

LIBERTARIAN PARTY PROGRAM

Adopted By The Libertarian National Committee 28 August 1991

PREAMBLE

The Libertarian Party wants all Americans to be able to plan their own futures. Libertarians believe that individuals, families, associations, and businesses have the right and the ability to deal with their own problems by working with other people in a peaceful and honest way. We reject the idea that the aggressive use of force, whether by criminals or government, is either a moral or practical means for achieving positive ends. Libertarians seek a world in which voluntary cooperation replaces force in human relationships. Toward that end, we offer the following ten point Program.

I. DEFENDING AMERICANS IN AMERICA

An important reason for having the federal government is national defense. Its job is to defend Americans in America from foreign attack. The federal government should work to provide security for us at the lowest possible cost, in a way which does not undermine our domestic economic productivity or violate our civil liberties.

U.S. military spending is over \$300 billion per year. Rather than defending America, the bulk of this pays for defending other countries. People in many of those countries pay less for their own defense than American taxpayers pay to defend them.

The United States has many thousands of nuclear weapons more than needed to deter a Soviet first strike, yet we spend billions every year building more.

U.S. military intervention in Central America, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East has not made Americans more secure. In fact, Americans are less secure, because U.S. military policy has made us more enemies than friends, making all Americans targets of terrorism. American military adventurism routinely results in unnecessary bloodshed without producing positive results. The United States should rely less on military force and threats and more on negotiation and trade to establish harmonious international relationships.

The Libertarian Party proposes the following initial steps to improve the security of Americans and reduce the costs of defense:

1. Notify our allies that they must plan for their own defense needs and take responsibility for paying for them. Provide allies with a timetable for the return of American military personnel to America in order to defend America.
2. Negotiate arms reduction treaties which do not compromise our national defense.
3. Adopt a policy that Americans who travel abroad and companies which invest abroad do so at their own risk and are subject to the laws and customs of other countries while abroad. The United States will no longer use gunboat diplomacy on their behalf at taxpayers' expense.
4. Reject the "Reagan Doctrine", which engages the United States around the globe and risks the security of all Americans by increasing the possibility that the U.S. will become embroiled in a foreign civil war.

II. FEDERAL SPENDING MUST BE CUT

Federal spending and federal taxation are connected. We must reduce spending to reduce taxes.

Unfortunately, the United States government has expanded its operations and spending far beyond the original constitutional plan. No matter what the subject, there is some group which wants government to regulate or subsidize it, and there are always those in Congress eager to take over more power and control. But it is impossible to get something for nothing. The government produces no goods, so it can hand out favors to some people only by taking the earnings and property of others first.

In recent years the government has attempted to hide its expensive meddling by forcing private organizations and businesses to adopt certain expensive programs, rather than have the government implement them directly. These programs are no less costly nor less intrusive than if they were adopted directly by the government.

Libertarians join with the vast majority of Americans in calling for a smaller, less expensive, less meddlesome government. The following are some first steps in the process of bringing federal government spending under control:

1. Place the federal budget under a "cap" at current levels. Any increase in spending on any project must be accompanied by an equal or greater reduction in other spending.
2. Phase out spending on aid to foreign governments and international organizations such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.
3. Phase out federal subsidies to all businesses such as the tobacco industry, the maritime industry, agriculture, or the military-industrial complex.
4. End federal subsidy programs to state and local governments. These programs merely take taxes out of the community and then send the money back, minus the amounts consumed by the government bureaucrats who administer them.
5. End all federally mandated programs forced on individuals, organizations, and businesses.

III. CHOICE IN EDUCATION

Government-run public schools have failed our children. Their cost keeps rising while student performance drops. Today one out of five teenagers can't even read at a grade school level, and colleges must teach many students how to read and write.

Poor children suffer most because they attend the worst schools. Few families can afford tuition for private schools while paying taxes for public schools. Private schools provide better education at a much lower cost.

Most families have no choice but to send their children to the neighborhood public school, regardless of its quality. This makes public schools a protected monopoly. Like most monopolies, they do a poor job of serving the public. Education suffers.

This same lack of choice frequently compels families to send their children to problem schools. Youngsters are exposed to violence, drugs, and other threats. Without other choices, parents feel helpless to change this.

