

Benton County Democratic Platform 2020  
May 3, 2020

01 – Preamble

Benton County Democrats find purpose in the words of the preamble to the Constitution: We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

We believe in American values such as liberty, equal justice under the law, human rights, tolerance, community, equal opportunity, interdependence and protection of private property for the common good of the people in the world we share. We believe in freedom of religion, and separation of church and state. We do not believe that establishment of state religions or theocracy is compatible with American values.

02 – Energy, Environment & Climate

We see Benton County's abundance of hydroelectric and nuclear energy, and now solar and wind energy as well, as essential to the prosperity of the Pacific Northwest. We see the future as favoring low-carbon forms including solar, wind, hydro and advanced nuclear energy, distributed through next-generation smart grids. We support energy research, such as that conducted at the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory, including pursuit of massive battery and smart-grid technology to support baseload. Energy conservation along with hydro and nuclear power can balance the electrical grid as we transition from carbon-based fuels to renewables

Our continued existence as a species is dependent on the preservation of a healthy home planet. We believe all people, including future generations, have a natural right to clean air, water, and food, all products of a healthy natural environment. Wise energy and environmental decisions will reflect the triple bottom line of economic, environmental, and social costs. The struggle to protect our planet's health intersects with social justice in all its forms. We oppose shortsighted irresponsible policies and market incentives that result in environmental damage without remediation and without accounting for economic, social and environmental costs.

We support proactively addressing climate change and its impacts through open scientific research, and through prompt and effective decision making based on scientific and economic evidence. We see international collaboration as the only approach to effectively address the global climate crisis threatening the health of the planet. We support pricing carbon emissions through a carbon fee and dividend or a cap-and-trade program to encourage an orderly transition to low-carbon energy sources.

We continue to support maintaining the Columbia and Snake River ecosystem and wildlife, including working to restore salmon runs as part of management of the rivers. We look forward to evidence-based guidance toward balancing the environmental, social, and economic effects of proposed dam removal from the upcoming Environmental Impact Statement being developed by the Columbia River System Operations (CSRO) Project.

### 03 - Agriculture

We support investing in the infrastructure that enables efficient agriculture and healthy rural communities, preserving family farms and ranches, and encouraging sustainable agricultural practices to ensure availability of high-quality affordable food. Supporting the agricultural labor force by including agricultural labor protections in compensation, worker safety and health, organizing, and unemployment laws will encourage reliable availability of labor. Immigration, workplace abuse, migrant housing, healthcare, and schooling of the children of agricultural workers also need to be addressed.

Food security and agricultural prosperity devolve from development of agricultural markets and trading relationships, and from market and regulatory incentives for sustainable agricultural practices. We oppose monopolistic practices in agriculture, such as extreme consolidation of farms and food processing because it jeopardizes food security. We oppose tariffs which negatively impact local agriculture. We encourage support of research at land grant universities like Washington State University, which will have a critical role to play in agricultural adaptation to climate change.

### 04 -Law, Justice, Human Rights & Civil Rights

Our people expect their government to fairly and effectively protect civil, property, consumer, and judicial rights, and provide for the public safety of everyone in a fair and respectful manner. We expect our government to recognize the inherent dignity and equal and inalienable rights of all human beings as set forth in the United States Constitution, the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, and the Washington State Constitution.

Equal justice for all under the rule of law is the basis of a democratic civil society. Justice is accomplished through a system of laws reflecting the decisions of We the People via our elected representatives, enforced by law enforcement officials, and upheld by the courts. We expect trials to be fair, transparent, and speedy. To be effective, the law must be respected by all parties, and no person or corporation or government entity is above the law. Therefore, elected representatives, law enforcement, and the courts are to be held to high standards. We expect prosecution of perversions of justice such as falsification of evidence and perjury, unlawful discrimination, interference with elections, stonewalling legal investigations, or undue influence over legislation or courts. Delegation of detention and incarceration to for-profit enterprises is susceptible to corruption and exploitation of prison populations, so we do not support them.

We support citizen's 2nd Amendment right re gun ownership, especially for hunting and personal protection, and we also support government's role in establishing common-sense laws regarding responsible possession and use of guns for the safety of all residents.

