

DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS



PARTY PLATFORM

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PREAMBLE

The history of the Northern Mariana Islands Democratic Party is rooted in the former Popular Party, which led the movement in the 1960s and 1970s for self-determination and the creation of our Commonwealth in permanent political union with the United States of America.

Today NMI Democrats are proud to be affiliated with the national Democratic Party. In 2016, NMI Democrats were represented for the first time in history at the Democratic National Convention and participated in the nomination of the first female candidate for President in United States history. In the 2020 Democratic National Convention, NMI Democrats endorsed Joe Biden for President and Kamala Harris for Vice President, and joined the national party in adopting a bold and progressive platform that sets forth a vision for a stronger, more just, and more equitable America.

In the Northern Marianas and across the nation, Democrats are committed to uniting and healing our communities, rebuilding an economy that promotes shared prosperity, and restoring public trust in government.

SECTION 2:

Democratic Values

Democrats in the Northern Mariana Islands and throughout the United States believe that healthcare is a right, diversity is a strength, the economy should work for everyone, and facts and truth matter.

In the Northern Marianas, Democrats are guided by these core values:

1. COLLABORATION

We work together as a team, for all people, in all precincts, for all islands.

2. RESPONSIBILITY

We work to ensure decisions are data driven and government resources are used efficiently.

3. ACCOUNTABILITY

We work to restore public trust and integrity in the government through transparency and the rule of law.

4. VISION

We work for a better, fairer, and brighter future for every island resident: rolling up our sleeves, mobilizing grassroots voters, and organizing everywhere to empower our communities.

5. ETHICS

We are the party of the people, serving the common good and fighting for equality, fairness, and opportunity for all. We strive for honest, principled, and trustworthy leadership, and we place the public interest before special interests.

SECTION 3:

Democratic Pledge to the People

1. We believe that public office is a public trust. We will hold ourselves and our colleagues to the highest ethical standards, and will abide faithfully by the oath of office and the CNMI Government Ethics Code.
2. We will diligently attend and participate in legislative sessions and committee meetings.
3. We will collaborate in the performance of our duties, including drafting, sponsoring, reviewing, deliberating, and deciding on legislation that puts the people of the Commonwealth first above all special interests.
4. We will support legislative rules that require all members to maintain records and publish quarterly reports of their expenditures.
5. We will regularly report to the people and welcome their feedback through community outreach and engagement, including but not limited to, public hearings, town hall meetings, and social media.
6. We will ensure that public funds are only spent on public purposes, including all funds allocated to our individual public offices for operational expenses.
7. We will work to improve the fiscal responsibility, performance, and efficiency of our government.
8. We will limit travel only to vitally important government purposes, and will report to the people after travel is performed.
9. We will work to develop a diversified and sustainable economy that will improve the standard of living for all of our people.

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10. We will support fairness, transparency, and accountability in government hiring and contracting.
 11. We will support the growth and development of locally-owned small businesses.
 12. We will work to strengthen the Personnel Service System to ensure fairness and due process, support employee morale, and reward excellence in public service.
 13. We will support increased investments in our Commonwealth's healthcare system, and will work to expand access to affordable and quality healthcare for all CNMI residents.
 14. We will require quarterly reports from each executive department which shall provide and include expenditures, travel, performance and ways to help the economy.

SECTION 4:

Our Vision

Democrats envision a safe, just, healthy, and beautiful commonwealth, where the rule of law prevails, prosperity is shared, and economic development raises quality of life for all. In the Northern Mariana Islands, our educational system develops skilled workers and great citizens. Small businesses thrive. Quality healthcare is affordable, accessible, and equitable. Our island cultures, natural resources, and historic sites are cherished and protected. Diversity is celebrated. Neighbors care for one another. Representation and trustworthy leadership matter.

SECTION 5:

Protecting Our People and Recovering from the Covid-19 Pandemic

We face a long road to recovery from the impacts of Covid-19. NMI Democrats support the national Covid-19 response and recovery packages that have been championed by Delegate Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan and his Democratic colleagues in Congress.

These efforts have made possible the delivery of more than \$100 million to the commonwealth for Pandemic Unemployment Assistance and Federal Pandemic Unemployment Compensation, the Paycheck Protection Program that allowed businesses and nonprofits to continue paying their employees, and \$36 million to the NMI government for coronavirus response. Congressman Sablan is also now working to secure over \$1 billion for the Commonwealth in the next Covid-19 response package, including funds to address revenue shortfalls affecting CNMI government operations, and language that clarifies that CW-1 workers are eligible for federal unemployment assistance as originally intended in the CARES Act.