The libertarian approach to education is to let parents choose the education that is best for their child.

The following steps should be taken immediately to promote choice and return control of education to parents and students:

1. Allow parents to send their children to the teacher and the school of their choice by implementing a voucher system.
2. Eliminate the U.S. Department of Education which spends billions on administration and educates no one.
3. Institute tax credits for any person or company which pays for the education of any student, or any number of students, at any school, public or private.
4. Remove restrictions which limit such private educational choices as home schooling.

IV. FREE TRADE AND NEUTRALITY

The Libertarian Party supports a foreign policy designed to promote peace and honest trade between Americans and all other people. Thomas Jefferson stated it: "Peace, commerce and honest friendship with all nations, entangling alliances with none." Libertarians would say: free trade and neutrality.

Protectionism hurts consumers. It drives up the price of clothing, shoes, automobiles, and other goods by billions of dollars each year. Protectionism favors special interests, eliminates jobs, and raises the cost of living for all Americans.

Both Democratic and Republican administrations have, for many decades, employed a foreign policy of intervention which disrupts free trade. Since Americans would never tolerate other nations interfering with our internal affairs, we should not interfere in theirs. We should stop using military and covert operations to prop up or topple any other government.

We should rely on the obvious benefits of trade to promote free markets and human rights throughout the world. Free international trade promotes peace because people trading with their neighbors do not want war to interrupt their prosperity. When trade is restricted by embargoes, quotas, and tariffs, history has shown that the likelihood of war increases.

The following are some steps which should be taken immediately to promote more harmonious trading relationships:

1. The United States should return to its historical foreign policy of free trade and neutrality.
2. The United States government should repeal all laws which hamper trade with people in other countries.
3. The United States government should repeal all laws which restrict the right of Americans to travel to other countries.

V. THE SAVINGS AND LOAN FIASCO

It is difficult to imagine a better example of government bungling than the savings and loan (S&L) bailout. The problems which many S&Ls are experiencing is the direct result of government deposit insurance.

For decades the government has required federally chartered S&Ls to buy deposit insurance from a government agency - FSLIC. FSLIC charged premiums without regard to how the S&Ls invested their depositor's funds. For example, consider two S&Ls that are identical except for how they invest their funds. One buys only the highest quality investments; the other speculates in a variety of risky investments. FSLIC charges both S&Ls the same amount of premium to insure their deposits.

This is insane. No life insurance company would charge the same premiums to two 30-year-old women -- one a smoker and one a non-smoker. Any sensible insurance scheme must base the premiums on risk. FSLIC did not, because it was a stupid scheme setup by the politicians. S&Ls, as an industry, wield a lot of power in Washington. The S&L lobby has been strong enough to prevent FSLIC from charging reasonable premiums.

Many S&Ls made risky investments that went sour. They lost not only their shareholder's money, but some of their depositor's funds as well. This left FSLIC holding the bag. Since FSLIC did not charge premiums related to risk, it doesn't have enough money to pay back all depositors. As a result the federal government -- which means we taxpayers -- are left holding the bag. As taxpayers, we are going to have to pay over \$300 billion (over \$1000 for each man, woman, and child!) because of this bungling.

The Libertarian Party knows and understands that protecting our hard-earned savings is far too important a job to trust to politicians and bureaucrats. It has been tried and it has failed miserably. We therefore propose that four federal insurance schemes be terminated:

- FSLIC - which insures deposits at savings and loans
- FDIC - which insures deposits at banks
- SIPC - which insures cash and securities at brokerage firms
- NCUIC - which insures deposits at credit unions

For years private insurance companies have insured residential mortgages, municipal bonds, corporate securities, and investments at brokerage firms. Based on the successful performance of these companies as insurers, it is clear that private insurance companies will be able to replace FSLIC, FDIC, SIPC, and NCUIC.

VI. TAXES: THE CRUELEST BURDEN

One of the Libertarian Party's goals is to replace taxation with voluntary methods for financing government services.

