The Virginia 2016 Democratic Convention
Permanent Resolutions Committee Committee Report
June 18, 2016

Respectfully submitted by,

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The Virginia 2016 Democratic Convention:

1. Supports Legislation to Remove the Pernicious Influence of Money on Government
2. Endorses Virginia’s Restoration of Ex-Felons’ Voting Rights
3. Urges Investment in Transportation Infrastructure and the Establishment of an Independent Agency to Audit Transportation Infrastructure Built through Public/Private Partnerships
4. Calls for Increased Funding for Job-Creating Infrastructure Projects
5. Endorses Bold Policies to Fight Climate Change and Protect Virginia’s Environment
6. Calls for Criminal Justice Reform
7. Opposition to the Proposed Constitutional Amendment on Right to Work
8. Calls for Media Fairness and Disclosure
9. Asserts that Privatization of Public Schools Does Not Equal “Choice”
10. Opposes the Trans-Pacific Partnership Treaty
11. Opposes the Death Penalty
12. Condemns Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)
13. Condemns Gun Violence in America
14. Supports Nonpartisan Redistricting
15. Approves the Resettlement of Refugees in the United States
16. Supports Improved Relations with Cuba
17. Supports Voting Rights for All
18. Supports College Access and Affordability
19. Urges Reform of Veterans Benefits and Claims
20. Supports Wall Street Reform
21. Supports Medicaid Expansion
22. Proposes Changes in Federal Prescription Drug Policy to Balance Cost, Innovation, and Availability
23. Calls for Medicare For All

24. Endorses Raising the Federal Minimum Wage to $15 per Hour

25. Supports a Democratic National Committee Study of the Role of Unpledged “Superdelegates”

26. Supports Women’s Reproductive Rights

27. Endorses Ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment

28. Supports Equality for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Community

29. Memorial Resolution Celebrating the Life of John C. Miller

30. Memorial Resolution Celebrating the Life of Madison Ellis Marye
The Virginia 2016 Democratic Convention
Supports Legislation to Remove the Pernicious Influence of Money on Government

Whereas,
Responsive and responsible government is fostered, supported, enhanced, and strengthened by state and federal legislation that reduces the influence of unregulated campaign contributions upon elected officials, and establishes limitations upon governmental officials who transition to the private sector.

The proper operation of responsible government requires that public officials and employees be independent, impartial, and accountable to the people.

To maintain public confidence in the integrity and transparency of its government, decisions and policy established by the government must be made in the best interests of the community, in response to the needs of the community, and free of inappropriate influence by interests and entities regulated by governmental officials.

Nearly $6 billion was spent in the 2012 elections throughout the United States, and spending in the 2016 elections is projected to top $11 billion, with the vast majority coming from special-interest donors, thereby making politicians dependent on a small segment of the population to fund their campaigns.

The recent expansion of the influence of Super Political Action Committees' has created an environment in which ordinary citizens believe their voices cannot be heard by their elected officials.

Meaningful limits, full transparency, and disclosure involving campaign contributions, coordinated campaigns, and independent expenditures are in the best interest of the citizens and businesses in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

Therefore, be it resolved, the Convention:
1. Encourages the United States Congress and the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia to pursue and enact legislation that:
   a. Establishes significant limits, and full transparency and disclosure on campaign financing, coordinated campaigns, and independent expenditures to promote fairness throughout the election process, and to ensure and promote responsible and responsive government;
   b. Establishes and/or enforces meaningful limitations on the time period between an elected government official or senior unelected government official leaving public service and accepting lobbying or advocacy employment which attempts to influence their former agencies or current elected officials; and
   c. Provides voters with a greater voice in the electoral process by encouraging increased voter participation in the funding of political campaigns.

2. Encourages the Democratic Party of Virginia to:
   a. Urge its voting members to, in accord with a post-employment, “R很有 the law for federal personnel, abide by a 2 year “cooling off” period after leaving public service before accepting lobbying or advocacy employment which attempts to influence their former agencies or current elected officials; and
   b. If ratified, provide copies of this resolution to Senators Mark Warner and Timothy Kaine; Congressmen Don Beyer, Gerald Connolly, and Robert Scott; Governor Terrance McAuliffe; and all honorable delegates and state senators of the Commonwealth.
Whereas,
Voting rights are the essence of American Democracy. For decades, many minorities have been denied the right to vote under fear of intimidation, retribution, or financial distress. Even today, many states have implemented prohibitive voting requirements that disproportionately disenfranchise communities of color, students, and senior citizens. Standing up for the voting rights of all citizens is long overdue, including restoring voting rights for individuals previously convicted of crimes who have served their sentences.

According to the Brennan Center for Justice, nearly 6 million citizens nationwide are unable to vote because of past criminal convictions, including 13 percent of African American men. This is seven times the national average.

Many states are moving toward the restoration of rights for individuals who have paid their debt to society. In 38 states and the District of Columbia, ex-felons automatically regain the right to vote upon the completion of their sentences. However, even in states that have restored the right to vote, there are still many regulatory burdens and challenges to overcome. According to the National Council of State Legislatures, the complexity of the laws and processes surrounding restoration of rights is often confusing for many ex-felons seeking to navigate them. Additionally, prohibitive regulatory and bureaucratic barriers exist among the authorizing agencies, and underfunded parole boards create a backlog of applications.

For the past 10 years, the Commonwealth of Virginia has been moving toward the restoration of ex-felons’ voting rights. In 2009 a state senate bill gave the Virginia General Assembly the authority to restore voting rights to nonviolent felons who had completed their sentences on a case-by-case basis. Guidance in 2013 ended Virginia’s ability to permanently disenfranchise any citizens with felony convictions. Governor McAuliffe announced in 2014 that he would streamline the process of restoring voting rights, and by 2015 he had removed the requirement that citizens fully repay court costs and fees in order to have their voting rights restored. Finally, in 2016, the Governor fully restored voting rights to over 200,000 Virginians who have completed their sentences.

Therefore, be it resolved, the Convention:
1. Commends Governor Terry McAuliffe for restoring the voting rights of ex-felon citizens of Virginia, and for simultaneously helping their transition back into society by restoring their right to civic engagement;

2. Asks the Virginia federal delegation to:
   a. Take the lead in persuading fellow congress members representing states without voting rights restoration provisions to enact legislation to restore ex-felons’ voting rights in their states; and

   b. Support Representatives John Lewis' and Senator Kirsten Gillibrand's *Voter Empowerment Act* and other such legislation that includes provisions to restore the right to vote for millions of Americans with prior convictions.
The Virginia 2016 Democratic Convention
Urges Investment in Transportation Infrastructure and the Establishment of an Independent Agency to Audit Transportation Infrastructure Built through Public/Private Partnerships

Whereas,
Investment in infrastructure can provide an important means of creating jobs while diminishing traffic congestion. However, the Congress has dragged its feet on enacting a Highway Bill and has not increase the federal gasoline tax to levels necessary to keep pace with increasing construction costs.

Consumers are increasingly turning to alternative fueled vehicles, including electric cars, hydrogen-powered cars, and natural-gas powered cars, but the range of these cars is not suitable for cross-country trips due to a lack of filling stations on our interstate highway system. In fact, Congress has prohibited states from constructing new filling stations on interstate highways in response to lobbying from private station owners located off the highways. One solution would be to make an exception to this ban for filling stations that service electric plug-in vehicles, hydrogen vehicles, and/or natural-gas vehicles in addition to selling gasoline or diesel fuel.

Finally, Virginia has recently had mixed experience with using Public/Private Partnerships to design and build new transportation infrastructure. Virginia needs an independent auditor of such partnership (akin to the federal Government Accountability Office) to ensure that the partnerships operate within prudent financial practices and to prevent excess profiteering over time. The United Kingdom has such an agency.

Therefore, be it resolved, the Convention:
1. Urges Congress to redouble its effort to address quickly the infrastructure needs of the nation in this time of economic challenge;

2. Recommends that states be authorized to construct filling stations on the interstate highway system so long as those stations supply hydrogen-fuelled, natural-gas fuelled or plug-in electric vehicles as well as gasoline or diesel powered vehicles; and

3. Recommends that Virginia establish an independent agency to audit its Public/Private Partnerships.
Whereas,
More work at good wages is needed for the labor force to be more fully utilized, and for it to expand to include more of the employable population. State and federal agencies could grow employment and labor market participation substantially by increasing spending for infrastructure projects, and developing new funding mechanisms to support them.

Though the United States has seen the addition of millions of jobs since the recession, employment levels remain below pre-recession levels. Many people are underemployed or are not seeking work in the current job market. The "Headline U-3 Unemployment Rate" that is frequently cited in the press does not reflect the reduced rate of participation of employable persons in the labor force in what some are calling the new "gig economy."

Efforts to boost the U.S. economy through monetary policy may have succeeded in aiding the recovery of our economy, but they are insufficient to spur robust economic growth. Federal stimulus programs similarly provided support for the recovery, but no significant follow-up programs have been enacted.

One aspect of the increase in income inequality over the last three decades is that labor's share of the gross domestic product has declined. Many of the jobs added since the recession have been low-wage jobs. Employers have emphasized short-term and seasonal hiring more than was the case before the recession.

Capital spending has not increased in a robust way since the end of the recession. Substantial capital is "on the sidelines" around the world and could be employed at extraordinarily low rates in the current interest rate environment. This presents an opportunity for infrastructure investment to be made at very low cost.

The American Society of Civil Engineers estimates that infrastructure projects costing $2.5 trillion are needed in the United States. The water crisis in Flint, Michigan, provides an example of the problems that we will encounter if our aging infrastructure is not addressed.

Improving our water, energy, transportation, and communications infrastructure is a sound investment. Future generations will make use of the improved infrastructure to conduct commerce and to remain competitive in the global economy.

Leaving our infrastructure deficits and problems for future generations is tantamount to saddling future generations with mountains of debt.

Investing in our infrastructure can take place at the higher levels that are needed through substantially increased funding of existing programs and development of new financing mechanisms such as an infrastructure bank and/or the sale of infrastructure bonds, provided that federal appropriations and implementing legislation and state programs are put on a fast track.