NMI Democrats also firmly believe that these federal funds must be monitored closely and managed with maximum transparency to ensure that the benefits flow to the people who need them most. We are committed to continuing and expanding the scope of oversight over all disaster-related funds to the commonwealth, both federal and local. We further support local measures to temporarily suspend evictions, foreclosures, and utility disconnections for vulnerable families and to direct federal and local resources to emergency housing and food assistance programs.

The pandemic has underscored how vulnerable our families are without basic safety nets to mitigate the devastating impacts of job loss

and illness. To this end Democrats believe the administration must extend its support to Congressman Kilili Sablan's efforts in Congress to infuse new money into the CNMI's Nutrition Assistance Program, immediately end its recent cuts to food stamps, and restore full benefits to individuals and families in need. Democrats are also committed to finally establishing an unemployment insurance program in the CNMI so that residents may have some peace of mind and protection when unexpected job losses occur.

SECTION 6:

Restoring Public Trust and Fiscal Responsibility in Government

The people of the Northern Marianas deserve caring, competent, honest, and responsible leaders. They deserve a government they can trust. They have the right to know how public funds are spent and why. Accountability requires transparency.

1. Exercising Oversight

Democrats believe that oversight is a critical function of the legislature, and ensures healthy checks and balances in our system of government. The legislature must exercise its role and power to monitor the expenditures of public funds and the performance of departments and agencies, and identify policy gaps or other issues requiring legislative attention.

Rigorous fiscal oversight is especially critical at this time. The legislature must have a true picture of the commonwealth government's overall financial condition, including cash flow, revenue projections, assets, receivables, and obligations. Accurate and timely data are essential for our government to chart a path forward to fiscal stabilization.

Democrats will champion fiscal oversight and efforts to streamline and improve the performance of government and ensure

that public funds are spent responsibly and for public purposes. An important part of this effort is legislation to strengthen the independence and enforcement capacity of the Office of the Public Auditor (OPA), and clarify by law the definition of “public purpose” for the expenditures of public funds.

Other areas that Democrats believe demand oversight at this time include: expenditures of all disaster-related federal and local funding and the CNMI’s implementation of programs intended to help residents impacted by disaster, including the Covid-19 pandemic; clearly defining the governor’s powers during states of emergency and obligations to provide accountability; reviewing management and operations at the Department of Public Safety; and reviewing the management and disposition of public lands and the Department of Public Lands’ compliance with legal, fiduciary, and constitutional mandates.

2. Opening Up the Legislature

Democrats believe lawmakers must also demonstrate transparency and accountability to the people they represent. We support OPA audit recommendations to enact legislation providing guidance for legislative allowances, and to establish a uniform travel policy for the government. Further, Democrats will make public the statements of financial interest submitted to OPA by all elected and appointed officials, and support legislative rules to require lawmakers to maintain records and publish reports of expenditures.

Democratic lawmakers will hold town hall meetings and public hearings, and report regularly to constituents on proposed legislation and other activities in the legislature. Democrats will also improve the legislature’s online presence including its official website and social media. We will livestream sessions and committee meetings, and work to pass the Livestream Video Act to require all government bodies to make their public meetings accessible online.

SECTION 7:

Creating a Stronger, Fairer, More Diversified Economy

Our people are our most precious resource. Democrats believe that a strong economy is one that provides fair and meaningful opportunities for all citizens.

1. Investing in Education

Democrats see public education as a major economic driver, and the single most important investment we can make as a community to raise our standard of living, close social and economic disparities, and build a sustainable future for the Northern Marianas. High-quality educational programs provide the means by which the CNMI's residents can develop their talents and build the necessary skills to become productive members of society and support themselves and their families.

In appropriations, Democrats will prioritize investments in all of our public educational institutions: the Public School System, the Northern Marianas College, and the Northern Marianas Technical Institute. We recognize the need for diverse talent and skilled workers in all trades, and we will promote career and technical education, including apprenticeship programs, through collaborative partnerships across PSS, NMC, and NMTI.

2. Strengthening Our Workforce

Democrats are committed to supporting and strengthening our workforce by updating our CNMI labor laws to raise the local minimum wage to meet federal standards and implement gradual wage increases over time to stay competitive and keep pace with inflation. We also support the establishment of a permanent federal OSHA office in the Northern Marianas as well as a CNMI occupational safety and health program to enforce workplace safety standards in the commonwealth government.

