

# COMPACT *for the* American Future

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A **Unifying Agenda** to Restore America's  
Promise of **Freedom & Fairness to Every Citizen**

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Policy Report by



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# INTRODUCTION

Once in every generation, an event so unexpected has the ability to shock the nation. From the assassination of a popular president, to divisive wars, to a cultural crescendo after decades of activism, there are moments that both shape and reveal the soul of our country.

The coronavirus pandemic is one of those moments.

As the country continues to grapple with the proliferation of a deadly virus and a devastating economic reality, a spotlight has shone on our preparedness — or lack thereof — as a nation. While the economic and healthcare systems are front and center in this crisis, it's become clear that preparedness across every level of society is no longer part of our DNA. With the coronavirus, our vulnerabilities have been exposed.

Take, for example, [the overloading of the Internet](#) as a surge of Americans began telecommuting for work in the early days of the pandemic. Our online infrastructure was not built for a worst-case scenario. Or recall the pandemonium and [shoulder-to-shoulder crowding](#) at airports receiving passengers from abroad as the administration sent mixed messages about travel restrictions. Our infrastructure has not been built for a worst-case scenario.

Or look at the [shortage of vital personal protective equipment](#) for doctors, nurses and first responders on the front lines of saving lives in this pandemic. For a country that spent 3.6 trillion dollars on healthcare last year, it is staggering to think of the breakdowns that would lead to a shortage of masks. And as cases continue to rise and we head toward another peak this fall, we will likely confront a scenario in which the healthcare system does not have enough [ventilators](#) to treat critical COVID-19 patients.

**The federal and state governments have taken important steps to combat the pandemic. But it's clear that we need to move beyond an approach that amounts to little more than shuffling chairs around on a sinking ship. It's time that we build capacity to be prepared — in strong economies and crises alike — for the future. It's time for a Compact for the American Future.**

Future Majority's research has shown that Americans want freedom and a fair shot to build a good future for themselves and their families. Preparing our country to be a leader across all levels of society — healthcare, jobs and the economy, infrastructure, technology, the environment, and a strong democracy — is where the next congressional agenda should be set. Building for the future isn't just compelling messaging; our country will also be stronger for it.

In a new series, the Future Majority team is taking a look at what it means and what it will take to build the American future. In these uncertain times and with the potential for new leadership, this is the conversation that our leaders should be running with. **This is the conversation that will matter.**

# HEALTHCARE in the 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY

If there is one system in American society that COVID-19 has proven inadequate and not equipped for a national crisis, it's our current healthcare system. It's not much of a surprise — the U.S. spends far and away the most on healthcare per capita than other industrialized countries, with little result. Life expectancy in the U.S. is below that of many of our peer nations. A quarter of Americans skip out on taking prescription medications they need because of the cost.

As a country, we spent **3.6 trillion dollars** on healthcare in 2018. But in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are unable to provide our frontline healthcare workers with masks, gowns and other basic personal protective equipment they need to stay healthy while treating patients. We hear reports of ER doctors setting up sewing stations to make masks and gowns out of sterile wrap, and firefighters and paramedics are also severely impacted by shortages. The CDC's response: use scarves or bandanas.

The shortcomings of our current patchwork system are instructive as we think about building a healthcare system that works for all Americans for the future. From pandemic preparedness to closing the coverage gap to reducing maternal mortality and lowering costs, improving healthcare is a key pillar of the **Compact for the American Future**. Here's how we can do it:

## **Pandemic Prevention & Preparedness**

The coronavirus pandemic and the Trump administration's negligence and at times malfeasance with respect to prevention and response has thrust our government's capacity to be prepared for pandemics into the forefront. Leadership that puts the public health over poll numbers, self-aggrandizement and the whims of the stock market is of course critical step 1 to combatting future pandemics.

From a healthcare standpoint, our system is not built to handle the spread of a deadly virus. We lack personal protective equipment for frontline healthcare workers, meaning many of our doctors and nurses will fall ill in alarming numbers. We do not have nearly enough hospital and ICU beds to treat those with COVID-19 and all other critical patients. And with a respiratory disease like COVID-19, our stockpile of respirators is dangerously under-resourced. Not to mention, our biggest failure to date was the inability to rapidly scale testing to the population.



So, in the midst of this crisis, we must prepare for the next one. Below are some steps that can be taken:

- As a first critical step, the Congress should urge the next administration to **reinstate the global pandemic response team** at the National Security Council — the office that Trump disbanded in 2018.
- Congress should significantly **increase the annual budgets of the Centers for Disease Control, the National Institutes of Health, and the World Health Organization** — the agencies chiefly responsible for preparedness and response to a pandemic. Agencies that Trump has justified his repeated proposals to slash them because, “I’m a business person, I don’t like having thousands of people around when you don’t need them — when we need them, we can get them back very quickly.” The CDC’s budget authority, for instance, dropped nearly 10% from \$7.18B to \$6.48B last year. In 2021 Congress should demand its budget is increased beyond 2018 levels and beef up funding for Emerging and Zoonotic Infectious Diseases.
- Since 2008, local public health departments have let 60,000 employees go, amounting to a 25% drop in their workforce. The federal government should make it easier for states to draw resources to **increase funding to state and local health agencies**, which in our federated system are in large part responsible for responding to public health crises.
- **Paid sick leave** is a critical way to ensure the workforce is healthy and not unnecessarily going to work when they are sick to get a paycheck they wouldn’t if they stayed home. The federal government should take the initiative to immediately expand guaranteed paid sick leave (at least 2 weeks) to all American workers, including hourly and part-time workers. It’s a move that is a boon to both health and productivity.
- Federal, state, and local governments should conduct **annual pandemic response simulations**, similar to the one run last year that showed the federal government was not prepared for a virus outbreak. These simulations should produce reports that are available to the public.
- The public health community should **deploy training** for the entire healthcare workforce to be able to respond to future pandemics.
- Congress should **earmark a rainy-day fund** that can spur the requisite agencies (CDC, FDA) to provide for **free treatment and testing of future viruses** instantaneously, without draw-out legislative processes and an over-reliance on private companies.
- **Rapid, ubiquitous testing should be the moonshot project of the 21st century**. It is that critical to fighting pandemic diseases.
- Congress should take notes and **issue formal guidance based on steps that South Korea, Singapore and other countries have taken to successfully contain the virus**. South Korea, in particular, experienced a significant outbreak with at its peak over 900 new cases in one day, but has dramatically “flattened the curve” without economic lockdowns or draconian travel and movement restrictions. So far, we’ve learned what works in this case: quick, aggressive national action with early intervention; widespread testing; contact tracing and isolation; and unwavering public cooperation. This last piece requires trust in national leaders.
- Congress should make sure our **health agencies are annually assessing the capacity of our healthcare system** to treat projected pandemics of all types, by ensuring an adequate healthcare workforce, from first responders to doctors, building hospital beds in major cities and rural towns alike, and increasing vital and life-saving medical equipment.
- When the administration and certain corners of the national media confuse the public, spread

disinformation for short-term political gains, and generally obfuscate the truth, Congress should **identify and call on experts and non-political leaders** who can relay critical information to the public and inspire public trust.

- **National leaders should pay more attention to and seek greater involvement of young people.** From developing an action plan to educate and keep millions of kids busy at home, to stressing the importance of social distancing among young people, it is vital that these large generations of Americans are involved and on board with public health strategies to fight future pandemics.
- As COVID-19 is showing, pandemics have the potential to cause significant strains to folks' mental health. Congress must shore up the patchwork mental health system for Americans, including expanding access to mental telehealth for low income individuals.
- Importantly, there must be significant measures put in place to **cushion blows to the economy** that inevitably arise during future pandemics. Action must be broad and swift, including: suspending student loan debt and credit card debt payments; forbearance on mortgage and rent payments; standing up a substantial stimulus fund that has key provisions going forward to ensure transparency, make sure federal dollars are supporting workers and not stock buybacks, allowing for progressive cash infusion to households, and multiyear loans at low or no interest rates to small businesses that retain employees.
- Lastly, Congress must implement **national vote-by-mail**. There is a very real possibility COVID-19 will extend into this November's election, and Americans should not have to choose between casting their vote and protecting their health. Vote-by-mail will both increase turnout and reduce the chances of exacerbating pandemic spread.

### **Affordable, Quality, and Universal Healthcare for all Americans**

Ensuring universal coverage so that every American has affordable, quality healthcare that they can access without barriers is central to improving the system overall and improving lives is necessary for securing freedom for every American. How best can we prepare for a future pandemic? Outside of the measures above, we need to make sure everyone who is sick can get the care they need, and the system can effectively handle the caseload.

Beyond pandemic preparedness, there is great enthusiasm to improve the system. Consistently, healthcare is reported as a top issue among voters, and several national polls showed healthcare being the most important issue that voters will consider going into the 2020 elections. Among Democrats in particular, healthcare features more prominently than in their Republican counterparts. In a recent Gallup poll, for instance, 49% of Democrats ranked healthcare as "extremely important" to determining their vote, while only 22% of Republicans gave it the same precedence, a 27-point differential.

While Democrats are largely united on the importance of healthcare in their daily lives, there are differences in how to achieve a commonly shared value that every American deserves affordable, quality healthcare. It's no secret why every 2020 Democratic Primary Debate opened with nearly an hour on the healthcare contention between a single payer system and other paths to universal health care. That debate is important, but leaders in Congress should be sure to not let it undercut the key message: that Democrats and progressives fundamentally believe in healthcare for all. The same cannot be said for many conservative lawmakers.

Moreover, 10 years after the passage of the Affordable Care Act, it's as popular as ever among Democrats (94%) and a majority of Independents (53%) approve it as well. Overall, 52% of Americans have a positive view of the ACA. Congress should lean into public opinion and strengthen the ACA, which not only would be feasible in a highly polarized political landscape, but also would serve as a direct contrast to the decade-long effort by conservatives to dismantle the ACA with no backup plan. How should that happen?

