.

Federal budget

In 1993, Democrats enacted the largest deficit reduction plan in U.S. history—without a single Republican vote. Now, the federal budget is in surplus for the first time in 30 years, and it was done without slashing Medicare, without draining money from education and healthcare, and without raising income taxes on the middle class. It was done without endangering the U.S. Constitution with a fiscally risky Balanced Budget Amendment.

Democrats Abroad support continued fiscal responsibility that insures our children will not be saddled with our debts, and we continue to oppose trickle-down policies that have already proven to be a financial failure. We support using a share of the budget surplus to pay down the national debt.

Minimum Wage

In 1996, Democrats pushed through a much-needed increase in the minimum wage, to \$5.15 per hour, increasing wages for ten million workers. But the minimum wage has still not kept up with inflation over the last two decades. Democrats Abroad support raising the minimum wage from \$5.15 to \$6.15, with 50-cent increases over the next two years.

Earned Income Tax Credit

Thanks to Democrats, 15 million working families receive additional tax relief through the Earned Income Tax Credit. This credit rewards work and helps to insure that all Americans who work will have help making ends meet. Democrats Abroad support continued expansion of the EITC and opposes attempts to deny the credit to working families in order to pay for tax credits for the wealthiest Americans.

The American Workforce

America's prosperity in the 1990s is a direct result of the strength of our work force. Democrats Abroad supports policies that support working men and women. We believe that the Occupational Safety and Health Administration must be supported in its efforts to protect worker safety.

Democrats Abroad strongly oppose efforts in Congress to deny workers their lawful right to advocate better working conditions. We oppose the hiring of permanent workers to replace lawful economic strikers. We oppose legislation that seeks to circumvent the collective bargaining process. We also continue to oppose Right-to-Work laws.

Corporate Responsibility

Corporations face unprecedented challenges of globalization, technological change and international competition. However, we believe that

corporations that are forced to restructure should make every effort to avoid redundancies. We fully support Democratic efforts to require good citizenship on the part of large American corporations who receive economic subsidies from all levels of government.

We support initiatives such as tax incentives to encourage companies to set up on-site child care facilities, as well as compensated health care coverage, flexible work schedules, job sharing and student internship and apprenticeship programs.

Urban Renewal

At the start of the 21st century, our great cities still remain the lifeblood of our economy and culture. Millions of tourists from around the world flock to our cities each year, bringing in revenue and taking with them a positive image of America. We must strive to make our cities safe, efficient places to live and work. Failure to invest in the infrastructure of our cities will make doing business in the U.S. more expensive and less attractive. We support programs which promote the creation of jobs and housing in economically deprived urban areas. We support Enterprise Zones and modernization of the public housing system.

Transportation

To combat increasing transportation congestion and pollution, we support the development of a national transportation strategy that will coordinate existing and proposed air, rail, and road projects. Public transportation should not be a luxury. Many low-income Americans are unable to find meaningful work simply because adequate public transportation is not available. Democrats Abroad support funding for improvements to public transportation systems on local, regional and national levels. We support development of high speed rail links where feasible, and aid to cities that strive to build them.

Agriculture

We oppose the continued use of price supports to aid agricultural industries, like the sugar industry, that degrade the environment and who use those subsidies to keep U.S. domestic prices artificially high.

HELPING FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

DEMOCRATS ABROAD continue to be concerned that provisions in the 1996 welfare reform bill are hurting the people they were intended to help. In particular we believe that a lack of funds for child care forces families to make a difficult choice between getting a job and caring for their children. We oppose any efforts to divert unused funds or to reduce the funding levels agreed in the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act. We continue to support equal benefits for legal immigrants.

We continue to support job training programs and vocational rehabilitation programs that help move people from welfare to work. In particular, we urge states to implement job training for the persistent welfare "hard-to-serve" cases, and substance abuse counseling for those who need it. We support tax Incentives to businesses who hire former welfare recipients. And we oppose efforts to deny a minimum wage to welfare recipients in welfare-to-work job training and apprenticeship programs.

