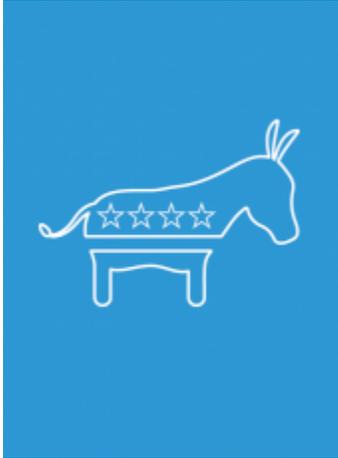


Proposed Content of a 2020 Democratic Party Platform Pledge of a Federal Job Guarantee: Informed by Analysis of Democratic Party Platforms, 1932-2016

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<https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/app-categories/elections-and-transitions/party-platforms>

This paper consists of three sections: Democratic Party Platform Pledges on Full and Maximum Employment, 1932-2016; An Overview and Analysis of Democratic Party Full Employment Pledges, and Proposed Components of a 2020 Job Guarantee Pledge.

Democratic Party Pledges on Full or Maximum Employment, 1932-2016

1932

We advocate the spread of employment by a substantial reduction in the hours of labor, the encouragement of the shorter week by applying that principle in government service; we advocate advance planning of public works.

1936

We believe that unemployment is a national problem, and that it is an inescapable obligation of our Government to meet it in a national way.

Due to our stimulation of private business, more than five million people have been reemployed; and we shall continue to maintain that the first objective of a program of economic security is maximum employment in private industry at adequate wages. Where business fails to supply such employment, we believe that work at prevailing wages should be provided in cooperation with State and local governments on useful public projects, to the end that the national wealth may be increased, the skill and energy of the worker may be utilized, his morale maintained, and the unemployed assured the opportunity to earn the necessities of life

1940

We will continue energetically to direct our efforts toward the employment in private industry of all those willing to work, as well as the fullest employment of money and machines. This we pledge as our primary objective. To further implement this objective, we favor calling, under the direction of the President, a national unemployment conference of leaders of government, industry, labor and farm groups.

1944

To speed victory, establish and maintain peace, guarantee full employment and provide prosperity —this is its platform.

1948

To serve the interests of all and not the few; to assure a world in which peace and justice can prevail; to achieve security, full production, and full employment—this is our platform.

1952

The Democratic Administration prudently passed the Employment Act of 1946 declaring it to be national policy never again to permit large-scale unemployment to stalk the land. We will assure the transition from defense production to peace-time production without the ravages of unemployment. We pledge ourselves at all times to the maintenance of maximum employment, production, and purchasing power in the American economy.

1956

(1) We repudiate the Republican stunting of our economic growth, and we reassert the principles of the Full Employment Act of 1946.

1960

[A new Democratic Administration] will reaffirm the Economic Bill of Rights which Franklin Roosevelt wrote into our national conscience sixteen years ago. It will reaffirm these rights for all Americans of whatever race, place of residence, or station in life:

1. "The right to a useful and remunerative job in the industries or shops or farms or mines of the nation."

Full Employment

The Democratic Party reaffirms its support of full employment as a paramount objective of national policy.

For nearly 30 months the rate of unemployment has been between 5 and 7.5% of the labor force. A pool of three to four million citizens, able and willing to work but unable to find jobs, has been written off by the Republican Administration as a "normal" readjustment of the economic system.

The policies of a Democratic Administration to restore economic growth will reduce current unemployment to a minimum.

Thereafter, if recessionary trends appear, we will act promptly with counter-measures, such as public works or temporary tax cuts. We will not stand idly by and permit recessions to run their course as the Republican Administration has done.

1964

Full employment is an end in itself and must be insisted upon as a priority objective.

It is the national purpose, and our commitment, that every man or woman who is willing and able to work is entitled to a job and to a fair wage for doing it.

1968

We are firmly committed to the twin objectives of full employment and price stability.

1972

Full employment—a guaranteed job for all—is the primary economic objective of the Democratic Party. The Democratic Party is committed to a job for every American who seeks work. Only through full employment can we reduce the burden on working people. We are determined to make economic security a matter of right. This means a job with decent pay and good working conditions for everyone willing and able to work and an adequate income for those unable to work. It means abolition of the present welfare system.

1976

I. Full Employment, Price Stability and Balanced Growth

The Democratic Party's concern for human dignity and freedom has been directed at increasing the economic opportunities for all our citizens and reducing the economic deprivation and inequities that have stained the record of American democracy.

Today, millions of people are unemployed. Unemployment represents mental anxiety, fear of harassment over unpaid bills, idle hours, loss of self-esteem, strained family relationships, deprivation of children and youth, alcoholism, drug abuse and crime. A job is a key measure of a person's place in society—whether as a full-fledged participant or on the outside. Jobs are the solution to poverty, hunger and other basic needs of workers and their families. Jobs enable a person to translate legal rights of equality into reality.

