



DPC NEW IDEAS PROJECT

THE 2008 FRESH 50: FIFTY NEW POLICY IDEAS FOR SENATE DEMOCRATS

NOVEMBER 2008

Building on the Democratic Party's legacy of reform and innovation, the DPC has developed a "New Ideas Network" to generate new policy ideas for Senate Democrats. The network includes academics, policy experts at think tanks, state and local government officials, thought leaders from business and labor, and bloggers. This report, "The 2008 Fresh 50," is the latest product of that collaboration. *These ideas do not represent the positions or agenda of the Democratic Leadership in the Senate.* They are the result of a brainstorming exercise meant to develop fresh, new ideas for review and consideration by Senate Democrats.

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OUR HISTORY AND VALUES

More than two hundred years ago, Thomas Jefferson and James Madison formed the Democratic Party to represent the interests of the “common man.” This simple but powerful idea, coupled with an unwavering commitment to progress, freedom and equality, has made the Democratic Party not only the most enduring political party in the world, but the embodiment of the hopes and aspirations of generations of middle-class Americans and those who have sought, through hard work and determination, to enter the middle-class.

OUR RECORD

America, under Democratic leadership, has always fought to expand the ranks of the middle-class, through bold acts of reform and innovation: the New Deal and Social Security, which brought retirement security to all working Americans; workplace reforms that made workers safer and more productive; civil rights and voting rights protections that opened doors to opportunity regardless of a person’s color or creed; the Great Society and Medicare, which provided health care after a lifetime of work; and the Great Prosperity of the 1990s, a rising tide that lifted all boats. Virtually every one of these advances, which some now take for granted, was opposed by the Republican Party and their powerful backers, who fought tooth and nail to preserve the status quo.

THE REPUBLICAN RECORD

The Republican Party, under the leadership of President George W. Bush and his Republican allies in the Congress, represents different interests. During the first years of this decade, we saw Republican economic and budget policies, which consist of tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans, a hands-off approach for corporations, and an unwillingness to manage global change, fail the American middle-class. These Republican policies have either caused or failed to address our biggest challenges as a nation: a financial market meltdown; fewer jobs with worse benefits; longer periods of unemployment; falling wages; less upward mobility; rising inequality in income and wealth; record budget deficits and trade deficits; an increased tax burden on the middle-class; less secure pensions; the challenges of globalization; global warming; and rapidly escalating energy, health care, and college tuition costs.

OUR NATION’S GREAT CHALLENGES

America faces unprecedented challenges. How we respond to these great challenges will determine whether America continues to be the pre-eminent economic, political, and military power in the world, or whether we will experience an era of declining economic and national security. Today, with the nation at a crossroads between declining prospects and unlimited opportunities, Democrats offer a new direction for America.

NEW IDEAS FOR A NEW DIRECTION

Building on the Democratic Party’s legacy of reform and innovation, the DPC has developed a “New Ideas Network” to generate new policy ideas for Senate Democrats. The network includes academics, policy experts at think tanks, state and local government officials, thought leaders from business and labor, and bloggers. This report, “The 2008 Fresh 50,” is the latest product of that collaboration. These ideas do not represent the positions or agenda of the Democratic Leadership in the Senate. They are the result of a brainstorming exercise meant to develop fresh, new ideas for review and consideration by Senate Democrats.

Our hope is that, after reviewing these ideas, Democratic Senators will find individual items they wish to adopt and promote as part of their own legislative agendas.

THE 2008 FRESH 50 – SUMMARY LIST

1. Streamline and modernize the regulation of large financial institutions.
2. Disrupt the black market in nuclear materials.
3. Charter a commission to examine government outsourcing and privatization.
4. Make September 11th a national day for volunteering.
5. Protect fingerprints and other biometrics against data breaches.
6. Encourage states to join the interstate compact on the education of children of military personnel.
7. Make sovereign wealth funds more transparent.
8. Use nanoengineering to make solar energy more economical.
9. Establish institutes on international reconstruction and stabilization efforts.
10. Revive postal savings banks.
11. Investigate Iraqi government officials who have stolen U.S. taxpayer dollars and been involved in corruption.
12. Re-tool the CIA to play a central role in protecting America in the 21st century.
13. Address chronic absence in the early grades.
14. Learn to track new “easy-to-make” nuclear technology to prevent terrorists from using it.
15. Create a strong, effective international environmental organization.
16. Require every 401(k) program to offer low-fee index funds.
17. Promote the availability of low-cost financial planning.
18. Link Medicare and private insurance to cover long-term care.
19. Allow alternative “shared appreciation” mortgages.
20. Offer one household energy “tune-up” to every American homeowner within the next three years.
21. Require a National Intelligence Estimate for homeland security threats and a “threat reduction” plan.
22. Make the federal government a leader in promoting job sharing.
23. Prevent “debt relief” fraud.
24. End public housing as we know it.