Democrats recognize the importance of a strong civil service, and a government Personnel Service System that ensures fairness and due process, attracts talent, and rewards excellence. To better support the commonwealth's government employees, Democrats will work with the Civil Service Commission and the Office of Personnel Management to update the Personnel Service System Rules and Regulations and review and align pay structures across the government. We will require workers compensation for all government employees, and support enhancements to the government's Defined Contribution Plan, so that the commonwealth's public servants may have greater peace of mind and security while on the job and when they are ready to retire.

Love of family is one of our most important values in the Northern Marianas, and Democrats believe that working families in the commonwealth and throughout the nation must be able to care for young children and sick or elderly relatives without suffering major hits to their household income. The United States is currently the only advanced economy in the world to lack a national policy for paid family leave. The national Democratic Party has a plan to ensure paid family leave for all workers; NMI Democrats support the extension of that plan to the Northern Marianas, as well as legislation tailored to meet local needs.

We also believe it is time to end the commonwealth's 100% tax on the Earned Income Tax Credit, and restore this tax credit to benefit our low- and middle-income families. The EITC is an important tool in the tax code to lift household incomes and raise the standard of living for many working families. Because the EITC is only available to U.S. citizens, FAS citizens, and permanent residents who work, Democrats view this tax credit as an important piece in an overall strategy to increase the number of U.S. workers in the commonwealth. We strongly support U.S. Congressman Gregorio Kilili Camacho Sablan's proposal to provide cover-over federal funds to enable the payment of the EITC in the Northern Marianas.

3. Diversifying Our Economy and Helping Local Businesses Thrive

Democrats believe in supporting homegrown local businesses. We will work with the Commonwealth Development Authority to develop initiatives to assist the commonwealth's entrepreneurial individuals who are ready to jumpstart their own businesses. These initiatives include but are not limited to retooling the Qualifying Certificate program to promote locally-owned businesses and industries that optimize and enhance the commonwealth's available human and natural resources and are not heavily reliant on outside labor or resources.

Tourism should remain the commonwealth's number one industry, and Democrats believe we can and should diversify and strengthen this industry beyond mass commercial tourism and casino gaming. We see opportunities for other types of tourism to flourish in the commonwealth, including culture and history tourism, culinary tourism, nature-based and wildlife tourism, and ecotourism that is low-impact on the environment. We also see major opportunities for more local entrepreneurs and locally-owned businesses to get involved in these new and diversified forms of tourism and ultimately grow the industry, create new jobs, and benefit our overall economy.

Democrats believe the government should play a role in supporting the diversification of tourism and the increased involvement of local residents and businesses in the industry. We will work with the Marianas Visitors Authority, the Northern Marianas College, the Small Business Development Corporation, and other institutions to expand the tour guide certification program, promote certified tour operators through MVA and partners, provide access to language, business development, and marketing training for local guides, and identify other means to promote the success of locally-owned businesses in the tourism industry.

The commonwealth's economic development programs must also support new or expanding businesses in productive and sustainable industries, such as renewable energy, recycling,

agriculture, aquaculture, and fisheries. The government plays an important role in providing research, technical expertise, and a fair and sensible regulatory framework, to help local producers, manufacturers, and entrepreneurs succeed. Democrats are committed to working closely with the Northern Marianas College Cooperative Research Extension and Education Service, the Department of Lands and Natural Resources, the Department of Commerce and other critical partners to develop and promote these new industries, to include more local food production as well as value-added products for local and export markets. We envision the creation of research institutes in the Northern Marianas that collaborate with other organizations in the region and the nation, including the University of Hawaii and the University of Guam.

4. Rebuilding Our Infrastructure

Democrats see the rebuilding of our critical infrastructure as key to the rebuilding of our entire economy. All of the commonwealth's ports need major upgrades. Many of our roads, both primary and secondary, are riddled with potholes and bumps. Across the CNMI, our solid waste management infrastructure fails to meet federal standards for public health and environmental protection, and the Commonwealth Utilities Corporation remains under a federal stipulated order for violations of the Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act. Water losses through CUC's distribution system are still unacceptably high, and translate into higher costs for ratepayers. Our energy infrastructure is outdated, inefficient, and almost completely dependent on imported fossil fuels that drain the CNMI of approximately \$70 million every year. The commonwealth's energy efficiency and renewable energy policies and programs must be updated and implemented. NMI Democrats support Congressman Gregorio Kilili Sablan's efforts to direct federal technical assistance and funding to help the Northern Marianas develop an energy action plan.