Our industrial capacity is also wastefully under-utilized. There are houses to build, urban centers to rebuild, roads and railroads to construct and repair, rivers to clean, and new sources of energy to develop. Something is wrong when there is work to be done, and the people who are willing to do it are without jobs. What we have lacked is leadership.

Republican Mismanagement

During the past 25 years, the American economy has suffered five major recessions, all under Republican administrations. During the past eight years, we have had two costly recessions with continuing unprecedented peacetime inflation. "Stagflation" has become a new word in our language just as it has become a product of Republican economic policy. Never before have we had soaring inflation in the midst of a major recession.

Stagnation, waste and human suffering are the legacy left to the American people by Republican economic policies. During the past five years, U.S. economic growth has averaged only 1-1/2 per cent per year compared with an historical average of about 4 per cent. Because of this shortfall, the nation has lost some \$500 billion in the production of goods and services, and, if Republican rule continues, we can expect to lose another \$600—\$800—billion by 1980.

Ten million people are unemployed right now, and twenty to thirty million were jobless at some time in each of the last two years. For major groups in the labor force—minorities, women, youth, older workers, farm, factory and construction workers—unemployment has been, and remains, at depression levels.

The rising cost of food, clothing, housing, energy and health care has eroded the income of the average American family, and has pushed persons on fixed incomes to the brink of economic disaster. Since 1970, the annual rate of inflation has averaged more than 6 percent and is projected by the Ford administration to continue at an unprecedented peacetime rate of 6 to 7 per cent until 1978.

The depressed production and high unemployment rates of the Nixon-Ford administrations have produced federal deficits totaling \$242 billion. Those who should be working and paying taxes are collecting unemployment compensation or other welfare payments in order to survive. For every one per cent increase in the unemployment rate—for every one million Americans out of work—we all pay \$3

billion more in unemployment compensation and \$2 billion in welfare and related costs, and lose \$14 billion in taxes. In fiscal 1976, \$76 billion was lost to the federal government through increased recession-related expenditures and lost revenues. In addition, state and local governments lost \$27 billion in revenues. A return to full employment will eliminate such deficits. With prudent management of existing programs, full employment revenues will permit the financing of national Democratic initiatives.

For millions of Americans, the Republican Party has substituted welfare for work. Huge sums will be spent on food stamps and medical care for families of the unemployed. Social insurance costs are greatly increased. This year alone the federal government will spend nearly \$20 billion on unemployment compensation. In contrast, spending on job development is only \$2—1/2 billion. The goal of the new Democratic administration will be to turn unemployment cheeks into pay cheeks.

What Democrats Can Achieve

In contrast to the record of Republican mismanagement, the most recent eight years of Democratic leadership, under John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, produced economic growth that was virtually uninterrupted. The unemployment rate dropped from 6.7 per cent in 1961 to 3.6 per cent in 1968, and most segments of the population benefited. Inflation increased at an average annual rate of only 2 per cent, and the purchasing power of the average family steadily increased. In 1960, about 40 million people were living in poverty. Over the next eight years, 14—1/2 million people moved out of poverty because of training opportunities, increased jobs and higher incomes. Since 1968, the number of persons living in poverty has remained virtually unchanged.

We have met the goals of full employment with stable prices in the past and can do it again. The Democratic Party is committed to the right of all adult Americans willing, able and seeking work to have opportunities for useful jobs at living wages. To make that commitment meaningful, we pledge ourselves to the support of legislation that will make every responsible effort to reduce adult unemployment to 3 per cent within 4 years.

Modernizing Economic Policy

To meet our goals we must set annual targets for employment, production and price stability; the Federal Reserve must be made a full partner in national economic decisions and become responsive to the economic goals of Congress and the President; credit must be generally available at reasonable interest rates; tax, spending and credit policies must be carefully coordinated with our economic goals, and coordinated within the framework of national economic planning.

Of special importance is the need for national economic planning capability. This planning capability should provide roles for Congress and the Executive as equal partners in the process and provide for full participation by the private sector, and state and local government. Government must plan ahead just like any business, and this type of planning can be implemented without the creation of a new bureaucracy but rather through the well-defined use of existing bodies and techniques. If we do not plan, but continue to react to crisis after crisis, our economic performance will be further eroded.

Full Employment Policies

Institutional reforms and the use of conventional tax, spending and credit policies must be accompanied by a broad range of carefully-targeted employment programs that will reduce unemployment in the private sector, and in regions, states and groups that have special employment problems.

The lack of formal coordination among federal, state and local governments is a major obstacle to full employment. The absence of economic policy coordination is particularly visible during times of high unemployment. Recessions reduce tax revenues, and increase unemployment-related expenditures for

state and local governments. To maintain balanced budgets or reduce budget deficits these governments are forced to increase taxes and cut services—actions that directly undermine federal efforts to stimulate the economy.