25. Expand the Dependent Care Tax Credit to cover elder care costs.
26. The federal government should help “start up” start-ups.
27. Promote lifelong public education.
28. Put 10,000 cops on the beat to head off a potential crime wave in communities hard-hit by foreclosures.
29. Build up “turnaround” capacity for improving troubled schools.
30. Support “four-season” farmers’ markets for healthier eating.
31. Establish a Corporation for International Study and Service with an expanded Peace Corps.
32. Make corporate tax returns publicly available to increase accountability and honesty.
33. Find ways to break the circle of crime.
34. Use a team-building approach to diversify colleges.
35. Promote small-donor democracy.
36. Create an independent federal disaster mitigation agency.
37. Improve credit score disclosure.
38. Allow failing elementary schools to become Early Education Academies.
39. Apply the “single stop” approach to helping children in poverty.
40. Propose an international “Diseases of Global Warming” fund.
41. Establish a National Innovation Foundation.
42. Encourage states to use international educational benchmarks.
43. Support teen pregnancy prevention efforts aimed at teen boys and young men.
44. Establish a “Freedom List” to publicize cases of important political prisoners.
45. Create a national web portal for adult learners.
46. Help Native Americans fight counterfeiters.
47. Ensure American children are protected against pandemic flu.
48. Use government purchasing power to improve computer security.
49. Shift to a new air traffic control management model.
50. Establish a uniform standard for sensitive but unclassified information.

for five years to develop a “reconstitution” plan. The law offers a menu of options for restructuring such schools, such as closing the school and reopening it as a charter school. However, some of these choices are approaches that lack evidence of demonstrated effectiveness. In fact, data from states with large numbers of schools in restructuring suggest a significant amount of them have seen little change.

Proposal: We should allow failing elementary schools to become Early Education Academies. The No Child Left Behind law should offer an additional option to schools in need of restructuring. An Early Education Academy would serve children from pre-kindergarten through 3rd grade (ages 3-8) and deliver a vertically aligned curriculum emphasizing literacy, language, and social-emotional development in the context of a full complement of core academic subjects. It should also provide time for teachers to work together in age and disciplinary teams to align curriculum and instruction. The academies could be regular neighborhood schools or schools of choice. The older elementary school grades could be reconstituted as a separate school-within-a-school or students in those grades could receive priority for transfer to higher-performing public schools. This approach would provide students a firm education foundation by the end of third grade.

More Information: See “10 New Ideas for Early Education in NCLB Reauthorization” by Sara Mead of the New America Foundation, found online here: http://www.newamerica.net/publications/policy/10_new_ideas_early_education_nclb_reauthorization.

39. Apply the “single stop” approach to helping children in poverty.

Issue: There are several different sources of government help for low-income working families, such as Medicaid, food stamps, and the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). Our disparate safety net can be complicated for families to maneuver and often requires multiple visits to different offices in different neighborhoods, something particularly challenging for parents working low-wage jobs. As a result, a significant amount of government assistance goes unclaimed – an estimated \$65 billion per year. There are 20 million struggling families with incomes below 200 percent of the poverty line, yet only seven percent of them receive all four of the main federal efforts to help such families (EITC, Medicaid, food stamps, and child care assistance.) While we need to do more for these families, we also need to do better at ensuring they can actually use the help we already offer.

Proposal: We should apply the “single stop” approach to helping children in poverty. Single Stop USA is a non-profit organization that partners with community groups and educational institutions to help families understand the aid for which they are eligible and then helps them navigate the system to receive it. Sophisticated computer software enables caseworkers to quickly review eligibility for the full spectrum of government aid. Additional partners provide onsite legal and financial counseling and free tax preparation – all in convenient locations in low-income communities. As pioneered by Single Stop USA, which operates in more than 60 sites, largely in New York, this approach has been found to result in an additional \$13 in benefits for families for every dollar it costs to operate. We should put \$100 million into testing this model in additional states. We should also study its results to find what aspects of federal programs are the biggest participation barriers to families so we can reform them.

More Information: See “Out of the Desert: An Integrated Approach to Ending Child Poverty” by Elisabeth Mason and Julie Kashen in *Big Ideas for Children: Investing in Our Nation’s Future*, from First Focus, found online here: <http://www.firstfocus.net/pages/3499/>.

40. Propose an international “Diseases of Global Warming” fund.

Issue: A side effect of global warming may be the shifting of the incidence and prevalence of disease. For example, the range of malaria-carrying mosquitoes appears to be increasing with climate change, bringing the disease to places that have not seen it before, such as South Korea, and which are unused to fighting it. Modeling