Improving Child Support

Too many single parents are impoverished because of a lack of adequate child support. Democrats Abroad believe that the federal government must work with states to improve child support enforcement mechanisms, creating incentives for states to get tough on "deadbeat" parents. We believe that the Federal Case Registry and the National Directory of New Hires, which track deadbeat parents across state lines, should be fully supported and funded.

Expanding Child Care

Democrats Abroad support initiatives to improve child care for low-income working families by expanding the Child Care and Development Block Grant. We believe the quality of child care must be improved through scholarships and training for child care providers, resource referral for parents, monitoring and inspection of providers, and networks for family day care providers.

Supporting Family Leave

In 1993, Democrats passed, over Republican objections, the landmark Family and Medical Leave Act. Now we believe the act must be enhanced by providing employees with 24 hours of unpaid leave per year to participate in school activities directly related to the educational de-

velopment of their children, or to accompany their children or elderly relatives to routine medical and dental visits.

Supporting International Programs

Because we live in a world that is growing smaller and more interdependent every day, Democrats Abroad continue to support the Fulbright program as well as other cultural and educational exchange programs aimed at the improvement of international relations, mutual cultural understanding, and intellectual development. Democrats Abroad support the negotiation of treaties with both developed and undeveloped countries, especially with U.S. trading partners, which give young people special “working holiday” visa status, similar to agreements in force between Japan and the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Insuring High K-12 Standards

Democrats Abroad support continued funding of the Goals 2000 program, to enable all states to acquire the tools necessary to give their children an education appropriate for the demands of the 21st century.

Reducing Class Sizes

We are pleased that Democrats led the fight to fund 100,000 more teachers to help reduce class sizes in the lowest grades. We believe that states and local education authorities must now be given support in their effort to reduce class sizes in all grades.

Helping Teachers

The level of education our children receive depends on the quality of our teachers. Salaries and support for teachers throughout the country should reflect the responsibility we place on them. We continue to support efforts to improve teaching, including measures (a) to establish partnerships between teachers’ colleges and school districts; (b) to recruit new teachers of diverse backgrounds; and (c) to improve the standards for incoming teachers, making sure they are qualified in the subjects they teach.

Re-Building Schools

Today, too many children have to learn in overcrowded classrooms, in buildings with leaking roofs and broken windows. We are dismayed that the Republican-controlled Congress has not passed Democratic proposals to provide billions of dollars in school construction funds. We support the immediate passage of legislation to provide \$25 billion in bonds to build and renovate public schools, which would help school districts renovate or build approximately 6,000 schools across the country.

Promoting Literacy

We support programs that would produce universal adult literacy in the U.S. by the year 2004. Towards this aim, we support sufficient funding of the Head Start program, so that all children can participate. We support continued funding of programs such as America Reads, whose objective is to insure that every child has access to a qualified reading instructor. We also continue to support adult education programs, to insure that no American must go through life unable to write his or her name.

Strengthening Public Education

We believe that public schools are the foundation of our education system. We support efforts to give students a choice of public school, and to increase the number of public magnet and charter schools. But we continue to oppose Republican efforts to bankrupt the public school system through a program of school vouchers which would enable select and often sectarian private schools to siphon off the best students and refuse entry to students with physical or learning disabilities. We believe every child in America has the right to the best educational instruction and care society can provide.

We continue to oppose any Constitutional amendment to authorize prayer in public schools.

Making College Affordable

In the last four years Democrats have made access to a higher education a reality for more Americans, through HOPE scholarships, through expanded Pell Grants and Lifetime Learning Tax Credits. We support continued efforts to make financial aid available to more students, and we support programs like GEAR-UP which guarantee that children from disadvantaged communities will have access to a higher education if they stay in school.

Providing Life-Long Learning

Democrats Abroad believe that, in the new technology-based economy, learning cannot end after high school, or even after college. Today’s

work force must continually update its skills. We are pleased that Democrats helped push through the \$10,000 tax deduction for life-long learning in 1997. Democrats Abroad support further measures that assist continuing education programs and help adults continue their learning.