Consistent and coherent economic policy requires federal anti-recession grant programs to state and local government, accompanied by public employment, public works projects and direct stimulus to the private sector. In each case, the programs should be phased in automatically when unemployment rises and phased out as it declines.

Even during periods of normal economic growth there are communities and regions of the country—particularly central cities and rural areas—that do not fully participate in national economic prosperity. The Democratic Party has supported national economic policies which have consciously sought to aid regions in the nation which have been afflicted with poverty, or newer regions which have needed resources for development. These policies were soundly conceived and have been successful. Today, we have different areas and regions in economic decline and once again face a problem of balanced economic growth. To restore balance, national economic policy should be designed to target federal resources in areas of greatest need. To make low interest loans to businesses and state and local governments for the purpose of encouraging private sector investment in chronically depressed areas, we endorse consideration of programs such as a domestic development bank or federally insured taxable state and local bonds with adequate funding, proper management and public disclosure.

Special problems faced by young people, especially minorities, entering the labor force persist regardless of the state of the economy. To meet the needs of youth, we should consolidate existing youth employment programs; improve training, apprenticeship, internship and job-counseling programs at the high school and college levels; and permit youth participation in public employment projects.

There are people who will be especially difficult to employ. Special means for training and locating jobs for these people in the private sector, and, to the extent required, in public employment, should be established. Every effort should be made to create jobs in the private sector. Clearly, useful public jobs are far superior to welfare and unemployment payments. The federal government has the responsibility to ensure that all Americans able, willing and seeking work are provided opportunities for useful jobs.

1980

Full Employment—We specifically reaffirm our commitment to achieve all the goals of the Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment Act within the currently prescribed dates in the Act, especially those relating to a joint reduction in unemployment and inflation. Full employment is important to the achievement of a rising standard of living, to the pursuit of sound justice, and to the strength and vitality of America.

We will strictly enforce existing anti-discrimination laws with respect to hiring, pay and promotions. We will adopt a full employment policy, with increased possibilities for part-time work Vocational programs for young women in our high schools and colleges will be equalized and expanded. Fields traditionally reserved for men...from construction to engineering...must be opened to women, a goal which must be promoted through government incentives and federally sponsored training programs.

1984

The Democratic Party believes in making our cities' needs a federal priority once again: We want to see again cities where people have jobs and adequate housing, cities whose bridges and mass transit are being maintained, and whose neighborhoods are safe to live in. And that will take a commitment by our federal government to help our cities again.

Toward that end, the Democratic Party pledges:

—a commitment to full employment. We believe the federal government must develop a major, comprehensive national job skills development policy targeted on the chronically unemployed and underemployed. We must launch special training programs for women who receive public assistance. We need to increase government procurement opportunities for small and minority firms and to encourage deposits of federal funds in minority-owned financial institutions. And to build for the future, the Democratic Party calls for a new national commitment to education, which must include raising standards, insisting on excellence, and giving all children a chance to learn, regardless of race, income or sex.

1988

WE BELIEVE that all Americans have a fundamental right to economic justice in a stronger, surer national economy, an economy that must grow steadily without inflation, that can generate a rising standard of living for all and fulfill the desire of all to work in dignity up to their full potential in good health with good jobs at good wages, an economy that is prosperous in every region, from coast to coast, including our rural towns and our older industrial communities, our mining towns, our energy producing areas and the urban areas that have been neglected for the past seven years. We believe that, as a first-rate world power moving into the 21st century, we can have a first-rate full employment economy, with an indexed minimum wage that can help lift and keep families out of poverty, with training and employment programs—including child care and health care—that can help people move from welfare to work, with portable pensions and an adequate Social Security System, safeguarded against emasculation and privatization, that can help assure a comfortable and fulfilling old age, with opportunities for voluntary national public service, above and beyond current services, that can enrich our communities, and with all workers assured the protection of an effective law that guarantees their rights to organize, join the union of their choice, and bargain collectively with their employer, free from anti-union tactics.

1992

No mention of full or maximum employment

1996

No mention of full or maximum employment

2000

No mention of full or maximum employment

2004

No mention of full or maximum employment

2008

No mention of full or maximum employment

2012

No mention of full or maximum employment

2016

We will protect and defend the Federal Reserve's independence to carry out the dual mandate assigned to it by Congress—for both full employment and low inflation—against threats from new legislation.

Overview and Analysis of Democratic Party Platform Full Employment Pledges

The aspiration for full employment or the right of all job-seekers to a decent job is strongly associated with the New Deal, and so this overview begins with an examination of Democratic Party Platforms of the New Deal era, the first being 1932 when the Presidential Candidate, Franklin D. Roosevelt, in accepting his nomination, pledged “a New Deal for the American people.” During the 1932 campaign, in an address to the Commonwealth Club of California, he spoke in favor of a guarantee of economic rights and specifically, a right to living-wage work:

Every man has a right to life; and this means that he has also a right to make a comfortable living.... Our government formal and informal, political and economic, owes to everyone an avenue to possess himself of a portion of that plenty sufficient for his needs, through his own work....

