

THE INDIANA DEMOCRATIC PARTY 2008 STATE CONVENTION PLATFORM

"Everywhere I go, I've been impressed by the values and hopes that we share. In big cities and small towns; among men and women; young and old; black, white, and brown - Americans share a faith and simple dreams. A job with wages that can support a family. Health care that we can count on and afford. A retirement that is dignified and secure. Education and opportunity for our kids. Common hopes. American dreams."

-Senator Barack Obama

"At this critical time in our state's history, we call on all Hoosiers to join with us in restoring Indiana's promise. It's time to dream big dreams once again. It's time to unlock our true potential. Working together, we can rebuild this economy, improve our education system, ensure affordable health care for all citizens and leave the next generation of Hoosiers a stronger Indiana."

--Jill Long Thompson

REBUILDING OUR ECONOMY

The Indiana Democratic Party is committed to the creation of jobs which provide a living wage, health care, pensions, training, and the opportunity for advancement in life for Hoosiers and their families. To make this commitment a reality, we will undertake the following initiatives over the course of the next two years:

- Comprehensive tax reform which provides fairness for all families, and creates a climate for economic growth that will lift all our citizens and communities;
- Targeted incentives focused on job creation in economically distressed counties;
- Economic policies that encourage the retention and growth of existing businesses while targeting efforts to attract good-paying new jobs that provide a living wage and benefits for Hoosier workers;
- Health care pools for small businesses and tax deductions for individuals to ensure greater access to health insurance while reducing the spiraling costs of health care in Indiana;
- Training that prepares Hoosiers for a changing economy through 21st century vocational education in high schools, access to technical and post-secondary education, and life-long retraining;
- Delivery of broadband and internet connectivity to all Indiana communities to close the digital divide, and open economic opportunity to everyone regardless of where they choose to live.

The current administration has failed our state by undertaking policies that meet short-term goals for short-term gains while ignoring the underlying needs of our citizens and failing to look to the future. Not all jobs are created equal. Yet the acquisition of any job is heralded as a success whether it produces salaries below the county average income, lacks benefits needed to care for Hoosier families, or comes at the expense of existing, good paying jobs with benefits such as those that we continue to lose in Indiana. As a result, Hoosier workers earn ninety cents on the dollar relative to workers in the rest of the country. Indiana is among the highest in the nation with record numbers of home mortgage foreclosures and personal bankruptcy filings. Nearly one third of our high school freshmen will not graduate from high school. Health care costs in Indiana are higher than the national average. These statistics are unacceptable. This Governor's lack of action on these issues is inexcusable. That's why Indiana Democrats are prepared to lead our state in a different direction and restore Indiana's promise.

We need an innovative approach to ensure our State's economy moves in the direction towards sustained growth that lifts up our communities, our citizens and our prospects for a better society. This new direction must start with comprehensive tax reform that provides fairness for families, is fully transparent, and creates a climate for economic growth that distinguishes Indiana from other states. Hoosiers must know that their hard work will not be erased by runaway property tax shifts on the state level or increased costs for basic services caused by unworkable and unrealistic caps on local governments. Indiana's tax code must reward the hard work of its citizens, rather than penalize them.

Our tax policy for Indiana businesses and workers must also encourage responsible action that improves our ability to compete in the global economy. We will offer incentives for Hoosier workers with tax credits offsetting their liability of health care costs, continuing education, and training.

Every citizen deserves the opportunity to reach their highest potential in our society. The pathway to greater income, success and personal achievement is through education and training that fits each individual.

We recognize that training Indiana's future workforce with new skills should commence as early as middle school and must certainly begin in earnest in high school. Dual accrediting between our high schools and institutions of higher learning should occur, especially in those areas of study which will teach the most current manufacturing, technological, biomedical, and health-related subject-matter. At the same time, we must engage students early to consider their future economic viability.

With a globalized economy, it's essential that Hoosier workers possess transferable skills that they may use in their current and future jobs. We will expand vocational training in our high schools and ease the path for access to post-secondary technical training. Through tax incentives, we will encourage both companies and individuals to continually seek life-long learning that enables each individual to reach their true potential.