Hundreds of millions of federal dollars have been made available to the CNMI to improve public infrastructure, including highways, solid waste management, utilities, and energy. At the local level, the legislature has made millions of dollars in appropriations for smaller infrastructure projects, usually precinct-focused. Democrats demand greater transparency in the use of these critical federal and local infrastructure dollars and the progress of projects they are intended to fund. We support more comprehensive public planning and coordination among the relevant departments and agencies, including the Bureau of Environmental and Coastal Quality, the Department of Public Works, the Commonwealth Ports Authority, CUC, and the Office of Planning and Development.

Democrats are also committed to following through on unresolved OPA recommendations from a 2016 audit report to reform the organizational structure of the Commonwealth Utilities Corporation in order improve efficiency and performance; ensure independent and professional management; and protect the interests of ratepayers. We recognize, as OPA did, that CUC has been subjected to political interference and mismanagement over many years, impairing utility operations and service delivery to the people of the Northern Marianas. A well-run, efficient, and high-performing utility system is essential to our economic development now and in the future.

SECTION 8: Achieving Universal, Affordable, and Quality Healthcare

Democrats in the Northern Marianas and across the nation view healthcare as a human right. We support increased investments in our Commonwealth's healthcare system, and will work to expand access to affordable, high-quality healthcare for all CNMI residents.

1. Reforming Medical Referral

One major step towards improving healthcare in the Northern Marianas is to restructure our medical referral program. Every year the commonwealth government overspends its appropriated budget on off-island medical referral by millions of dollars. There has yet to be a thorough analysis of these expenditures, or the areas where services could be improved or offered on-island, or where savings might be realized. Democrats will work with the Commonwealth Health Care Corporation, Medical Referral staff, and other policy experts to undertake this long-overdue review of the medical referral program. We also support the careful and closely-monitored transition of the program out of the governor's office to the Commonwealth Health Care Corporation, and the enactment of legislation to establish basic parameters for off-island referrals.

2. Expanding Access to Care

Another important study that Democrats support is a feasibility assessment for universal health coverage in the CNMI. Public Law 21-35, the Appropriations Act of FY 2021, requires CHCC to present a report to the legislature by March 2021 on policy options that might be considered in order to expand access to care and reach this goal of universal coverage. Democrats will work with CHCC to ensure the agency has the resources and support it needs to complete and deliver a sound study.

One significant option for expanding access to care in the CNMI is to develop an affordable buy-in program with Medicaid. CNMI Public Law 21-28 now authorizes the Medicaid Agency to offer a buy-in program to residents who currently lack health insurance and would not otherwise qualify for regular Medicaid. Democrats will collaborate with the Medicaid Agency to support the development of this program and make it available to the commonwealth's citizens as soon as possible.

3. Raising Revenue for Healthcare

The CNMI has one of the highest rates of chronic disease, such as diabetes and heart disease, in the nation. The related rates of tobacco and alcohol consumption, as well as child and adult obesity, are alarming. The costs of a population in poor health are staggering - to our healthcare system, our economy, and overall quality of life. Democrats support raising revenue specifically for healthcare and especially for preventive screening and care, through moderate increases in alcohol and tobacco taxes and the establishment of a reasonable tax on sugar-sweetened beverages. We recognize that these tax measures are backed by evidence that they promote healthier lifestyle choices, are supported by the commonwealth's health care professionals, and were broadly endorsed at the community-wide fiscal response summit in May 2020. Revenues generated from these taxes should go directly to investments in our healthcare system, and to tax enforcement.

SECTION 9: Improving Village Life

Democrats will focus special attention on improving the quality of life in our villages. We believe that cleaning up our villages, protecting our natural, historic, and cultural sites, and promoting an active lifestyle must be top priorities to improve the quality of life and the health, enjoyment, and pride of our people.

1. Reinstating Village Sanitation and Public Education Programs

We will work with the Bureau of Environmental Health, the Saipan Mayor's Office, the Zoning Office, and other agencies to bring all our residential areas to healthful and sanitary conditions. We will reinstate village sanitation inspection and public education programs throughout the commonwealth. We will also invest in municipal animal control programs, and provide low-cost spay and neuter services for pets and shelter animals offered for adoption.

2. Tackling Blighted Properties

Democrats support enforcement of the Blighted Properties Act, and will collaborate with the Zoning Office and other relevant agencies to identify enforcement needs and priorities for blight removal, mitigation, and revitalization. We also support legislation to authorize temporary, productive uses for vacant and abandoned lots, such as gardens, farms, or community festivals.

3. Delivering Universal Solid Waste Services

Another major goal for Democrats is to establish a universal, commonwealth-wide system of solid waste collection, disposal, and recycling, that includes curbside pick-up for residents and businesses and subsidies for low-income households. We know too well the problems of illegal dumping and overflowing trash receptacles that arise in every village because there is no coordinated solid waste program. Many low-income families cannot afford to pay for private trash haulers, or lack a vehicle to transport their waste to the transfer station or landfill.