As I see it, the task of government in its relation to business is to assist the development of an economic declaration of rights, an economic constitutional order. This is the common task of statesman and businessman. It is the minimum requirement of a more permanently safe order of things.

This commitment was constrained by FDR’s widely shared acceptance of the pre-Keynesian belief that balancing the federal budget was inherently desirable—even during a depression—but his orthodox views on that point were in turn constrained by his belief that government had a prior duty to ensure that people’s basic needs were met. He made this clear in another of his 1932 campaign speeches in which he excoriated President Hoover for his failure to balance the federal budget. After outlining his own plans to reduce government expenses, FDR went on to offer the following caveat to what he had just said.

At the same time, let me repeat from now to election day so that every man, woman and child in the United States will know what I mean: If starvation and dire need on the part of any of our citizens make necessary the appropriation of additional funds which would keep the budget out of balance, I shall not hesitate to tell the American people the full truth and ask them to authorize the expenditure of that additional amount.

How he would fulfill this latter commitment was left unclear. Regarding the overarching problem of mass unemployment, the 1932 Democratic Party platform pledged only mild measures.

We advocate the spread of employment by a substantial reduction in the hours of labor, the encouragement of the shorter week by applying that principle in government service; we advocate advance planning of public works.

It was during FDR’s first term in office that the New Deal’s approach to the problem of unemployment took shape, and because of the priority the President attached to meeting people’s basic needs, it was his social welfare policy advisors rather than his economic advisors who developed the New Deal’s strategy. Unemployment wasn’t just an economic problem to be solved by promoting the economy’s recovery. It was also a social problem that required the immediate intervention of government to provide for the needs of unemployed workers and their families. The strategy was conceived, proposed, tested and implemented by Harry Hopkins and Aubrey Williams, the administration’s top social welfare administrators, was to meet the needs of unemployed workers by providing them with decent employment producing useful public goods and services rather than

putting them “on the dole.” It was what the unemployed themselves wanted, and it also benefited the public.

Following a massive and highly successful trial run of this strategy over the winter of 1933-34, FDR appointed a cabinet level Committee on Economic Security (CES) to develop a comprehensive set of legislative proposals to meet the economic security needs not just of the unemployed, but also of persons who were either unable or not expected to be self-supporting. The Committee’s report proposed a two-legged social welfare strategy. For the unemployed it proposed “employment assurance,” a commitment on the part of the federal government to do what it could to stimulate private sector employment accompanied by a guarantee of temporary public sector employment for all job-seekers the private sector was unable to employ at a particular time or in a particular locale. For persons who were unable or not expected to work it proposed a series of targeted social insurance and public assistance programs partially or wholly funded by the federal government and subject to its supervision. For example, it was the CES that proposed the establishment of the nation’s Social Security program.

The Democratic Party’s 1936 platform endorsed the CES’s proposed response to the problem of unemployment, and was the first to endorse the goal of “maximum employment” (the term used by the CES to describe its goal before Keynes coined and popularized the term “full employment” to describe the same goal).

We believe that unemployment is a national problem, and that it is an inescapable obligation of our Government to meet it in a national way.

Due to our stimulation of private business, more than five million people have been reemployed; and we shall continue to maintain that the first objective of a program of economic security is maximum employment in private industry at adequate wages. Where business fails to supply such employment, we believe that work at prevailing wages should be provided in cooperation with State and local governments on useful public projects, to the end that the national wealth may be increased, the skill and energy of the worker may be utilized, his morale maintained, and the unemployed assured the opportunity to earn the necessities of life.

Unfortunately, FDR’s commitment to securing people’s basic needs did not encompass the full funding of the CES’s “employment assurance” proposal. Instead, he sought only enough funding for the effort to provide jobs for unemployed workers who otherwise would be eligible for public relief. Unemployed workers who were managing to keep their heads above the water without public assistance were not eligible for employment in the New Deal’s direct job creation programs—the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), the Works Progress Administration (WPA), and the National Youth Administration (NYA). These programs provided decent employment for those among the unemployed whose need it the most—an average of 38 percent of all unemployed workers between 1936 and 1940. In 1936, the first year all three of these programs were fully operational, the jobs they provided reduced the nation’s unemployment rate by 7.7 percentage points, and the increase in the federal budget deficit required to fund the establishment of the WPA and NYA helped boost private sector growth enough to reduce the private sector job deficit by 3.3 percentage points (the unemployment rate calculated as though CCC, WPA and NYA workers were unemployed). Had the CES’s “employment assurance” proposal been fully funded, the U.S. unemployment rate would probably have dropped below 2 percent by 1938 and the private sector would probably have fully recovered from the Depression before rather than during World War II.

In 1940, with the private sector job deficit still in the double digits at 14.6 percent and the overall unemployment rate counting the CCC, WPA and NYA at 8.9 percent, the Platform focused exclusively on the promotion of private sector job growth. It pledged “continuing efforts toward the employment in

private industry of all those willing to work, as well as the fullest employment of money and machines.”
“This we pledge as our primary objective.”