Therefore, be it resolved, the Convention calls upon Congress and the Commonwealth of Virginia to enact legislation that:

1. Substantially increases funding of existing federal and state infrastructure programs to allow for increased employment in infrastructure projects;

2. Establishes and funds state and federal infrastructure banks to provide financing for infrastructure projects that will substantially increase employment and labor market participation; and

3. Explores other means of public financing for infrastructure projects that will substantially increase employment and labor market participation.
The Virginia Eleventh Congressional District 2016 Democratic Convention
Endorses Bold Policies to Fight Climate Change and Protect Virginia’s Environment

Whereas,
Man-made greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels such as coal, oil, and natural gas are the chief cause of climate change, according to the overwhelming majority of climate scientists. Scientists also agree that climate change is accelerating at an unprecedented rate and that we are running out of time to avert catastrophic consequences to our planet. Because greenhouse gases from fossil fuels, primarily carbon dioxide and methane, stay in the atmosphere for up to thousands of years, the decisions we make today will affect humanity for many centuries to come.

Climate change is already here. In the history of weather record-keeping, 2014 was the hottest year recorded, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. Moreover, the World Meteorological Organization reports that 14 out of the 15 warmest years on record have occurred since 2000. Without bold action to fight climate change, rising temperatures will reduce labor productivity and increase energy demand. Summer heat, especially when combined with worsening drought, will decrease crop yields across the United States, and it has already increased the incidence of wildfires. The Risky Business Project on Climate Change determined that, in the Southeast, increasing temperatures would cause 11,000 to 35,000 additional deaths annually over the present century.

A U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report on global warming consequences states that, “The health effects of these disruptions include increased respiratory and cardiovascular disease, injuries and premature deaths related to extreme weather events, changes in the prevalence and geographical distribution of food- and water-borne illnesses and other infectious diseases, and threats to mental health.” Further, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the poorest countries and regions worldwide are the most vulnerable. In this country, climate change will disproportionately affect minority and other disadvantaged populations and escalate income inequality. Worldwide, food insecurity, freshwater scarcity, and soil degradation will lead to migration and population pressures that will increase conflict, threatening both human and national security.

As a consequence of climate change, sea levels are already rising globally at an increasing rate, and catastrophic storms have become more frequent. According to the National Climate Assessment—U.S. Global Change Research Program, Virginia is highly vulnerable to storm surges and sea level rise due to climate change. Virginia Beach is cited among the top five most vulnerable cities in the southeastern U.S. The Risky Business Project on Climate Change reported that within the next 15 years, the average cost of coastal storms and increased hurricane activity along the Eastern Seaboard and the Gulf of Mexico is estimated to increase as much as $7.3 billion annually up to a total of $35 billion per year. The NCA further warns that economic effects are inevitable due to the impact of increasing temperatures, heat waves and water scarcity on Virginia’s public health, transportation, agricultural and forest productivity, and fisheries. Further, the loss of infrastructure, wetlands, and beaches along the Chesapeake Bay will harm Virginia’s tourism industry.

Fighting global warming requires both steep reductions in fossil fuel consumption within the next two decades and increased investment in energy efficiency and renewable energy. After China, the U.S. leads the world in global warming pollution from fossil fuels, yet we still lack mandatory reductions on fossil fuel emissions in many sectors. Virginia ranks near the bottom in renewable energy capacity compared with other states, and lacks a mandatory Renewable Portfolio Standard.

Fossil Fuel electrical power plants are responsible for nearly 40 percent of U.S. carbon dioxide pollution, representing our nation’s single largest source of global warming pollution. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)’s proposed Clean Power Plan would reduce carbon pollution from existing power plants 30 percent by 2030, relative to 2005. One of the side benefits will be a decrease in other pollutants emitted by coal and other fossil fuels that contribute to respiratory and cardiovascular disease. EPA estimates that the Clean Power Plan will prevent 2,700 to 6,600 premature deaths and 140,000 to 150,000 heart attacks per year.

President Obama has launched a national Climate Action Plan that sets a goal of 20 percent renewable energy solutions by 2020, cuts carbon emissions from new power plants, raises auto efficiency standards to 35 miles per gallon with a goal of 54.5 miles per gallon in 2025, and tasks the EPA with setting standards to cut methane emissions from the oil and gas sector by 40 to 45 percent from 2012 levels by 2025.

In April 2016, President Obama joined 174 other nations in signing the Paris Climate Agreement, which establishes a framework for reducing global greenhouse gas emissions. This historic agreement will combat climate change, and help generate increased investment and jobs in the renewable energy sector.

These measures are a good start, but they are not enough to fight the dire social, economic, and health consequences of climate change. Climate change champions are needed in federal, state, and local government to help protect such efforts from continued attack by industry special interests, and to enact additional initiatives to reduce energy waste and accelerate our transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy solutions.
Therefore, be it resolved, the Convention:

I. Urges:

A. Virginia’s federal, state, and local elected officials, within the scope of their respective purviews and in accord with Virginia’s constitutional mandate to “protect [Virginia’s] atmosphere, lands, and waters from pollution, impairment, or destruction”, to:

1. Establish the fight against climate change as a top legislative priority;
2. Support the design and implementation of the EPA’s Clean Power Plan in Virginia, and impose a state moratorium on fracking for natural gas;
3. Support a Progressive Carbon Tax that protects workers by both returning revenue to working families through tax credits and funding investment in job-creating renewable energy industries, training, and workforce development;
4. Champion increased funding for renewable energy through legislation making permanent the federal Production Tax Credit and the Investment Tax Credit for solar, wind, and other emissions-free renewable energy sources; and pass state legislation to grant renewable energy tax credits and change Virginia’s Renewable Portfolio Standard from a voluntary to a mandatory program;
5. Pass legislation to expand Net Metering, so that owners of renewable energy systems can receive credit for power that they generate and send back into the grid;
6. Champion energy efficiency legislation and funding for research and development designed to (a) reduce costs and increase efficiencies of renewable energy and electric power storage technologies and (b) generate high-paying green manufacturing, construction and service jobs; and promote utility-funded energy efficiency programs for low-income housing;
7. Increase federal and state investments in infrastructure such as metrorail, railroad, and rapid bus service and in smart growth planning such as pedestrian and bike-friendly communities and public transportation within Virginia’s existing cities, towns, and older communities;
8. Vote and advocate to minimize fossil fuel projects in Virginia, such as drilling for oil off the coast of Virginia and drilling for natural gas on public lands such as the George Washington National Forest, as the Commonwealth moves toward a carbon-free environment. Senator Tim Kaine set a good example for other lawmakers to emulate in opposing new fossil fuel projects in Virginia with his trenchant explanation and his vote against the TransCanada Keystone XL Pipeline: “Approving Keystone XL is a market signal to expand production of dirty tar sands oil. I believe energy should be getting cleaner every day.”
9. Take the lead in initiating legislation to eliminate corporate tax loopholes and subsidies for the natural resource extractive industries, e.g. oil, coal, and natural gas;
10. Refuse campaign contributions from the fossil fuel industry and members of the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). ALEC denies climate change, and key ALEC goals are undermining environmental protections and immunizing industries from legal accountability for injury or damage inflicted.

B. Governor Terry McAuliffe to amend the current Virginia Energy Plan, and the Climate Change and Resiliency Update Commission, to develop recommendations in agreement with actions A1-10, above;

C. President Obama to expand EPA’s task to set national standards for methane emissions that include existing, new, and modified sources, and to task the Department of the Interior’s Bureau of Land Management to set mandatory national standards for oil and gas methane emissions on public lands.

II. Commends:

A. Delegates David Bulova, Kaye Kory, Rob Krupicka, Alfonso Lopez, Jennifer McClellan, Rip Sullivan, and David Toscano and Senators Rosalyn Dance, Adam Ebbin, John Edwards, Barbara Favola, Mamie Locke, Donald McEachin, Chap Petersen, and Scott Surovell for previously introducing legislation to combat climate change; and Senator Surovell for recently introducing SB537, which required utilities to transfer coal ash to dry, lined landfills; and

B. Governor Terry McAuliffe for vetoing Senate Bill 44, which extended tax breaks to subsidize coal companies that have already received hundreds of millions of Virginia taxpayer subsidy dollars, and for vetoing SB21, which was introduced to weaken Virginia’s implementation of EPA’s Clean Power Plan; and

C. Congressman Gerry Connolly for co-chairing the House Sustainable Energy and Environment Coalition and for his track record of opposing Atlantic Coast offshore drilling and subsidies to the oil industry, protecting the Department of the Interior’s ability to reduce methane emissions and supporting higher fuel efficiency standards for cars and trucks; Congressman Don Beyer for cosponsoring, in his first months in office, legislation to impose a carbon tax and return proceeds to taxpayers; Congressman Robert “Bobby” Scott for promoting clean energy, opposing dirty energy projects such as offshore oil drilling in Virginia, and supporting actions to help Virginians adapt to the threat of inundation and coastal sea level rise due to climate change; and the instrumental leadership of the above three Democratic congressmen in overturning the Obama administration’s decision to drill off the Atlantic coast.
Whereas,
In 1980, fewer than 500,000 Americans were in prison; today, the number is 2.2 million. The United States now has the highest incarceration rate of any major country in the world. The median rate among all countries is 125 prisoners for every 100,000 people. In England, it’s 153; Germany, 89; Japan, 63. In the United States, it’s 700. There are an additional 4.8 million U.S. residents on probation or parole; the total U.S. correctional population is 6.9 million—roughly one in every 35 Americans. The United States incarcerates nearly 25 percent of the world’s prisoners, even though we have only 5 percent of the world’s population.

Incarceration in the U.S. skyrocketed between 1980 and 2000 because of harsher sentences for crimes—including mandatory imprisonment for lesser crimes, mandatory minimums, and mandatory terms for repeat offenders—and the elimination of parole.

There are great racial disparities in incarceration in the United States. As of 2009, black non-Hispanic males had an incarceration rate of 4,749 inmates per 100,000 U.S. residents, more than 2.6 times higher than the rate for Hispanic males (1,822 inmates per 100,000 U.S. residents) and 6 times higher than the rate for white non-Hispanic males (708 inmates per 100,000 U.S. residents). Black men who do not finish high school have a 60 percent chance of going to jail, which, over the course of their lives, will reduce their annual employment by nine weeks and lower their yearly earnings by 40 percent.

Over half (53.4 percent) of state and federal prisoners with sentences of a year or more are serving time for non-violent offenses. Some are even serving life sentences—for repeated nonviolent property or drug crimes.

Prisons operated by private companies—as opposed to the government—housed 8.4 percent of federal and state inmates in 2013. They have been tied to higher rates of violence and recidivism, shown to supply less-than-adequate health care, and found to offer fewer opportunities for educational enrichment. When people of color are sent to prison, they are more likely than their white peers to be sent to these institutions, which profit from mass incarceration.