The government uses force to collect taxes. If you don't pay taxes voluntarily, your property may be seized and you may be imprisoned. Our earnings and property are taken by force if we don't cooperate. If any organization or person other than our government tried this, we would call it stealing. If it is wrong for private citizens to take others' property, it is wrong when government does it. Private citizens and companies would be called criminals for using such methods, so it must be criminal for our government to do it.

When taxation takes money or property from private citizens and transfers it to government, economic productivity declines. Employers cannot expand, businesses fail, and jobs are lost. We have seen this repeatedly, particularly during the past 77 years since the federal income tax was introduced. Even successful businesses must pass on the cost of taxes to consumers. Everyone loses except the government.

Experience shows that government is inefficient. Most government services can be provided better by private businesses, private charities, and other community organizations.

To begin the process of replacing taxation with voluntary financing of government activities, we propose the following:

1. Neither Congress nor any state legislature should create any new tax or increase any tax rate from this day forward.
2. A "sunset" provision should be added to every tax statute. Such a provision would end the particular tax after two years unless it is re-enacted.
3. The U.S. Constitution and the state constitutions should be amended to provide for a binding initiative process where the voters can repeal any tax by majority vote.
4. Tax money should no longer subsidize any government service which can possibly be provided in the private sector.

VII. THE ENVIRONMENT

Every one of us is dependent on the environment to support our lives. When a person, a company, or a government dumps waste from its property onto the property of others without their consent, it has trespassed against them. The victims of pollution should be able to sue the polluter, require it to stop, and collect damages.

The best way to understand why we have the high level of air and water pollution we have today is to recognize that responsibility for protection of the environment has been turned over to a government bureaucracy. Today's failures are a result of the ineffectiveness of the government to deal with such important issues. Corporate officials are often protected from liability. Various levels of government -- often the worst polluters -- impose ever greater regulations on private parties, while hiding behind legal exemptions which permit them to violate their own standards.

Current laws relating to the environment are not based on the concept of trespass. These laws define acceptable levels of pollution and attempt to prevent anyone from exceeding those levels. They fall short of what is needed for several reasons.

By setting acceptable levels of pollution, the government is actually approving those levels of pollution. Libertarians do not believe that government bureaucrats in Washington should determine how much poison we are forced to eat, drink, and breathe!

Government sanctions environmental destruction; polluters feel safe as they poison our environment up to government accepted levels. It is an uphill battle for an injured private citizen to sue a polluter who has met all government guidelines. Even if the individual has been unquestionably harmed, the polluter's claim that all applicable government standards were met provides a strong defense.

When polluters exceed government standards, the penalties they pay typically go to the government, not to the people who were harmed. Why should the government be paid for poisoning private citizens? Why shouldn't polluters compensate their victims?

Faceless bureaucrats can never be as effective in fighting pollution as individual citizens; provided that we give citizens the tools they need to do so. The following are some initial steps to protect our environment.

1. Clearly establish the legal right of individuals or groups to claim that harmful pollution of their body, property, air or water is a trespass, allowing them to successfully sue individuals, companies, or governments for damages.

2. End all regulatory attempts to define acceptable levels of pollution. Setting such standards has the effect of legally sanctioning that amount of pollution, even when it might be reduced below that level. It also deprives citizens the right to successfully claim damages from levels of pollution which are lower than government standards.

VIII. SOLVING THE DRUG PROBLEM

Libertarians want to see all Americans healthy and free of drug dependence. However, we recognize that criminal penalties for sale, transportation, possession, or use of drugs have not solved and cannot solve this problem. Similar penalties were tried when alcoholic beverages were outlawed over 60 years ago. The failure of this approach was recognized, and Prohibition was repealed.

Prohibition spawned organized crime. Today's drug laws keep it going. Criminal penalties for drug trafficking reduce supplies, force drug prices up, and make drug dealing very profitable. High prices lead to violent crimes committed by a small number of addicts who may steal or murder to feed their habits. Most victims of these crimes are innocent non-users.

Prohibition resulted in many deaths from "bathtub gin". Today we read of deaths from the use of adulterated drugs. There is no difference. There is no consumer protection for impure, illegal drugs. Dead users cannot prosecute their suppliers.