In 1944, with unemployment at 1.2%, its lowest level in the nation’s history, the 1944 Democratic Party Platform referred to “full employment” for the first time, a phrase coined by John Maynard Keynes to describe the “maximum employment” policy goal: “To serve the interests of all and not the few; to assure a world in which peace and justice can prevail; to achieve security, full production, and full employment—this is our platform.”

Earlier that year, in his State of the Union address, FDR had proposed his landmark Second or Economic Bill of Rights which began with “The right to a useful and remunerative job in the industries or shops or farms or mines of the nation.” Remunerative employment, moreover, was to be “enough to provide adequate food and clothing and recreation” (note that earnings were to go beyond necessities). In other words, FDR was advocating not just the right to a job, but a useful, living-wage job. Yet, there was no mention of the “employment assurance” provided by programs like the WPA. Why? The simple answer is that Keynesian economists had by then persuaded policy makers, including FDR, that it wasn’t necessary for the government to create jobs itself to achieve full employment, secure the right of all job seekers to useful remunerative employment, and meet social needs. Stimulating private sector growth and expanding government services with deficit spending when needed would be sufficient, and it would relieve the federal government of the administrative burden and political controversy associated with the New Deal direct job creation programs.

In reiterating and amplifying the Economic Bill of Rights in his last (1945) State of the Union Message, FDR referred to the right to living-wage employment as “the most fundamental, and one on which the fulfillment of the others in large degree depends.” The others included the right to a decent home, to a good education, to good medical care, to social security, to reasonable farm income. The relationship, FDR held, was reciprocal: the fulfillment of these other rights would contribute to achieving adequate levels of employment. Here, he reiterated that jobs must be useful and adequately compensated: “Full employment means not only jobs--but productive jobs. Americans do not regard jobs that pay substandard wages as productive jobs.” He specifically ruled out “mere makeshift jobs.”

In the 1945 restatement, FDR alluded to the achievement of full employment during wartime: “We have had full employment during the war. We have had it because the Government has been ready to buy all the materials of war which the country could produce--and this has amounted to approximately half our present productive capacity.” One infers that it was the achievement of full employment during the war that convinced Roosevelt that the goal to which he had aspired at least as early as 1932 was attainable. “After the war, he held, we must maintain full employment with Government performing its peacetime functions.”

The meaning of full employment is now contested, but it is clear that at the end of World War II it was viewed by progressives as synonymous with the realization of the right to a useful and remunerative job, and that both of these phrases contemplated the labor market conditions that produced 1-2 percent unemployment from 1943 thru 1945. This understanding of the meaning of full employment was also reflected in the definition provided by Sir William Beveridge in his highly influential book, *Full Employment in a Free Society*, published in London in 1944. For Beveridge, full employment meant “having always more vacant jobs than unemployed men [sic], not slightly fewer jobs.”

In concluding his 1944 State of the Union Address, FDR stated: “I ask the Congress to explore the means for implementing this economic bill of rights- for it is definitely the responsibility of the Congress so to do.” Later that year, leading Democratic Senators began working on a Full Employment Bill. With the war likely to end soon, demobilization certain to mean substantial job losses and more job seekers, and

mass unemployment a recent nightmare, the bill was quite timely, even necessary. Introduced in January 1945 by Senator James E. Murray (D-MT), S.380, known as the Murray-Wagner Full Employment Bill, passed the Senate by a wide margin. The bill adopted the Keynesian full employment strategy rather than the New Deal “employment assurance” strategy. The bill included no provision for the use of direct job creation to combat unemployment, and given the Keynesian strategy’s inability to guarantee work to individual job seekers, the bill contained a watered-down commitment to the right to work with no mechanism by which workers could claim that right. The commitment to the Keynesian strategy was also hedged. Whereas the bill introduced by Senator Murray would have guaranteed the funding necessary for the federal government to close the economy’s job gap, that guarantee was absent from the bill that passed the Senate.

The more conservative House of Representatives then chipped away at whatever commitment to full employment remained in the bill approved by the Senate. The term “Full” was even removed from the title of what became the “Employment Act of 1946” instead of the “Full Employment Act of 1946.” Ironically, instead of “full employment” the Act’s stated goal was the achievement of “maximum employment” a term commonly thought to mean something other than “full employment” despite the CES’s use of it to describe the goal of their proposed “employment assurance” policy before Keynes coined and popularized the term “full employment.” The symbolic importance of this substitution lay entirely in its rejection of the progressives’ preferred term. As leading Republican opponent of full employment Senator Robert Taft (R-Ohio) told the Senate in the final 1946 debate: “I do not think any Republican need fear voting for the bill because of any apprehension that there is a victory in the passage of the full employment bill, because there is no full employment bill anymore.” Far more important was the House’s further stripping of provisions designed to ensure the federal government would follow through in its pursuit of the Act’s stated goal. Nevertheless, the Employment Act of 1946 did formally mandate federal responsibility for the health of the nation’s economy and created economic planning institutions like the President’s Council of Economic Advisors (CEA) and the Congressional Joint Economic Committee to carry out that purpose.