Indiana's workforce is one of the strongest, hardest-working and most diverse in the nation. As such, we support programs that provide workforce information and needs assessments to employers and employees. We will promote the efforts of the Department of Workforce Development to repurpose and utilize information obtained from assessments to match workers' skills with good-paying jobs to ensure Hoosiers are prepared for existing and newly created jobs resulting from the broad-based sustainable economic growth efforts.

We also recognize that small businesses are the backbone of Indiana's economy and the importance of encouraging and supporting minority and women owned businesses. The Indiana Democratic Party is the party of the small business entrepreneur, the hard working laborer and the family farmer. With roots on a small farm in northeast Indiana, Jill Long Thompson will ensure this traditional support continues.

To be part of our dynamic global economy, real-time access to technology is essential for all our citizens. Whether it's a budding entrepreneur in Elnora or Marysville, a student in Farmersburg or Fort Wayne, or a small business owner in Indian Village or Indianapolis, all Hoosiers deserve the same opportunity to participate in the revival of Indiana's economy. We will extend broadband and internet connectivity to every community in Indiana to grow a new generation of entrepreneurs that will help drive our economy to new successes.

The right kind of change is needed in Indiana. The Indiana Democratic Party will provide change that lifts up our citizens and our communities by forging a solid path to a much brighter future.

AFFORDABLE AND ACCESSIBLE HEALTH CARE

A top priority of the Indiana Democratic Party is to ensure that all citizens have access to high-quality health care that is continuous, affordable, and available regardless of an individual's ability to pay. More than 790,000 Hoosiers lack health insurance. While Indiana has taken steps to improve coverage, we must do better to ensure that state-sponsored health care programs provide easy and accessible enrollment and cut red tape to allow for continuous coverage for medically necessary services and preventive care.

The Indiana Democratic Party supports a health care plan that will give small businesses and individuals the opportunity to secure much needed health care coverage. We support a plan which will be focused proactively on health promotion, preventive medicine, and public health, with particular emphasis on smoking cessation, disease prevention, and primary care. We believe that a comprehensive program should require the creation of insurance pools that will offer individuals and businesses the opportunity to purchase health coverage through private insurers at an affordable rate.

The Indiana Democratic Party is committed to ensuring that Hoosier employers are given assistance in providing health care coverage for their employees. Currently, only 40 percent of Hoosier small businesses are able to offer their employees coverage. We believe that successful economic development in Indiana depends on creating an environment where small businesses can prosper. That will not occur without healthy employees and opportunities for employers to access programs to assist them with paying the increasing costs of health insurance for their employees.

The downturn in the economy and the loss of quality, high-paying jobs in Indiana is affecting the health of Hoosier children and families with no visible improvement in sight, evidenced by the fact that nearly one in ten Hoosier children remain without health insurance. We believe that efforts must be made to increase the enrollment of eligible children in the Hoosier Healthwise program and ensure that efforts are

made to provide continuous coverage to these vulnerable children.

We also support full funding of Indiana's Medicaid program so that Hoosiers who are least able to pay for coverage through other public or private programs will be guaranteed access to health care. Funding must be sufficient to promote the participation of health care providers and to protect our most vulnerable Hoosiers. We must increase our support for our citizens with mental health needs, our disabled citizens, and our aging population. We also must provide more community-based health programs that allow these individuals to remain near family and friends while receiving the important services they need and deserve. As Indiana is ranked 49th among states' efforts to prevent unintended pregnancies, we support the rights of women and families to access needed health care services. We support programs that will help families understand the benefits of planning and spacing pregnancies to ensure that all children are healthy, wanted and loved. We believe in every Hoosier's right to privacy and the right and responsibility to make sound, healthy personal choices for ourselves and our families without fear of unwarranted government intrusion.

FULFILLING OUR EDUCATIONAL POTENTIAL

The Indiana Democratic Party's commitment to the future of Indiana has been proven through the steady and unfailing success of our public education system. To make Indiana an attractive place to live, work and raise a family and to make Indiana a place where jobs of the future will locate, this commitment must continue.