- First, there should be a national campaign to finally urge the 14 states — including Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Texas, and Wisconsin — that have not expanded Medicaid to do so immediately, which would expand healthcare coverage to millions of Americans who are still uninsured. In the event of a crisis, this would mean more Americans have a primary doctor to call or visit, with reduced strain on emergency department visits. It means folks won't be afraid to go without care or treatment for fear of otherwise not being able to put food on the table because their care is covered.
- 78% of Americans said they did not have to give up a health insurance plan they liked because of noncompliance with the ACA, a key positive of the law. A public option that allows individuals or families to buy insurance through Medicare or Medicaid with no premiums and reduced cost sharing for low income Americans and premium assistance for middle class Americans would help close the coverage gap and allow people to keep their current plans.
- Congress should make real on their promise to end surprise billing by requiring patients to be notified before an out-of-network charge is applied and banning out-of-network charges when patients don't have control over which doctor they see, like in emergency visits.
- In the face of attacks on the Affordable Care Act and Republican-led lawsuits to do away with protections of the 100 million Americans with pre-existing conditions, Congress should support state efforts to codify ACA-level pre-existing conditions protection laws.
- A famous 2003 *Health Affairs* article still rings true today: "It's the prices, stupid." Lowering per capita costs will take major strain off the system and make us better prepared for public health crises. As Congress takes action to lower costs, higher-value, cost-effective health solutions should receive greater attention, like universal home visiting and better wages for home health care workers.
- Congress should enact a [Veterans Bill of Rights](#) to tackle underinsurance and increase access to critical mental health care for veterans.
- A greater emphasis should be placed on finding solutions to the maternity mortality crisis in the U.S. We lag far behind other industrialized nations and lose far too many women -- especially women of color -- to unnecessary and preventable causes during childbirth. Congress should increase funding to study the root causes of this crisis and back evidenced-based solutions.
- Congress must take action to protect choice and allow women the freedom to choose if, when, and with whom to start a family. Laws should be passed to ensure women can access all forms of reproductive care no matter their geography or income level.

### **Lowering Prescription Drug Costs**

Drug prices have ballooned [60 percent](#) over the last decade, putting vital prescriptions out of reach for 1 in 4 Americans. It's time to confront the drug price epidemic in this country head-on.

As a major priority, Congress should stand up to special interests and allow Medicare to negotiate prescription drug prices like every other payor. Congress should also bar pharmaceutical

companies from hiking drug prices above the general inflation rate that are covered by public health plans.

In the face of pandemics, Congress should increase funding and award contracts or increase tax credits for R&D exclusively focused on getting ahead of medication treatment and vaccinations for viruses. In the event of pandemics, pharmaceutical companies that manufacture life-saving drugs should not be allowed to price gouge.

Congress should also exercise more oversight over prescription drug advertising, including barring tax breaks on advertisement spending, and not allowing misinformation to confuse patients in TV ads.

Additionally, action can be taken to increase competition and remove barriers for generics and reduce monopolies that lead to unfair prices. Congress should take action to ban “product hopping” and “pay-for-delay” tactics, and other tricks pharmaceutical companies play to make it difficult for generics to enter the market.

Finally, Congress should continue to allow states and allow individuals to import safe, low-cost prescription drugs from other countries, such as Canada. This increases competition in the U.S. and lets families get critical treatment without forgoing other necessities.

### **Improving Rural Healthcare Access**

Rural communities have long been overlooked in our current healthcare system. And especially when a pandemic hits, rural communities are often the last to receive critical care they need to stay healthy and survive economically.

Congress should be unwavering in its commitment to improving healthcare access in rural America for now and for the future.

Rural hospitals have been closing at alarming rates, and a quarter of rural hospitals are at risk of being shut down. A national agenda must include keeping those hospitals open and standing up new ones, so no family has critical care too far out of reach. Congress must allow for programs for rural hospitals to stay open as they test new models of care for their communities. Any proposed payment cuts to rural hospitals must be met with fierce opposition and proposals to increased funding to rural hospitals.

Beyond hospitals, Congress should increase funding to preventative health services in rural communities, such as community health centers, low-cost transportation to get folks to health centers, social workers and patient navigators to help patients make sense of their primary care options, and expanding telehealth by finally bringing high-speed broadband to rural America.

Finally, we must shore up the pipeline of healthcare workers in rural communities. Congress can offer loan forgiveness to college and professional school graduates who move to underserved rural communities to work as healthcare providers. Communities can tap into high school and college students already in their areas by expanding credits for courses that put them on track to be health care professionals.



## **Conclusion**

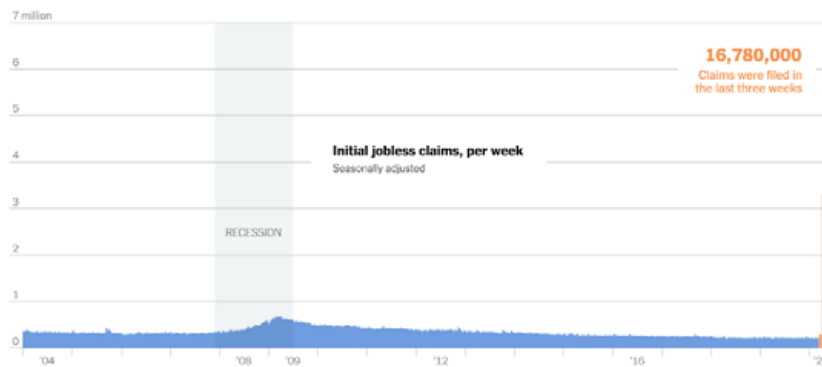
The **Compact for the American Future** is rooted in a promise: a promise that every American should have the freedom and a fair shot to build the future they want for themselves and their families. Fundamental to that freedom and fair shot are healthy people and healthy communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has made it increasingly clear that we have work to do to make our healthcare system not only prepared for future crises like this one, but also ready to support future generations of Americans.

Congress should lead with an agenda to do just that.

# AN ECONOMY THAT WORKS FOR ALL AMERICANS

The numbers are staggering: In the last 2 weeks of March and the first week of April when the pandemic took its first devastating blow, nearly **17 million Americans** newly filed for unemployment benefits — shattering records from previous depressions throughout our country’s history. It’s hard to imagine the scale of devastation that underpin these numbers:



Source: New York Times

And while the federal government took some necessary action to provide emergency economic relief to Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic, ultimately it won’t be enough. For decades now, economic policy in America has left millions behind, without livable wages, without benefits that increase productivity, and instead of increased investments we need, we’ve implemented knee-jerk tax cuts. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exposed our patchwork economic system and its vulnerabilities in the harshest light. It’s time to have a conversation about building an economy that works for everyone — for our future.

In the next installment of the **Compact for the American Future**, we’ll detail how bold changes to our economic framework can grow jobs, reduce income inequality, and give Americans the economic freedom they deserve with higher wages and less debt.

## Economic Firewalls for the Next Pandemic

The Congress and the Trump White House have had no choice but to work together on major economic relief packages for those impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. The economy is in freefall, and millions of Americans are hurting as businesses are forced to shutter. As we watch this crisis unfold, we are learning lessons about how to be prepared for the next pandemic or the next disaster.

It’s become clear that our long-term economic policies, our under-invested workforce, and our top-down economy is not equipped to handle a pandemic that brings the economy to a screeching halt to prevent community spread. Below are steps we can take now to make our economy more

resilient in the face of a public health outbreak so instead of only throwing lifeboats, we can keep everyone above water to begin with:

- The federal government, states and banks must **suspend student loan debt payments** during a national crisis like the one we are in now. Further, the government and banks should refinance existing student loan debt.
- The federal government should require **forbearance on rent and mortgage payments, as well as credit card debt**, for those who cannot pay those bills. The government can step in to provide bridge loans at lower interest rates to cover the forbearance and negotiate payments to banks and other lending institutions to keep them afloat.
- Many states have rightfully worked with credit agencies to **minimize or even ban negative reporting of financial difficulties** experienced due to the pandemic. The federal government should follow suit.
- We should continually invest in an **economic relief fund** that is flexible enough to send direct cash payments to Americans immediately. In the current crisis, it will be several weeks if not months before any American sees a much-needed check come in the door.
- The federal government should not arbitrarily channel relief fund dollars through select institutional banks. Rather, it should explore providing **block grants to all 50 states and territories**, which not only would prevent the government paying interest payments that the banks are charging, but also allow funds to get to Americans much faster than they are now as the state tax infrastructures are better set up for residents than the IRS is for the country writ-large.
- As in the CARES Act, a separate fund should be set aside to provide **no-interest loans to businesses** hit by pandemics, but only if they maintain previous employment levels and in the case of public companies, do not use any federal funds for stock buybacks.
- In times of crisis, states can **ensure that utility companies don't shut off vital necessities** for those who cannot make payments, and **halt evictions and foreclosures** for nonpaying renters and homeowners impacted by the crisis.
- The federal government could set up a program to **reimburse businesses** that retain employees at reduced salaries, to avoid loans that ultimately end up saddling businesses and individuals. This only works, of course, if employees' home expenses are reduced, as mentioned above.
- We should **bring more small business owners, especially minority- and women-led businesses, to the table** to understand what worked and what didn't in this crisis and be better prepared for the next one.
- For essential business that still operate under pandemic conditions, there must be **federal protections** in place under OSHA to ensure these hard-working Americans are not at increased risk of contracting a virus or coming to work with symptoms for fear of missing out on a paycheck.
- It's become clear during the COVID-19 crisis that the Small Business Administration (SBA) is not set up for the volume of loans businesses are requesting under the CARES Act. Because of the bureaucracy, many businesses are forced to go under before loans are even reaching them. It is time to **envision a new lending structure** that is timely, low or no interest in the case of a crisis so that businesses do not go belly up for no fault of their own.
- We must not leave behind the **self-employed, contractors, part-time, and gig workers** that make up large swaths of the American economy but are often not appropriately built into economic relief packages.
- The federal government should look to countries like Denmark and think about going even bolder

during the crisis — **effectively freezing the economy** and bringing in the federal government to cover payroll costs for businesses to keep the economy suspended so it is ready to open when social distancing measures are lifted.

- Unemployment insurance must be expanded to cover **100% of wages** for a meaningful cross-section of Americans up to an adjusted salary levels based on cost of living.
- The federal government should be prepared to **shore up lower interest rates** for sectors hardest hit by pandemics, such as transportation, entertainment, food and consumer services.
- Corporate officers should be **incentivized to retain workers** and their benefits by encouraging CEO salary cuts and reduced executive compensation, or through future tax incentives.
- We should establish **go-forward policies that impact furloughed workers**, to ensure they maintain their health benefits and wages during crises.
- The federal government and states must **not overlook cities**, which have been strapped for cash during the COVID-19 pandemic and forced to lay off or furlough city employees. Economic relief packages must include lines of credit to cities so they can maintain their workforces and provide services residents need.
- To prepare for the next pandemic, we must go under the hood of our **national, inter-state and global supply chains** so that they are more efficient and ready to handle the volume of medical supplies needed to address a crisis.
- The federal government must put its weight behind **research and development**, specifically with respect to being able to rapidly develop and deploy testing and as soon as possible deliver an effective, ubiquitous vaccine for a virus.
- As we'll discuss below, it is essential to expand and provide **paid family and paid sick leave**.