In 1986, as part of the “War on Drugs”, Congress enacted mandatory minimum penalties for drug offenses. That legislation, and a wave of similar state laws, increased the number of people jailed for drug offenses by 1,200 percent. About 300,000 of the 2.2 million inmates in the U.S. today are drug offenders. About 25% of all people on probation or parole have a drug charge as their most serious offense. A significant fraction of drug offenders are in for possession or nonviolent offenses stemming from addiction and related behavioral issues. About half of all drug arrests are for marijuana offenses. African-Americans are imprisoned at a much higher rate for possession than non-blacks; they represent 74 percent of those imprisoned for possession, even though they make up only 14 percent of users.

Mass incarceration has only reduced U.S. crime rates by small amounts. It has not shut down the illegal drug trade, nor has it reduced the amounts of dangerous drugs—cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamines—used in the United States. In fact, the current system of drug illegality and black markets contributes to crime. Approximately 16 percent of state prisoners and 18 percent of federal prisoners have reported committing crimes to obtain money for drugs.

Treatment is a more cost-effective remedy for drug use than incarceration. Community drug treatment costs approximately $20,000 less than incarceration per person per year. Every dollar spent on drug treatment in the community yields over $18 in cost savings—to taxpayers and would-be victims—from the prevention of future crimes. By contrast, imprisonment of drug offenders yields only $0.37 in cost savings per dollar spent. Releasing people to supervision and making treatment accessible is an effective way of reducing drug use, reducing drug-related crime, and reducing the number of people in prison.

The U.S. criminal justice system—federal, state, and local—costs more than $200 billion a year.
Therefore, be it resolved, the Convention calls upon Congress and the Commonwealth of Virginia to undertake the following actions to eliminate the scourge of mass incarceration in the United States, and end the counterproductive War on Drugs:

1. Change criminal laws to permit judges to impose criminal sentences proportionate to the defendant’s actual wrongdoing;

2. Reform or eliminate mandatory minimum sentences, which preclude judges from exercising their traditional role of individually tailoring a sentence to the crime and the defendant’s culpability, taking all relevant factors into account;

3. Eliminate or narrow the use of life without parole and other severe sentences. Life sentences may be appropriate for certain horrific crimes. But people guilty of far less serious crimes, including nonviolent drug and property crimes, have received life sentences, including life without the possibility of parole;

4. Increase the use of compassionate and geriatric release of prisoners. In 2010, 26,200 state and federal prisoners were 65 or older. Absent compassionate or geriatric release, many prisoners will grow old and die behind bars;

5. Eliminate parole and probation policies that drive hundreds of thousands of people back to jail for nonthreatening, technical violations;

6. Provide for work-release programs, educational opportunities, and looser custody levels for prisoners preparing to reenter society;

7. Treat youth and adult offenders differently—tailor the prosecution, sentencing, and custody of youth to their needs and potential. Young offenders should not be subject to adult criminal justice procedures that fail to take their needs, vulnerabilities, and inherent capacity to grow and change into account;

8. Provide all youth offenders with periodic meaningful opportunities for release—ensure periodic review of continued incarceration and whether it is necessary in light of the youth’s evolving maturity and capacity to return to society;

9. Pass the Prison is Not For Sale Act, which would require the government to directly oversee correctional facilities, rather than contracting them out;

10. Adopt drug policies that respect personal liberty, autonomy, and privacy—decriminalize drug use that does not impose unwanted harm on others. Use alternative measures to encourage people to make good choices around drugs and to protect drug users from harming their own health, including offering substance abuse treatment and social support;

11. Consider more aggressive public health approaches to reducing drug use. For example, for more addictive drugs, particularly opioids, consider ways to provide addicts access to drugs on a tightly controlled basis on the path to recovery. Recent research indicates that access to a drug that might be decriminalized, marijuana, improves opioid recovery. Granting such access under tightly controlled conditions should also be considered. The goals are to remove the profit motive from the drug market and remove the motivation for addicts to commit crimes to pay for their drugs. Needle exchange programs and safe rooms for overdose victims are additional public health measures to consider; and

12. End unwarranted racial disparities due to drug law enforcement practices and eliminate crack/powder cocaine sentencing disparities. Although whites and blacks use and sell drugs at comparable rates, blacks are arrested and incarcerated on drug charges at rates that greatly exceed their proportion of the general population and of drug offenders (both users and sellers). Blacks also disproportionately bear the brunt of federal crack cocaine sentencing.
EXPRESSING VIRGINIA 2016 DEMOCRATIC CONVENTION OPPOSITION TO THE PROPOSED CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT ON RIGHT TO WORK.

WHEREAS, Virginia’s Constitution is a guiding document that does not need be to changed; and

WHEREAS, this amendment is the latest move in an on-going trend to attack the middle class and stifle workers’ voices on the job; and

WHEREAS, these laws already give multi-national corporations more power to outsource jobs, cut wages, and reduce benefits at the expense of our workers, small businesses, and the local economy; and

WHEREAS, this amendment is a waste of time and public resources, including more than $130,000 of taxpayer funds, that would be better spent addressing real issues throughout the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, state legislators should focus on policies that support vital services in our communities, fund our schools, create good jobs, fix our crumbling infrastructure, raise wages, and protect hardworking Virginians; and

WHEREAS, business and labor should work together to create good jobs and improve the economy, and avoid distraction by special interest groups that seek to minimize the ability of Virginia workers to improve their economic status and deny economic opportunities to the middle class; and

WHEREAS, the collective bargaining rights of workers should be protected; now, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED on this the eighteenth day of June, 2016, Virginia’s 2016 Democratic Convention delegates express their opposition to amending the State Constitution of Virginia to include the right to work statute, on the basis that it is unnecessary, wastes taxpayer dollars, undermines the promotion of fair labor practices, and detracts attention and resources away from policies designed to support working families and our local communities.

ACCEPTED: June 18, 2016
Chair, Virginia Democratic Party

Sponsored by the Virginia AFL-CIO and area Labor Federations.
The Virginia 2016 Democratic Convention
Calls for Media Fairness and Disclosure

Whereas,

Much of the media that reaches Americans through newspapers and broadcast and cable TV and radio is currently owned by a limited number of for-profit organizations, whose goals in maximizing profit and advertising sales are often in conflict with the practice of responsible and balanced journalism. While the Internet has many voices, much of its primary content comes from the concentrated sources in print and broadcast media. In addition, threats to net neutrality could limit Internet diversity.

In 1949, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) introduced The Fairness Doctrine. The concern was that the three emerging television broadcasting networks would be able to exert undue influence over their viewers. The Fairness Doctrine required that holders of broadcast licenses present controversial issues of public interest, and that they do so in a manner that the FCC would deem honest, equitable, and balanced.

Congress backed the Fairness Doctrine in 1954 and by the 1970s the FCC called the doctrine the “single most important requirement of operation in public interest. The sine qua non for grant of a renewal of license”.

In 1975 the FCC enacted cross-ownership rules that prohibited unilateral ownership of television, radio, and newspaper media in any given region. The concern was rate fixing for advertising and undue political influence. The Supreme Court in Red Lion Broadcasting Co. v. FCC upheld this ruling.

In 1987 the FCC rescinded the Fairness Doctrine on the grounds that it “limited public debate.” In 1996 the Telecommunications Act deregulated the broadcasting and media markets and rescinded the ban on cross-ownership. Since 1997 just eight of the country's largest and most powerful media and telecommunications companies, their corporate parents, and three of their trade groups, have spent more than $400 million on political contributions and lobbying in Washington, according to a Common Cause analysis of federal records.

Also since that time, corporations such as Clear Channel, now owned by iHeartMedia, have gained virtual monopolies over the information available in cities and towns all over the United States. This organization, in particular, acts as the voice of the Republican Party and is the only source of news, political intercourse, and advertising available to a significant segment of the American population.

Throughout the United States, corporate sponsors wield an undue influence on which news stories are chosen for broadcast and the manner in which they are presented.

This year’s presidential election process has been a clear demonstration of corporate influence, allowing for wall-to-wall coverage of a media spectacle instead of a balanced presentation of all registered candidates. The domination of the media and its choices in who receives coverage and what type of coverage is afforded all candidates goes beyond mere concerns of fair and balanced reporting; it calls our democratic electoral process into question.

In a number of other western democracies, campaign finance and advertising is strictly regulated. For example, in France, according to the Law Library of Congress, “All forms of paid commercial advertisements through the press or by any audiovisual means are prohibited during the three months preceding the election. Instead, political advertisements are aired free of charge on an equal basis for all of the candidates on national television channels and radio stations during the official campaign.”

Therefore, be it resolved, the Convention urges our federal elected officials, in their FCC oversight capacity, to legislate:
1. Reinstatement of a 21st-century Fairness Doctrine;
2. Review of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, and reinstatement of the ban on cross-ownership of media outlets;
3. Rules requiring transparency of ownership and corporate sponsorship for all media;
4. A specified time period prior to elections for free and equal electioneering exposure for political candidates in broadcast media, similar to a number of other western democracies.
The Virginia 2016 Democratic Convention
Asserts that Privatization of Public Schools Does Not Equal “Choice”

Whereas,
The original charter school movement, which began as a grassroots attempt to improve public education (Forbes 09/29/11), has been hijacked by for-profit corporations and their political proponents as “part of a larger campaign to diminish public institutions by contracting out the jobs and responsibilities of public servants across the United States. School vouchers and charter schools run by for-profit companies are seen as part of the school privatization movement, which “… will ultimately undermine the country’s democracy” (Washington Post 01/07/16). At the same time, the voucher movement started across the U. S. Vouchers are an amount of money given to a parent to allow choice other than the public schools.

Charter Schools take public money but, as corporations, are not subject to audit by state comptrollers and have no accountability requirements for their use of public funds nor do private schools that received tax-payer funded vouchers.

Charter schools have not, as touted, improved education. What they have done is allowed for cherry-picking of students, leaving poor and special needs children to public schools whose funds have been siphoned off to for-profit charter schools. Studies have found no significant improvement in education by charter schools. This is primarily because the bottom line is profit, not education. Charter schools pay their teachers less, employ teachers with far fewer years of experience, have higher teacher turnover rates, employ unlicensed and untrained teachers, and often employ shortcuts such as “virtual instruction” where upwards of 130 students are being taught online.