We believe that every Indiana family should have the opportunity to send their children to full-day kindergarten. We know that high-quality education from birth to age eight is the foundation children need to be successful in their educational career and that an investment in early education yields a significant return for our state and its citizens. We support the expansion of additional full-day kindergarten opportunities, as well as the expansion of, and investment in, pre-kindergarten childhood education opportunities for at-risk children.

We understand that the success of Hoosier students only occurs because of first-class educators dedicated to providing a quality education to students. We are committed to continuing classroom success and student achievement through retaining professional educators and assisting school systems to decrease classroom sizes in order to allow for more individualized instruction. Additionally, we will work to ensure that more Indiana educators are trained in math and science. We will work with our educators and schools to increase our programs for students in math and science and support efforts to equip students with the requisite skills for a successful future in high-tech jobs and emerging sciences.

Hoosiers who do not complete their high school education are faced with difficulties and disadvantages. We are committed to taking proactive and aggressive steps to decrease the dropout rate of Indiana's high school students, including working to engage families and communities of at-risk students. We will also take additional steps to encourage students who have dropped out to complete their GED and seek further higher education or on-the-job training.

The future of Indiana's economy heavily relies on developing and maintaining a workforce prepared for the jobs of the tomorrow. Indiana Democrats are committed to fully utilizing vocational and technical education programs in public schools to prepare high school students to immediately enter the workforce upon graduation.

Indiana boasts many of the finest public and private colleges, universities, graduate and professional schools in the country. We are committed to the affordability of higher education for all Hoosiers by ensuring that tuition remains as low as possible and credits remain transferable to all Indiana public colleges and universities. We will further ensure that students have job opportunities in Indiana post-graduation and that efforts are made to retain more graduates from our colleges and universities in Indiana to reverse the 'brain drain.'

The Indiana Democratic Party believes that the only way to be competitive in a global economy is to expand and support on-going educational opportunities for all Hoosiers to continue a culture of lifelong learning, therefore permitting our workforce to retain an up-to-date, world-class skill set.

SUPPORTING WORKING HOOSIERS

Organized labor has led the charge against poverty throughout American history, helping to create millions of good jobs and strengthening the middle class. The Indiana Democratic Party supports their efforts to protect working Hoosier families.

We support the passage and enforcement of state and federal laws ensuring workers the right to choose a union, including those who work in the public sector. We support the passage of the Employee Free Choice Act to give workers a real choice in whether to unionize. We encourage stronger penalties for violating labor laws, and support banning permanent replacements of striking workers. We oppose so-called "right to work" or "paycheck protection" measures intended to meddle in the decisions of workers and weaken their voice in our community.

Trade deals also must benefit Hoosier workers, not just increase profits for multinational corporations. The Indiana Democratic Party supports aggressively enforcing the trade policies already in place, and will push for any new trade agreements to include strong standards on labor, the environment, and currency manipulation.

In many industries, violations of our most basic labor laws have become the accepted way of doing business. We will work to restore workers' rights to overtime, to enhance prevailing wage protections, to stop companies from mislabeling employees as "independent contractors" to avoid paying benefits and taxes, to expand minimum wage protections for tipped workers and home care workers, and to index the minimum wage to the cost of living.

The Indiana Democratic Party believes that Hoosier workers simply doing their jobs should not be caused harm. We will fight to better protect every Hoosier worker with federal and state safety and health standards, including new ergonomics standards and stronger OSHA enforcement. Protections for whistleblowers reporting injuries or unsafe conditions also should be strengthened to ensure that problems are reported and resolved. And worker's compensation must be reformed to ensure workers injured on the job receive the care and support needed to return to the workforce.

We support public employees, and oppose outsourcing government jobs for profit. Public employees must be given a fair chance to compete with private contractors where outsourcing is a viable option, but with the recognition that work involving essential governmental functions should never be privatized. We strongly support a thorough evaluation of contractors' records on tax, labor, environmental and other laws prior to awarding contracts.