Following passage of the Employment Act of 1946, the Democratic platform of 1948 nonetheless retained the term full employment: “... to achieve security, full production, and full employment—this is our platform.”

Four years later, the 1952 Platform, called attention to the fact that the Democratic Administration had “prudently passed the Employment Act of 1946, declaring it to be national policy never again to permit large-scale unemployment to stalk the land.” Consistent with praise for that Act, “maximum employment” replaced full employment in the Platform: “We pledge ourselves at all times to the maintenance of maximum employment, production, and purchasing power in the American economy.”

From 1956 through 1988, Platforms resumed use of the term full employment to express the Party’s employment goals or clearly pledged its commitment to securing the right to a job for everyone who wanted one. The 1956 platform was the first since 1928 written during a Republican presidency. Calling attention to 30 months of unemployment rates between 5 and 7.5%, the Party not only reaffirmed its support for full employment “as a paramount objective of national policy,” but interestingly did so by “reassert[ing] the principles of the Full Employment Act of 1946”—ignoring the deletion of the term “Full” from the Act’s title.

The platforms of the 1960s firmly committed the Party to the achievement of full employment and expanded the concept beyond its focus on the availability of decent jobs to also encompass the principle of equal employment opportunity. Written with John F. Kennedy as the Presidential nominee, the 1960 Platform was the first to expressly invoke FDR’s Economic Bill of Rights. It not only repeated the first of the rights proposed by FDR: “to a useful and remunerative job in the industries or shops or farms or

mines of the nation.” It also pledged to “reaffirm these rights for all Americans of whatever race, place of residence, or station in life.” This too reflected Roosevelt’s declaration that: economic rights were to be “established for all—regardless of station, race, or creed.” This was first Democratic Party platform with an anti-discrimination pledge in connection with employment rights.

The Party’s next platform, in 1964, was noteworthy for both expanding its commitment to inclusiveness (a reflection of increasing concern for gender equity), and for emphasizing FDR’s call for “remunerative” jobs. Full employment, it held, “is the national purpose, and our commitment, that every man or woman who is willing and able to work is entitled to a job and to a fair wage for doing it.”

The 1968 platform was the first to commit the Party to the twin goals of full employment and price stability, signaling the emergence of inflation as a political important economic issue along with unemployment.

The 1972 platform strongly endorsed full employment as “the primary economic objective of the Democratic Party,” and it did not mention price stability, perhaps because the inflation rate was down from higher levels in the preceding two years. For the first time, full employment was referred to as a “*guaranteed* job for all [emphasis added].” The Platform further specified a commitment to a job for all who seek work and to one with decent pay and working conditions. At a time when reform of welfare was on the agenda, it called for an adequate income for those unable to work and the abolition of the present welfare system. The presidential candidate, Senator George McGovern (D-SD initially favored a Guaranteed Income but during the course of the campaign shifted his focus to “jobs for all” who are able to work through public service employment and a reasonable income for those unable to work..

By the time of the next platform, 1976, the second major Congressional attempt to achieve full employment had been underway for two years. The Equal Opportunity and Full Employment Bill was introduced in the House of Representatives by Reps. Augustus Hawkins (D-CA) and Henry Reuss (D-WI). Soon after an identical bill was introduced in the Senate by Senator Hubert Humphrey (D-MN). This first version of this legislation included an enforceable guarantee of enrollment in a “Standby Job Corps” for anyone who could not be placed in a regular job. Enrollees in this Standby Job Corps would be paid a monthly stipend proportional to but less than they could expect to earn in a regular job, in exchange for which they would have to remain “available for public service work” on “projects and activities” approved by local community boards established under the act to create “community public service work reservoirs” for Standby Labor Corps members to undertake.

The 1976 Platform had a very long section on Full Employment, Price Stability and Balanced Growth. The nominee, Gov. Jimmy Carter of Georgia, was lukewarm in his support for the platform’s full employment goal but endorsed it as a nod to liberal constituencies in the Party. There was no reference to a guarantee of remunerative work in the Platform, but it used the language of rights to describe its commitment. “The Democratic Party is committed to the right of all adult Americans willing, able and seeking work to have opportunities for useful jobs at living wages.” The Platform also stated that “useful public jobs are far superior to welfare and unemployment payments.” “To make that commitment meaningful, we pledge ourselves to the support of legislation that will make every responsible effort to reduce adult unemployment to 3 per cent within 4 years.” With unemployment averaging 8.6% in the first six months of that year, this meant cutting the rate more than in half. This was the first platform to define the right in terms of an unemployment rate, in this case an interim goal. The legislation that passed, The Full Employment and Balanced Growth Act of 1978 has an interim target of 4 percent overall and 3% adult unemployment in five years, and it had an inflation target as well. At the five-year mark, unemployment stood at 9.6%, more than twice the already high target rate, having been in the double digits for more than a year during the interim period.