Charter schools and vouchers have become the new vehicle for a return to segregated schools in the South. These plans, backed by billionaires like the Koch brothers, employ a “voucher” system to accomplish their goals. But they don’t use the loaded word “voucher”; instead, they call it “choice”. Here is an example:

“Mississippi just passed legislation to establish vouchers for children with special needs and to permit more charters. The ‘vouchers for children with special needs’ is a first step towards a broader voucher plan that grows to include low-income children; then to include children in schools that have low test scores; then to include more and more children, until everyone gets a voucher. The not-so-subtle joke is that the voucher is not large enough to pay the tuition at a first-rate private school, so most of the children will have a voucher to go to a...school whose teachers are uncertified and whose resources are meager. Worse, the children with special needs lose the legal protections that the public school guarantees when they leave the public system.... It is a measure supported by ALEC (the American Legislative Exchange Council), the Koch-funded advocacy group for privatization and deregulation.” (Salon 04/14/16)

Privatization of education achieves many conservative political goals. It shrinks government and gets government out of the lives of citizens. By making sure that only the privileged receive a decent education, it assures that the rich will stay rich and the poor will stay poor.

Charter schools try to justify their existence by showing results of standardized testing. The profit motivation for better testing results leads to teaching for testing rather than teaching for actual learning. Statistics show that children do not retain the information crammed into them purely for the purpose of penciling in little boxes. Meanwhile, private schools are exempt for all state testing and depending upon the charter granted, those schools may be as well.

The Virginia Constitution in Article VIII. Education Section 7 gives the supervision of public school to the school board in the division. Therefore, charters can only be granted by the local school division.
In addition, Section 10 of the Constitution also prohibits state appropriations to any schools or institutions of learning not owned or exclusively controlled by the State or some subdivision with limited exceptions. This led the Virginia General Assembly to enact legislation in 2012 that permits companies and individuals to receive a tax credit for any donation to the Education Improvement Scholarships Tax Credits program. So while Virginia cannot constitutionally have vouchers; Virginia does under another name.

For-profit charter schools and vouchers pull money and resources away from the public schools that our communities rely on.

**Therefore, be it resolved,** the Convention:
1. Calls upon Congress and the Commonwealth of Virginia to enact legislation that:
   a. Affirms that quality public education is the civil obligation of society;
   b. Commits to a greater investment in public education;
   c. Commits to education for the sake of learning, rather than results on standardized tests;
   d. Requires full accountability by charter schools with respect to their use of public funds; and
   e. Bans for-profit charter schools and for-profit charter school operators.

2. Calls upon the Commonwealth of Virginia to repeal the legislation that established and permits the Education Improvement Scholarships Tax Credits program.

3. Commends and supports Virginia’s Constitution for ceding control of local schools to local school boards, rather than to political committees created to override school board decisions and force Charters or Public Education Tax Credits on local communities.
Whereas,
The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Agreement was negotiated in secret between the United States and 12 or more Pacific Rim countries and largely influenced by multinational corporations. Its full text did not become publicly available until after Congress granted “fast track” trade approval to the deal, forcing themselves to vote on the complete document without the possibility of amendment.

The TPP is designed to prioritize corporate profits rather than workers in each of the partner nations. Claims that the TPP includes the strongest protections for workers in any trade deal are moot without an enforcement mechanism. Additional claims that the TPP provides US businesses and products a competitive edge are unfounded. Among others, the TPP has the following potentially negative ramifications:

- The Investment Chapter of the TPP would allow foreign corporations to sue the United States and its individual States over any law or regulation that could reduce or obstruct their future profits.
- U.S., state and local food safety rules could be challenged by foreign corporations as “illegal trade barriers” if higher than the standards in other TPP nations, thus threatening the health and safety of consumers everywhere.
- The TPP would provide large pharmaceutical firms with new abilities to extend patent rights, increasing prescription drug prices, limiting competition and halting access to cost efficient generic drugs. This would further increase health care costs.
- TPP financial rules would weaken or prevent regulation of risky financial products, such as “interest rate swaps,” and threaten the financial stability of our economy.
- Under the TPP, the US would be forced to waive “Buy American” or “Buy Local” requirements specifically aimed at enhancing our local economies and the ability to create new local jobs.

Therefore, be it resolved, the Convention requests:

1. Our Elected Officials to faithfully present the elements of this resolution and to:
   a. Reject the Trans Pacific Partnership, and negotiate a fair trade agreement that prioritizes working people instead of profits;
   b. Protect and grow good, middle class jobs right here in the United States; and
   c. Declare the Commonwealth of Virginia a TPP-Free Zone, and enact and enforce the TPP-Free Zone to the maximum extent allowed by law, and, in consideration of the best interests and livelihoods of all our citizens, workforce, local businesses and health of our environment and ecology.

2. The Democratic Party of Virginia to send a copy of this Resolution to all Elected Officials in the Commonwealth of Virginia Democratic Party, the National Democratic Party, members of both Chambers of the US Congress, and to President Obama to seek a better way forward on future trade deals.
The 2016 Virginia Democratic Convention
Opposes the Death Penalty

Whereas,
The death penalty is imposed in an arbitrary manner and studies have found that the location of a crime and the race of the defendant are big factors in whether the death penalty or imprisonment will be applied in a particular case. Almost 80% of death row defendants have been executed for killing white victims, even though in society as a whole African-Americans account for about half of murder victims.

As of July 1, 2015, 19 states do not have the death penalty and another four states have a Governor-imposed moratorium on executions. In addition, the manufacturers of the chemicals commonly used in executions have refused to sell them for the purpose of executions. In response to this potential shortage of chemicals, the Virginia General Assembly has not only continued to carry the death penalty in its laws, but is also reviving the inhumane electric chair as a permissible form of execution.

There have also been many cases where DNA evidence has proven the innocence of people sentenced to death at a time when such advanced techniques were not available. Every crime-solving technology can be misapplied and has been replaced by even more accurate techniques, yet the finality of an execution leaves no margin for error.

As Judge Kozinski wrote for the U. S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, “We have little more than an illusion of a death penalty in this Country. . . . Whatever purposes the death penalty is said to serve – deterrence, retribution, assuaging the pain suffered by victims’ families – these purposes are not served by the system as it now operates.

In every state where a cost study has been conducted, the death penalty has been found to be more expensive than a system of life imprisonment. In Maryland, the cost of executing a person is three times the cost of life incarceration. In North Carolina, an execution cost $2.2 million more than the cost of life incarceration.

World-wide 102 countries have abolished the death penalty, 51 are not currently exercising the penalty, and only 36 still use it. The US is one of only 5 highly industrialized countries to retain the death penalty, and our continued use of the penalty undercuts our moral leadership internationally. The death penalty is unworkable and does not serve its intended purposes.

Therefore, be it resolved, the Convention calls upon the Virginia General Assembly to abolish the death penalty in Virginia.
The 2016 Virginia Democratic Convention
Condemns Female Genital Mutilation

Whereas,
The inhumane practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FMG) involving various degrees of surgical removal of a woman’s external genitalia is an ongoing threat to the health of women, especially in Africa, Indonesia, Iraqi Kurdistan and Yemen (as well as some other countries in Asia and the Middle East, as well as communities from these places who have emigrated elsewhere, including the US).

This unnatural alteration of the female body all too often results in recurrent infections, difficulty urinating and passing menstrual flow, chronic pain, the development of cysts, and inability to get pregnant, complications during childbirth, and fatal bleeding. There are NO known health benefits. The practitioner’ use of shared instruments is also thought to aid the transmission hepatitis B/C and HIV. Loss of normal protection from external infection can lead to damage to the urethra and bladder. Neonatal mortality is increase as well, according to the World Health Organization. Psychological consequences include anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. A marked decrease in sexual desire or painful intercourse can also result in marital relations becoming troubled.

FMG has been outlawed or restricted in most of the countries in which it occurs, but the laws are poorly enforced. There have been international efforts since the 1970’s to persuade practitioners to abandon it, and in 2012 the United Nations General Assembly, recognizing FMG as a human-rights violation, voted unanimously to intensify those efforts.

In 1996, the Federal Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act made it illegal to perform FMG on minors for non-medical reasons in the US. In 2013, the Transport for Female Genital Mutilation Act prohibited transporting a minor out of the country for the purpose of FMG. Currently, 24 states have laws banning FMG for non-medical reasons. Virginia does not have a statute addressing this specific problem.

Therefore, be it resolved, the Convention condemns this barbaric practice and encourages our communities at risk of its implementation to discuss and warn its members as to the physical and psychological damage that can result, and requests the General Assembly to enact additional laws to ban this practice, and encourages state and local governments to conduct outreach to high risk communities within Virginia to inform families of the health dangers of this practice.
The 2016 Virginia Democratic Convention
Condemns Gun Violence in America

Whereas,
It is indisputable that – by whatever measure or standard - our country is the gun violence leader of the planet. The “Global Burden of Disease Study” found that the U.S. had a rate of 3.5 gun homicides per 100,000 of population, compared with one-seventh of that rate (or less) in peer countries. Violence perpetrated by the use guns has become ingrained in the American culture, and is progressively undermining the very fabric of civility in America. Addressing this social malady is an absolute imperative. Technology – specifically, research and development (R&D) – may be the last best hope to curb this menace to the humaneness of our society.

Existing legislation (or the absence thereof) has precluded or stymied the sorely needed R&D to deal effectively with hand gun safety. Congress has expressly prohibited the Centers for Disease Control from studying gun violence. Abandoning R&D on hand gun safety is tantamount to curtailing or declaring a moratorium on cancer, heart disease or Alzheimer research.

The application of current and leading-edge technology to the problem of hand gun safety is the most expedient manner of addressing this clear and present danger to our society without contesting Second Amendment rights in the U.S.

Therefore, be it resolved, the Convention urges the Governor of the Commonwealth of Virginia, through his Council and Office on Technology, to encourage, facilitate and incentivize the world-class technology enterprises of Virginia to pave the way in developing and marketing ground-breaking and affordable technology applications to gun safety issues.

Urges the Governor of the Commonwealth to promote, fund and incentivize the academic institutions of Virginia to participate in a “Manhattan Project” type of collaborative effort to lead the nation in developing a low-cost and readily accessible personalized safety devices for hand guns, with particular emphasis on child and home safety.

Urges the Virginia General Assembly to empower localities to enact ordinances to prohibit guns in government facilities and in establishments serving alcohol, and urges the Congress of the US to promote, authorize, aggressively fund and incentivize programs and projects that will result in the immediate availability of personalized safety devices for hand guns.