The Indiana Democratic Party believes that government should be free to utilize project labor agreements and recognizes that they can be an important tool to enhance worker protections and economic development.

INCLUDING EVERY HOOSIER

The Indiana Democratic Party is proud of our longstanding commitment to and support for civil rights and equality. Our 2008 ticket makes history, creating the opportunity for the first African-American president and the first female governor. As the party of the people, we strongly oppose restriction of opportunity to Hoosiers based on their race, religion, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or economic background. We reaffirm our commitment to full enforcement of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, as well as to full enforcement of the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Age Discrimination in Employment Act. As Democrats, we believe that older workers are a vital part of the workforce and that the age discrimination prohibition should be enforceable in the same manner and to the same extent as any other discrimination. We also encourage legislation addressing hate crimes that would protect the freedom of all Hoosiers and create tougher penalties for those who infringe, criminally or otherwise, on those freedoms.

We are concerned with accessibility issues for those with disabilities, which include access to the ballot. We also believe that a state Family and Medical Leave Act should be ratified and that meaningful remedies be available when a person is subjected to discrimination and seeks redress under our state civil rights statute.

The Indiana Democratic Party supports the right of every Hoosier citizen of legal voting age to cast a ballot without undue burden, fear or intimidation. We vehemently oppose any politically motivated effort aimed at disenfranchising any voter of our state. Voting should be made easier, not more difficult. Voting is our most precious fundamental right, one that preserves all other rights and that ensures the legitimacy of our political system. To that end, we support the opportunity to vote by mail be afforded to all Hoosier voters.

As Democrats, we firmly oppose the practice of racial profiling as a law enforcement tool. Police stops or arrests should be based on evidence of criminal conduct, not on a person's demographic or physical characteristics.

We believe that state and local governments, as well as the private sector, should create a truly diversified and inclusive economic infrastructure by making it a priority to buy goods and services from minority contractors. Democratic-led local governments are leading the way across Indiana by diversifying local administrations while encouraging greater participation from women and minorities.

It is inconceivable that in 21st century America we continue to have millions of people living in the shadows, subject to exploitation, not afforded basic human and civil rights. These Americans want nothing more than to share in our nation's abundance and opportunity. We must work to ensure that all people—without regard to race, religion, gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or economic background—have the opportunity to achieve the American dream. For the sake of current and future generations, it is our duty as Democrats to put an end to any injustices that threaten that goal. In the Indiana Democratic Party, everyone has and always will have a seat at the table.

FAIR TAXATION FOR INDIANA

In addition to Hoosier families, Indiana's state and local governments face severe financial problems. Band-aid political gimmicks and shifting the burden onto local government will no longer suffice. Indiana Democrats recognize that we need broad policy changes that will help our families, communities and businesses compete and grow.

We believe tax policy is as important to economic growth as are infrastructure and economic development programs. Indiana's tax structure is regressive, with increasing levels of consumption based taxes which especially hurt working families. Indiana has recently increased the sales tax, food and beverage taxes, and is only one of seven states that apply the sales tax to gasoline purchases.

While we support property tax relief, we continue to believe that we must do much more. We need to restructure our tax code, not just move the burden from one revenue source to another as the current Governor has done. We believe an overhaul of Indiana's entire tax structure should be part of a comprehensive, regional based economic development assessment that examines the effects of tax policy, education policy, healthcare policy and infrastructure on regional economic development.

PROTECTING THE MOST VULNERABLE HOOSIERS

The Indiana Democratic Party has a long and proud tradition of enhancing the quality of life for all Hoosiers. We know that children live better lives when their families are strong and that families are strong when they live in communities that connect them to economic opportunities, social networks, and services. These "connections" include employment, health care, education, housing, and child care. We are committed to ensuring the economic stability of all Indiana families - supporting a living wage for those employed, providing adequate housing for all citizens, and helping all persons to access affordable health care.

State economic policy must effectively serve the citizens of Indiana by minimizing barriers to employment. Transportation, child care, education, discrimination and eldercare are all potential barriers that can prevent individuals from fully participating in the workforce. The Indiana Democratic Party supports policies that will assist Hoosier workers with these issues and provide opportunities to succeed.