### **Investing in the American Worker**

For decades, the United States has lost its investment mindset. As wages have stagnated, we have – to our great detriment – failed to invest in people. The federal government has stalled on education reform, allowed healthcare to become unaffordable and inaccessible for millions, and denied millions benefits that would increase their productivity and happiness.

To build an economy that works for all Americans, we must put people at the forefront of policymaking. That means from cradle to grave, our public policies should invest in 100% of Americans. Rather than propping up inefficient capitalism that focuses its investments on the top 10% of earners and empowers greed over wealth creation, by investing in all Americans, we can reduce income inequality, grow the middle class, decentralize wealth, and empower everyday workers. How?

- We can make **childcare more affordable**. Childcare has become wildly expensive and unaffordable for millions of families. It's time we make childcare universal and affordable for those who need help supporting their families.
- The United States is one of the only major countries to not provide its citizenry **paid family leave**. It's time we support families, in times of crisis or times of prosperity, with the assurance that they can care for new children or sick family members and maintain their pay.
- Many Americans are hamstrung without paid sick leave and report to work despite feeling ill. We must provide **comprehensive paid sick leave** so workers can get the medical care they need to stay healthy, protect their coworkers and increase productivity for everyone.
- **Domestic workers, part-time workers, home care workers** and other unsung heroes not

accounted for or not being paid their worth must be invested in with better wages, benefits, transparency around scheduling, job security, and a fair workweek for the critical duties they perform.

- **Farmworkers** have also been left out of federal labor laws, and we must protect their workplaces and ability to organize with federal action.
- We must finally commit to investing in women and people of color as we do for men and white men, in particular, with **pay equity and pay transparency laws** that once and for all close pay gaps.
- It is long overdue to **raise the minimum wage in America**. While many states and localities have taken important measures, the easiest and highest-impact way to invest in all Americans is to boost wages nationally. \$7.25 per hour no longer cuts it. We should follow the will of a majority of voters and institute a **\$15 minimum wage across the board**. Moreover, the federal minimum wage should increase annually with inflation.
- Policymakers should help **restore the bargaining power of America's unions**, with policies like sectorial bargaining. More broadly, to grow and sustain the middle class, we must incentivize the formation of unions and collective bargaining across sectors, ensure dignity at work, and stop corporate violators of labor laws in their tracks. We must also **end "right to work" laws** that are harming American workers in states around the country.
- We can invest better in the many independent contractors that help the economy and businesses thrive. **Independent contractors should be given the right to collectively bargain**.
- Too many Americans have lost out on **overtime pay** they deserve. We can invest in workers by making sure they receive their overtime pay for hours worked beyond a regular work week and reduce the Trump administration efforts to do the opposite.
- We should pass the **Veterans Bill of Rights** in states to ensure our nation's veterans are able to access capital to start a business, and make sure veterans can reenter civilian life with fulfilling and good-paying jobs and receive academic credit for the skills they obtain while in service.
- Investments need not start at childcare but should also extend into **early childhood education and K-12**. The U.S. has continued to lag behind in investing in both of these critical areas that are foundational to healthy kids and prosperous societies. The United States must make early childhood education universal and completely accessible. And we must ramp up funding to K-12 so every child has a solid education, no matter their zip code.
- It's paramount that we make it less burdensome to pursue a higher education and not saddle students with decades of crippling debt. We need to make higher education more affordable on the front end, while **relieving millions of Americans of debt** that hampers their economic opportunity and leads to "brain drain" in rural communities.
- We can also put greater investments into **two-year colleges, community colleges, apprenticeship programs, and career and technical training programs** to give all Americans a path to a fulfilling career based on a more diverse set of skills.
- American companies should be incentivized to **allow workers to elect a meaningful percentage of their company's board**, so they have greater decision-making power.
- We must end the geographical disparities in workforces that particularly hit rural America. We can **invest in the pipeline of workers** – especially healthcare workers – to make rural communities stronger and healthier and create good jobs for folks outside of major metropolitan areas.
- We should allow **Americans to retire with dignity** and without worry they can't cover their expenses.
- And finally, we should **protect the millions of undocumented immigrants** who work hard here



in the United States with labor rights and the ability to report labor violations and unsafe work environments.

Ultimately, higher paid workers mean a growing economy, more consumer spending, a broader tax base, more companies and workers willing and able to innovate, better health outcomes, a more educated populace, and more cohesive communities.

Investing in all Americans will make us stronger and better positioned to success in the future. It will make us all more free.

### **An Economic Framework for the Future**

Investments don't end with people. Public funds can be invested in myriad ways to grow the economy, create jobs, and ultimately drive returns for the country. What we'll need is a changed mindset and a new economic framework for the future. It's about growing investments to reduce costs – not shying away from investments for fear of upsetting the applecart.

Government is the exact strategic partner we need to help make capitalism – and our economy more broadly – work for all Americans. It can serve as a referee to ensure competition, protect public goods such as clean air and water, produce public goods like transportation and a well-funded postal service, any many more. It all adds up to investments that extend to everyone. Here's what we can do now to invest in our economy and make the United States a global economic leader:

- We can make our healthcare system work for everyone by **increasing access, lowering costs and improve quality** – it's the most effective way to positively impact productivity and economic mobility, while lowering costs through scale efficiencies.
- How else can you ensure Americans are healthy and have more economic mobility? Ensure every American family has **stable, affordable housing**. The federal government can make large investments to do just that, by ending unfair and discriminatory housing practices, increasing financial assistance to boost Americans' ability to rent, making it easier for folks to own homes with affordable loans, and taking swift and comprehensive action to end homelessness.
- And as the pandemic has taught us, many Americans cannot afford essential household expenses and are mired by increasing household debt. It's time we **reduce household debt** by making expenses more affordable – from college, to car insurance, to mortgages and beyond. And for those with debt, we should make it easier for everyday Americans to seek relief through bankruptcy, end racial and gender gaps, and close loopholes that allow the ultra-wealthy and corporations to abuse the system.
- We urgently need to address the \$4.5 trillion sized gap in our economy: our failed **investments in infrastructure**. From fixing our roads and bridges to modernizing our public transport to improving our airports and water systems to fixing our energy grids and making broadband accessible to all Americans, infrastructure investments would create a clear path to creating good jobs and growing the economy. Moreover, investments in infrastructure extend benefits to all Americans, all sectors, and all businesses. It increases rural connectivity and boosts opportunity in metro areas and small towns alike.
- The United States needs to once again become a **leader on education**. We must shift our

mindset to see education spending as a strategic investment – not a cost – that grows our workforce, expands opportunity, and makes communities safer.

- It is long overdue to face the climate crisis head on and make **nationwide investments in a green economy** while collaborating globally. Instead of arguing about the science of climate change, we need to use science to seize opportunities to produce new forms of energy that are healthier, less expensive, more decentralized and inexhaustible. We'll create millions of jobs and heal our planet along the way.
- America must become the **R&D capital of the world again**. Over the past several decades, we have slashed R&D investments. We must return to a time in which R&D investments were paramount to discover new technologies and solutions and our government was fully in the innovation business. Investing in R&D will also help grow jobs, and by ensuring that production from federally funded R&D stays in the United States, we can grow the economy, too.
- We **can revitalize rural economies** by supporting sound trade policies that prioritize the American worker first and foremost, grow green jobs, expand bio-based manufacturing, invest in rural broadband access, and expand credit opportunities for new and small businesses through community banks and micro-lending programs. Broadband should be treated like the public good that it is, and states and municipalities should be allowed to own broadband networks.
- We can also **invest in rural America by saving the United States Postal Service**, an employer for hundreds of thousands of Americans and a cornerstone of many communities and necessity for every business. The postal service can be the site of innovation and economic opportunity through postal banking.
- From a **structural standpoint**, our economy can better work for Americans by reducing regressive payroll taxes and tax rates that are too burdensome for low- and middle-income Americans. We can also remove income tax caps on the highest earners. Additionally, we can **expand the earned income tax credit**. Two policies that make strong investments in families are the Working Families Tax Relief Act and the bolder American Family Act
- The federal government can both **protect workplace safety and health**, while also ending **unnecessarily stringent occupational licensing requirements** that hinder economic opportunity.
- Finally, we can make the economy work for all Americans by **ending political corruption and enacting H.R. 1** to rid of dark money and unlimited corporate spending that have crowded out the voices of voters in favor of corporate special interests. By rooting out corruption, we can change who gets elected and how policy is shaped and ensure those with an interest in concentrating wealth and power don't have a greater say than the public interest.

## Conclusion

Making our economy work for all Americans is not about pitting capitalism against socialism -- or any other ism. It's about reforming inefficient capitalism so that instead of investing only in the top 10% of Americans, we invest in 100%. When one part of the ecosystem that is our national economy does better, we all do better. That's the **Compact for the American Future**. We can boost wages, grow jobs, reduce inequality, and give Americans economic liberty in a more free, fair and just society for the future.

# BUILDING AMERICA'S INFRASTRUCTURE

America's infrastructure was once the shining example for the world. Private industries and the public sector alike invested heavily in modern, sustainable infrastructure that could serve as the backbone for a thriving society.

But in the past several decades, we've left a **\$4.5 trillion hole** in our nation's infrastructure. Crumbling roads, a vulnerable energy grid, congested airports, and aging bridges paint a picture of how far we've slid, and how monumental an investment we need to make to improve America's physical buttress.



The COVID-19 crisis has only further driven this point home. Our failing infrastructure is abetting our failed response to the pandemic. The pandemic has **exposed** our severely lacking water infrastructure, hindering families from accessing clean, safe drinking water when they need it most. It has underscored our failing broadband network, as countless Americans telecommute and millions of students working in residential environments struggle to connect efficiently online. And many more lack the basic broadband needed to flourish in our modern society — pandemic or otherwise.