Urges the Federal government (through appropriate agencies) to fund studies and collect statistics on the nature and extent of gun violence in the United States, and urges the National, state and local elected officials to place a very high priority on oversight of the sale and distribution of guns, especially those having little or no value for sport, recreation, collection or other socially non-violent purpose, and Democrats at every level to focus their energies an support on political candidates who espouse the sense and intent of this resolution on gun violence and safety.
Whereas,
We support redistricting reform in Virginia for the State and Congressional Districts, and maintain that nonpartisan legislative redistricting is essential to build a more accountable democracy for our Commonwealth.

We also maintain that redistricting reform is necessary to eliminate the conflict of interest that allows General Assembly members to essentially “pick their voters.” The elimination of political data in the formula would resolve the problem of split precincts and divided jurisdictions. Action is needed to correct the imbalance in most of the jurisdictions throughout Virginia.

Therefore, be it resolved, the Convention supports the creation of a Nonpartisan Redistricting Commission to protect and promote democracy in Virginia.
Whereas,
There are currently nearly 5 million Syrian refugees registered with the United Nations. The UN is leading an effort to resettle 10% of those in the next few years. Despite the target set by the Obama administration to accept 10,000 in this fiscal year (as part of the annual quota of 75,000 worldwide refugee admissions) only approximately 1,300 have been admitted since September 30, 2015. Additionally, in the last year Republicans in Congress have tried to adopt legislation that would essentially end resettlement of Syrian and Iraqi refugees to the US.

The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) has referred approximately 19,000 Syrians to the U.S. Government for resettlement in the last six months. This administrative process backlog only serves to exacerbate what has been described as “the biggest humanitarian refugee crisis of our time”.

These policies and proposed laws contradict American values and our laws and policies cannot be dictated by fear and short-term thinking. Since our country was founded, the United States of America has been shining light in the world, offering a place of refuge and freedom for people of all nations seeking to escape persecution and violent conflict. Continuing that moral obligation and source of national pride is not inconsistent with ensuring our national security and the safety of all who live here.

Therefore, be it resolved, the Convention calls for the annual quota for refugee resettlement to be increased by 50,000 (for a total of 125,000) in the fiscal year beginning October 1, 2016, and Congress to act to adequately fund the State Department and Homeland Security, and other agencies with specific earmarks for the refugee vetting and resettlement process, to more adequately respond to this crisis while maintaining our national security interests, and the State Department work with the UNHCR and other nations currently resettling refugees to learn and adopt ‘best practices’, including the adoption of specific pathways for Syrians with family already living legally in the U.S.
Whereas,
President Obama successfully secured the safe return of USAID contractor Alan Gross and the other U.S. intelligence assets from Cuba and has taken a bold and historic step to end more than five decades of failed policies, recent polling shows 63% of Americans, 74% of Democrats, and 67% of young people age 18 to 29 support the President’s decision to re-establish diplomatic ties with Cuba; and 66% of Americans, 78% of Democrats, and 74% of young people ages 18-29 support ending the U.S. embargo on Cuba.

Fifty plus years of isolationism policy toward Cuba has failed. It has weakened our national security, according to a 2007 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report, and has restricted the personal freedoms of American citizens and has reduced economic opportunity for U.S. companies. Normalized relations with Cuba will greatly benefit both the American and Cuban people; it will create a new market for U.S. exports, especially within the agricultural and technology sectors, and will create American jobs, if strong trade protections are implemented.

Virginia Governors have sent representatives to Cuba’s annual trade fair starting in 2003 with Governor (now Senator) Mark Warner. Also, Virginia is the US’s largest agricultural exporter to Cuba, representing 28% of American agricultural exports to Cuba. Agricultural trade between Virginia and Cuba totaled $42 million in 2015.

The Democratic National Committee (DNC) passed a resolution at its 2015 Winter meeting in Washington, DC endorsing “efforts by the U.S. Congress to modernize travel and economic policies related to Cuba while pursuing meaningful improvements in human rights and freedoms.” We recognize the immediate need for the Cuban government to improve its human rights record and because direct diplomatic engagement allows the U.S. State Department leverage to address serious human rights concerns and push for greater structural reforms within Cuba.

Therefore, be it resolved, the Convention commends President Obama on his historic initiatives to build ties with Cuba, endorses the Freedom to Travel to Cuba Act (H.R. 664/S. 299) the Free Trade with Cuba Act (H.R. 403), the Freedom to Export to Cuba Act (H.R. 3238) and encourages all members of the Virginia delegation to support these bills, calls upon the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations and the U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs to authorize funding for a diplomatic mission in Havana and the U. S. Senate Committee on Appropriations and U.S. House Committee on Appropriations to appropriate funding for this embassy, and commends Governor McAuliffe for his leadership in ensuring Virginia is the top agricultural exporter to Cuba, and recommends that the General Assembly support such export initiatives.
The Virginia 2016 Democratic Convention
Supports Voting Rights for All

Whereas,
The right to vote is fundamental to a vibrant democracy, and our elected office holders gain their moral authority to lead from a voting process that is fair and representative of the will of the people.

Historically, that has not been the case in Virginia, where voting rights were originally limited to white male landowners. However, under the Voting Rights Act of 1965, Virginia has moved closer to fulfilling the promise of a representative democracy.

However, on June 25, 2013, the United States Supreme Court by a 5-4 decision in Shelby County vs Holder held the Section 4(b) formula for determining which states should be subject to the preclearance requirement of the Voting Rights Act unconstitutional. Although legislation has been introduced since to update Section 4(b) to keep its formula current, the Republicans in Congress have blocked a legislative fix, leaving states free to take administrative action and enact laws that restrict voting rights and have a discriminatory impact.

Further restricting this fundamental right, Republicans in the Virginia General Assembly have imposed voter identification laws that make it harder for student and the elderly to vote and have defeated bills that would provide for no-excuse early in-person absentee voting.

In contrast, Gov. Terry McAuliffe has made a historic use of his executive powers to restore voting rights to all felons who have served their time, rather than rely upon a cumbersome case-by-case application process. The prior policy had served to disproportionately bar minorities from regaining their voting rights.

Therefore, be it resolved, the Convention condemns any measure that seeks to gain political advantage from hindering citizens from exercising their fundamental right to vote; urges Congress to act promptly to fix Section 4(b) of the Voting Rights Act so that states with a recent history or discrimination will once again be subjected to pre-clearance review by the U.S. Department of Justice; and urges the Virginia General Assembly to enact a no-excuse in-person early absentee voting procedures, repeal the recently enacted voter ID laws, and commend our Governor for his recent blanket action to restore rights to convicted felons who have served their time, without the unnecessary and time consuming application process.
The Virginia 2016 Democratic Convention
Supports College Access and Affordability

Whereas,

College is more important but more expensive than ever before, a college degree or other postsecondary credential or certificate has never been more important, but it has also never been more expensive. Public payment for public education was formerly available, and in the words and beliefs of Thomas Jefferson, public education was necessary to sustain a democracy and benefits society.

Information and statistics from the “Institute for College Access & Success” Project on Student Debt reveal that: “Seven in ten seniors (69%) who graduated from public and nonprofit colleges in 2014 had student loan debt, with an average of $28,950 per borrower. Over the last decade from 2004-2014 – the share of graduates with debt rose modestly (from 65% to 69%) while average debt at graduation rose to more than twice the rate of inflation.”

The Project further found that “Virginia 4-year or above institutions in 2013-14 average debt of graduates was $26,432. The percent of graduates with debt was 60%. The nonfederal debt of graduates, as percent of total debt was 18%. There were 55,497 Bachelor’s degree recipients. Their tuition and fees (in-district/instate) were $15,439. Their total cost of attendance (on-campus) was $29,260. The % of 12-month enrollment (FISAP) receiving Pell Grants was 33%. Virginia ranks 25th in the Nation in its strength (burden) of college debt”

One only has to follow the current political debate on the issue of College debt to understand its political significance. President Obama’s support for affordable, effective higher education, including rating College performance and caps on monthly student loan payment resonates with Millennials. Both Democratic candidates have significant policy positions on the issue:

Senator Sanders says: “As President I will make tuition free at public colleges and universities, lower student loan interest rates for current and future borrowers, ensure all children have access to a quality education by fighting to ensure equal access to educational resources and make childcare and pre-K universal and affordable.”

Secretary Clinton says: “We need to make a quality education affordable and available to everyone willing to work for it, without saddling them with decades of debt.“ She says she will “ensure no student has to borrow to pay for tuition, books, or fees to attend a four-year public college in their state, enable Americans with existing student loan debt to refinance at current rates, hold college and universities accountable for controlling costs and making tuition affordable.

In addition, Governor McAuliffe says: “we need to strengthen pathways in K-12, community colleges, and throughout higher education, increasing affordable completion of high-demand degrees and credentials as well as continue to strengthen Virginia’s system o Community Colleges and 4-year institutions and promote greater access and affordability for all Virginians

Therefore, be it resolved, the Convention urges strengthened pathways in K-12, community colleges, and throughout higher education with tuition free-entry for qualified students to Community Colleges and Technical schools.
Whereas,
The United States should never break it promise to care for the Veterans who have put their lives on the line in defense of our Nation. The Veteran’s Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014 sought to alleviate excessive delays and travel for Veteran’s receipt of healthcare through non-VA providers, the government must improve service from third-party implementer, increase access during further reform of the VA, and extend authorities and authorizations that expire in 2017.

The mental health crisis for Veterans has resulted in an unconscionable rate of suicides daily, and over 50,000 Veterans are homeless. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (“VA”) estimates that Post-traumatic stress disorder (“PTSD”) afflicts almost 31 percent of Vietnam veterans, as many as 10 percent of Gulf War veterans, 11 percent of veterans of the war in Afghanistan, and 20 percent of Iraqi war veterans. The efforts of the VA’s Veteran’s Crisis Line must be expanded and joined with state and local community resources. Although some states provide medical use of marijuana as treatment and pain management for TBI and PTSD, the VA and National Institute for Health should conduct controlled studies to evaluate the safety and effectiveness of medical marijuana for Veterans on a nationwide scale.

Veterans are entitled to receive timely responses on claims and appeals. VA Regional Offices must be adequately staffed to handle initial claims in a timely manner, and statutes regarding appeals must be changed to allow fully developed claims to be expedited in the appeals process.