Bringing the Internet into the Classroom

To make sure that our children are not left out of the information revolution, Democrats Abroad believe that all schools should be wired to the Internet, that the e-rate program for providing low-cost Internet access for schools should remain in place, and that teachers should have adequate training in the latest technology.

Reforming Bilingual Education

The United States is a nation made up primarily of immigrants and the descendants of immigrants. People who immigrate to the U.S. have the fundamental right to celebrate and maintain their cultural ties to their countries of origin. At the same time, all children in the U.S. have the right to be taught English language skills as quickly as possible, so that they can succeed in school and prosper in the work force. Bilingual education programs should be reformed so that they are a true bridge to learning English language skills. We oppose anti-immigrant “English Only” legislation, but we believe that helping students transition into English as quickly as possible must be the top priority of bilingual education programs.

Ending Violence in Schools

Like Americans living at home, Americans abroad have been deeply troubled about the recent spate of violent incidents in American schools. From Jonesboro, Arkansas, to Littleton, Colorado, we have seen children and their teachers injured and killed in the one place where they should be safe: in a school.

Democrats Abroad believe Washington must stop the easy flow of guns into the hands of children. And we need to stop the conspiracy of silence that stops children from reporting classmates who threaten violence.

Democrats Abroad support full funding of the Safe and Drug Free Schools Act to make sure that local education authorities have the resources to stop violence on campuses. We support legislation to help schools educate children about the dangers of guns.

GUARANTEEING HEALTH CARE TO ALL AMERICANS

DEMOCRATS ABROAD BELIEVE that medical coverage is a right, not a privilege. America has the best health care in the world—if you can afford it. Sadly, too many Americans cannot. We believe it is simply unacceptable that nearly one in five Americans lacks health coverage.

Democrats Abroad believe health care reform must be returned to center stage. Every American, whether at home or abroad, regardless of job or pre-existing conditions, has the right to health care coverage, including preventive care.

We believe Congress missed an important opportunity to help millions of Americans receive access to health care by blocking the Patients’ Bill of Rights. We think doctors and patients—not insurance company bureaucrats—should make medical decisions. We believe in guaranteed access to needed specialists and to lifesaving drugs, an internal and external appeals process, and the right to be compensated when a health plan’s decision causes a patient harm or death. Democrats Abroad believe that passage of a Patients’ Bill of Rights must be a top priority after the 2000 election.

Preserving Medicare

We stand with Democrats who have resisted Republican efforts to cut Medicare by over \$300 billion. We believe Medicare should remain fully available to all seniors over the age of 65—without punitive increases in premiums—and we oppose efforts to force seniors into HMO-style arrangements against their will. We strongly support efforts to insure that prescription drugs are covered under Medicare plans. We support efforts to reserve a part of the budget surplus to preserve the Medicare Trust Fund.

Strengthening Long-Term Care

As the population ages, long term care will become a growing concern for more Americans. We believe a National Commission on Long-Term Care should be convened immediately after the 2000 election to explore ways to address this problem. In the meantime, we support tax credits for families to save for long-term care.

Promoting Medical Research

Democrats Abroad believe that funding for medical research, including that for heart disease, breast and prostate cancer and HIV/AIDS, should be increased. We do not believe that different diseases should have to “fight” one another for funding. Instead of shifting the pot of money around, we should make the pot larger.

SAVING SOCIAL SECURITY

DEMOCRATS ABROAD believe that all Americans who have worked hard their entire lives have the right to enjoy retirement in the dignity and security they have earned.

Democrats Abroad believe that the Social Security system is one of our Party’s greatest accomplishments, and one of the last century’s greatest achievements. We strongly oppose efforts to endanger the system through privatization, or by risking large amounts of Trust Fund assets in the volatile stock market.

We support Democratic efforts to direct nearly two-thirds of the projected budget surpluses over the next 15 years, totaling nearly \$2.8 trillion, into the Social Security Trust Fund, allowing the U.S. to extend the solvency of the Social Security Trust Fund until 2055.