It's going to take tremendous efforts to put the pieces back together after this crisis. Building a healthcare system for the 21st century and making the economy work for all Americans are two vital places to start. Rebuilding America's Infrastructure is another core piece of the Compact for the American Future. With bold ideas, a commitment to investing in the long-term, and an innovative mindset, we can be prepared for future events like this crisis and build America's infrastructure for generations.

The good news? There is broad, bipartisan support for rebuilding our infrastructure. According to battleground state polling from Build Together, **91% of voters support a new infrastructure plan**

with policies like those below. And while large majorities of voters are concerned about the current state of our infrastructure (i.e. according to the poll 63% are very concerned about America's aging drinking water system), 90% agree that they never know how or where infrastructure investment dollars will be spent. But because of the support for new investments, there's an opportunity for an infrastructure agenda that shows voters their leaders can get something done and make a meaningful impact in their lives.

## **Pandemic Preparedness & Prevention**

It was already out in the open, but the COVID-19 pandemic has put an exclamation mark on the scale of depletion in our nation's infrastructure. For years the federal government has quibbled over how to infuse robust funding into infrastructure programs, only to arrive at impasse after impasse. President Trump has touted his desire to improve America's infrastructure, but to date, no major bill has been passed. But leading on infrastructure works: Gretchen Whitmer (D-MI), succeeded in her 2018 election to become the Governor of Michigan in part because of her insistence to "fix the damn roads."

A successful congressional agenda should further tap into this sentiment. But it needs to go bigger: Let's build America's infrastructure for our future. Infrastructure touches every aspect of our daily lives, and it should be treated with such import. When another crisis hits, we must have executed a plan to shore up our infrastructure so our systems can respond in a crisis as effectively as possible. Here are steps we can take now:

- Seventeen million Americans make up America's infrastructure workforce. From delivering packages, to maintaining our water systems, to securing our energy grid and much more. It is critical that these essential workers, who will be asked to be on the frontlines again, are protected during a pandemic. **We must protect these workers** with mandatory paid sick leave, personal protective equipment, comprehensive health insurance, and the ability and incentive to raise concerns about their workplace health and safety.
- The U.S. should make a concerted effort to **hire and train more infrastructure workers**. Not just for temporary building jobs, but as a long-term investment to employ Americans to maintain the nation's infrastructure so it is prepared to handle future pandemics.
- **Safety must be the number one priority**. We've heard devastating stories of frontline workers, from healthcare workers to grocery store and essential retail workers, to meat plant workers succumbing to COVID-19 because of lack of protections. There must be federal protections in place that compel businesses – and make sure resources are there – to protect employees.
- The pandemic response was slowed in part due to our complicated and dated supply chains. We should go under the hood of our nation's supply chains – from medical supplies to protective equipment to treatment – to **streamline and modernize** them for future pandemics.
- President Trump likes to talk about our depleted national stockpile as a reason for the crushing delays in getting PPE to our nurses, doctors and frontline workers. But the national stockpile wasn't built to be a panacea. We should **return and exceed the levels we funded our national stockpile** in the previous administration, and it needs to be flexible enough to deploy to states and localities proactively. Moreover, it needs to run alongside typical supply chains that feed into our hospitals and local health systems.
- Testing should not be an 11th-hour invention. We need to invest in national R&D programs and **lay the groundwork for a robust testing apparatus** that can respond to a new virus expeditiously.

- The same goes for a vaccine. The only rate-limiting factor for the development of a new vaccine should be ensuring its safety and efficacy through randomized controlled trials. **We must lay the infrastructure groundwork** to identify, test, produce, and disseminate a vaccine quickly and effectively.
- Part of the challenge during COVID-19 has been our patchwork data infrastructure. And a pandemic response is only as good as its data. We need to establish **better and more cohesive state and national data systems** that allow for more fluid tracking of trends and contact tracing.
- Tens of millions of American workers and students have been forced to work and learn in residential environments. It has become evident that our broadband is not reliable, easily subject to speed declines, and grossly inequitable (the “digital divide” has the potential to set back a portion of a generation of students. We need to make **broadband internet** a reality for every household and every zip code - more on this below.
- Finally, our infrastructure is not resilient. The pandemic has displaced thousands. Natural disasters can displace even more. We need to make our **communities resilient** not just against pandemics, but also hurricanes, floods, fires, and storms that will only increase with the impacts of climate change. More on this below.

## Let’s Build

Infrastructure is the issue that is a bridge between all types of consistencies. An agenda that is bold on revitalizing our infrastructure – and one that is inclusive – can show Americans the transformational change an improved infrastructure can make in their communities. And with the current state of our infrastructure in plain sight, Congress can easily connect these changes to improving public health, improving the economy, and improving lives for the future:

- We need to repair and modernize our **roads, highways, and bridges**. According to the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE), our roads earn a D grade and our bridges earn a C+ grade. Americans lose billions of hours of productivity to traffic each year. Congress must make immediate and significant federal investments, as well as funding state and local efforts, to repair our nation’s roads, highways, and bridges. Permanent or annual funds might be established to repair roads on an ongoing basis.
- Investments in **high-speed rail** are long overdue. We are lagging behind Europe and Asia in providing this safe, convenient, and more environmentally sound transportation alternative. Rail can connect the country in an instant, boost jobs from the steel production needed to lay the rails to the opportunities a more connected transportation system will open up.
- As Americans continue to flock to suburban areas, our transit systems need to keep up. We need to make **strategic investments in mass transit** – from buses, to trains, to ferries – with plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and make traffic work smarter for America’s commuters.
- Millions of Americans do not have access to **clean, safe drinking water**. This is an unacceptable and avoidable travesty that must be resolved. We must make comprehensive efforts to improve our water infrastructure from ridding our pipes of lead, to ensuring toxic chemicals like PFAS can’t contaminate our waterways, to shoring up our faulty wastewater and irrigation systems, it’s time to take bold measures to make water more efficient, less costly, and accessible to all.
- America’s airports are crumbling and congested. ASCE has slapped aviation in the U.S. with a D rating, noting a \$42 billion funding gap to 2025. We need to close that funding gap to **repair and modernize airports**, connect rural communities to aviation, improve safety measures, and reduce unnecessary traffic and cancellations that stymie productivity.



- America should make **regional planning** a fixture of its infrastructure investments. Allowing states or localities to band together regionally is smart public policy that helps solve problems for more people quicker, and makes sure dollars are spent wisely. Regional planning must also bring communities to the table that are underserved or disproportionately impacted by environmental justice issues.
- We can transform cities by making them ready for emerging technologies, like self-driving cars, and expanding access to lower-impact transportation (e.g. increased bike sharing and bike lanes). American cities should have opportunities to learn from each other nationally on best practices to **build smart cities for the 21st century**.
- Climate change is a major test to our nations' infrastructure, and communities are already feeling the impacts – especially communities of color. Parallel with efforts to combat climate change, we must **build resilient infrastructure that can withstand natural disasters**, storms, extreme weather, floods, and sea-level rise. Moreover, we must bar utilities from shutting off vital services during extreme weather and flooding to save lives.
- **Dams and levees** are critical to our water infrastructure – from transporting goods across the country to protecting communities from floods. But there are over 15,000 high-hazard dams in the U.S. and levees are in need of \$80 billion in improvements. There must be federal investments in improving the vital infrastructure of dams and levees.
- America's ports are falling behind much of the world, and we currently have a \$16 billion gap in investments. We need to modernize and **refurbish our seaports**, so these critical points of commerce are prepared to accommodate larger vessels and keep up with global competition.
- According to ASCE, 24% of our nation's school buildings are in fair or poor condition. Students deserve healthy, clean, safe physical environments so they can focus on learning. When millions of American students return to school in person, it will become more pressing than ever that we fund the **modernization of our schools**. No school should have water systems contaminated with lead. Our schools need improved ventilation systems to curb the spread of COVID-19 and other diseases. And our schools need structures and technology to meet the challenges of the future to best prepare students for a rapidly changing economy.
- Parks are key to attracting tourism dollars and encouraging healthy living for communities. Our nation's **parks need increased maintenance funding** to keep these public spaces accessible and safe.
- Infrastructure is not always a big picture. It's also hyper-local. We need national, state, and local interventions to **tackle homelessness** and increase opportunities to access affordable housing. For starters, we can make home-buying for America's working and middle classes easier with affordable loans. We can work to reduce household expenses by making public utilities and water more affordable and make efforts to not displace those who are trying to make ends meet.

### **Beyond the roadways, railways, and waterways...**

Shoring up our physical infrastructure is important, but it's not the whole picture. Infrastructure has other tangible impacts on individuals and communities that can be borne out with improvements for the 21st century. How does that look?

- We must finally make **high-speed internet** a reality for every single American. 21 million Americans still do not have broadband – that's almost a third of U.S. households. It's an issue that affects rural and urban communities alike. We must make significant capital investments to expand broadband to every household, while cracking down on providers to prevent monopolies

- that artificially inflate prices and encourage competition to innovate and increase internet speeds.
- To thrive in the 21st century, America needs to achieve a **100% clean and renewable energy economy**. 100% of our new investments must be in clean and safe energy and we must achieve net-zero emissions.
  - As with all sectors, we must boost **federal research and development** spending so we can discover new technologies that help our nation achieve a more sustainable, clean, equitable and resilient infrastructure.
  - Our energy grid is not meeting the demands of the 21st century. We must **invest and build a power grid** that can distribute clean energy to every single household and business across the country. The grid must be safe, resilient against attacks, and reliable. Clean energy must also be made affordable for every consumer while increasing choice and driving competition.
  - We must also make our **buildings more energy efficient**. Through incentive structures such as tax credits and tax deductions, as well as benchmarking systems, we can encourage residential and commercial buildings alike to meet clean energy standards and reduce emissions.
  - Nationally, we must **modernize our data systems**, so they are more open and accessible to study patterns and implement solutions that meet the challenges we face in real-time.
  - We must expand opportunities for Americans to build our infrastructure through increased **vocational and apprenticeship training programs**. In addition, we can tap into existing apprenticeship programs by employing workers on projects in registered apprenticeships programs. As we work to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, programs must be stood up to re-train workers in the oil, gas and coal industries for new, good-paying jobs in the green economy.
  - Finally, infrastructure investments **create jobs**. This is a no brainer, but of late Washington has been reticent to invest in American workers through infrastructure spending. The lack of earmarks means there is diminished incentive for elected officials to support increased spending. But we can build our infrastructure together: America has a massive demand to rebuild its infrastructure, and a supply of millions of American workers currently out of work and in need of good-paying jobs. We can get a significant return on our investment with jobs that have fair wages, worker protections and benefits, all while helping to grow the middle class. And job creation doesn't stop with the implementation of a bold plan to revitalize America's infrastructure. Maintaining our infrastructure and systems is a massive, long-term job creator and sustainer.

