

Handout #1: Where does each party stand when it comes to fiscal management?

Directions: Read the following excerpts from each party platform. Then answer the discussion questions.

Democratic Party Platform

Strengthening Management of Federal Government

Democrats understand responsible fiscal stewardship is key to American democracy and to the country's long-term economic prosperity. We believe that by making those at the top and the largest corporations pay their fair share we can pay for ambitious progressive investments that create good-paying jobs and offer security to working families without adding to the debt....

We will also ensure that new spending and tax cuts are offset so that they do not add to the nation's debt over time. We will tackle waste, fraud, and abuse to make sure government dollars are spent wisely and efficiently. Democrats believe that we should not be contracting, outsourcing, or privatizing work that is inherently governmental in nature, including postal services, school services, and state and local government services. We are committed to a strong, effective, accountable civil service, delivering the quality public services Americans have every right to expect.

Excerpted from the 2016 Democratic Party Platform: <https://www.demconvention.com/platform/>

Republican Party Platform

Reducing the Federal Debt

Our national debt is a burden on our economy and families. The huge increase in the national debt demanded by and incurred during the current Administration has placed a significant burden on future generations. We must impose firm caps on future debt, accelerate the repayment of the trillions we now owe in order to reaffirm our principles of responsible and limited government, and remove the burdens we are placing on future generations.

A strong economy is one key to debt reduction, but spending restraint is a necessary component that must be vigorously pursued....

Balancing the Budget

....The Republican path to fiscal sanity and economic expansion begins with a constitutional requirement for a federal balanced budget. We will fight for Congress to adopt, and for the states to ratify, a Balanced Budget Amendment which imposes a cap limiting spending to the appropriate historical average percentage of our nation's gross domestic product while requiring a super-majority for any tax increase, with exceptions only for war or legitimate emergencies. Only a constitutional safeguard such as this can prevent deficits from mounting to government default.

Republican budgets will prioritize thrift over extravagance and put taxpayers first. We support the following test: Is a particular expenditure within the constitutional scope of the federal government? If not, stop it. Has it been effective in the past and is it still absolutely necessary? If not, end it. Is it so important as to justify borrowing, especially foreign borrowing, to fund it? If not, kill it.

Excerpted from the 2016 Republican Party Platform: <https://www.gop.com/the-2016-republican-party-platform/>

Libertarian Party Platform

2.4 Government Finance and Spending

All persons are entitled to keep the fruits of their labor. We call for the repeal of the income tax, the abolishment of the Internal Revenue Service and all federal programs and services not required under the U.S. Constitution. We oppose any legal requirements forcing employers to serve as tax collectors. Government should not incur debt, which burdens future generations without their consent. We support the passage of a "Balanced Budget Amendment" to the U.S. Constitution, provided that the budget is balanced exclusively by cutting expenditures, and not by raising taxes.

Excerpted from the 2016 Libertarian Party Platform: <https://www.lp.org/platform>

Green Party Platform

M: National Debt

OUR POSITION

Greens will reduce our national debt.

Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama have irresponsibly expanded our national debt by trillions of dollars to finance tax cuts for savings of our workers are wealthiest citizens, war, corporate welfare and bailouts of Wall Street and the automotive industry. This debt and the interest that must be paid on it is not sustainable.

Working people and the small business community are bearing a disproportionate amount of the federal debt burden. Yet the federal debt is, to a large degree, the end product of tax cuts for the wealthy and big business, and the military-defense industry buildup.

For many years the federal government borrowed trillions of dollars. Money that should have been going into a better "safety net" for the poor, homes for the homeless, environmental and public lands conservation, sustainable jobs, research and development, roads and bridges, schools and the technologies of tomorrow, has been lost to servicing the national debt. We cannot ignore the consequences of our nation's past deficits and the related costs of debt service.

GREEN SOLUTIONS

1. Reduce our national debt by increasing taxes on large corporations, the super-rich and pollution; and decreasing expenditures in some areas, especially for war, armaments and corporate welfare.
2. Oppose privatization of Social Security.
3. Increase funding for green jobs, Social Security, public housing, higher education, public transportation, environmental protection, renewable energy and energy conservation.

Excerpted from the 2016 Green Party Platform: <http://www.gp.org/platform>

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways is there agreement across these different party platforms?
2. What are the key points of disagreement?
3. The Fiscal Ship game asks you to choose from a list of specific governing goals: Reduce Inequality, Strengthen National Defense, Fight Climate Change, Strengthen Social Safety Net, Tax Cutter, Shrink Government, Shield the Elderly, Invest in the Future, Fiscal Hawk, Rein in Entitlements. Based on just these brief excerpts, can you identify the parties' key governing goals? List those that come across clearly for any of the four parties.