PROTECTING OUR ENVIRONMENT

WE BELIEVE the United States must take a leading role in the world struggle to insure that our planet’s natural environment and its resources are preserved and protected for future generations.

We oppose efforts to turn the environment into a wedge issue by claiming that environmental protection invariably costs jobs. We support initiatives that help business prosper with environmentally friendly technologies, including tax credits to stimulate the adoption of energy-efficient technology in such areas as buildings, homes, industrial processes, vehicles, and power generation; and increasing tax deductions for providing employees with mass transit subsidies, similar to those for providing free parking.

We strongly support full funding for the Environmental Protection Agency. For our own and our children’s future, we support full funding of the programs of the Clean Air Act and the Clean Water Act, as well as the Safe Drinking Water Act.

We are committed to the worldwide timetable, established by the Montreal Protocol, to phase out manufactured chemicals that destroy the ozone layer. We support enforcement of these and other stringent regulations that require polluters to pay for cleaning up the environment they degrade. We also fully support Agenda 21, the global environmental program for the next century, adopted at the UN Summit in Rio de Janeiro.

We support the passage of Community Right-to-Know laws which require businesses to keep track of harmful toxins and pollutants they use and then release into the environment.

We support efforts to protect America’s greatest natural resource: its wild lands, from the canyons of Utah to the marshes of the Everglades. We believe Congress must enact sensible changes in grazing and timber policy that currently allow ranchers and loggers to use federal resources at far below the market value. We support higher fees for grazing permits on federal lands and better management to protect our ever vanishing wildlife.

FIGHTING CRIME

WE ARE PLEASED that under a Democratic administration, violent crime is at its lowest level since 1973. The murder rate is down more than 25 percent since 1993, its lowest point in 30 years. Thanks to Democrats, communities have thousands more police officers on the beat, protecting our communities. Yet there is much more to do.

We support strengthening all areas of crime prevention: expanding law enforcement and community policing; increasing drug control, prevention and rehabilitation programs; aggressively pursuing criminals; and protecting victims’ rights. We support the COPS program, which is helping put 100,000 more police on the street.

Punishment

While we believe in appropriate punishment for people who commit crime, we also believe the three-strike law has failed to decrease the level of violent crime and has only aggravated the dangerous prison

overcrowding problem. Therefore, we support funding those prevention programs that help stop crime before it happens. In particular, we support juvenile justice programs at the Department of Justice that help at-risk children. We support legislation to ensure that all children have a place to go, such as community centers, after school.

We oppose efforts to incarcerate juveniles with adults and believe that education and job training programs should work in coordination with juvenile justice programs to help young offenders turn their lives around. We also oppose mandatory minimum sentencing guidelines, which tie the hands of judges and force nonviolent offenders to take prison space from violent criminals.

Democrats Abroad believe that racial profiling, police brutality and prosecutorial misconduct constitute clear violations of fundamental rights, resulting in unjust convictions and imprisonment. Worse, the limitation of the right of appeal and habeas corpus unjustly compounds these wrongs. Therefore, we support effective legal and administrative measures to redress the wrongs done those convicted under such circumstances, including speedy new trials where appropriate.

Drug abuse

The U.S. incarcerates far more individuals per capita than any other country in the industrialized world. Many felons are convicted of dealing in small quantities of so-called “soft” drugs and sent to prison, sometimes for longer terms than those convicted of murder. Lengthy incarcerations sometimes turn many such nonviolent offenders into violent criminals. Democrats Abroad support studying ways to end the damaging cycle of petty crime leading to incarceration followed by greater and more sinister criminal activity. We believe that drug prevention and treatment programs, along with job training, should be given a higher priority in the fight against drugs.

Death penalty

Since the Supreme Court reinstated the death penalty in 1976, more than eighty death-row inmates have been freed, their convictions overturned by evidence of innocence. Many inmates on death row have had their Constitutional habeas corpus rights violated in the judicial process. Increasing evidence suggests a racial bias in the imposition of the death penalty. Democrats Abroad oppose the death penalty and support its immediate elimination.

