

THE PROGRESSIVE PARTY CALLS FOR CHANGES

The views of many reform-minded Americans around 1910 can be found in the “platform” or official position statement of the Progressive Party. Theodore Roosevelt ran as the Progressive Party’s presidential candidate in the 1912 election. He lost that election to Woodrow Wilson, but many of the party’s proposals became law over the next few decades. These excerpts are condensed from the party’s 1912 platform.

The conscience of the people, in a time of grave national problems, has called into being a new party, born of the nation’s sense of justice. We of the Progressive Party here dedicate ourselves to the fulfillment of the duty laid upon us by our fathers to maintain the government of the people, by the people, and for the people.

Political parties exist to secure responsible government and to execute [put into effect] the will of the people.

From these great tasks both of the old parties have turned aside. They have become tools of corrupt interests. Behind the ostensible government [the government we see] sits enthroned an invisible government owing no allegiance and acknowledging no responsibility to the people.

To destroy this invisible government, to dissolve the unholy alliance between corrupt business and corrupt politics is the first task of the statesmanship of the day.

In particular, the party declares for direct election of United States Senators by the people.

The Progressive Party pledges itself to the task of securing equal suffrage [voting rights] to men and women alike.

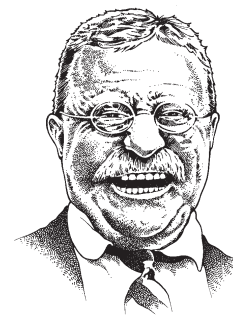
We pledge our party to legislation that will compel strict limitation of all campaign contributions and expenditures.

We pledge ourselves to work unceasingly in State and Nation for:

Effective legislation looking to the prevention of industrial accidents, occupational diseases, overwork, and unemployment.

The fixing of minimum safety and health standards for the various occupations.

The prohibition of child labor.



Minimum wage standards for working women, to provide a “living wage” in all industrial occupations.

One day’s rest in seven for all wage workers.

The eight hour day in continuous twenty-four hour industries.

The protection of home life against the hazards of sickness, irregular employment and old age through the adoption of a system of social insurance. *[Social insurance was the term used at that time for what today is known as Social Security and unemployment insurance.]*

We favor the organization [into labor unions] of the workers, men and women, as a means of protecting their interests and of promoting their progress.

Group Discussion: *What were the Progressive Party’s main ideas for improving the political system? What were its main proposals to improve conditions for American workers?*