

Sevier County Democratic Party Platform

INTRODUCTION

Definition

This platform is a formal set of positions supported by the Sevier County Democratic Party (SCDP). It is offered as a policy guide and a statement of core values for all citizens but especially for Sevier County Democratic party members.

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to express the ideas and beliefs of the Sevier County Democratic Party as they relate to specific issues that impact citizens of Sevier County. SCDP fully supports the Democratic Party Platform.

PREAMBLE

The Sevier County Democratic Party is working to create a community where anyone can affect positive change; that values its diversity; where truth is freely spoken to power; whose citizens are safe and secure; where economic opportunity abounds; where honesty, integrity, and facts prevail; where everyone votes and every vote counts; and where power and authority reside in the people.

We believe that all persons, regardless of race, faith, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender and/or gender identity, national origin, disability, or other factor of the human condition are innately equal. We believe that acts of discrimination and intimidation are anti-democratic and must be opposed by our political, social and economic leaders and institutions. We abhor recent events that have threatened the safety, security and freedom of selected groups of citizens.

OUR POSITIONS

Healthcare

1. High quality, equitable and affordable Health Care is a human right.
2. The Tennessee General Assembly's failure to expand Medicaid coverage to approximately 7,000 currently uninsured Sevier Countians who cannot otherwise afford any coverage puts local healthcare institutions like LeConte Medical Center at risk of financial loss and even failure. Federal funds (taxes we have already paid) are on the table to cover the cost of the expansion and our local officials should demand that the General Assembly to accept this money now.
3. Services for an aging population are in need of enhancement and expansion.
4. We believe that there is enough evidence to support the use of marijuana for medical purposes with special reference to Traumatic Brain Injury, chronic pain, PTSD, and terminal illness.

Public Health

1. Public Health policy and decisions should be guided by science and medical expertise.
2. Public Health decisions should be flexible and related to conditions and facts in the local community.
3. Public Health must be non-partisan and unbiased.
4. We believe that addiction and mental illness are public health issues and that individuals should be directed to treatment rather than the criminal justice system.
5. Our community should create community coalitions and strengthen already-existing coalitions (govt agencies including law enforcement and social services, private businesses, hospitals) for the purposes of combating the drug trade as well as providing opportunities for alcohol and drug assessments while allowing effective and affordable treatment options. Initiatives to address addiction issues must include, education, prevention, treatment, interdiction and control of the source suppliers. We encourage our county government to use funds received from Tennessee's Opioid Abatement Council for these efforts.
6. We believe that mental health is a public health issue that has been exacerbated by the COVID pandemic. As such, services should be community based, local and readily accessible.

Benefits and Coverages

1. Old Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance (Social Security) must be protected and preserved as a "contract with Americans".
2. Medicare coverage must be preserved and expanded.
3. The state of Tennessee must expand Medicaid. Through its failure to expand Medicaid, the State is denying beneficial medical care to hundreds of thousands of Tennesseans and contributing to the closure of rural hospitals across the State. It has also caused increased rates in private and ACA insurance plans.

Education

1. Our public schools should be fully funded as they are responsible for the education of all children in our community. All children have a right to a free and full education and our state government has an affirmative duty to provide the highest quality K-12 education to our children regardless of income.
2. Our school system should not be undermined by charter schools or vouchers for private schools who by law do not have to meet the same standards as public schools when educating children.
3. We believe that all Tennessee public schools must accept all funding provided by the US Department of Education and fully participate in the programs supported by that funding which provide educational and supportive programs for disabled and disadvantaged students.
4. Education must be fact based in science and history with evidence in order to grow minds prepared to lead in the future. Public schools must prepare young people for the 21st century workforce including, technical, vocational and academic programming.
5. Compensation and benefits in our public-school systems should be competitive, especially for teachers, in order to attract and keep highly qualified staff. The make-up of the public-school work force should be diverse and offer students an opportunity to meet mentors who are both alike and different from themselves.
6. School boards and school administration must be free of partisan politics. Those elections should be non-partisan.

7. Communication among and between school boards, administrators, staff, students, parents and the community at large must be open, tolerant, and regular.

Equality

1. We support the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment.
2. We oppose all discrimination.
3. We expect our public and private institutions, and elected and appointed officials, to proactively and publicly stand for the equality, acceptance, access, and admittance of all people.
4. We expect all organizations, institutions agencies and groups, public or private, to defend the rights and equality of all.

Women's Rights

1. Communities throughout the south and in Tennessee have continued to see increases in single-parent households. Specifically, single mothers are increasingly raising children and taking care of elderly parents without a support person. Empowering these women, especially the poorest women in our communities to have the greatest levels of health, education, nutrition, and other elements of well-being in turn enriches those children and elders who rely on these women.
2. We believe in a woman's right to equal pay for equal work.
3. Women must be allowed to make informed decisions about their bodies with respect to birth control and the decision whether to undergo an abortion. In making these decisions, a woman shall be free of harassment and censure. The Sevier County Democratic Party supports the finding of a right to privacy as outlined in the landmark 1972 US Supreme Court decision *Roe v. Wade*, a 7-2 decision which was precedent for almost 50 years.
4. We support affordable pre- and post-natal care, paid maternity leave, affordable childcare, affordable health insurance, comprehensive sexual education (that is not limited to abstinence), affordable adoption, and a living wage.
5. Communities that emphasize women's rights boast better health outcomes than those where women's rights are poorly respected. These health indicators include disease prevention, such as vaccination, reproductive health, death rates and life expectancy.

Economy

1. We support the continuation of an expanding employment base for all skill and education levels. We support diversifying job opportunities by welcoming other and new industries to the area.
2. We believe that everyone should be paid a living wage.
3. We support the elimination of taxes on staples such as food and feminine hygiene products.
4. We recognize that tourism is a major element of the county economy and we support the protection of the GSMNP and other natural resources.
5. We support the growth of small businesses and entrepreneurial opportunities.
6. We support affordable housing and transportation for the local workforce.