We are committed to providing proper care for the "Greatest Generation," as well as future generations. We are proud of the achievements of the CHOICE in-home care for people with disabilities and senior citizens and the program's record of averting institutionalization.

An affordable home means that mortgage payments or rent requires no more than 30 percent of a family's income. Coupled with the other necessities - food, health care and transportation - high housing costs force many Hoosiers to make difficult choices. We are committed to protecting home owners from mortgage foreclosure and to expanding access to affordable housing opportunities.

The Indiana Democratic Party believes that vulnerable Hoosiers, including senior citizens and low-income families, must not be preyed upon by those who would take advantage of them through risky mortgages, loans or investment schemes. Hoosier families must be free from fear of losing money to predatory lenders or shaky commercial enterprises.

As the party that advocates for all Hoosiers, we support prevention and education programs that teach Hoosiers age-appropriate sex education that will stress the benefits of abstinence as well as provide the medically accurate facts needed to protect themselves and others. We fully support adequate funding for substance abuse treatment and prevention services, including programs for prenatal substance abuse prevention. Indiana should adequately address the needs of people with HIV/AIDS, while at the same time provide education and prevention services to reduce the number of new infections.

Family violence is an increasing concern in Indiana because of the high incidence of child mistreatment and continuing incidents of child fatalities. In order to protect some of our most vulnerable Hoosiers, the Indiana Democratic Party supports continued reform of Indiana's child welfare programs, including enhanced services, adequate funding, and improved training of case workers.

PRESERVING INDIANA'S NATURAL HERITAGE

We recognize that families face the challenge of global environmental decline. Effective environmental protection will lead to greater innovation and economic growth. Hoosiers can grow the economy while simultaneously preserving the integrity of the environment.

The Indiana Democratic Party believes that we must modernize and re-tool our state's economy to replace the manufacturing jobs that have vanished from Indiana in the past four years. We must utilize the skills of our workforce to attract green manufacturing and invest in renewable energies, both of which will sustain the environment and provide good wages.

The current administration has failed to address crucial environmental issues, such as identifying and reducing Indiana's carbon footprint. As a result, the Indiana Democratic Party vows to fight for conversion of at least 20 percent of Indiana's energy usage to renewable sources by the year 2020.

We also believe that it won't be enough to cultivate new green business, it is also our solemn responsibility to fairly, but firmly regulate the environmental impact of existing Indiana businesses. Indiana's most powerful environmental regulations must be firmly upon solid scientific data and research, not the bottom line. Indiana's most powerful environmental regulators must be truly independent and not beholden to the industries that they are duty-bound to regulate.

HONORING AND SUPPORTING HOOSIERS WHO SERVE

The most fundamental job of a government is to ensure the safety of its citizens. The Indiana Democratic Party is committed to securing our nation's borders through comprehensive immigration reform.

We pledge to work with local, state and federal agencies to protect Americans from any threats posed against us. We will look to state and local emergency management officials for continued leadership in the areas of emergency planning and counter-terrorism.

We also are committed to keeping Hoosiers safe in their communities. There is no greater threat to a community's vitality than the scourge of drugs, violence and disregard for the law. It's why we will strongly advocate for local governments so they have the tools they need to proactively fight crime, and why we remain steadfast in supporting the men and women of public safety - law enforcement officers, firefighters, emergency services personnel, and others - in protecting Hoosiers.

The Indiana Democratic Party also honors those who serve in our United States military and Indiana National Guard and Air National Guard. The dedication of an individual in this endeavor is the ultimate

selfless act to perform on behalf of one's country. We continue to applaud the sacrifices of these individuals and their families to serve our nation and to defend and protect the principles of democracy, principles we as a party hold in the highest regard.

It is our steadfast belief that we must continue to be committed to giving our brave men and women the tools to succeed in whatever endeavor our nation faces either at home or abroad. Our party is committed to providing our veterans the benefits they deserve and more importantly, have earned, protecting the safety of our citizens.