The first two platforms in the 1980s were written at times of high unemployment and disappointing results of Humphrey-Hawkins. Inflation rose too until it was broken by high interests rates and at the cost of the highest unemployment rates since the Great Depression. Annual rates of unemployment were 7.6% in 1980 (7.1% first six month) and 7.5% in 1984 (7.7% first six months). For 19 months in the interim years, 1982-1983, the rates ranged from 9.0% to 10.8%. Despite the failure to move toward the target unemployment rate, the 1980 Platform pledged to “reaffirm our commitment to achieve all the goals of the Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment Act within the currently prescribed dates in the Act, especially those relating to a joint reduction in unemployment and inflation.”

The 1984 platform signaled a switch in emphasis, making no mention of Humphrey-Hawkins. In the context of rebuilding the nation’s cities, it pledged “a commitment to full employment.” Job creation would have been a result of its further advocacy of rebuilding the infrastructure and public housing although the connection was not made. However, instead of emphasizing the need to increase the supply of jobs or the demand side, it focused on the supply side or workers’ skills: “We believe the federal government must develop a major, comprehensive national job skills development policy targeted on the chronically unemployed and underemployed. We must launch special training programs for women who receive public assistance.” And to build for the future, the Democratic Party called for “a new national commitment to education, which must include raising standards, insisting on excellence, and giving all children a chance to learn, regardless of race, income or sex.”

The 1988 platform, the last until 2016 to refer to full employment, placed the goal within the context of economic justice and included both an indexed minimum wage but without proposed levels, and, in the context of current controversy over welfare reform, education and training as well as child care to promote the move from welfare to work: “We believe that, as a first-rate world power moving into the 21st century, we can have a first-rate full employment economy, with an indexed minimum wage that can help lift and keep families out of poverty, with training and employment programs—including child care and health care—that can help people move from welfare to work, with portable pensions and an adequate Social Security System, safeguarded against emasculation and privatization....” However, in the face of disappointing results of Humphrey-Hawkins, the Party had no strategy for closing a large job gap, again focusing on the supply side rather than on job creation. While various commitments to a living wage or a reasonable wage had been part of some earlier pledges of full employment, it is, alone, not a means of achieving full employment.

Full employment disappeared entirely from the Democratic Party’s platforms in 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, and 2012—a clear indication of the Party’s effective abandonment of the goal. Why? It certainly was not because the problem of unemployment had become less critical. A better explanation is that the Democratic Party lacked a strategy for achieving it following the collapse of faith in the Keynesian full employment strategy during the stagflation crisis of the 1970s. The eclipse of full employment from Democratic Party aspirations or pledges was concurrent with the rise of neo-liberalism and party leaders’ turning away from, if not repudiating, the New Deal legacy.

The Democratic Party’s lack of a full employment strategy was underscored 2016 platform: “We will protect and defend the Federal Reserve’s independence to carry out the dual mandate assigned to it by Congress—for both full employment and low inflation—against threats from new legislation.” In other words, we have no strategy for achieving full employment, but the Federal Reserve Board is supposed to, and we think it should be left alone to get the job done.

Overview and Analysis of Full Employment Pledges

Democratic Party Platforms from 1932 to 2016 have been reviewed with a view toward identifying whether and how achievement of full employment was pledged in order to inform a proposal for a Pledge of a Job Guarantee in the 2020 Democratic Party Platform.

Because the realization of the right to work and the achievement of full employment is associated with the New Deal, this background for a proposal for inclusion of a Job Guarantee in the 2020 Democratic Party Proposal began by examining Platforms of the New Deal era. Despite FDR's view that government should assure employment as a right, the first New Deal platform proposed only some measures for reducing mass unemployment. The 1936 Platform echoed the conclusion of the Committee on Economic Security that planned the Social Security Act: that "the first objective of a program of economic security is *maximum* employment in private industry at adequate wages [emphasis added]." The 1940 Platform, still in a time of high unemployment, called for efforts toward the employment in private industry of all those willing to work. The 1944 Platform, with unemployment at an all-time low, was the first to use the term "full employment" and it also included the word, "guarantee": To speed victory, establish and maintain peace, guarantee full employment and provide prosperity —this is its platform" [referring to the Democratic Party].

Of the 12 platforms from 1944 to 1988, all but two called for full employment, and these, reflecting the Employment Act of 1946, aspired to "maximum employment." Several of these platforms referred to full employment as a "paramount," "primary," "major" goal, or a "commitment" of the Democratic Party.

Six platforms from 1992 to 2012, coinciding with repudiation of the New Deal and a turn to neo-liberalism on the part of the Democratic leadership, omitted the goal of full employment. Full employment, coupled with maintenance of low inflation, returned to the Platform in 2016, perhaps a reflection of renewed interest, including legislative initiatives, in full employment.