## Conclusion

Americans want fair shot and the freedom to live the future they envision for themselves and their families. And they want to build it. Modernizing and democratizing our nation's infrastructure with real investments is one critical way to do just that. Infrastructure is the backbone of our communities – from the water we drink to the way we travel to work to our ability to get on the internet – infrastructure is necessary and right now it is failing us. So, let's build it. That is part of the **Compact for the American Future**, where expanded access to affordable, quality healthcare, an economy with opportunities for all, and a humming infrastructure can help build the American future our communities deserve.

# BUILDING FOR THE DIGITAL FUTURE

In our 21st century economy, technology makes the world go 'round. Fortunately for the United States, we have some of the brightest and most capable minds discovering new and useful technologies every day. But our collective brilliance and innovations are often shortchanged by our systems and institutions that make technology less equitable, fair and accessible.

The COVID-19 pandemic has only further underscored the problems with our technologies and the systems that undergird them. Millions of Americans working and learning from home struggled to access reliable broadband Internet. Testing backlogs led to delays so long it rendered results basically useless. And consequentially, misinformation and disinformation have been allowed to fester online as social media companies haphazardly self-regulate. Look no further than a viral video featuring the dark-money-financed “America’s Frontline Doctors” spouting mistruths about the pandemic – the video was viewed over 14 million times and was tweeted by the president himself before the major social media giants took it down.

Now, more than ever, we need system-level change to increase innovation, expand access to useful technologies, provide guardrails against the unintended consequences of big data, and build a better future for all. In the next installment of the **Compact for the American Future**, we’ll discuss policies and strategies to Build for the Digital Future.

## **Pandemic Preparedness and Response**

As Ed Young of The Atlantic [wrote](#), the COVID-19 pandemic has brought the most powerful nation on the planet “to its knees.” Why? For a number of reasons, including a perhaps less-examined issue: despite our world-class technologies, they were not built for an effective crisis response.

From testing failures to shortages in personal protective equipment to the spread of disinformation that has hurt our government’s response and reduced the public’s adherence to safety measures, technology has failed the U.S. in effectively combatting COVID-19. How can we improve our technological systems to be better prepared for the next crisis?

- Testing is the bedrock of any viral pandemic response. We must ensure a national testing strategy is put into place and executed, and that tests are accurate, rapid, efficient, and ubiquitous.
- The current administration has allocated significant resources to the discovery and production of COVID-19 vaccine. That is certainly a laudable effort. But vaccine production should be independent of political considerations, though it should circumvent otherwise cumbersome bureaucratic protocols that could slow its development down. Vaccines must be proven safe and

effective through clinical trials and should be made one of the key priorities of a pandemic response.

- Implementing contact tracing programs during COVID-19 has been sporadic and ineffective. We need to build up technologies to **make contact tracing efficient**, including streamlining personnel hiring and training, producing user-friendly apps, capturing data that is useful and actionable, automating collection, and allowing cities and states to communicate to each other so we can vastly improve our national digital contact tracing systems. Efforts like those in Taiwan are worth examining further. Any digital program must take into account and balance personal privacy concerns.
- The United States should lean into its ability to **use big data to solve complex problems**. Enhanced investments in big data would allow for national population-level data that can be used quickly for analysis and subsequent policy decisions to help curb disease transmission, track movement patterns, monitor health of communities and put prevention tactics into place.
- Reporting accurate data from the hospital, local and state levels to the federal level is crucial to a national pandemic response. It is why health officials are up in arms over the current administration's coronavirus database switch unveiled in July that required hospitals to send daily reports to a central hub in Washington, bypassing the CDC. Hospital administrators have had to scramble to meet daily reporting requirements, all while concerns mount that the data could be concealed from the public and used for political purposes. **We must protect data integrity** because it is so central to an effective response. Reporting requirements, metrics, and the very system used should be run out of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and determined before or at the very least at the outset of an outbreak.
- Telemedicine is important in non-pandemic environments – it makes healthcare more accessible and is an affordable option as well. **Telemedicine should be made readily available** and at low or no cost for patients during healthcare crises like the one we are currently facing.
- It may sound like an interesting high school course, but **robotics** can be lifesaving. Using robotics technology allows for care to be administered in hazardous environments and repetitive tasks to be taken on with precision and without human error.
- We should tap into our great academic infrastructure and collaborate with the world to employ various **emerging technologies** that can help fend off a spreading pandemic. Such technologies include artificial intelligence to help detect the virus, blockchain to improve tracing, and cloud computing to improve disease modeling.
- Effective communication during a public health crisis is key. From physicians to national public health officials to elected leaders, Americans need to trust the information they are receiving to protect themselves and others. We must **improve our public communication** – including the message, messengers, and mode – to be more effective in getting timely, succinct, and accurate information to the public. This means ensuring that there is a technological infrastructure in place before a crisis to be able to put communication into swift action. The mixed messages from top officials on the risk of COVID-19, if and how the public should use masks, as well as unnecessarily rosy predictions in the early days of the pandemic hobbled our collective response. Beyond the public, first responders and those working on the ground need to have access to the most up-to-date information to effectuate their activities.
- Finally, we must be proactive about **stopping the origin and spread of misinformation and disinformation** (both foreign and domestic) that can greatly reduce trust in the government and public health officials and lead to behaviors counter to combatting a pandemic. Clear distribution of accurate information is our first line of defense, and mis/disinformation can

squander it. One doesn't need to look further than current conspiracy theories on COVID-19 (Bill Gates, 5G, microchips, George Soros, etc.) and a certain sleek video called "Plandemic" to understand how deep and wide these issues run in America.

### **Making Technology More Fair and Accessible**

A recent Pew survey found that 42% of Americans named technology as the source of the biggest improvement to life in America over the past 50 years. The next closest response was medicine and health at 14%. Americans have been particularly receptive about the benefits of technology and optimistic about how technology can improve the country even more in the future. With such strong support in public opinion, there is a high floor to build from.

What we have missed is connecting this support to people's day-to-day lives and guarding against the pitfalls inherent new technology before policy has a chance to catch up. So, beyond preparing for the next pandemic, the U.S. must explore policies to catch up to the technologies already out there and be ahead of more to come. Here's what that could look like:

- The next president should **establish a cabinet position on technology** and its influence on Americans' lives. From electricity to the phones in our pockets to clean water, technology touches everything. A cabinet position is a critical first step to reorganize and potentially reset policies and programs that govern technology from our federal agencies. State governments that have not done so should consider an office of technology as well. Technology will only keep advancing, and our highest levels of government should have the expertise they need to make sure technology is working as efficiently as possible for their systems and for every American. This of course is not meant to replace the various legislative actions that the Congress and state legislatures can and should take to modernize technology policy in America.
- The FCC is one agency that should be removed from politics – we've seen in the current administration how political considerations have gotten in the way of sound policy. The next FCC commissioner should **restore net neutrality rules** and pave the way for state and localities to own **build municipal broadband** so every American can be connected. The federal government must commit significant investments to this effort with particular focus on low-income, minority, and rural communities that are disproportionately impacted by the lack of broadband Internet. And the next Congress must establish what Internet regulatory authority the FCC does – or does not have – in concert with the cabinet level team and staff dedicated to technology in America.
- Federal regulators should be **empowered to take on tech giants**. Every company in America must play by the rules, but if the rules aren't fair, we're already a step behind. Congress must be empowered to regulate the big tech companies to prevent anti-trust issues and break up monopolies, promote competition, and make sure private data stays private.
- One place to start: Congress can implement a **set of standards companies** have to meet – much like policies that govern other industries. Those standards can encompass everything from privacy to data integrity to combatting disinformation and misinformation, and more. Guidelines and recommendations can be issued by the technology secretary to improve community standards as well as diversity, equity and inclusion.
- The cabinet secretary on technology can **dispense regulators committed to using existing antitrust** laws to break up mergers that reduce competition among big tech companies.
- Most Americans believe that they own their personal information and data online. A Future



Majority [analysis](#) found that the business model for the gathering, analyzing and selling of Americans' private data has led to revenues that will reach nearly \$200 billion by 2022. If Americans own their data, then Americans should be party to the revenues. A **fund for broad public purposes** could be established with those revenues to finance key programs to rebuild America, including infrastructure investments, healthcare expansion, and reducing the national deficit.

- But first, Americans deserve to have their data and their privacy protected. We must **affirm personal data as a property right** and Congress and states must **establish a consumer data bill of rights** to protect Americans from fraud, misuse and abuse of their private information. Moreover, Americans must know how their data is being collected (with the ability to opt out of such collection), to whom their data is being shared, and what data and information companies have of individuals. Informed consent must be the priority and users must have the option to delete data after using it.
- The Congress should **reexamine some portions of the Patriot Act of 2001** that are a potential affront to basic civil liberties and privacy rights.
- The U.S. has been losing market share in high-tech sectors, including STEM industries, pharmaceuticals, data processing, semiconductors, electric power, and more. These technologies are essential to long-term economic wellbeing, and we should **invest in R&D to support the development and production of critical technologies**.
- But it doesn't end with high-tech and essential technologies. The United States has lost its edge in innovation that could make entire systems more efficient and equitable – from healthcare to education to food production, and much more. We've innovated greatly in Silicon Valley, but our productivity growth as a nation has slowed. It's time we **take learnings and innovations from our technological sectors and apply them writ-large to the U.S. economy**. That starts with major investments in R&D in areas where market failures are most inhibiting (think healthcare and clean energy) to grow the economy and solve our greatest challenges.
- The U.S. should also fund basic research of theoretical work that might have practical and commercial applications in the future. This means going beyond commercial R&D to **basic R&D** that can be used by the government, public and private institutions, academia and more to eventually innovate and produce useful products and processes.
- America should **invest in and scale smart cities**. [Louisville, Kentucky](#) is a great example. The city has taken on the challenge over the next 20 years to “enhance the abilities of public service employees and citizens by empowering them to solve public problems through the use of existing and emerging technologies.” The program pledges to bring fiber optic cable to every home, surge autonomous vehicles, sensors to collect information to make communities healthier and safer, and more. Smart cities are bolstered by public private partnerships and work best when community members have a seat at the table. Using technology to inform city design and community building will improve mobility, health of residents, make cities more sustainable, increase public safety, grow the economy, and increase civic engagement.
- States should invest and incentivize every city to adopt a **311 framework and system**. Using the latest technologies, including big data and user-friendly apps, cities and their citizens alike would benefit greatly from these non-emergency resource and service hubs.
- The federal government as well as state and municipal governments should **prioritize open data** platforms for citizens, businesses and officials to access government data. This can include campaign finance data, patents and IP tracking, employment statistics, and much more, so

researchers can do their jobs better and citizens can be more engaged.