Because an increase in accountability and transparency in the claims and appeals process may improve Veterans understanding and confidence in the VA, a web-based dashboard for the filing and individual tracking of claims and appeals should be implemented.

There is a need to provide dental care for our Veterans. Most veterans do not qualify for dental healthcare, and homeless veterans list dental care as one their top three unmet needs. In addition, there is a need to enhance coordination in the healthcare of Veterans. DoD and the VA should develop and implement and integrated Electronic Health Records System, including accessibility by private providers.

As a model, the Vermont National Guard operates an innovative outreach program to provide pre-deployment and post-deployment support to family members and service members that has been successful in making sure that veterans know about and receive the health care, mental health counseling, family assistance, transition assistance and other benefits they need to make sure they can live a healthy and productive life.

Therefore, be it resolved, the Convention urges:
1. Comprehensive reform of the Department of Veterans Affairs, to include the requisite changes to legislation, statutes, authorizations, and appropriation of funds to ensure that the government fulfills its sacred responsibility to care for and support our Veterans, including the specific initiatives described above; and
2. Emulating the Vermont National Guard Outreach Program in the Commonwealth of Virginia.
The Virginia 2016 Democratic Convention
Supports Wall Street Reform

Whereas,
There was a serious financial crisis in the Fall of 2008 that left millions of Americans unemployed and resulted in trillions in lost wealth including retirement savings accounts, our broken financial regulatory system was a principal cause of that crisis. It was fragmented, antiquated, and allowed large parts of the financial system to operate with little or no oversight and allowed irresponsible lenders to take advantage of consumers. In response to this crisis, President Obama signed into law, the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act. Dodd-Frank sent a signal that the years of deregulation were over and Dodd-Frank gave regulators new tools to deal with big banks and other financial entities. While none of these measures are fail safe, they do require institutions to have much more capital on their books and comply with other risk-reduction measures. Additionally, Dodd-Frank created the Consumer Protection Financial Bureau – a one-stop shop to protect consumers of both banks and non-banks financial entities such as payday and title lenders from unfair and deceptive practices and ensured compliance with consumer protection laws.

This landmark decision is a step in the right direction, but there still is a long way to go. The problem is that the further we move away from the events that caused the crisis, the less urgency there is to fix the gaps that remain, implement parts of the law, and fight those who would overturn Dodd-Frank altogether. The banking industry and Republicans are pushing back on Dodd-Frank and hope to see it overturned arguing that Wall Street can police itself. Both Democratic candidates agree that more needs to be done to address the problems on Wall Street that cause the financial crisis in 2008.

Therefore, be it resolved, the Convention:
1. Strongly supports additional financial industry reform legislation that extends regulatory oversight for both large banks as well as to the large non-bank financial entities to ensure effective enforcement and greater accountability, and reduce consumer harm; and

2. Encourages President Obama and Congressional Democrats to oppose efforts by Republicans to undermine or repeal the Dodd-Frank Act and continue to strongly support the activities and mission of the Consumer Protection Financial Bureau.
The Virginia 2016 Democratic Convention
Supports Medicaid Expansion

Whereas,
The Affordable Care Act (ACA) was signed into law on March 23, 2010. The health care law required all states to expand their Medicaid programs to cover individuals under age 65 with income at or below 138 percent of the federal poverty level. However, a U.S. Supreme Court decision, while upholding the rest of the health reform law, effectively turned the mandate into a state option. It is now up to each state to decide whether to expand its Medicaid program to cover low-income people who are currently uninsured.

However, several states have opted not to implement Medicaid expansion, leaving millions of uninsured adults unable to obtain affordable health care coverage. Currently 26 states, including the District of Columbia have opted to expand Medicaid. 6 more states have opted to expand using a non-traditional option. As of the beginning of 2016, 19 states, including the Commonwealth of Virginia, have opted to not expand Medicaid.

If Virginia were to expand Medicaid coverage, 400,000 Virginians, including over 25,000 of Virginia’s veterans all across the commonwealth would get access to quality, affordable health insurance drastically reducing the rate of those without insurance. Not only would Medicaid expansion assist those without coverage, but it would also reduce health care costs for those currently with insurance by drastically reducing emergency room visits resulting in rising costs to the health care system.

Expansion of Medicaid in Virginia would also infuse the health care economy in Virginia with millions of dollars. The Affordable Care Act provides financial support to states that choose to expand their existing Medicaid programs, with the federal government covering the full cost of expansion for three years, phasing down to a 90 percent match rate for the sixth year of the expansion and in subsequent years.

Recently, Senators Mark Warner and Tim Kaine introduced the States Achieve Medicaid Expansion (SAME) Act of 2016. The bill would ensure that states that choose to expand eligibility for Medicaid are eligible for the same level of federal matching funds as states that expanded earlier under the terms of the Affordable Care Act, regardless of when they opt to expand Medicaid.

Therefore, be it resolved, the Convention:

1. Commends Senators Mark Warner and Tim Kaine for their introduction and support of the SAME Act of 2016 to preserve the economic incentives for Virginia to expand Medicaid under the ACA and to insure the nearly 400,000 Virginians who fall within the coverage gap;

2. Commends Governor Terry McAuliffe, Lieutenant Governor Ralph Northam, Attorney General Mark Herring, and our Democratic members of the General Assembly for their actions in support of Medicaid expansion;

3. Calls upon the U.S. Congress to pass The SAME Act of 2016; and

4. Calls upon the Administration of President Barack Obama to continue to implement and work with states to expand Medicaid to provide health care coverage for the millions of Americans who need it.
Whereas,

Current prescription drug policy has resulted in excessively high prices, chronic shortages, and misaligned incentives for the development and dispensing of drugs. These are signs of policy and market failures that appropriate government policy and program changes can address.

The drug industry has attempted to justify the high costs for new drugs because of the cost of research and development for developing and testing the drugs. Drug industry sources estimate the R&D cost of a single new drug at $2.6B (up from a drug industry estimate of $500M in 2001). These costs include “discovery” (determining the factors within a disease that might be amenable to a drug, and finding a candidate drug to treat the disease), “clinical trials” (testing the drug in accordance with FDA regulations), and “failed drugs” (writing off drugs that are abandoned due to the failure of clinical trials or the likelihood that profits will be “insufficient” from the perspective of the drug company). NIH funds “discovery” phase basic medical research at around $328B, more than the entire drug industry R&D budget. Industry uses its exclusive term patent rights (20 years from the date of patent filing or 17 years from the date of grant) to price drugs to take advantage of its monopoly and to increase revenue, not simply to recover R&D costs. In certain instances, these prices are far above the reasonable cost of R&D, marketing, and production, resulting in an industry profit margin of over 20%. One new drug, Sovaldi, was recently priced at $84K per treatment in the U.S., $60K in the U.K, and $900 in Egypt, according to Marilyn Tavenner, president and CEO of America’s Health Insurance Plans. Such examples may indicate that the U.S. is largely funding the recovery of drug R&D costs for the world, because prices in other countries are far closer to the marginal cost of production.

There are many possible approaches to try to rebalance the costs, incentives, and disincentives for prescription and generic drugs. Currently, clinical trials are done almost entirely by drug companies at their cost. These trials can be expensive and the drugs may fail during the trials. An alternative approach would be, for example, for the government to acquire some level of rights to drug patents prior to clinical trials, either by buying or licensing or creating a partnership for the patent rights or in return for funding all or some elements of the clinical trials. Such rights might include some outright ownership rights of the patent, geographic/territorial rights, the right to award multiple rights to produce drugs that successfully pass the trials, or a shorter exclusivity period. For example, the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute or other entities may help determine which drugs might be the best candidates for such an alternative approach.

On average, prices for existing drugs are also increasing at rates far above inflation. –According to an American Association of Retired Persons report, drug prices increased 9.4% in 2013, while the inflation rate was 1.5%. For patented drugs, monopoly pricing power due to the patent is a major factor in the price increases. For out-of-patent drugs, massive short-term price increases are possible due to the time required to ramp up production and obtain approval for an alternate drug source. Because the firm that raised the price can lower it again in the face of competition, other potential sources have a very limited incentive to get into a market for such a drug, particularly if the market is small (For example, last year, Turing Pharmaceuticals raised the price of a 62-year-old drug, Daraprim, over 5000%, from $13.50 per pill to $750. Such price increases are not possible in a truly competitive market.).

The drug industry has also extensive drug shortages. As of April 27, 2016, there were 157 specific drug shortages listed by the American Society of Health-System Pharmacists. The shortages are due, among other reasons, to the limited availability of compounding pharmacies, which in effect manufacture specialty “sterile injectable” drugs from a combination of existing drugs in other forms.
The primary purpose of prescription U.S. drug policy should be to maximize the health benefits from the drugs, not to maximize profits for a pharmaceutical company. But current policy seems to be more designed as if the latter goal were the most important. With the current policies, there are few incentives for drug companies to develop drugs that would primarily benefit the poor, who cannot pay for them; to test existing out-of-patent drugs for new uses or to evaluate non-drug alternatives; or even to eliminate shortages. Stronger government oversight and alternative policy and program actions are needed to improve the affordability and availability of prescription and generic drugs to meet the needs of the American people.

Therefore, be it resolved, the Convention:

1. Commends the efforts of Rep. Lloyd Doggett (D-Texas) for his efforts in forming a Democratic Caucus Prescription Drug Pricing Task Force, and both Democratic presidential candidates for their strong positions on drug price reform;
2. As a matter of the highest priority, requests Congress to consider and, if appropriate, pass legislation to:
   a. Fund the evaluation of alternative approaches to rebalancing incentives for innovation and cost for prescription drugs;
   b. Fund research to leverage electronic health records (EHR), now generally available because of the High-Tech Act, to support clinical trials. Such research should consider changes to “meaningful use” to allow opt-in for clinical trials and to determine the data elements necessary in EHRs to support clinical trials. The use of EHRs for this purpose could substantially reduce the cost of clinical trials. However, privacy of personal health records should never be compromised;
   c. Establish the capability (via the most logical combination of public, private, and nonprofit resources) to manufacture and distribute vaccines, generic drugs, compounded drugs, and other drugs with substantial social utility for which shortages might occur. The intent of this capability would be not to compete with private sources, but to establish a viable national strategic drug reserve—a source that could respond to and help meet exigent public health needs;
3. Requests that the Department of Health and Human Services take administrative actions, as recommended by the Democratic Caucus Prescription Drug Pricing Task Force, to reduce drug costs. This includes supporting a test case of the Bayh-Dole Act with the government exercising its retained patent rights, and having the Food and Drug Administration “prioritize the approval process for competing generics to counter unwarranted price increases” as recommended by Los Angeles Times columnist Michael Hiltzik; and
4. Requests that our state legislators review the California ballot initiative to require state-acquired drugs to be priced no higher than the Department of Veterans Affairs negotiated prices, consider similar legislation, and enable legislation to require constant renegotiation of lower drug prices of state-acquired drugs to reflect the state’s economy of scale purchasing power.
The Virginia 2016 Democratic Convention
Calls for Medicare For All

Whereas,
This country has a long history of caring for older Americans through programs such as the Older Americans Act, Social Security, and Medicare. It also has a long history of providing health care to the poor through Medicaid and state supplemental programs. Since the administration of Franklin D. Roosevelt, Democrats have sought to create a universal health care system guaranteeing health care to all people. Every other major industrialized nation has done so.