Immigration

1. We believe in a safe and secure environment for individuals and families.
2. We support initiatives and programs that allow individuals to seek legal status.
3. We believe that local law enforcement is not responsible for immigration enforcement, except in cases of felony conviction.
4. We support a clear path to citizenship for DACA recipients.

Refugee Status

1. We believe that refugees have proven to be assets to the communities in which they are located.
2. We urge the State of Tennessee to “opt in” to refugee relocation if a choice is required.

Criminal Justice Reform

1. We urge Sevier County to discontinue the practice of housing state and federal prisoners on a long-term basis in the County Jail.
2. We believe that eligible felons have a right to regain identification papers, driver’s licenses and voting rights.
3. We believe in the decriminalization of personal amounts of marijuana.

Local Government Operations

1. Local government must implement the highest level of standards and best practices regarding integrity, honesty, truthfulness and accuracy in government operations. Decisions and actions must be fact-based.
2. Local government must implement the highest level of conflict-of-interest practices and policies, including disclosure of family and business relationships; and strict adherence to recusals (nepotism).
3. Local government should institute the highest level of financial practices, internal controls and external examinations.
4. The local county government workforce should be diverse.
5. Local government must adhere to the highest standards of openness, transparency and public participation.
6. Local government websites and other digital communications methods should comply with the highest standards of openness and transparency, be ADA compliant; and be designed to provide the public with user friendly access; and encourage civic participation. They should include current contact information for ALL elected officials.
7. The County government should apply adequate and appropriate resources to resolve the critical issues of homelessness and a shortage of affordable housing.

Infrastructure

1. We support the improvement of existing roads over expansion of interstates and other major roads.
2. The County should participate in regional and state planning with respect to alternative mass transit development.

3. We believe that all individuals, organizations, and communities should have the capacity to access current and future information technology in order to fully participate in our society, democracy and economy. This includes but is not limited to access to secure and affordable high-speed internet. The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored this critical need for children of low-income families to be able to participate in school remotely.
4. We believe that the residents of Sevier County who live on English Mountain should have access to safe, affordable drinking water.

Quality of Life and Environmental Stewardship

1. We believe that the county must protect the nature of our rural, suburban and small urban development in its planning and zoning policies and procedures. This is particularly relevant to short term rentals that have left locals without long term rental availability.
2. Our local economy and public health are heavily dependent on the rich biodiversity and rare ecosystem of our country's most-visited National Park -The Great Smoky Mountains. County government must proactively work for their protection and allocate the resources necessary to do so.
3. Our local businesses and transportation infrastructure should, as much as possible, prevent pollution of our mountains, forests, waterways and sky.
4. The county should prioritize recycling in all its internal practices and expand options for the public.
5. Man-made climate change is real and presents a significant threat. 2010-2023 includes ten of the hottest years on record. Governments at all levels should prioritize the use of alternate and renewable energy resources.

Homelessness

1. An insufficient number of affordable housing options are available to Sevier County residents. Sevier County boasts a large number of seasonable but low-paying jobs. Residents who struggle with basic income, income that does not provide a living wage, seasonal employment, challenges associated with transportation and rising costs of healthcare should be able to afford basic, decent housing for themselves and their families.
2. We encourage our County Government to advocate and put programs into place that address local homelessness without sending people out to other counties.

Voting Rights and Accessibility

1. We believe that voting is a fundamental right and responsibility of all citizens and that government has an overriding responsibility to assure the highest level of access to the ballot box.
2. We support the liberal early voting practices of the State of Tennessee and encourage the state to seek ways to improve and expand ballot access.
3. We believe that the State of Tennessee must accept a broader range of identifications to verify identity to vote.
4. We believe that felons (as noted above) who have paid their debt to society, have their voting rights restored in an equitable and affordable manner.

5. We believe that voting machines must be accessible for all persons qualified to vote, and that vote counts can be independently verified, protected and maintained.
6. We believe that the integrity of elections must be protected through the use and maintenance of paper to document the actual vote and the tally.
7. We believe that all voting locations must be accessible for all citizens.
8. We believe that all qualified voters should have access to absentee ballots.

Employee rights and benefits

1. We believe that the right to organize is fundamental and should be protected.
2. We believe that elected and appointed officials are duty bound to remain neutral in any and all disputes, negotiations and other contacts between labor and management.
3. We believe that government at all levels must abide by the principle of a living wage and enact legislation to that effect within its jurisdiction.
4. We believe that the State of Tennessee should enact its own minimum wage in accordance with the principle of a living wage.

Access to Firearms

1. We believe that no right is unfettered and that every right carries a heavy burden of responsibility. We support public policy that protects the right but also well regulates its impact on the safety and security of others.
2. We believe that common sense legislation best serves the public interest including but not limited to: universal background checks, safe storage, red-flag laws, closing the gun show loopholes which allow for unregistered gun sales, rational limitations on type and capacity of firearms, and where they may be possessed.
3. We believe that legislative action is urgently needed to improve public safety.

Nuclear Weapons

1. We urge the United States to sign and adopt the Treaty on The Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, which is the only viable treaty that is currently on a possible path to end the existential threat posed by nuclear weapons. On June of 2017 the Treaty was passed by 122 nations, and now has 68 signatory states parties.
2. Given its history as the first (and so far, only) nation to use nuclear bombs in war, the size of its current arsenal, and the huge investments in developing more nuclear weapons in the United States should demonstrate its leadership among the nine nations that currently have nuclear weapons by being the first among the nuclear armed states to adopt the Treaty.

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