Ending Gun Violence

Few issues have generated more concern among Americans living abroad than the issue of guns. Living in nations which take sensible steps to prevent gun violence, we see first hand that these measures work to reduce gun-related crime. In 1996, there were 74 firearm-related deaths in the United Kingdom. In the same year, there were 34,000 firearm-related deaths in the United States.

In the last seven years, Democrats have taken real steps to reduce gun violence, through passage of the Brady Bill and the Assault Weapons Ban. These laws have helped reduce gun fatalities and injuries to their lowest level since the 1960s. And yet, as recent tragic shootings have shown, more needs to be done: In 1997 alone, more than 32,000 Americans died from guns; over 4,000 of these victims were children.

Democrats Abroad believe Congress should immediately pass the McCarthy-Kennedy Children’s Gun Violence Prevention Act, comprehensive legislation to reduce gun violence among children. We support limiting the purchase of firearms to one every three months, raising the age of the youth handgun ban from 18 to 21, banning the possession and sale of semiautomatic assault rifles, halting the importation of and manufacture of large capacity ammunition magazines, imposing background checks for explosives purchases, developing programs to help law enforcement agencies trace crime guns to their source, and authorizing repeat inspections of gun dealers involved in illegal gun trafficking.

We support legislation to require immediately that all guns be manufactured with a safety lock or other safety device. We believe the loophole in the law that enables purchasers at gun shows to avoid background checks and other controls on the purchasing of dangerous weapons must be closed.

ENDING DISCRIMINATION

THIRTY-FIVE YEARS AFTER the passage of the Civil Rights Act, we believe that racism, gender bias and ethnic discrimination continue to be a serious problem in the United States. The horrific incident in Jas-

per, Texas, showed that racism is not a thing of the past. But the aftermath of the incident shows that Americans can come together and condemn racist acts in a unified voice.

Democrats Abroad believe in the original goals of affirmative action: The attempt to insure equality of opportunity for all regardless of color, creed and ethnicity. We support revising the current affirmative action programs and insisting on aggressive implementation of them in order to bring them closer into line with the original goals.

We believe that all Americans are a part of our community, no matter their sexual orientation. We decry hateful acts of homophobia, such as the brutal murder of Matthew Shepherd, and we support the inclusion of sexual orientation in the list of matters covered by hate crime laws.

Democrats Abroad support equal rights for all spousal unions, regardless of gender, in aspects pertaining to, but not limited to: medical insurance and joint coverage through employers; life insurance; medical decisions as a spouse; tax benefits and right to file jointly; power of attorney; right of adoption; right to jointly hold property; and right of inheritance.

The current Department of Defense policy of "Don't ask, don't tell, don't pursue" has failed. Democrats Abroad believe Defense policy should be changed to irreversibly accept the service of homosexuals in all branches of the Armed Services and to make discrimination and persecution of homosexuals illegal in the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

We support the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, which insures that people cannot be discriminated against in the work place for sexual orientation.

Safeguarding Civil Liberties and Freedom of Speech

Democrats Abroad oppose censorship and limits on freedom of speech on the Internet. Language referring to such matters as abortion and sexuality is guaranteed by the First Amendment and should not be restricted by legislation.

We believe people should be strictly protected from unreasonable search and seizure of property they co-own with persons whose individual property is seized by government agencies in law enforcement.

The separation of church and state is a central tenet of American society, and that separation must be maintained. Teachers, in particular, should be protected from being forced to present or refrain from presenting specific points of view. We are deeply concerned by attempts to remove the teaching of evolution from the classroom.

Terminally ill patients who wish to end their lives with dignity should have this right. We encourage states to adopt legislation to protect physicians and individuals from prosecution for assisting patients in exercising this right, as specified in a living will. We believe that critical medical decisions must be made between a doctor and his or her patient. Therefore, we oppose legislation that prevents doctors from providing medicine to terminally ill patients for fear that they will be jailed for euthanasia.

Supporting Legal Immigration

America is a nation founded by and built upon the contributions of people who have come from all over the world. We are proud of our heritage as a nation founded and recognize the enormous contributions immigrants have made throughout our history.