- Lawmakers should consider the notion of developing a federal (or perhaps state) **citizen portal** that leverages technology to make critical services and functions easy for all Americans. The portal can be modeled on successful examples in other countries, including South Korea and Canada, and include everything from voting information to taxes to passport documentation and other critical documents – a one-stop-shop for citizens to engage with their government and access the things they need to start a business, get a driver’s license, receive unemployment benefits, apply for any number of permits and more.
- We should **use technology to make government better by improving constituent communications**. The most important aspect to any elected official office is its constituent services. But too many offices are using 20-year-old technologies that have no place in a modern, efficient government office. Investments should be made to equip every single office with up-to-date CRM technology, data collection instruments, and communication tools so critical requests get answered in a timely fashion. Everyone will be better for it.
- We must make a concerted effort to increase **STEM education** in our education curricula – from school age to vocational and technical training to 4-year college and beyond, a workforce knowledgeable in STEM is a workforce that will thrive in the 21st century. As we build the pipeline of engineers, scientists and other technology professionals, we must ensure that women, women of color, and other underrepresented communities are given the same fair shot as their peers.
- As part of our plan for *Building America’s Infrastructure*, we discussed **modernizing our nation’s schools**. A core component of this effort is providing schools with up-to-date technology, equipment and software to bring learning and teaching in line with or exceeding today’s standards.
- Our digital world has begun to have unintended consequences on our health, including the health and development of our children. The next president should form a **task force to fully understand the health and social impacts** that technology and social media have on America’s children to ultimately issue recommendations about health-centered design, screen-time guidelines, and privacy concerns.
- The federal government can incentivize or set benchmarks that U.S.-based tech companies must meet to become **100% carbon neutral** in their supply chain, products, and corporate emissions (taking notes from Apple Inc., for example).
- Silicon Valley alone cannot compete with China, who is emerging as the global leader in artificial intelligence. We must make significant and immediate investments in **artificial intelligence research and development** to be the global leader in what will become the world’s most important technology. We must boost coordination between the government and private industries so that the national interest is served.
- Finally, it is long overdue that Congress takes very seriously with **legislative action the misinformation and disinformation** that has curtailed our pandemic response, contributed to unnecessary divisions in our society, and undermined our democratic processes and institutions. Social media networks as they currently stand have virtually no gatekeepers – when you add self-selection into fringe communities plus the multiplier effect, it leads to the rapid transmission of dangerous misinformation and disinformation. It is urgent that Congress establishes guardrails to prevent the origination and spread of false information online (both foreign and domestic) and require social media companies to implement robust labeling and algorithmic removal measures of such content. Regulations must extend to disclaimers on political advertising, with updated

standards to meet the times and the ever-growing nefarious tactics used by bad actors. Lastly, there should be a communications campaign to educate the public on how to distinguish reliable information from fake sources online.

## **Conclusion**

The most recent technological revolution has brought immeasurable positive changes to the world and to the United States – from computing technology to the Internet to artificial intelligence and astounding advances in medicine to social networking – we are a much more connected, informed, and productive society. But the benefits have not come without downsides – including privacy concerns, human rights issues, misinformation and disinformation, and social isolation.

The COVID-19 crisis has further exposed shortcomings, not only in our technologies, but in the policies that make them accessible – or not. With good public policy that helps leverage technology, not just during our most trying times, but in thriving times as well, we can help give every American a fair shot at the future they want to build for themselves and their families.

That is why Building for the Digital Future is a key pillar of the **Compact for the American Future** – with the changes outlined herein we can emerge from this crisis to build a brighter future for all.

# DEFEATING CLIMATE CHANGE & BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

The COVID-19 pandemic, in a matter of only months, has completely altered the globe. In terms of events with global ramifications, it rivals perhaps only climate change in its scale, scope, and impact. And like climate change, COVID-19 has proven to disproportionately impact communities of color, especially in the United States.

The two issues are interrelated – and both require immediate attention and action. But too often, a lack of political will has gotten in the way of necessary change. Americans have and will continue to pay the price.

According to the major 2018 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [special report](#), the window to reverse catastrophic climate change is narrowing. If we continue at our current rate, global warming is likely to reach 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels between 2030 and 2052. We're nearing on nine years left to stop irreversible damage due to climate change and make our planet a safe and healthy place to live.

It will take ambition, collaboration, and grit to solve these challenges – something Americans are no strangers to. By tackling the climate crisis and preparing for pandemics through the lens of climate, we will be on our way to building a better future for every American, no matter their race or geography. And critically, by going all-in on solving this crisis, we can create millions of good-paying, union jobs and get so many who lost their jobs during COVID-19 back to work.

## **Pandemic Preparedness and Response**

The COVID crisis has underscored the legacy of the climate crisis and its disproportionate impact on communities of color. It has also brought to light the urgent need to make our country more sustainable so we can be better prepared to fend off the next pandemic. Here's some of the steps we can take now in the months ahead:

- Deaths from COVID-19 have been shown to be linked to exposure to toxic air pollution. It is critical that we reduce **greenhouse gas emissions** and improve our air quality, especially for communities of color.
- We must lead with a bold **climate justice plan** to address inequities in the impact of COVID-19 that are explained by systemic racism. We need a top-down approach with major policy changes, coupled with community-level engagement and education.
- Further, we must **address compound risks**, including storms, flooding, droughts, extreme heat, fires, and other climate-related events that heighten displacement during a pandemic. We must put into place national, regional, and state-level plans for safety and evacuation procedures that minimize virus spread when people are forced to seek shelter. Prevention

measures for these climate events must take into account the pandemic risk, and ahead of time understand the compounded effect they can have on the healthcare system and economy in the midst of a pandemic.

- Beyond disaster preparedness and acute emergency response, the appropriate level of government must ensure **continuity of essential services**, including water, electricity and other basic utilities. For example, state governments can implement measures to ensure that utility companies do not turn off electricity or deny service in extreme weather to households that are behind on payments.
- To mitigate multiplier risks and synergist effects of climate change and health crises, we must **invest in public health** and tackle underlying conditions, such as poverty, socioeconomic and racial disparities, hunger, and an inequitable healthcare delivery system.
- Climate change impacts every single species on Earth and that matters. As the planet warms, animals are migrating to the poles to avoid heat – which means more species are in contact and there is a greater risk for pathogens to get into new hosts and spread to humans. **Addressing the root causes of climate change, including deforestation**, can stop the loss of habitat and biodiversity that ultimately allows pathogens to thrive and pandemics to happen.
- We can also **rework our agricultural processes** to reduce the raising of animals in unhealthy and close quarters that lead to disease transmission between animals and into humans. Further, we can take a serious look at how our diet and food production are harming our population-level health, making us less resilient to pandemics like COVID-19.
- Respiratory diseases, like COVID-19, are exacerbated by underlying conditions such as asthma. And asthma disproportionately impacts people of color. We must **reduce the disparities in asthma** and improve our air quality to lower disease insistence overall. One way to do this – reducing air pollution caused by burning fossil fuels.
- One reason indoor activities have been difficult or impossible to resume during COVID-19 is due to lacking ventilation and filtration systems in buildings. This is especially apparent in schools – which have been systematically underfunded for years. It's time we **fully fund and modernize the infrastructure** underpinning our public-school systems, with an emphasis on installing ventilators that can quickly filter out air and reduce the spread of illness through respiratory droplets.
- As mentioned in a previous Compact for the American Future memo – but worth restating – we must reinstate the **pandemic response unit at the National Security Council**.
- The **Department of Health and Human Services must play a role in understanding social determinants of health** and how they interact with climate to achieve health equity both broadly and in the face of a pandemic or climate disaster.
- Our climate intersects with every aspect of our existence. It would be misguided and dangerous to not look at the inextricable links between climate change and this pandemic – or any pandemic, for that matter. In the following sections, we will discuss a bold agenda to **solve our climate crisis** and rebuild a better, more resilient future for all.

### Defeating Climate Change Head-On

Climate change is a massive, global problem. The impacts of climate change are existential to our communities, health, economy, security, and lives. It will take courage, coordination, and forward-thinking to defeat it. Look no further than the unfathomable wildfires raging across the West



coast over three million acres, with millions breathing in toxic air. Climate-induced event after event are cascading around the country and the window to reverse the impacts of climate change is dwindling.

Tackling climate change not only will improve the health of the planet and the people who inhabit it, but will also create jobs, improve the health of communities, and build a more sustainable future. Here's how we can build a green energy future by tackling climate change and global warming head-on:

- We must drastically **reduce greenhouse gas emissions and realize a clean energy economy with net-zero emissions by no later than 2050**. This should include federal and state-level enforcement mechanisms that are bound in law to reach milestones.
- The U.S. must immediately and in large-scale **invest in low-carbon energy sources** such as wind and solar to reduce harmful air pollutants. Investing in the climate technology we need can be done through numerous funding streams, including holding big polluters accountable, closing tax loopholes, ending government subsidies for fossil fuel companies, and tapping into private sector dollars and innovation.
- We can jumpstart our economy and make our workforce more resilient to climate change by **ramping up investments in low-carbon technologies**. This includes conducting more research into solutions that would reduce airline emissions.
- Improving our climate means improving our infrastructure, so we are a more resilient country and world. We must make the **significant infrastructure investments** discussed earlier in the *Building America's Infrastructure* section. Investments like rebuilding and modernizing our schools, fixing our roads and crumbling bridges, modernizing our seaports, building smart cities, and more.
- Investing in infrastructure has the added benefit of **creating millions of good-paying jobs** toward building a clean energy future. We must focus on national and community-based efforts to create the pipeline of clean energy workers. That includes education, vocational training, expanded apprenticeship programs, and opportunities for Americans no matter their race or zip code.
- We must empower American workers through **labor and health standards** and ensure that unions are able to prosper in the green economy, allowing workers to organize for better wages, benefits and working conditions.
- Going big on solving climate change offers an opportunity to **build American**. The federal government can stipulate that go-forward projects use American-made materials, like aluminum and steel.
- New jobs should go far beyond green energy jobs. We can also grow the workforce and spur the economy with renewed focus on public health, the auto industry, STEM, and much more.
- The next president should expand the cabinet to include a **climate secretary**. There is no issue more important or intersectional than our climate. It's time we have a **coordinated national effort out of the White House and among the federal, state and local governments**.
- Climate change is not just a threat to the planet, but it's also a threat to our national security, health and healthcare, and economy. The next president should seek to build out a robust **climate department** overseen by the new climate secretary. Other leading countries have

established federal agencies specifically designed to address climate change and in the United States, along with a technology department, a climate department is sorely missing.

