

I Choose Democracy

A Framework for Protecting Freedom, Opportunity, and Community in America
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Executive Summary

Democracy is more than a form of government — it is the foundation of how Americans live, work, and thrive together. At its best, democracy allows us to speak freely, shape our communities, protect our families, and build hope for future generations. While the process can sometimes be messy, it remains the most powerful system for ensuring freedom, fairness, and opportunity for all.

The phrase “*I Choose Democracy*” is a declaration of values. It affirms what we are **for**, rather than only what we oppose. Choosing democracy means choosing freedom of speech, fair elections, and the rule of law — principles that ensure no one is above the law and every citizen has a voice. It means choosing equal opportunity, so every person has a fair chance at success. It means choosing community, where neighbors work together across differences. And it means choosing hope, ensuring that our children and grandchildren inherit a country where they can thrive.

These values apply to every American, but they take on special meaning for different groups: families who want safe schools and strong communities; veterans who sacrificed to defend freedom; people of faith whose right to worship is protected by democracy; small business owners who depend on fair competition; rural communities who want their local voices heard; and seniors who depend on Social Security and Medicare they earned. In each case, democracy is the system that protects and sustains what people care about most.

At a time when democracy is under strain from division, disinformation, and extremism, it is essential to remind ourselves — and one another — why democracy matters. The purpose of this paper is to provide a simple, positive framework that can guide conversations, education, and action. *I Choose Democracy* is not about left or right but about preserving the freedoms and responsibilities that define America.

The choice is clear. The choice is ours. *I Choose Democracy*.

1. Introduction: Choosing What We're For

For over 25 years, my approach to environmental stewardship has been to focus on what I support, not only what I oppose. I speak about clean water, not dirty water. Healthy communities, not unhealthy ones. Thriving biodiversity, not extinction. By emphasizing positive values that few would argue against, I've found a way to bring people together across differences.

The same principle applies to democracy. Too often, discussions focus on what we fear or what we are against. *I Choose Democracy* reframes the conversation by emphasizing what we are for. It reminds us that democracy, though sometimes messy, is the best way for people to live free, equal, and hopeful lives.

Just as conservation programs can be adapted for golf courses, schools, or neighborhoods while keeping the same core principles, so too can democracy be framed in ways that speak directly to families, veterans, communities of faith, small businesses, rural towns, and seniors. It is the same democracy, but packaged in a way that feels relevant and personal.

2. The Core Values of Democracy

Democracy thrives when it is rooted in values that are easy to understand and hard to oppose. These principles are not abstract political ideals — they shape our daily lives, our communities, and our shared future. Choosing democracy means choosing these core values:

- **Freedom of Speech** – Every person has the right to speak their mind, share their story, and voice their concerns without fear. Freedom of speech is the foundation of creativity, innovation, and dignity.
 - **Fair Elections** – Power flows from the people, and every eligible citizen's vote must count equally. Fair elections are the great equalizer in a diverse society.
 - **Rule of Law** – No one is above the law — not presidents, not corporations, not the wealthy. This principle protects freedom, ensures accountability, and prevents corruption.
 - **Equal Opportunity** – Everyone deserves a fair chance to succeed. While no society is perfectly equal, democracy is designed to expand opportunity and prevent discrimination.
 - **Community** – Democracy thrives when neighbors work together, solve problems locally, and welcome diverse voices. It is built from the ground up.
 - **Hope for the Future** – Democracy is a gift we pass on. Each generation inherits the responsibility to keep it alive so the next can thrive.
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3. Tailoring Democracy to Everyday Life

Democracy works best when people see how it connects to their own lives. While its values are universal, they resonate differently depending on where we stand. The message of *I Choose Democracy* can be adapted to meet people where they are:

- **For Families:** Democracy protects children’s safety, education, and future opportunities.
- **For Veterans:** Democracy honors the freedoms defended through sacrifice and service.
- **For People of Faith:** Democracy ensures freedom of belief and protects every tradition.
- **For Small Businesses:** Democracy provides fair rules, transparency, and opportunity.
- **For Rural Communities:** Democracy ensures local voices are heard, not silenced by elites.
- **For Seniors:** Democracy safeguards Social Security, Medicare, and the promises earned through a lifetime of work.

The genius of democracy is that it speaks to everyone, no matter their station in life. By framing its values in the language of everyday concerns, we remind people that democracy is not abstract — it is the protector of the things we care about most.

4. Why This Matters Now

Democracy is never guaranteed. It must be renewed in every generation, not only through laws and institutions but through the choices ordinary people make each day.

Across our country, democracy is being tested by disinformation, division, and extremism. These forces seek to convince people that democracy is broken or that freedom requires silencing others. The challenges are real — but so are the opportunities.

History shows that when democracy is threatened, Americans rise to defend it. From the Revolution to the Civil Rights Movement, ordinary people have renewed democracy through courage and action. Today, we are called to do the same.

This is not about left or right, red or blue. It is about whether we want to live in a nation where everyone has a voice, where fairness prevails, and where our children inherit liberty and opportunity. *I Choose Democracy* is the rallying cry for that choice.

5. Conservation Lifestyles Connection

The work of conservation and the work of democracy are deeply connected. Both rest on the idea of stewardship — caring for something larger than ourselves, something we inherited and must pass on stronger than we found it.

In conservation, local actions add up: planting native flowers, protecting clean water, creating wildlife sanctuaries. Each act may seem small, but together they sustain ecosystems for generations.

Democracy works the same way. It is not preserved by a single leader or law but by countless local choices: voting, volunteering, teaching children, having honest conversations. Like conservation, democracy must be nurtured daily if it is to endure.

A Conservation Lifestyle means living with purpose and responsibility for the health of people, communities, and nature. Choosing democracy is part of that lifestyle. It is how we steward not only land and water, but also freedom and opportunity.

6. Conclusion: A Call to Action

Democracy is not handed down from leaders. It is built and preserved by citizens. It survives only when people choose it, protect it, and pass it forward.

The phrase “*I Choose Democracy*” is more than a slogan. It is a personal declaration of values, an invitation to others, and a reminder of what unites us. Choosing democracy means choosing freedom, fairness, equal opportunity, and community. It means choosing to build, not destroy; to protect, not surrender; to hope, not fear.

At a time when democracy is under strain, every voice matters. Each of us has a role in keeping it strong — by voting, speaking up, teaching, and engaging our neighbors. No action is too small when it contributes to the whole.

The choice is clear, and it is ours to make.

I choose freedom.

I choose fairness.

I choose community.

I Choose Democracy.

The question for every American is simple: **What do you choose?**