As Democrats living abroad, we reject the anti-foreigner sentiment found in parts of the nation. We support an immigration policy based on social fairness and constitutional intent, particularly in cases of family reunification and dissident persecution. We believe in maintaining political asylum programs, particularly for refugees fleeing oppressive regimes.

Immigration laws should be changed to accommodate the lifetime partners of all Americans, regardless of marital status or sexual orientation.

The problem of illegal immigration continues to exist in the U.S., and yet certain types of laborers are needed there. Therefore, Democrats Abroad believe the U.S. should encourage legal immigration, especially from Mexico, in order to check illegal immigration and prevent the exploitation of immigrants. Specifically, we call for the re-establishment of the Bracero program.

INCREASING VOTER REGISTRATION

AROUND THE WORLD, people look to the United States as a beacon of democracy. And yet, in the greatest democracy in the world, fewer than

half of those eligible to vote come out to the polling booths on Election Day. Democrats Abroad support state initiatives that allow universal, same day voter registration. We support efforts like the Oregon voting-by-mail initiative that expand the ways in which people can exercise their right to vote.

Reforming Campaign Finance Laws

Democrats Abroad believe that campaign finance reform should be a top priority after the 2000 election. Progress on this issue has been blocked by the influence of big money contributors and political action committees, which undermine the very heart of our democracy.

Without reform of the relationship between money and power, no true and substantive progress can be made on major issues. Democrats Abroad supports efforts like the Shays-Meehan bill to clean up the campaign finance system, and we support voluntary public financing of campaigns for candidates who abide by voluntary spending caps to ensure that money does not stand in the way of a candidate communicating with voters.

FUNDING THE ARTS

THE DREAMS AND ASPIRATIONS of all Americans are expressed and shared through participation in the arts. We support the arts and encourage participation by the widest possible audience by promoting the inclusion of arts-related education in grades K-12 and restoring funding to the NEA to pre-1994 levels. We oppose any politically motivated censorship of the arts.

Democrats Abroad also support continued federal funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the National Endowment for the Humanities on a basis which provides for and supports artistic freedom and freedom of expression generally.

FIGHTING FOR REPRODUCTIVE CHOICE

DEMOCRATS ABROAD UNEQUIVOCALLY support a woman's Constitutionally protected right to choose and is against any legal encroachment in this area. While the Republicans claim they "want to get government off our backs," they contradict themselves by insisting on enacting legislation which glaringly invades this most deeply private decision.

The decision on whether to terminate a pregnancy is a private matter. We support women's rights to bear children, practice birth control, and obtain safe, legal abortions regardless of economic, religious or racial status. We support the right to uncoerced sterilization for men and women, fertility counseling and comprehensive, readily available health information.

We continue to oppose the punitive Hyde Amendment. We oppose efforts to interfere with decisions between a woman and her doctor when her life or health is at stake, and we support increased funds for contraception education as well as pre- and postnatal care.

CONCLUSION

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY was called by many The American Century. It is tempting to think that the twenty-first century, too, will warrant this euphoric phrase. But we should never assume that we should, and can, rule the world. Americans who live abroad are only too conscious that we represent but a small fraction of the world's people. They tend to forgive us our faults, and even to emulate our ways. We are a very young nation, an infant by comparison with the ancient and elderly civilizations amongst which we live. We have much to teach to others, but also much to learn from them.

Today we stand on a brink. True peace throughout the world seems possible, but only if we have the strength and commitment to rid the world of weapons of mass destruction. True prosperity seems possible, too, but only if the Haves seriously address the problems of the Have-Nots.

This is the message of Democrats Abroad for the convention of the Democratic Party in Los Angeles, and for the Nation. It is a message for all Americans: Democrats, Republicans, and Independents alike.



This platform, based on resolutions prepared by the country committees, was debated and passed at the Global Caucus of Democrats Abroad on April 2, 2000. It was then turned over to a style committee, charged with cutting verbiage and improving consistency in language. The committee delivered the finished document at the end of May. Michael Ceurvorst (DA-HK) will carry it to the Platform Committee in July.