

PLATFORM

PREAMBLE

As Libertarians, we seek a world of liberty: a world in which all individuals are sovereign over their own lives and are not forced to sacrifice their values for the benefit of others.

We believe that respect for individual rights is the essential precondition for a free and prosperous world, that force and fraud must be banished from human relationships, and that only through freedom can peace and prosperity be realized.

Consequently, we defend each person's right to engage in any activity that is peaceful and honest, and welcome the diversity that freedom brings. The world we seek to build is one where individuals are free to follow their own dreams in their own ways, without interference from government or any authoritarian power.

In the following pages we set forth our basic principles and enumerate various policy stands derived from those principles.

These specific policies are not our goal, however. Our goal is nothing more nor less than a world set free in our lifetime, and it is to this end that we take these stands.

STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

We, the members of the Libertarian Party, challenge the cult of the omnipotent state and defend the rights of the individual.

We hold that all individuals have the right to exercise sole dominion over their own lives, and have the right to live in whatever manner they choose, so long as they do not forcibly interfere with the equal right of others to live in whatever manner they choose.

Governments throughout history have regularly operated on the opposite principle that the State has the right to dispose of the lives of individuals and the fruits of their labor. Even within the United States, all political parties other than our own grant to government the right to regulate the lives of individuals and seize the fruits of their labor without their consent.

We, on the contrary, deny the right of any government to do these things, and hold that where governments exist, they must not violate the rights of any individual: namely, (1) the right to life – accordingly we support the prohibition of the initiation of physical force against others; (2) the right to liberty of speech and action – accordingly we oppose all attempts by government to abridge the freedom of speech and press, as well as government censorship in any form; and (3) the right to property – accordingly we oppose all government interference with private property, such as confiscation, nationalization, and eminent domain, and support the prohibition of robbery, trespass, fraud, and misrepresentation.

Since governments, when instituted, must not violate individual rights, we oppose all interference by government in the areas of voluntary and contractual relations among individuals. People should not be forced to sacrifice their lives and property for the benefit of others. They should be left free by government to deal with one another as free traders; and the resultant economic system, the only one compatible with the protection of individual rights, is the free market.

NOTE: THE STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES WAS APPROVED AT THE CONVENTION IN DALLAS IN 1974.

1.0 PERSONAL LIBERTY

Individuals are inherently free to make choices for themselves and must accept responsibility for the consequences of the choices they make. Our support of an individual's right to make choices in life does not mean that we necessarily approve or disapprove of those choices. No individual, group, or government may rightly initiate force against any other individual, group, or government. Libertarians reject the notion that groups have inherent rights. We support the rights of the smallest minority, the individual.

1.1 Self-Ownership

Individuals own their bodies and have rights over them that other individuals, groups, and governments may not violate. Individuals have the freedom and responsibility to decide what they knowingly and voluntarily consume, and what risks they accept to their own health, finances, safety, or life.

1.2 Expression and Communication

We support full freedom of expression and oppose government censorship, regulation, or control of communications media and technology. We favor the freedom to engage in or abstain from any religious activities that do not violate the rights of others. We oppose government actions that either aid or attack any religion.

1.3 Privacy

Libertarians advocate individual privacy and government transparency. We are committed to ending government's practice of spying on everyone. We support the rights recognized by the Fourth Amendment to be secure in our persons, homes, property, and communications. Protection from unreasonable search and seizure should include records held by third parties, such as email, medical, and library records.

1.4 Personal Relationships

Sexual orientation, preference, gender, or gender identity should have no impact on the government's treatment of individuals, such as in current marriage, child custody, adoption, immigration, or military service laws. Government does not have the authority to define, promote, license, or restrict personal relationships, regardless of the number of participants. Consenting adults should be free to choose their own sexual practices and personal relationships. Until such time as the government stops its illegitimate practice of marriage licensing, such licenses must be granted to all consenting adults who apply.

1.5 Abortion

Recognizing that abortion is a sensitive issue and that people can hold good-faith views on all sides, we believe that government should be kept out of the matter, leaving the question to each person for their conscientious consideration.

1.6 Parental Rights

Parents, or other guardians, have the right to raise their children according to their own standards and beliefs, provided that the rights of children to be free from abuse and neglect are also protected.