The Affordable Care Act was a critically important step toward the goal of universal health care. But we must build upon the success of the ACA to achieve truly universal care. Twenty-nine million Americans today still do not have health insurance and millions more are under-insured and cannot afford the high copayments and deductibles charged by private health insurance companies.

The U.S. spends more on health care per person, and as a percentage of gross domestic product (17.1%), than any other advanced nation in the world, including the major nations of Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan (Sweden is next closest at 11.9% of GDP). But that spending has not made Americans healthier than the rest of the world. The U.S. had the lowest life expectancy at birth of all high-income Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, at 78.8 years in 2013, compared with the OECD median of 81.2 years. The U.S. also had the highest infant mortality rate among those countries, at 6.1 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2011; the rate in the OECD median country was 3.5 deaths.

Creating a single, public insurance system, such as Medicare for all, would reduce health care spending significantly. It would eliminate administrative costs (saving $476 billion per year) and allow the government to negotiate fair prices with drug companies on behalf of the American people (saving $116 billion per year). In total, it would cut U.S. health care costs by almost 20% per year.

A family of four earning $50,000 per year would save over $5,800 on health care costs each year with Medicare for all. Businesses would save over $9,400 a year in health care costs for the average employee (cutting costs from $12,591 to $3,100 per employee).

Medicare for all would also allow the government to track access to healthcare providers and make smart investments to avoid provider shortages and ensure communities can access the providers they need.

Medicare for all could be phased in over time to reduce any disruption caused by a change of health insurance systems. For example, the current eligibility age of 65 could be reduced in steps until all Americans were included in the program.

If Medicare were extended to all Americans, they would enjoy the freedom and security that comes with separating health insurance from employment. It would also promote entrepreneurship and innovation in every sector of the economy. People could start new businesses, stay home with their children, or leave jobs they didn’t like without fear of losing their health care. Employers could focus on running their businesses rather than providing health insurance to their employees. Working Americans wouldn’t have to choose between bargaining for higher wages or better health insurance. Parents wouldn’t have to worry about providing health insurance to their children. People with serious or chronic illnesses could afford the medications necessary to keep them healthy. Millions of people would no longer have to choose between health care and other necessities such as food, heat, and shelter, and would have access to services that previously have been out of reach, including dental and long-term care.
Medicare for all could be paid for with employer and household premiums to Medicare (instead of private insurance), and appropriate progressive tax policies.

**Therefore, be it resolved**, the Convention calls upon Congress to:

1. Potentially, on a time-phased basis, grant all American citizens eligibility for Medicare; and

2. Ensure that Medicare will cover the entire continuum of health care, from inpatient to outpatient care; preventive to emergency care; primary care to specialty care, including long-term and palliative care; vision, hearing, and oral health care; mental health and substance abuse services; as well as prescription medications, medical equipment, supplies, diagnostics, and treatments.
The Virginia 2016 Democratic Convention
Endorses Raising the Federal Minimum Wage to $15 per Hour

Whereas,
Income inequality in America has been growing steadily since the beginning of the Reagan administration and the trend has become too stark to ignore. In the 32 years between 1947 and 1979, real (i.e., inflation-adjusted) family income doubled for rich and poor alike. In the 34 years between 1978 and 2012, the real family income of the poorest 20% actually declined, the average worker’s income increased by only 5%, but CEO income increased by 875 percent. One reason the incomes of working people have not kept pace is the minimum wage. The federal minimum wage and the Virginia minimum wage are now $7.25 per hour. They have not been raised since 2009.

Historically, the minimum wage has been raised erratically, as changing it requires an act of Congress. It was not raised at all from 1997 to 2007 and from 1981 to 1990. When Congress does not raise it, it does not keep pace with inflation.

American workers, particularly those with families, cannot support themselves on the minimum wage without assistance. Today, a full-time minimum-wage employee makes $15,080 a year, or $650 less than the federal poverty level for a two-person household. In 2013, 1.3 million workers earned the minimum wage. In Virginia, there were approximately 90,000 minimum wage workers in 2014. Based on the current minimum wage, a worker would earn $15,080 annually for a 40-hour work week, while a $15.00 an hour minimum wage would return annual earnings of $31,200.

The minimum wage is important because the people who earn it are working adults, not just teenagers. Eighty-nine percent of those who would benefit from a federal minimum wage increase, even to $12 per hour, are age 20 or older, and 56 percent are women, further contributing to the intractable wage gap between men and women. Workers in minimum wage jobs also tend to come from the most exploited populations in our society.

Raising the federal minimum wage would also help workers in states with minimum wages higher than the federal level. While 29 states and the District of Columbia currently have such higher minimums, it has been estimated that increasing the federal minimum wage would boost earnings for nearly 38 million low-wage workers nationwide.

A reasonable increase in the minimum wage will not cause people to lose their jobs. In a letter to President Obama and congressional leaders urging a minimum wage increase, more than 600 economists, including seven Nobel Prize winners, wrote, "In recent years there have been important developments in the academic literature on the effect of increases in the minimum wage on employment, with the weight of evidence now showing that increases in the minimum wage have had little or no negative effect on the employment of minimum-wage workers, even during times of weakness in the labor market. Research suggests that a minimum-wage increase could have a small stimulative effect on the economy as low-wage workers spend their
additional earnings, raising demand and job growth, and providing some help on the jobs front."

Recent surveys have shown that most small business owners with employees support a modest and gradual increase in the minimum wage. Small business owners say an increase "would immediately put more money in the pocket of low-wage workers who will then spend the money on things such as housing, food, and gas. This boost in demand for goods and services will help stimulate the economy and help create opportunities." Higher wages also reduce employee turnover, which can reduce employment and training costs.

Raising the minimum wage for tipped workers, many of whom are waiters, would not hurt restaurants. Even in states and cities where business owners must pay employees the full minimum wage before tips, restaurants have seen increases in sales even when the minimum wage has gone up.

Both Democratic presidential candidates, Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders, support raising the federal minimum wage to $15 per hour. The general public also supports raising the federal minimum wage. Polls conducted since February 2013, when President Obama first called on Congress to increase the minimum wage, have consistently shown that an overwhelming majority of Americans support an increase.

Therefore, be it Resolved, the Convention:

A. Commends:
   1. Congressmen Gerry Connolly, Don Beyer, and Bobby Scott for their efforts to raise the minimum wage;
   2. Democratic members of the Virginia General Assembly for introducing and supporting legislation to raise Virginia’s minimum wage; and
   3. The Fight for $15 campaign and other collective actions taken by unions and workers to secure higher wages.

B. Calls upon:
   1. Congress to:
      a. Raise the minimum wage to $15 per hour by 2020; and
      b. Thereafter, increase the minimum wage annually by the percentage by which labor productivity in the United States increased in the previous year, as calculated by the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the U.S. Department of Labor.
   2. The Virginia General Assembly to increase the state minimum wage, and pass legislation that allows counties and cities to establish higher minimums.
Whereas,
The Democratic National Committee rules regarding automatic unpledged delegates (“superdelegates”) was instituted in 1982 based on the recommendations of the Hunt Commission.

The role and number of unpledged delegates has been evaluated and changed over numerous election cycles.

Much discussion has occurred during this election cycle over the proper role and fairness of unpledged delegates.

It is always a good idea to continue to reevaluate the usefulness of unpledged delegates to the Democratic Party’s overall goals.

Therefore, be it resolved, the Convention asks the Democratic Party of Virginia to:

1. Propose and advocate for the Democratic National Committee to convene a panel to reevaluate the role of unpledged delegates, to make recommendations/changes to the Democratic National Committee effective for the 2020 Election Cycle;

2. Urge Virginia’s “superdelegates” to the 2016 Democratic National Convention to voluntarily cast their votes proportionately in accordance with the results of the Virginia Democratic Presidential Primary; and

3. Urge Virginia’s delegation to propose to the Democratic National Committee that they encourage all states’ “superdelegates” to the 2016 National Convention to voluntarily cast their votes in proportion to their state’s popular vote.
The Virginia 2016 Democratic Convention
Supports Women’s Reproductive Rights

Whereas,
On January 22, 1973, the U.S. Supreme Court decided the landmark decision Roe v. Wade, which held that the constitutional right to privacy extends to a woman’s right to make her own personal medical decisions — including the decision to have an abortion. Over 40 years later, Americans still stand behind Roe — with 7 in 10 Americans believing Roe v. Wade should remain the law of the land. However, the anti-choice movement has tried to overturn this decision at the federal level and enact stringent legal requirements that systematically dismantle this right at the state level.

The damage at the Virginia state level is a clear and present danger to women. Virginia legislators continue to enact dangerous restrictions on women’s health care. For example, Virginia requires women to undergo a state-mandated ultrasound at least 24 hours before having an abortion, regardless of whether or not she wants one or a doctor deems it necessary. Additionally, the physician is required to offer the woman to view the ultrasound and listen to the fetal heartbeat. The additional 24-hour delay between the mandatory ultrasound and abortion amounts to more required trips over multiple days which is cost prohibitive. An even more egregious law in Virginia bars women on Medicaid from having coverage for abortion, even when a woman’s pregnancy causes severe health risks.

