

Boulder County Democratic Party Platform

2020 Plank: Healthy Democracy

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HEALTHY DEMOCRACY: Election Reform, Media Reform, and Government Ethics & Accountability

Our current electoral system uses six factors to predetermine or influence elections:

- 1. Reducing faith in election outcomes:** Insecure voting and tabulation machines, lack of a voter-verified paper ballot, and lack of sufficient, high-quality election audits
- 2. Distorting who votes:** Gerrymandering, voter suppression, and disenfranchising voters
- 3. Limiting who and what we can vote on:** Ballot access suppression, marginalization of third parties, and Direct Democracy initiative suppression
- 4. Distorting representation:** US Senate, Electoral College, single-winner districts and plurality “block” voting that can give zero representation to minority parties
- 5. Distorting outcomes due to the voting method:** Plurality voting (aka First Past the Post), winner-take-all
- 6. Distorting information:** Foreign meddling via social media, denigration of fact-based media, and lack of media accountability

These electoral distortions cause concentrated power, limited accountability and widespread exclusion from decision making.

A. Election Integrity

Boulder County Democrats believe that the integrity of elections and the public's trust in the accuracy of election results is essential to a healthy democracy. We oppose election meddling.

1. Pass legislation (e.g., mandate voter-verifiable paper ballots) and fund new voting/tallying machines to secure our elections
2. Require thorough audits up to full manual hand counts to ensure that all cast votes are counted, and demand that all aspects of the election process be transparent and open to public inquiry
3. Investigate and prosecute election interference, whether foreign or domestic
4. Prohibit election administrators (e.g., secretaries of state, county clerks and their elections staff) from involvement in any campaigns on their ballot other than their own election campaigns. Require candidates on the ballot to recuse themselves from administering their own elections. Official election observers may be active in political campaigns.
5. Require permanent retention of emails and other election documents and communications by government employees and anyone working on political campaigns.

B. Voting Rights and Voter Engagement

Boulder County Democrats believe that a healthy democracy requires a citizenry that is involved and engaged on an ongoing basis. To remain engaged, the Boulder County Democrats believe that voting rights must be protected and should be expanded to encourage greater engagement with the government. The people with a stake in the outcomes should have a voice in our elections.

1. Ensuring the right to vote
 - a. Prohibiting election officials and judges from purging otherwise qualified voters from the voting rolls.
 - b. Prohibiting intimidation or interference in voting preferences, community activism, or political affiliation by employers or others in an unequal-power relationship. Membership organizations, such as unions, churches and political parties, may provide voting guidance, but should not prohibit members from speaking as individuals contrary to the organizations' preferences.
 - c. Enforcing the Voting Rights Act and requiring that all states uphold federal voting rights standards and obtain federal preclearance before making changes to election laws that restrict voting.
2. Expanding the right to vote.
 - a. Lower the voting age to 16 to encourage the start of a lifetime habit while still in K-12 years and allow youths who will be 16 on the day of the general election to participate in primaries and caucuses.
 - b. Citizens without a street address, citizens who were formerly incarcerated, citizens whose first language is not English, disabled citizens and all other citizens of voting age should have the right of suffrage.
3. Increasing voter engagement
 - a. Ease of registration: Universal automatic opt-out voter registration or updating of voter registration whenever using government services (e.g., DMV, getting a birth certificate, filing taxes), same-day voter registration, online voter registration, and acceptance of a wide variety of IDs for voter registration
 - b. Ease of voting: Vote by mail, early voting, convenient hours/locations and an adequate number of polling locations to prevent long lines
 - c. Voter motivation: Adopt proportional representation so voters can elect a representative who shares their values without fear of throwing away their vote
4. Increase Participation in Democratic Party Nominations and Elections
 - a. Caucus/Assembly/Convention/Central Committee and Vacancy Meetings
 - i. Pre-registration should be encouraged to minimize congestion. (Pre-registration may be particularly important for youths who will be 16 on the day of the general election since their voter registration records may be confidential and require more work for party officials to access.)
 - ii. Allow all registered Democrats who will be 16 or older on the day of the general election to run for Democratic Party positions unless restricted by law

- iii. Use more expressive voting methods (e.g., rating or ranking or proportional representation) in meetings whenever possible to better hear the collective voice of the members or delegates.
 - b. Primary Process
 - i. Support primary elections over caucuses
 - ii. Support allowing unaffiliated voters to vote a Democratic or Republican ballot in the primary without having to affiliate.
- 5. Direct Democracy
 - a. Make it feasible to collect signatures with only unpaid volunteers by
 - . Allowing online petition signatures for ballot initiatives and candidates or
 - i. Reducing the overall number of signatures and/or number of signatures per districts for state ballot initiatives
 - b. Continue to require 55% of the electorate to newly amend the state constitution, but only require a bare majority to overturn constitutional language that originally passed with a majority
 - c. Require a two-thirds vote of the legislature to amend or change a statute approved by the voters via a citizens' initiative

C. Candidate Recruitment and Ballot Access

Boulder County Democrats believe that the quality of our representative government is dependent on good candidates running for office. Impediments to running for office should be minimized, but reasonable safeguard prerequisites for certifying candidates are appropriate.