### 05 –Commerce & Economic Development

Benton County enterprises include manufacturing, agriculture, and trade – producing, buying and selling products under regulated market capitalism for a global market system. We believe markets should be

as free as possible while remaining fair to all market participants and stakeholders. One of government's roles is to support a business climate favorable to successful private enterprise, while protecting the commons through regulation from unfair and destructive business practices leading to monopolies and cartels that damage the common good through market failures. A clearly stated framework of rules and regulations under which honest enterprises that benefit the people can operate and prosper will deliver a business climate that neither stifles commerce nor allows exploitation.

We recognize that a role of government in commerce is to invest in institutions and initiatives which provide those benefits which private investment by itself cannot do well or do at all. Examples of such initiatives are basic research, large-scale infrastructure development, advanced energy research, protection of agriculture, natural resource protection and development, addressing global climate change, disaster recovery and relief, universal healthcare, public education, incarceration, and national defense and security. Such governmental investments and public-private partnerships have contributed to the national welfare and development throughout the nation's history.

#### 06 –Economic Equity & Corporate Power

Extreme economic inequality is a driving issue of our time. We believe that the most successful economies exhibit a relatively narrow range between the poor and rich, and feature widespread availability of living-wage jobs, fair taxation, a strong public sector, and protection of property rights and contracts. Competition is fair and open, under laws protecting against fraud, deception, monopoly, and governmental favoritism.

We believe that corporate personhood may be a necessary legal fiction, but corporations are constructs, not human beings, and not entitled to free speech protections in the same way that human beings are. When corporations and extremely wealthy people apply their consolidated economic power to the political arena without constraint, it results in market distortions favoring oligarchic special interests. We expect corporations to conform to societal norms and ethical behavior as embodied in law. In short, we expect corporations to be good citizens.

#### 07 – Education & Information Media

The backbone of our democracy is a universal public-school system (pre-K through postsecondary, academic or trade), designed to develop informed, reasoning, and thoughtful citizens who are critical-thinking lifelong learners, prepared to participate in and contribute to our economic and civic society. All students have the right to attend schools where their personal safety and well-being is assured. Education means investing in people, and no student with aptitude and diligence should be denied an education only because they can't afford it. Finally, we support a revival of civics education in Washington schools.

A citizenry informed by the free flow of information from an inquisitive and independent press is fundamental to democracy. Governmental and corporate censorship suppresses the flow of ideas, whether executed through decree or economic practices. Monopolistic and discriminatory practices in the media business restrict the free flow of information and subvert democratic process. Net neutrality is essential for maintaining the free press. We support rural access to high speed, high capacity internet,

similar to the Rural Electrification Act of the 20th century

The source of information presented in media needs to be identified to allow consumers to evaluate bias and reliability and identify propaganda. Intrusion into public discourse intended to shape elections or create chaos by entities concealing their identities is subversive to democratic societies. We expect our government to be proactive in countering such intrusion with effective measures including regulating social media.

## 08 - Foreign Policy

The United States has long held a position of leadership in the world. Our purposes are best served when we act in congruence with American values of freedom, democracy, human rights and equitable prosperity around the world. The world community needs us to work with a spirit of peace, cooperation, and generosity to support human welfare and civil rights.

Diplomacy and nonviolence must be our primary tools for conflict resolution, even as we maintain a strong defense capability. A multilateral approach, working through the United Nations and other multinational organizations, allows us to calibrate to the prevailing global perspective, secures our leadership, and enhances our influence. Isolationism does the opposite and is in no way a long-term solution. Focused tariffs for international trade have a specific role in international relations, but we recognize that tariff wars are ultimately destructive and should be avoided as much as possible.

Integrating refugee populations will be particularly important as climate change further affects weather events, disease, food production, and water availability, with resulting political instability. We will need to cooperate with international efforts and foster a welcoming spirit.

## 09 - Government & Political Reform

The American system of government derives its legitimacy from the people, to whom government answers. Government serves as the peoples' instrument to achieve ends that the people cannot achieve individually. We need to support and update the institutions of government so that they can do their jobs effectively. Checks and balances as prescribed in the Constitution must remain effective to maintain an appropriate balance of power. Congress must not enable Executive branch overreach by ceding its power of governance. The Supreme Court and judiciary must strive to remain independent of the influence of partisan politics and corporate pressure, while refraining from legislating from the bench.

Good democratic government requires a robust, fair and transparent election process with a high degree of participation and public confidence. Election authorities must ensure that all eligible voters have an opportunity to participate. We expect the voting process to be protected against hacking and manipulation. All financial and in-kind contributions to political activities, direct or indirect, must be completely and immediately made public.