1.7 Crime and Justice

Government force must be limited to the protection of the rights of individuals to life, liberty, and property, and governments must never be permitted to violate these rights. Laws should be limited in their application to violations of the rights of others through force or fraud, or to deliberate actions that place others involuntarily at significant risk of harm. Therefore, we favor the repeal of all laws creating "crimes" without victims, such as gambling, the use of drugs for medicinal or recreational purposes, and consensual transactions involving sexual services. We support restitution to the victim to the fullest degree possible at the expense of the criminal or the negligent wrongdoer. The constitutional rights of the criminally accused, including due process, a speedy trial, legal counsel, trial by jury, and the legal presumption of innocence until proven guilty, must be preserved. We assert the common-law right of juries to judge not only the facts but also the justice of the law. We oppose the prosecutorial practice of "over-charging" in criminal prosecutions so as to avoid jury trials by intimidating defendants into accepting plea bargains.

1.8 Death Penalty

We oppose the administration of the death penalty by the state.

1.9 Self-Defense

The only legitimate use of force is in defense of individual rights – life, liberty, and justly acquired property – against aggression. This right inheres in the individual, who may agree to be aided by any other individual or group. We affirm the individual right recognized by the Second Amendment to keep and bear arms, and oppose the prosecution of individuals for exercising their rights of self-defense. Private property owners should be free to establish their own conditions regarding the presence of personal defense weapons on their own property. We oppose all laws at any level of government restricting, registering, or monitoring the ownership, manufacture, or transfer of firearms or ammunition.

2.0 ECONOMIC LIBERTY

Libertarians want all members of society to have abundant opportunities to achieve economic success. A free and competitive market allocates resources in the most efficient manner. Each person has the right to offer goods and services to others on the free market. The only proper role of government in the economic realm is to protect property rights, adjudicate disputes, and provide a legal framework in which voluntary trade is protected. All efforts by government to redistribute wealth, or to control or manage trade, are improper in a free society.

2.1 Property and Contract

As respect for property rights is fundamental to maintaining a free and prosperous society, it follows that the freedom to contract to obtain, retain, profit from, manage, or dispose of one's property must also be upheld. Libertarians would free property owners from government restrictions on their rights to control and enjoy their property, as long as their choices do not harm or infringe on the rights of others. Eminent domain, civil asset forfeiture, governmental limits on profits, governmental production mandates, and governmental controls on prices of goods and services (including wages, rents, and interest) are abridgements of such fundamental rights. For voluntary dealings among private entities, parties should be free to choose with whom they trade and set whatever trade terms are mutually agreeable.

2.2 Environment

Competitive free markets and property rights stimulate the technological innovations and behavioral changes required to protect our environment and ecosystems. Private landowners and conservation groups have a vested interest in maintaining natural resources. Governments are unaccountable for damage done to our environment and have a terrible track record when it comes to environmental protection. Protecting the environment requires a clear definition and enforcement of individual rights and responsibilities regarding resources like land, water, air, and wildlife. Where damages can be proven and quantified in a court of law, restitution to the injured parties must be required.

2.3 Energy and Resources

While energy is needed to fuel a modern society, government should not be subsidizing any particular form of energy. We oppose all government control of energy pricing, allocation, and production.

2.4 Government Finance and Spending

All persons are entitled to keep the fruits of their labor. We call for the repeal of the income tax, the abolishment of the Internal Revenue Service and all federal programs and services not required under the U.S. Constitution. We oppose any legal requirements forcing employers to serve as tax collectors. We support any initiative to reduce or abolish any tax, and oppose any increase on any tax for any reason. To the extent possible, we advocate that all public services be funded in a voluntary manner.

2.5 Government Debt

Government should not incur debt, which burdens future generations without their consent. We support the passage of a "Balanced Budget Amendment" to the U.S. Constitution, provided that the budget is balanced exclusively by cutting expenditures, and not by raising taxes.

2.6 Government Employees

We favor repealing any requirement that one must join or pay dues to a union as a condition of government employment. We advocate replacing defined-benefit pensions with defined-contribution plans, as are commonly offered in the private sector, so as not to impose debt on future generations without their consent.

2.7 Money and Financial Markets

We favor free-market banking, with unrestricted competition among banks and depository institutions of all types. Markets are not actually free unless fraud is vigorously combated. Those who enjoy the possibility of profits must not impose risks of losses upon others, such as through government guarantees or bailouts. We support ending federal student loan guarantees and special treatment of student loan debt in bankruptcy proceedings. Individuals engaged in voluntary exchange should be free to use as money any mutually agreeable commodity or item. We support a halt to inflationary monetary policies and unconstitutional legal tender laws.

2.8 Marketplace Freedom

Libertarians support free markets. We defend the right of individuals to form corporations, cooperatives, and other types of entities based on voluntary association. We oppose all forms of government subsidies and bailouts to business, labor, or any other special interest. Government should not compete with private enterprise.