- Our public transportation is outdated, inefficient, and inequitable. We need to provide our cities with **zero-emissions public transit** at little or no cost to city residents. Cities should make plans to increase bike lane and pedestrian access so Americans can get around without gas emissions.
- The foundation of resilient communities are resilient homes and buildings. We must invest in **affordable housing**, so every single family has the opportunity to put a roof over their head that is up to codes and safety standards and are energy efficient. We must also invest in **upgrading our buildings for current sustainability standards and weatherize millions of homes and buildings**.
- Congress needs to incentivize and/or require that **American companies are carbon-neutral in their supply and operations**.
- We must firmly set **fuel efficiency standards** while also incentivizing both the auto industry and American consumers to increase production and use of **zero-emissions vehicles**. States should look into following California's lead in requiring passenger **vehicles sold in the state are zero-emission by 2035**.
- The growth of electric vehicles must be accompanied by **investments in electric vehicle charging stations** to make driving these more efficient and climate-friendly vehicles as convenient as gas-running cars and trucks. Doing so will create thousands of jobs.
- The **power sector** must undergo significant changes to in the next 20 years not generate any carbon pollution and reduce our reliance on foreign energy (especially from adversarial nations) by producing more American-made clean energy.
- Cleaning up power plants should also be met with **reducing costs in clean energy technologies and electrifying other sectors of our economy**. That includes moving from gas-burning furnaces to electric heat pumps and other innovations to reduce energy use, for instance by making manufacturing more energy-efficient and upgrading insulation in homes to suck up less energy.
- For sectors that are **difficult to decarbonize**, we need to put great effort and resources behind **discovering new technologies** – such as air capture systems to harness carbon dioxide directly out of the air.
- We must drive **utility energy efficiency and spur greater competition** to lower the cost of energy for consumers especially the use of renewable energies like solar and wind power.
- **Agriculture** is the fourth-leading source of greenhouse gas emissions, after electricity, transportation and manufacturing. We need to **improve ranching practices** to use less land while also producing fewer emissions. Tackling climate change will lessen the impact of droughts, fires, flooding and other extreme weather that have destroyed countless farms and crop cycles.
- By reforming farming practices, we can **create new jobs and grow rural economies**. The federal government must incentivize farmers and ranchers to use new technologies that reduce emissions.
- America must swiftly create jobs and **invest resources in cleaning up harmful resource extraction sites** that do nothing for the economy and hurt community health.
- We must also **hold major polluters accountable** in tandem with environmental cleanup acceleration. The federal government can impose fines on polluters that violate federal laws

and **redirect those funds to job training and resource development** needed for environmental cleanup across the country.

- In addition to broad energy efficiency standards, the United States must set bold and time-bound **energy standards for all government buildings and large commercial and residential buildings**. An incentive and penalty model could significantly reduce emissions in some of the biggest sources of electricity in the country. We must set efficiency standards for appliances as well.
- The next president must **immediately rejoin the Paris Climate Accord** to fight this global challenge with our global allies. The next president should encourage a **reassessment of the standards as outlined in 2015** based on new developments in research and the ever-increasing threat. Ultimately, **we must remain below 1.5 degrees Celsius of global warming**.
- The United States should again be a **leader on fighting climate change** and encouraging other countries to do so. When countries in the Paris Agreement are not meeting their standards or are cheating the system, the U.S. should take strong positions to disincentivize such behavior.
- Under coordination of the climate secretary and executive office, there must be **procedures in place and regular reporting requirements on the impact of climate change on U.S. national security**, including on our military bases around the world.
- Humans are decimating wildlife and harming biodiversity, which accelerates climate change. The United States must **protect its public land, restore the Endangered Species Act, protect wildlife and disincentivize overhunting and overfishing**.
- Policymakers should revisit what works and what doesn't work with market-based approaches like a **carbon tax** to potentially **couple with the aforementioned approaches** of investment and economic development as well as setting goals and legal standards.
- The U.S. should learn from global best practices and have a serious debate on **ending offshore drilling and on public lands**.
- We must make significant **investments in research and development to continue building smart infrastructure**, discover new green technologies, reduce our carbon footprint and decarbonize areas that otherwise seem impossible with new innovations.
- Public companies and government agencies must **disclose climate-related risks** in all new projects, as well as business operations.
- While we must confront the challenges of climate change, we must seize on the opportunity to build a better, safer, healthier future for all Americans. **The federal government must be honest in its communications** about the risks and opportunities related to climate change.
- With that, the Department of Education should **evaluate curricula in the states around climate change** and make recommendations to ensure that what is taught in schools is aligned with the overwhelming majority of scientists and in-line with peer-reviewed literature.
- The **Congress must use its full oversight powers** to investigate and shed light on the reported abuse and self-dealing at the EPA during the Trump administration. Bad actors must be held accountable, and anti-corruption measures must be put into law.
- We must **protect our wildlife and natural resources** on all federal lands and waters.
- Finally, we must **develop and implement carbon capture and sequestration technology** to permanently store greenhouse gases and **develop advanced nuclear energy to remove risks** associated with conventional nuclear.

## Achieving Environmental Justice

Americans are facing a devastating intersection of challenges – the COVID-19 pandemic, job loss, health impacts and attacks on health care, and an impending climate catastrophe. When these challenges interplay with the injustices committed against Black and Brown communities every day and the structural determinants that have left communities of color behind, they are revealed painfully as systemic issues. We must commit to a bold, environmental justice agenda that puts equity at the forefront for BIPOC communities. Here is what those solutions might look like:

- People of color are disproportionately impacted by toxic air and air pollution. We must tackle climate change head-on to reduce air pollution and make sure every American can breathe **clean air**.
- We must restore, revitalize, and modernize our water infrastructure to make sure that every American has **clean water** to drink from their taps at home. We must ensure that our water infrastructure can stand up to future impacts from climate change.
- America must immediately **get lead out of drinking water** in homes. Schools and daycare centers.
- Water should never be unaffordable for any American. We can make **water bills affordable** for low-income Americans through targeted revolving loan funds.
- The congress must impose strict standards and **maximum contaminant levels where relevant on harmful pollutants and toxins in our water systems**, including PFAS and other chemicals that disproportionately impact communities of color. There must be harsh penalties imposed on polluters that are in violation of these limits.
- Under the newly formed Climate Department, there must be a **division with the sole focus on environmental justice**. This division should ensure that all U.S. climate policy is just and equitable and should work closely with the Department of Justice to hold bad actors accountable and ensure equal protection under the law.
- The Environmental Protection Agency must **re-commit to civil rights** and should publish **annual reports and recommendations** around climate injustices and the furtherance of policies and practices to promote environmental justice.
- The federal government should issue a **robust assessment of how past climate disasters, from Hurricane Katrina to more recent tragedies, have disproportionately impacted communities of color**. Recommendations should include how to respond to future extreme weather events and climate disaster with equitable first response and disbursement of resources.
- Every state should require that communities are **notified of environmental risks and threats** of new government and public projects.
- We **must understand through a needs assessment and immediately rectify climate injustices against indigenous communities** and protect the over one million American Indians and Alaska Natives that live on or near reservations or native land. The federal government must hear the demands of tribal nations and resolve climate inequity facing their communities expeditiously.
- The U.S Department of Agriculture has a long and unfortunate history of discriminating against Black farmers. We **can erase these inequities by establishing a public land trust for Black farmers and other disadvantaged communities** starting out and expand technical assistance to farmers of color. Congress must exercise its oversight authority of the USDA to ensure these measures happen.

- We must commit to **retraining working-class Americans** who spent their careers in coal mines and power plants for clean energy jobs for the future.
- Our country must make efforts to establish a **more diverse, equitable and inclusive workforce** that reflects the people of this great nation through **expanded job training for historically marginalized communities**.
- We **must make capital accessible** for minority- and women-owned small businesses in communities impacted by environmental injustices.
- Far too many working- and middle-class Americans are forced to endure long commute times because housing is unaffordable near their workplaces. The U.S. must form **regional planning councils** to design **smart transportation hubs** that reduce the reliance on automobile emissions and reduce commute times, which will cut emissions and allow for more leisure time for Americans that often don't have it.
- Moreover, we must vastly **expand affordable housing policies** to build millions of climate-safe affordable homes near public transit hubs, so every American has an opportunity to live safely and in healthy homes.
- When polluters and bad actors are held accountable, **those impacted and the communities they represent must have a seat at the table** when remediation and reinvestment decisions are made.
- Communities of color must be the **primary beneficiaries of funds and programs aimed at eliminating legacy pollution** and remediating lead in homes, schools, businesses, childcare centers and more.
- Finally, we must commit to the principles in the **THRIVE agenda** – Transform, Heal, and Renew by Investing in a Vibrant Economy – to boldly revive our economy and grow it so every American has a fair shot, improve our healthcare system and empower our government to enact solutions that rise up to the challenges we face during our climate crisis.

## Conclusion

The events of 2020 so far have driven the point home perhaps more clearly than ever: The planet is under siege by global warming and cascading extreme weather events, the growth of displaced communities, a water crisis, and a global pandemic that intersects with climate change.

We need concerted, coordinated, and strong action on climate change and environmental justice now. The proposals outlined herein are by no means exhaustive, but they can start to lay the blueprint of the most pressing areas lawmakers should address to heal the ailing planet and improve the health and sustainability of our communities. Defeating Climate Change and Building a More Sustainable Future is a vital and existential set of policies for the **Compact for the American Future**.



# FIGHTING CORRUPTION & STRENGTHENING AMERICA'S DEMOCRACY

The foundation of America's promise is its democracy. An imperfect but righteous set of laws, norms and values, Americans fundamentally believe that the government should be of, by and for the people. But in practice, we have fallen short.