A comprehensive, universal system of solid waste management will go a long way to resolve these problems. Democrats believe it is the responsibility of the government to provide this service that is so essential for public health and sanitation.

4. Promoting Active and Healthy Lifestyles

Democrats believe strongly in creating a social and physical environment that promotes active and healthy living. We support sports programs, regional and international competitions, and the construction and improvement of sports and recreation facilities on Saipan, Tinian, and Rota. Democrats also support the development of more walking paths, bike paths, and hiking trails throughout the commonwealth, and the repair and maintenance of existing pathways. The Beach Road Pathway, constructed by the last Democrat Governor, Froilan C. Tenorio, is a fine example of an amenity that enhances the beauty of Saipan

and is enjoyed by residents and tourists alike, but this too, needs restoration.

Democrats envision beautiful, well-maintained villages throughout the commonwealth, with parks, gardens, community centers, sidewalks, street lights, crosswalks, and paved streets. We will promote community and backyard gardening in all our villages. We also support initiatives to safeguard and promote our natural, cultural, and historic resources, including a CNMI state park system and new heritage trails for historically and culturally significant areas.

SECTION 10: Reforming Our Criminal Justice System

Democrats believe that our criminal justice system must be transformed to better protect our communities. We view incarceration as the harshest tool of punishment in our system of justice, and we also recognize that mandatory sentencing laws and lengthy jail times do not result in safer communities, especially when correctional or rehabilitative services are lacking during incarceration.

In the CNMI, Democrats see urgent needs to address mismanagement and low morale at the Department of Public Safety and the Department of Corrections, to increase the use of specialty courts and diversion programs to reduce incarceration and recidivism, and to institute meaningful rehabilitation programs for inmates and support their reentry to society when they complete their sentences.

1. Raising Professional Standards for Public Safety and Corrections

Our community is safer when our law enforcement officers are trusted, well-trained, and equipped with the resources they need to protect and serve. Democrats support raising professional standards for the Department of Public Safety and the Depart-

ment of Corrections, starting at the very top, with enhanced minimum qualifications for Commissioners of DPS and DOC and requirements to pursue national accreditation for law enforcement. We support rigorous background checks and screening for law enforcement applicants, and regular, mandatory drug testing during training and in the force. To ensure fair and competitive recruitment and retention of officers, we believe a review of the pay schedules for law enforcement officers is in order, as well as a review of the rules and procedures that govern performance reviews and promotions.

Democrats support evidence-based measures that include robust training at the academy and on the job in areas such as conflict resolution, de-escalation, peer intervention, and appropriate use of force. We also support personal safety equipment and access to mental health services for all law enforcement officers.

2. Increasing the Use of Problem-Solving Courts and Diversion Programs

Democrats support the increased use of diversion programs for minor offenders and specialty courts to improve public safety, reduce incarceration costs, and reduce recidivism. We commend the CNMI judiciary and its partners for its successes in establishing the drug court, and we support the creation of other problem-solving courts for which we recognize a need in our community, such as domestic violence and reentry courts.

We believe that a person charged with a minor offense who has fulfilled certain requirements, such as completing treatment, making restitution to victims, or performing community service should not be incarcerated and burdened with a criminal record for life. We also believe that community service should be treated as a positive tool for restorative justice, not as a punishment handed out during sentencing. Inmates as well as participants in specialty courts and diversion programs should have the opportunity to perform community service as a way to make amends

and offer restitution to the society that has been harmed by the crimes.

3. Establishing Rehabilitation Programs for the Incarcerated and Supporting Reentry for Ex-Offenders

Our community is not safer when our justice system merely locks people up for crimes they have committed but makes little effort to rehabilitate them during incarceration. Individuals who are incarcerated must be given opportunities to turn their lives around and to become contributing members of society when they complete their sentences.

Democrats support a holistic approach to rehabilitation. We support educational programs for those who have been convicted of crimes, both in prison and upon release, including G.E.D., career and technical training, and college. We also support access to educational financial aid, housing assistance, mental health services, employment assistance, and community service opportunities to help ex-offenders reintegrate with society and transition successfully to become productive and law-abiding citizens.

SECTION 11: Join the Movement!

Help us build a safe, healthy, beautiful, and sustainable Northern Marianas!

Join the NMI Democratic Party today.



Register as a Democrat



Donate to the NMI Democratic Party