2.9 Licensing

Libertarians support the right of every person to earn an honest and peaceful living through the free and voluntary exchange of goods and services. Accordingly, we oppose occupational and other licensing laws that infringe on this right or treat it as a state-granted privilege. We encourage certifications by voluntary associations of professionals.

2.10 Sex Work

The Libertarian Party supports the decriminalization of prostitution. We assert the right of consenting adults to provide sexual services to clients for compensation, and the right of clients to purchase sexual services from consenting sex workers.

2.11 Labor Markets

Employment and compensation agreements between private employers and employees are outside the scope of government, and these contracts should not be encumbered by government-mandated benefits or social engineering. We support the right of private employers and employees to choose whether or not to bargain with each other through a labor union. Bargaining should be free of government interference, such as compulsory arbitration or imposing an obligation to bargain.

2.12 Education

Education is best provided by the free market, achieving greater quality, accountability, and efficiency with more diversity of choice. Recognizing that the education of children is a parental responsibility, we would restore authority to parents to determine the education of their children, without interference from government. Parents should have control of and responsibility for all funds expended for their children's education.

2.13 Health Care

We favor a free market health care system. We recognize the freedom of individuals to determine the level of health insurance they want (if any), the level of health care they want, the care providers they want, the medicines and treatments they will use, and all other aspects of their medical care, including end-of-life decisions. People should be free to purchase health insurance across state lines.

2.14 Retirement and Income Security

Retirement planning is the responsibility of the individual, not the government. Libertarians would phase out the current government-sponsored Social Security system and transition to a private voluntary system. The proper and most effective source of help for the poor is the voluntary efforts of private groups and individuals. We believe members of society will become even more charitable and civil society will be strengthened as government reduces its activity in this realm.

3.0 SECURING LIBERTY

The protection of individual rights is the only proper purpose of government. Government is constitutionally limited so as to prevent the infringement of individual rights by the government itself. The principle of non-initiation of force should guide the relationships between governments.

3.1 National Defense

We support the maintenance of a sufficient military to defend the United States against aggression. The United States should both avoid entangling alliances and abandon its attempts to act as policeman for the world. We oppose any form of compulsory national service.

3.2 Internal Security and Individual Rights

The defense of the country requires that we have adequate intelligence to detect and to counter threats to domestic security. This requirement must not take priority over maintaining the civil liberties of our citizens. The Constitution and Bill of Rights shall not be suspended even during time of war. Intelligence agencies that legitimately seek to preserve the security of the nation must be subject to oversight and transparency. We oppose the government's use of secret classifications to keep from the public information that it should have, especially that which shows that the government has violated the law. We oppose the use of torture and other cruel and unusual punishments, without exception.

3.3 International Affairs

American foreign policy should seek an America at peace with the world. Our foreign policy should emphasize defense against attack from abroad and enhance the likelihood of peace by avoiding foreign entanglements. We would end the current U.S. government policy of foreign intervention, including military and economic aid. We recognize the right of all people to resist tyranny and defend themselves and their rights. We condemn the use of force, and especially the use of terrorism, against the innocent, regardless of whether such acts are committed by governments or by political or revolutionary groups.

3.4 Free Trade and Migration

We support the removal of governmental impediments to free trade. Political freedom and escape from tyranny demand that individuals not be unreasonably constrained by government in the crossing of political boundaries. Economic freedom demands the unrestricted movement of human as well as financial capital across national borders.

3.5 Rights and Discrimination

Libertarians embrace the concept that all people are born with certain inherent rights. We reject the idea that a natural right can ever impose an obligation upon others to fulfill that "right." We condemn bigotry as irrational and repugnant. Government should neither deny nor abridge any individual's human right based upon sex, wealth, ethnicity, creed, age, national origin, personal habits, political preference, or sexual orientation. Members of private organizations retain their rights to set whatever standards of association they deem appropriate, and individuals are free to respond with ostracism, boycotts, and other free market solutions.

3.6 Representative Government

We support election systems that are more representative of the electorate at the federal, state, and local levels. As private voluntary groups, political parties should be free to establish their own rules for nomination procedures, primaries and conventions. We call for an end to any tax-financed subsidies to candidates or parties and the repeal of all laws that restrict voluntary financing of election campaigns. We oppose laws that effectively exclude alternative candidates and parties, deny ballot access, gerrymander districts, or deny the voters their right to consider all legitimate alternatives. We advocate initiative, referendum, recall, and repeal when used as popular checks on government.

3.7 Self-Determination

Whenever any form of government becomes destructive of individual liberty, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to agree to such new governance as to them shall seem most likely to protect their liberty.

4.0 OMISSIONS

Our silence about any other particular government law, regulation, ordinance, directive, edict, control, regulatory agency, activity, or machination should not be construed to imply approval.