Finally, one of the most detrimental anti-choice laws was enacted in Virginia in 2011. That law requires the state Board of Health to promulgate regulations on outpatient first-trimester abortion providers as a type of hospital. This targeted regulation of abortion providers (TRAP) singles out abortion providers from other outpatient facilities for medically-irrelevant hospital-style requirements and restrictions that make it harder for them to stay open. In May 2014, Governor McAuliffe ordered a review of the regulations. However, by that point, some clinics had closed because of the prohibitive cost of complying with the rules. The State Board of Health Commissioners revised the regulations because they were deemed medically unnecessary. While existing clinics are grandfathered in and do not have to comply, new clinics must comply with the regulation while it is under review, a process that can take up to two years. However, if the Democrats lose the Governor’s seat, this reprieve could vanish, and the TRAP regulations could have new legislative life. Currently, 92 percent of Virginia counties lack an abortion provider due to this restriction. This is troubling given the fact that 1 in 3 women will have an abortion. In NARAL Pro-Choice America’s 2016 annual report, “Who Decides? The Status of Women’s Reproductive Rights in the United States,” Virginia received a failing "F" grade. Virginia lawmakers must work harder to make reproductive choice a reality for all.

Therefore, be it resolved, the Convention goes on record that lawmakers must ensure that Virginians have equitable access to the information and services they need to make the reproductive decisions that are best for themselves and their families — from preventing unintended pregnancy, to accessing abortion if they choose, to having healthy pregnancies and births.

Lawmakers must also protect what current pro-choice policies and programs there are in Virginia and nationally from constant attack by anti-choice lawmakers.
The Virginia 2016 Democratic Convention
Endorses Ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment

Whereas,
The United States Congress adopted the 27th Amendment to the United States Constitution, the so-called Madison Amendment, and the Madison Amendment was proposed by our first Congress and only recently ratified by three-fourths of the states, 203 years after it was first proposed.

The restricting time limit for the Equal Rights Amendment ratification is in the resolving clause, and is not a part of the amendment proposed by Congress and already ratified by 35 states. Constitutional equality for women and men continues to be a timely issue in the United States and worldwide, and a number of other nations have achieved constitutional equality for their women and men.

Since Congress passed a time extension for the Equal Rights Amendment on October 27, 1978, Congress has demonstrated that a time limit in a resolving clause can be disregarded if it is not a part of the proposed amendment.

Congress is in a unique position to judge the tenor of the nation, to be aware of the political, social, and economic factors affecting the nation, and to be aware of the importance to the nation of the proposed amendment.

If an amendment to the United States Constitution has been proposed by two-thirds of both houses of Congress and ratified by three-fourths of the state legislatures, it is for Congress to determine the validity of the state ratifications occurring after a time limit in the resolving clause, but not in the amendment itself.

Therefore, be it resolved, the Convention:
1. Endorses ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment to the United States Constitution proposed by the United States Congress on March 22, 1972, and ratified by 35 state legislatures, upon ratification by 3 more states. “Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex;” and
2. Will propose this resolution to the Democratic National Convention Party Platform for endorsement; encouraging and enabling advocacy to that end on all levels of Party participation: state, local and national.
The Virginia 2016 Democratic Convention
Supports Equality for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Community

Whereas,
The U.S. Supreme Court affirmed in Obergefell v. Hodges that lesbian and gay persons have a right to equal dignity in the eyes of the law. Today that right is under attack.

Many states – most recently North Carolina and Mississippi – enacted sweeping laws that allow discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and deny the most basic recognition and respect to transgender individuals by barring them from public restrooms and changing facilities that match their gender identity.

The campaigns to pass these laws are based on nothing more than unreasoned fear and animus. Persons in favor of these discriminatory statutes often claim that laws prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation threaten their religious liberty and protections for transgender persons place women and children at risk. It is no coincidence that these same arguments were raised against African-Americans when discrimination on the basis of race was prohibited in 1964.

Despite widespread public condemnation of these discriminatory actions, efforts are underway to enact similar laws in other states, including Virginia. In the most recent session of the General Assembly, Republican members introduced and passed a number of bills that sought to encourage discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity, many operating under the guise of religious liberty. Those bills would have become law if not for the united opposition of Democrats in the General Assembly and the veto of Governor Terry McAuliffe.

Local school boards are also being pressured to deny equal access to transgender students in violation of federal law. As a federal circuit court of appeals in Virginia recently found in a case against Gloucester County School District, denial of equal access to restrooms or changing facilities violates the federal civil rights of transgender students.

This discrimination is inconsistent with the U.S. Constitution’s guarantees of Equal Protection and Due Process and the Democratic Party’s commitment to equal rights and opportunities for all people.

The time has come for the Party to condemn these efforts and reaffirm that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons have the right to live openly in society, free from discrimination.

Therefore, be it resolved, the Convention:
1. Commends Congressman Don Beyer, Jr. for his support of the Equality Act, a statute that would provide comprehensive federal civil rights to the LGBT community, and equal rights for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender ("LGBT") community in general;
2. Commends Governor Terry McAuliffe, Lieutenant Governor Ralph Northam, Attorney General Mark Herring, and our Democratic members of the General Assembly for their actions in support of equal rights for the LGBT community;
3. Calls upon the U.S. Congress to pass the Equality Act;
4. Calls upon the Administration of President Barack Obama to continue to aggressively enforce existing legal protections for LGBT persons;
5. Calls upon the General Assembly of Virginia to pass legislation permanently barring discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity in state government; and
6. Calls upon the Democratic Party of Virginia to condemn these attacks on the rights of the LGBT community and reaffirm its commitment to civil rights for all, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity.
WHEREAS, the Honorable John C. Miller, member of the Virginia State Senate passed away suddenly on April 4, 2016; and

WHEREAS, John C. Miller studied at Northern Illinois University before embarking on a distinguished career in public service as a respected journalist, congressional aide, higher education administrator, and public broadcasting administrator; and

WHEREAS, fresh out of college and desiring to serve the public John C. Miller embarked on a career in journalism as news director at WVEC for twelve years, receiving numerous accolades from his colleagues in the media for his integrity and commitment to accurate reporting of news to the public; and

WHEREAS, desiring to be of greater service to the people of Virginia, John C. Miller went on to become a top aide to Republican U.S. Senator Paul Trible for six years, providing exemplary constituent service to the citizens of the Commonwealth of Virginia; and

WHEREAS, at the conclusion of Sen. Trible’s time in office John C. Miller returned to his first love of journalism and Hampton Roads as a news anchor at WVEC for six years, bring with him to the news desk the same spirit of public service and concern for accurate reporting that defined his time as news director earlier in his career; and

WHEREAS, John C. Miller found his true passion in advocating for increased educational opportunity for the young people of Hampton Roads and the Lower Peninsula, and went on to become Vice President of University Relations at Christopher Newport University; and

WHEREAS, John C. Miller’s career at Christopher Newport University was marked by significant investment from the Commonwealth of Virginia, increased enrollment of students, qualitative improvements in academic programs, and a legacy that left the institution stronger than John found it; and

WHEREAS; John C. Miller gave of his time and energy freely to numerous charitable and civic organizations with a focus on promoting childhood literacy and opportunity in Hampton Roads, most notably through his work with the Food Bank of the Virginia Peninsula, Junior League Hampton Roads, Downtown Hampton Child Development Center, Newport News Alliance for Youth, Newport News YMCA, Newport News Youth Commission, and the Peninsula Reads Literary Council; and

WHEREAS, John C. Miller’s career in public service culminated in 2007 with his election to the Virginia State Senate from the 1st District, a campaign that is fondly remembered by a number of Christopher Newport University and William and Mary Young Democrats whom he mentored during that effort, as well as serving to mentor numerous members of the 1st Congressional District over the years; and

WHEREAS, upon election to the Virginia State Senate John C. Miller quickly distinguished himself as a fierce advocate of educational opportunity for Virginia’s most vulnerable schoolchildren, becoming a leader in the legislative fights that reduced Standards of Learning (SOL) testing and increased physical activity opportunities during the school for students; and

WHEREAS, a man of tremendous integrity, uncommon compassion, and immense kindness John C. Miller leaves behind a legacy of service to the Commonwealth that will be remembered far beyond his lifetime; and

WHEREAS, John C. Miller will be fondly remembered and greatly missed by his wife Sharron, daughter Jenny, son-in-law Mark, son John, daughter-in-law Mary Peyton, and grandson Isaac.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Convention hereby notes with sadness the loss of an accomplished and admired journalist, congressional aide, higher education administrator, public broadcasting administrator, State Senator, and highly esteemed citizen of the Commonwealth, the Honorable John C. Miller; and be it

FURTHER RESOLVED that the Convention presents this resolution to the family of John C. Miller as an expression of the gratitude for his service and great sorrow for his loss.
The Virginia 2016 Democratic Convention
Memorial Resolution Celebrating the Life of Madison Ellis Marye

WHEREAS, the Honorable Madison Ellis Marye of Shawsville, a respected farmer, businessman, and public servant who represented the residents of the 37th District in the Senate of Virginia for almost three decades, died on February 23, 2016; and

WHEREAS, a native of Montgomery County, Madison Marye graduated from the University of Georgia and honorably served his country during World War II, the Korean War, and the Vietnam War as a member of the United States Army, rising to the rank of major; and

WHEREAS, desiring to be of further service to the Commonwealth, Madison Marye ran for and was elected to the Senate of Virginia during a special election in 1973; where he ably represented the residents of the Counties of Carroll, Floyd, Grayson, and Montgomery and the Cities of Galax and Radford in what was then the 37th District; and

WHEREAS, during his 29-year tenure, Madison Marye was a champion for rural residents and introduced many important pieces of legislation to benefit all Virginians, including a bill to lower the state food tax; and

WHEREAS, respected for his legislative expertise Madison Marye served on several committees, including the Committees on Local Government, Rehabilitation and Social Services, and Commerce and Labor, and served as chairman of the Committees on Agriculture, Conservation and Natural Resources and General Laws; and

WHEREAS, known for his sense of humor, Madison Marye could always be counted on to share home-spun stories of his “Uncle Billy” with his colleagues in the General Assembly; and

WHEREAS, a man of great integrity, Madison Marye served the Commonwealth with the utmost dedication and distinction until his well-earned retirement from public office in 2002; and

WHEREAS, Madison Marye will be fondly remembered and greatly missed by numerous family members, friends, and colleagues on both sides of the aisle; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Convention, that the Democratic Party of Virginia hereby notes with great sadness the loss of the Honorable Madison Ellis Marye, a farmer, businessman, and public servant in Southwest Virginia; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, that the Convention directs the Democratic Party of Virginia to prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the family of the Honorable Madison Ellis Marye, as an expression of our party’s respect for his legacy of service to the people of Southwest Virginia.