## 10 - Human Services & Health Care

Health care and human services enable a productive workforce and promote the common welfare. We

believe health care is a basic human right rather than a commodity; therefore, affordable universal health care must be made available, offering options not hindered by religious or economic ideology.

Public health is also a governmental responsibility and should be supported adequately to ensure clean air, water, and food. We expect our government to protect us against pandemics, so we support adequate support and funding of our public health institutions such as the Benton County Health District, the Centers for Disease Control, and the National Institutes for Health. Since pandemics (as well as bioterrorism) can quickly become a national security issue, we expect that infrastructure, materials and supplies necessary to address a pandemic be produced in the USA, with minimal outsourcing to other countries.

Governmental services must receive stable funding to reliably provide the basics of a dignified life for those out of the workforce due to disability, or in retirement. Measures to ensure the long-term sustainability of our earned entitlement safety-net programs – Social Security and Medicare – are urgently needed now.

Government-supported research, including health and medical research results belong to the public. When taxpayer-subsidized research and patents are spun-off to private sector firms to use commercially, fair agreements on public investment recovery and price control need to be reached. Government agency information and decisions should be based on unbiased evidence-based scientific research findings rather than on industry promotion or political ideology.

## 11 – Labor & Immigration

A strong economy depends on jobs with safe working conditions that provide fair compensation to workers sufficient to provide for the basic needs of any full-time worker, with minimum wage indexed to the cost of living. Every worker should have the right to organize and collectively bargain for their pay, benefits, performance expectations, and working conditions. Contractually limiting employees' future occupation, such as non-compete and non-disclosure agreements, is illegal and constrains competition to the detriment of the public.

We are a nation of immigrants from diverse cultures. We are strengthened by the bold ideas and hard work of newcomers. All immigrants should be afforded full human rights and a fair, safe, and timely path to legal status or citizenship. We need a humane immigration system that meets the nation's real economic and social needs, even as we need orderly controlled borders. Temporary worker programs should not be used to displace qualified citizens in employment. Temporary workers must possess their visas, should be paid fairly at going rates, and be able to change employment at will to prevent exploitation. Refugees from wars, environmental disasters, or endemic violence should be met with humane policies that recognize their universal human rights.

## 12 -Congress, Military & Veterans Affairs

The core task of the U.S. military is to protect and defend the nation, as the Constitution stipulates. Our military must be adequately prepared to provide for our nation's defense and should never be subject to abuses of power by any branch of government. Congress shall authorize military actions as required by

the Constitution and impose taxes or authorize war bonds needed to fully cover their incremental cost, including conscientious care of casualties and their dependents for as long as required. All members of the military shall be treated with respect and fairness. Discrimination and sexual assault are inconsistent with military codes of honor. We support our troops and honor our veterans who act in the service of our country.

We support the system of government outlined in the Constitution, including the separation of powers between equal branches of government, and the concept of checks and balances. We believe that it is urgent that Congress take back many of the powers that it has effectively ceded to the Executive branch, including the power to authorize or not authorize wars.

### 13 - Transportation, Flood Control & Irrigation Infrastructure

Investment in an efficient, well-planned, multimodal transportation system promotes a healthy economy, environment, and community. We support public-private partnerships to continually develop and maintain our transportation infrastructure. We support well-considered and economically viable public transportation for the benefit of the citizenry.

Impacts to flood control, transportation, energy production, salmon protection, and irrigation need to be carefully evaluated through comprehensive cost-benefit analysis when considering any course of action regarding management of our rivers and watersheds.

### 14 - Tribal Relations & Sovereignty

Tribal governments make up a significant part of our national identity and community. Benton County must maintain lasting and respectful relationships with Tribal Nations, affirm their treaty rights and state compacts, and oppose all attempts to diminish tribal sovereignty, tribal culture, land and natural resources or the general welfare of tribes located within Benton County and the State of Washington.

### 15 – Specific to Benton County

Benton County contains many noteworthy features that establish it as an exceptional economic engine that includes unique contributions in science and technology, energy, and agriculture. These contributions can be magnified or diminished depending on policies established at the local, state and national level. In addition, legacy environmental cleanup challenges at the DOE Hanford Site demand financial and operations management consideration consistent with long-term needs. Benton County's unique position presents it with opportunities to further its development as an energy research and production center, a regional health center, a center for tourism, an agricultural powerhouse, and more, while maintaining its historical roots and magnificent landscapes. The Benton County Democrats will work to promote the policies which will lead to this kind of positive future for Benton County.