1. Ballot access for candidates
 - a. Change Colorado statute to allow parties to determine their own nomination process. For the Democratic Party we recommend returning to the previous assembly threshold of 20% from the current 30% or use block approval voting -- vote for all the candidates you approve of -- with the current 30% threshold. If exactly one candidate reaches the threshold but at least one other candidate has at least 10% support, the second-most popular candidate should also be included on the primary ballot.
 - b. Require US presidential, vice-presidential, gubernatorial, US Senate and US House candidates to submit 5 years of tax returns
2. Eliminate favoritism by official party organizations such as the DNC, DSCC, DCCC, CDP and BCDP, by:
 - a. Forbid official party organizations from making endorsements prior to a primary election.
 - b. Forbid official party organizations from discouraging challengers to incumbents or presumed front-runners and from blacklisting organizations who work with any particular candidate.
3. Attract good, diverse candidates

- a. Elected officials and their staff should be paid a living wage commensurate with the time and experience required for the positions. Elected officials should receive adequate stipends for housing, travel and staffing needs.
 - b. Remove term limits for all elected officials except for elected executives (e.g., governors, US president) who appoint judges.
 - c. County coroners and surveyors should be appointed rather than elected, following the example of Colorado Home Rule counties.
4. Recall petitions of elected officials should be limited to a specific violation of oath of office or specific election shenanigans, not political motivations.

D. Better Voter Representation and Voter Satisfaction

Boulder County Democrats believe our current electoral system concentrates power and excludes people. We believe that eliminating structural impediments would result in inclusive representation and maximize voter satisfaction. We should alter the rules to prevent disproportionate voting power to select parts of the electorate (e.g., swing states in presidential elections and small-population states in the US Senate), suppress the voice of some populations (e.g., gerrymandering and plurality elections), and promote corruption (e.g., campaign finance).

- 1. Reducing the influence of money in campaigns
 - a. Full transparency of
 - i. all political campaign donations to and spending by candidates
 - ii. donations to and spending by individuals or groups, such as PACs and issue committees, not affiliated with candidates
 - b. Broaden the definition of political spending to include advocacy media
 - c. Regulate Internet and social media political campaign ads like current political ads on radio, TV and print
 - d. Disclosure of ultimate funding sources (individual, corporate, foreign actor, etc) to campaign finance regulators to prevent astroturfing and foreign meddling
 - e. Encourage public funding of elections to attract more diverse candidates
 - f. Pass a constitutional amendment to overturn the influence of corporations as currently permitted by Citizens United or bring a new case that can overrule Citizens United to the Supreme Court so that we can institute reforms on campaign spending, campaign contributions and self-funding
- 2. Adopting non-plurality voting methods
 - a. Adopt voting methods in single-winner contests that eliminate the spoiler effect, are better at electing the candidate who would win a head-to-head contest against any other candidate and allow for more voter expressiveness on a ballot, such as rating each candidate with Olympic-type scoring and ranking candidates with instant-runoff voting.
 - b. Adopt proportional representation for multi-member bodies in order to avoid concentration of power by one group, especially when that one group does not constitute or barely constitutes a majority of the electorate. When members of a

- multi-member body are elected in single-winner contests, we support consolidating districts to provide for multi-winner contests.
- c. Until the adoption of proportional representation eliminates gerrymandering for multi-member bodies, each new district map should be the least gerrymandered map that meets the required districting criteria.
 - d. Work toward the National Popular Vote Compact taking effect so that the US president is the candidate who wins the national popular vote.

E. Government Structure, Ethics and Accountability

We believe that all levels of government should be subject to strict rules of transparency, accountability and ethical behavior. We should minimize and penalize opportunities for corruption.

1. Government transparency and access to elected officials and public servants
 - a. Institute free or reasonable costs for people submitting non-frivolous FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) requests
 - b. Require regular two-way communication between elected officials and constituents, e.g., monthly town halls or press conferences, monthly public hearings at local meetings, no blocking Twitter followers
 - c. Reinstitute We the People public petitions to the White House with mandatory responses when 100,000 signatures are achieved within 30 days.
 - d. Require ALEC (American Legislative Exchange Council) or other template bills to clearly communicate the origin of the bill text
 - e. Oppose an Article V convention which can become controlled by special interests until we have fixed the money-in-politics problem and the concentration of power
 - f. Require timely access to agendas, minutes and, if possible, video or audio recordings of all government meetings with the exception of executive sessions
 - g. Require the executive and legislative branches to maintain publicly available logs of government officials' interaction with lobbyists and constituents.
 - h. Publicly announce Requests for Proposals for government contracts, have an open, public application process with public, archived records, and public justification for choosing the eventual contractor up to and including details of the applicants' scores
 - i. Protect whistleblowers from retaliation and public identification
2. Ethical behavior of decision-makers and decision-influencers
 - a. Regulate activities of paid lobbyists and elected officials
 - i. Regulate the "revolving door" whereby national and state legislators leave office to almost immediately become highly paid lobbyists
 - ii. Full, public disclosure of paid lobbyists' income
 - iii. Full, public disclosure of contacts between paid lobbyists and elected members of Congress
 - iv. Require national and state legislators to avoid financial conflicts of interest