The Platform pledges did not define full employment in terms of an unemployment rate or proportion of the working-age population employed. At a time of high unemployment, the Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment and Balanced Growth Act set an *interim* unemployment target of 4% overall and 3% adult unemployment. Unemployment in the 3% range was seen as a desirable achievement when unemployment rose to higher levels. Language, instead of setting numerical targets, otherwise referred to work for all who are willing or want work and, in two Platforms, to a guarantee. How a guarantee would be enforced was not specified in any of the platforms.

A number of Platforms referred to full employment as a "right" and one specifically used the wording of the Economic Bill of Rights and its first right that assured living-wage work. "We are determined to make economic security a matter of right. This means a job with decent pay and good working conditions for everyone willing and able to work and an adequate income for those unable to work." (1972) One such pledge, however, defined "right" in terms of an interim unemployment rate that would leave millions without work: "The Democratic Party is committed to the right of all adult Americans willing, able and seeking work to have opportunities for useful jobs at living wages. To make that commitment meaningful, we pledge ourselves to the support of legislation that will make every responsible effort to reduce adult unemployment to 3 per cent within 4 years." (1976) At the time, unemployment was more than double that rate.

Living or adequate wages were sometimes part of the commitment, and in one instance, there was reference to an indexed minimum, but wage levels were never specified in pledges of full employment..

With rising inflation, the twin goals of price stability and full employment were paired goals in some of the Platforms and in the Humphrey-Hawkins Full Employment and Balanced Growth Act of 1978. The 2016 statement paired full employment and low inflation.

Platforms took strides toward universality. Whereas the Economic Bill of Rights were to be established for all “regardless of station, race, or creed,” the 1960 Platform “reaffirmed these rights for all Americans of whatever race, place of residence, or station in life.” In 1964, gender was added: “... every man or woman who is willing and able to work is entitled to a job and to a fair wage for doing it.” The central role and necessity of government job creation and its dual benefits were scantily recognized, if at all, in the Full Employment platforms.

It should be noted that the strongest commitments to this goal have come at times when the Party had a concrete plan for achieving the goal—in 1936 when the CES strategy was being promoted and in 1976 when the H-H bill was being promoted. The exception to this rule is the 1944 platform that mentions the four freedoms but makes no reference to FDR’s proposed Economic Bill of Rights. Despite the repeated commitment to full employment over a period of 48 years and 15 Platforms, the goal of living-wage employment for all who want work, the goal was not realized. Two major reasons for this failure of pledge and policy are: the lack of a strategy for filling the gap between available jobs and jobs for all and the absence of an enforceable guarantee or means of enforcing the right.

Proposed Components of a 2020 Job Guarantee Pledge

1. The statement should take note of the Democratic Party’s long-term commitment to full employment, as manifested in its quadrennial Platforms from 1944 to 1988 and, after a 24-year lapse, reference to it again in 2016. This consistent support of full employment should be emphasized and built upon.
2. The statement should emphasize the need for a Job Guarantee, that millions of people are unemployed, even with low official unemployment rates. The official unemployment rate of the Department of Labor, it should be noted, leaves out millions of jobless people (the “hidden unemployed” or persons who want work but aren’t actively looking and those who want full-time employment but are forced to work part-time.) The Platform could propose a revision of the Department of Labor’s official unemployment rate to include the “hidden unemployed” and hence to indicate the magnitude of the problem.
3. The Platform should state specifically what a Job Guarantee is, how it can be enforced, and how guarantee mechanisms are essential to implementing a right to employment.
4. The Guarantee should be presented as a 21st century realization of the Economic Bill of Rights, with assurance of employment being its fundamental right. A relationship to the New Deal tradition could be included.
5. The Guarantee, like that proposed in the Economic Bill of Rights, should assure useful, living wage work with a definition of both.
6. There should be some association with the achievement of other essential rights: health, housing, etc. and reciprocity among them. (Important in view of current emphasis on health care and affordable housing crisis)
7. Government job creation should be seen as essential to filling the gap between private and public sector employment and a job for all who seek it. Examples of government job creation should be cited and associated with New Deal achievements.
8. The dual benefit of government job creation—for unemployed workers and the rebuilding of the nation’s resources—physical infrastructure, human services, culture, sustainability, hence of benefit to all Americans—should be noted
9. Savings, financial and human, that result from a fully-employed population of working age should be taken into account, and the program’s contribution to resources, including sustainability, should be included.

10. The role of a Job Guarantee in forcefully combatting climate change should be stressed—not only its creation of green and climate-change-combatting jobs but its removal of the fear of job loss-- a major obstacle to an assault on climate change. The JG should be associated with the Green New Deal and regarded as essential to achieving sustainability but presented as a separate and important right in itself. (Discussion at Conference Call today seemed opposed to making the Guarantee part of the Green New Deal or subsumed by it, that it should stand alone.)