

CORE VALUES OF THE POLITICAL "LEFT", THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY IN AMERICA

A deep belief in the *human and civil rights* that give every individual dignity. These rights are described in our Bill of Rights as "inalienable" -- they cannot be surrendered or taken away.

The belief that *we exist in community* and have a duty to contribute to the common good. We share one another's fate, and our government is the shared product of our joint effort. Freedom lies in our ability to take part in our government.

The need for our government to ensure *social justice – both equality of opportunity and a fairness of distribution*. The fairness of distribution must be focused on giving all people the education and economic independence essential for freedom and dignity, and on assuring that concentrations of wealth and power do not threaten democracy.

The commitment to *tolerance, inclusion and openness to diversity*. We believe that our country is made stronger by the wealth of difference among us. And we believe, as Jesus and other great religious leaders have said, that our society is judged by what we do for the least among us. Therefore, we stand with the marginalized and oppressed and help them gain equal rights and opportunities.

The knowledge that *together, we can progress and create a better world*. Progress means change, progress means growth. Together we can guide change and growth into forward movement for our society and our country.

A social philosophy that cares equally for individual rights and for the common good most certainly sets up a balancing act. When individual rights dominate, we weaken the ties that bind our society together -- the community can lose its right to enforce civil conduct; the rich may wall themselves off from the problems that threaten the well being of the rest. When the balance is set too far the other way, the common good can become coercive -- individuals can chafe at rules that restrict their right to live life as they wish; the cry for equality can seem to reject personal endeavor. Most important, when we fail to balance the rights of the individual with the good of the community, we lose our own moral center. **Balance is difficult -- but when we get it right, we have created eras in our history where people as a whole are prosperous, our country is united, and Americans make great strides together.**

Arthur Schlesinger Jr. wrote that "we require individualism which does not wall man off from the community, we require community which sustains but does not suffocate the individual". He was not arguing for split-the-difference politics, but for the passionate energy of the Democratic Party to sustain itself in its truest form. As he wrote: "the middle of the road is definitely not the vital center, it is the **dead center**".

“People don’t raise themselves or exist alone – we are all born into a community, and we have a responsibility to improve that community. All people in our society should be able to live with dignity and with equal rights. We can and should work together to make our community better by working for greater tolerance and progress for everyone. When these systems fail...our government needs to step in and ensure these rights are upheld.”

This material adapted from an article by Rachel Kleinfeld, international relations scholar and Executive Director of the Truman National Security Project. With permission of the author.