- b. Require the US president, vice-president, US senators, congressmen and governors to place their assets in a blind trust or in index funds that won't present a conflict of interest
 - c. Prohibit current and former elected officials and their immediate family members from receiving 6-figure speaking fees and other suspicious sinecures, such as unwarranted positions on corporate boards
 - d. Every government employee and contract worker has the obligation to refuse any order which would cause them to violate their oath of office. We all have the responsibility to encourage and support the workers in their right to refuse.
3. Government officials should govern
- a. Change rules to make a government shutdown harder to achieve by requiring legislators to increase the debt ceiling as needed but also to simultaneously create a fiscally responsible plan to reduce the debt in the future
 - b. Institute a GAVEL amendment for the US Senate and the US House of Representatives so that every bill and every nominee gets a committee vote.
 - c. Checks and Balances - No branch of government is above the law and each branch should take its checks-and-balances responsibility seriously.
 - d. Public servants swear an oath to the constitution and should be held to their oath to put government above loyalty to any government official or political party
 - . The "Unitary Executive" or US President's powers should be constrained within the spirit of the law via appropriate measures including filing lawsuits against executive orders or legal opinions, conducting impeachment proceedings, censuring officials, and rejecting legislation that concentrates power in the executive branch.
 - i. As long as our government is paralyzed by political polarization, the US Senate rules should be changed to spread power over its body among more leaders than just the Majority Leader
 - ii. Our democracy depends on an independent judiciary.
3. Vacancies
- a. A vacancy in elected office should be filled by special election rather than by appointment whenever possible.
 - b. For a vacancy in a position requiring approval by a legislative body, an appointed acting official should be approved within 90 days or vacate the post.
 - c. In order to encourage ethically-challenged elected officials to resign, partisan offices without an automatic replacement (such as a lieutenant governor for the governor) should be filled with someone of the same party affiliation until the next election.
4. Boulder County
- a. Support 5 county commissioners elected using proportional representation
 - b. Support Boulder County becoming a Home Rule county

F. Media Reform and Access to Media

We believe that voters must be factually informed on issues, candidates and government officials in order to ensure an open and accountable government. A functioning and trustworthy media bear a large share of this responsibility. We also oppose Orwellian data collection and manipulation to influence unwitting voters and to subtly shift the “Overton window” of discourse.

1. Data ownership and regulation of data collection: The government must recognize
 - a. The threat non-state actors that hoard data can pose to democracy
 - b. Data collectors can violate privacy by turning over data to the state or a foreign actor without a warrant
 - c. Data collectors can use data to directly influence the election. (e.g., Cambridge Analytica)
 - d. Individuals retain ownership of their personal data and must approve and be compensated for any commercial use of such data and information
2. Reinstate Net Neutrality with guarantees of equal accessibility to all content and applications for internet service providers and customers, regardless of the source, and without favoring or blocking particular products or websites
3. Fair and respected media
 - a. Loss of local newspapers and local ownership reduce visibility of local government activities
 - b. Ownership of media, e.g., foreign or corporate, should be prominently disclosed annually via the media’s medium, e.g., on-air or in print, and when relevant to a news story.
 - c. Media literacy should be part of the K-12 school curriculum
 - d. Defend fact-based journalism and hold the media accountable by increasing liability limits for publishing false, defamatory or libelous information.
 - e. Repeal the 1996 Telecommunications Act
 - i. Anti-consolidation of media - Prohibit media monopolies and provide financial incentives for media competition, local ownership, and independent media to ensure a diversity of viewpoints.
 - ii. As part of the Public, Educational and Governmental (PEG) access, provide free, fair, and open public access television as a First Amendment, Freedom of Speech forum for all US residents on an equal and non-commercial basis.
4. Journalistic freedoms and protections
 - a. Protect journalists and their sources: Protect the constitutional rights and provide for the publicly funded defense of media and their whistle-blower sources when disclosing to the public classified information about government abuses of power and illegal or unconstitutional acts.
 - b. Access to unclassified government meetings, hearings and actions including in combat zones when doing so does not endanger our troops.
5. Public Service Broadcasting
 - a. Require licensed broadcast, cable, and satellite media to provide a significant level of public service broadcasting

- b. Reinstatement of the Fairness Doctrine: Require that broadcast licensees provide, at no cost, substantial airtime that is equal in both quality (similar time slots) and quantity
 - i. to all candidates who have achieved at least 5% public support
 - ii. to the pro and con sides of every ballot measure
 - c. Maintain the independence of public broadcasting by significantly increasing its public funding.
6. Return control of Voice of America to a non-partisan board with independent auditors and restart its "broadcast" exclusively to outside our borders.