The substance that causes the greatest problem is alcohol. The most physically damaging and most addictive is tobacco. For every death caused by the use of illegal drugs, there are almost 100 deaths caused by the use of alcohol or tobacco. Yet few suggest that either alcohol or tobacco should be banned.

The Libertarian Party does not advocate the use of drugs. The libertarian approach recognizes that the drug problem is worsened by the use of criminal law to attempt to halt drug use. However foolish people may be, they should have the right and the responsibility to determine for themselves what to put in their own bodies. The law should reflect that.

The following reforms should be instituted immediately:

1. Relegalize the possession of marijuana, cocaine, heroin, and other controlled substances for personal use. Alaska and the Netherlands have already done this for marijuana and experienced no problems. The British have done this for heroin with similar results.
2. Hold people who commit crimes or cause accidents while under the influence of any drug (including alcohol) fully liable for their actions.
3. Repeal all laws and regulations which impede the establishment of private drug treatment programs.

IX. IMMIGRATION

America grew and developed as a result of the efforts of millions of immigrants who fled their homelands to seek a better life in our land. Libertarians believe that all Americans are best served if the doors to our nation remain free and open.

Many fear that the welfare programs which we have created would act as a magnet to draw immigrants to America. Some say that being poor in America offers a higher standard of living than many can attain in their homelands. We agree. However this is not a good reason to slam our doors shut on those who seek freedom and an opportunity to prosper through their own honest efforts. If anything, the situation calls for the reform or end of these welfare programs.

Others fear that immigrant labor would throw Americans out of work. In fact, what will happen is that greater competition will develop for jobs, particularly in the area of unskilled labor. The principal result of this competition can only be a reduction in labor costs which will ultimately be passed on to all American consumers in the form of price reductions on labor-intensive goods and services. Those who object most strenuously to an "open door" policy are those labor groups which stand to gain the most from monopolizing the labor market.

America was once respected around the world as a symbol of peace and freedom -- the land of opportunity. People voted with their feet. They left much behind to come to the United States. We should return to the proud tradition of welcoming all who would join us, wishing them well, and allowing them to earn their way.

To quickly achieve an open door policy, we endorse the following immediate steps:

1. Amend all welfare and benefit programs to exclude coverage and services for anyone who is not a U.S. citizen.
2. Repeal all laws and regulations which require a work permit or other form of government approval for a foreign citizen to work in the United States.
3. Eliminate all immigration quotas.

X. HEALTH CARE AND HEALTH COSTS

Our health is far too important to entrust to politicians and bureaucrats. Government's ever-expanding role in our nation's health care system interferes with the ability of patients and doctors to freely select treatments, denies potentially life-saving medicines to the terminally ill, encourages fraud in government-funded care and research, and causes skyrocketing costs for everyone. Quality, affordable health care is increasingly unavailable.

In the name of insuring that drugs are safe and effective, the Food and Drug Administration delays or blocks the introduction of new drugs while patients who could benefit suffer and die. Victims of AIDS and other terminally ill patients are routinely denied the experimental drugs which offer their only hope for life.

Most medical research in the U.S. is funded by government. Politics, not science, dictates research priorities. The government grant system fosters fraud and abuse. Honest researchers who "blow the whistle" on fraud lose their grants while the fraud is covered up. Meanwhile, important breakthroughs like the discovery of the AIDS virus are made by small privately-financed institutes operating free of government bureaucracy.

Increased subsidies for health care, including Medicare and Medicaid, have inflated costs, promoted fraud, and reduced the standard of care provided. Government "cost containment" regulations have failed to contain costs while inflating private hospital bills and insurance premiums.

The most effective way to battle serious diseases, like AIDS, is through education and prevention. Yet government regulations restrict the type of information which can be mailed, broadcast, or taught in public schools. Government prohibits the sale of sterile needles, resulting in needless deaths among drug addicts and those they infect.

The Libertarian Party proposes the following steps to insure access to affordable, quality health care for all Americans:

1. End government restrictions that limit our choice of treatment, medications, and health care providers.
2. Replace government funded and controlled research with tax credits for private contributions to medical research.
3. End government medical insurance programs. Pending elimination, contract medical insurance for the poor with private insurers.
4. Eliminate regulations which restrict our access to medical information.