Critically, the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that corruption in our government can get in the way of an effective and equitable national response. As Americans are left to struggle without additional economic relief, we are reminded of the corruption that plagued the first round of stimulus – from PPP loans to friends of the administration to no-bid contracts and the most powerful getting ahead. And long before the public health crisis, corruption and threats to democracy have taken hold of our system, from the federal government to the judicial branch to state legislatures. In systematic ways and to the great detriment of our democracy, corruption and cronyism have been wielded at the highest levels.

Take for instance, the federal courts, including the highest court in the land. A vast network of special interests has successfully fueled hundreds of placements of highly conservative ideologues – sometimes underqualified – to the federal bench, and then turned around to fund coordinated legal and issue advocacy campaigns on everything from rolling back climate protections to restricting abortion access. As Senator Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) put it in his statement at Judge Amy Coney Barrett's Supreme Court confirmation hearing, "\$250 million is a lot of money to spend if you're not getting anything for it. So that raises the question: What are they getting for it?"

Future Majority polling shows that Americans have similar concerns about corruption in the highest levels of government. In the key swing state of Wisconsin, for instance, 85% of voters are very concerned about corruption influencing decisions made in Washington, D.C. – another 13% are somewhat concerned, or 98% of voters are concerned overall. On the flip side, 45% of these voters rate the importance of Congress passing legislation to clean up corruption as a 10 out of 10. Another 22% rate it a 9 and 18% as an 8 (84% 8 or higher). The intensity and scale of voters' desire to clean up corruption is virtually unmatched by any other issue. Our polling showed similar patterns across swing states with different geographies and demographic makeup.

While House Democrats passed a landmark anti-corruption bill, H.R. 1, in 2019, support is significantly lower – at 54% – than support for cleaning up corruption broadly. And nearly a quarter of voters are not sure about this particular legislation. So, while there is a broad mandate to tackle corruption, there is a communication issue since Democrats have passed the very type of legislation voters overwhelmingly support. The bottom line: Americans are ready to root out corruption, head-on. There is an opportunity to communicate how H.R. 1 works toward that and how policymakers can build upon it to deliver on the promise of an American democracy that is of, by and for the people.

In the final installment of the **Compact for the American Future**, *Fighting Corruption and Strengthening America's Democracy*, we'll discuss promising solutions to rebuild our democracy and make our government work for everyone.

### **Pandemic Preparedness and Response**

There have been many failures to the United States federal response to the COVID-19 pandemic – from insufficient strategic stockpiles, to breakdowns in supply chains, to misinformation and disinformation coming from the very top of the government. What cannot be overlooked is how corruption has thwarted our government's response and hobbled it, often leaving hardworking Americans behind, struggling to make ends meet, and small businesses left to suffer. We must make sure that guardrails are up before the next pandemic to protect against corruption, self-dealing and abuse of power. Here is where we can start:

- There have been major gaps in oversight of Congressionally appropriated COVID-19 economic aid. Some due to incompetence, and some due to corrupt intent. In future crises, a completely **independent commission should be established and empowered** to prevent and root out corruption in the selection of recipients and deployment of taxpayer dollars.
- A pandemic, like COVID-19, can be a national security risk. The next President must **restore the pandemic response team at the National Security Council** to prevent any undue corruption or national security risks on the part of foreign adversaries.
- Over a quarter of contracts signed in the early efforts of the U.S. government response to COVID-19 were done without competitive bidding. Congress and state legislatures must ensure that **proper bidding process for contracts** – one without any real or apparent conflicts of interest with any federal or state officials.
- State and federal unemployment programs have been rife with fraud and abuse. Strong **protections must be put in place to prevent and hold accountable any bad actors that fraudulently access unemployment funds** and take away from those out of work and who qualify.
- The **Office of the Inspector General should be heavily involved in future national task forces** set up to respond to a pandemic so anti-corruption is at the forefront of our national response.
- Congress must **establish stronger limits for the president around firing inspectors general** and those limits should be enforced.
- Congress and the independent commission and the team at the National Security Council should **each identify and make public potential corruption risks** within and outside of the federal government as part of their situational analyses – and they should follow up with recommendations to stop these corruption risks before they start.
- The Paycheck Protection Program to date has been riddled with disparities. Congress must ensure that **federally appropriated funds for small businesses to not discriminate against business owners due to their race, ethnicity, gender or geography**.
- **Federal agencies as well as leaders and activists that deal with gender parity, diversity, equity and inclusion, people with disabilities and other marginalized groups** must have a seat at the table in the national task force.
- This is important not only for ensuring equitable outcomes and mitigating unintended consequences of large government programs but also for corruption control.
- The government should prioritize **rapid and complete disclosure** so oversight bodies can

identify trends that could impact priorities to accelerate and economic recovery and ensure that dollars are getting out to the right people without delay and with the desired impact.

- Rapid and complete **disclosure with transparent communication to the public** can also help other agencies uncover systemic fraud, waste and abuse in the disbursement of federal funds.
- **Public engagement and participation** should be a key component of a national pandemic response. Doing so will help ensure lawmakers are responding to the public's needs and that policies are responsive, not discriminatory and ethical. Further, by engaging the public from the outset, the government can solidify public trust, making the public more likely to comply with local and national restrictions to combat a pandemic.
- Preparation is often the best remedy against corruption. The U.S. and state government must **adhere to and regularly update comprehensive pandemic or other emergency response plans** using best practices and those plans should be developed with attention to corruption risks.
- Congress must affirm and **strengthen whistleblower protections** so those operating in the federal government are protected from retaliation and feel empowered to come forward with corruption in a pandemic response. There must be clear and accessible mechanisms for whistleblowers to make claims.
- The U.S. must engage in **ongoing monitoring and evaluation and auditing** of the deployment of taxpayer dollars for pandemic economic relief. These should be balanced with the need to distribute funds quickly and the risks that without oversight measures there is a high likelihood of fraud and corruption. Reporting mechanisms must be put into place as well.
- Finally, the entire ethos of federal and state leaders who are the face of the government's response to a pandemic should be one of **transparency, integrity and accountability**.

### **Safeguarding the Right to Vote**

There is no more important act one can take in America's democracy than exercising the right to vote. It is a right that has been routinely and systematically undermined by lawmakers and special interests who believe the benefit from fewer Americans voting – not more. This has been targeted at Black Americans, young voters, and other voters of color. The rigged system further dampens the vote as Americans do not trust their elected officials are working for them and are skeptical that their vote – in face of all of the obstacles – will make a difference. But protecting the right to vote can restore the public's trust in our government and make our democracy work for everyone, as it was intended. Here's where we can start:

- In recent years, the Supreme Court has gutted the Voting Rights Act of 1965. It is imperative that Congress and the next president make it a priority to **pass the John Lewis Voting Rights Act** to restore and build upon this landmark pro-democracy legislation.
- We must **pass and enact into law H.R. 1 For the People Act of 2019** to increasing voting access, reduce the influence of money and politics, and reform government ethics so our government works for the people. Several key voting provisions should be codified and expanding upon, including the following:
  - **Automatic voter registration** through coordination with various agencies and with the most up-to-date technology to streamline the process and reduce costs.
  - **Same day voter registration** to allow Americans to register and vote on the same day. This makes it easier for Americans to participate in our democracy.

- **Early voting** should be the practice in every state – without excuses – and for at least two weeks before Election Day. Early voting should provide equal ballot access as on Election Day through adequate polling locations.
- More than five million Americans are currently denied their right to vote after serving their sentences because many state laws disenfranchise voters permanently. It is long overdue that the United States **restores voting rights** of the millions of Americans who have served their time.
- Every American voter should have the option to vote from home by the mail. This means expanding **vote by mail**, eliminating excuses to do so, and ensuring that adequate drop boxes are available for voters to drop off their ballots in addition to the option to send them through the mail.
- Americans should be able to **pre-register for the next election in which they are eligible to vote at 16 and 17 years old**. This helps more young people engage in the democratic process which increases their likelihood of engaging for their lifetimes.
- We must finally ensure every state engages in redistricting reform, so voters choose their elected officials, not the other way around. **Independent redistricting commissions** are a proven model in several states that produce fair legislative maps and prevents political and racial gerrymandering.
- The federal government can **declare Election Day a national holiday** so millions more workers get time off to vote on Election Day, in concert with expanded early voting and greater vote by mail opportunities.
- Congress must **ensure that employees are not retaliated against and have the freedom to take time off work to vote** in any local, state and federal elections.
- As the Congress and states expand vote by mail opportunities, the federal government must **fully fund, protect and modernize the United States Postal Service**. The next administration must reverse the operational changes made under the current administration that have slowed delivery times and put postal workers' jobs at risk.
- State legislatures decide when ballots delivered by the mail no longer are valid. As vote by mail expands, states should update their laws to count ballots that are **postmarked on or by Election Day and give a grace period in the days after** for ballots to arrive at their local election offices so long as they are postmarked by Election Day.
- Voter roll purges have disenfranchised voters by the tens of thousands – and they predominantly impact Black voters, other voters of color and young voters. Congress must **set limits on states' ability to purge voter rolls** outside of voter requests and legitimate reasons for removal (including death, change of address, etc.).
- The U.S. should move toward an **entire paper ballot system**, as electronic voting machines are vulnerable to hacking, fraud and technical issues, while paper ballots are more secure, less susceptible to fraud and provide a paper trail that allow voters the opportunity attest to any discrepancies in signatures.
- States should have **timely and accurate mail ballot tracking systems** – similar to systems delivery companies use – so voters can track their ballot and be assured their vote is counted.
- Poll workers have increasingly been in short supply, and the COVID-19 pandemic has only heightened this challenge. **There are several steps state governments and the federal government can take to recruit more poll workers**, including adequately paying them for



their time, recruiting more young poll workers by offering child care services, working with the business community and government agencies to source workers trained in similar practices, and eliminating service requirements that are a high barrier to entry to work at polls.

- Congress and state governments should make concerted efforts to **recruit more poll workers that speak languages that represent their communities** as well as BIPOC individuals and persons with disabilities – so every voter feels safe and feels that their voices are represented.
- Regulators and law enforcement should be **empowered to follow the law that criminalizes voter intimidation** at the polls. Campaigns and outside groups that encourage voter intimidation designed to dampen the vote must be held accountable.
- After three decades, a consent decree that limited the Republican National Committee's ability to challenge voters' qualifications was lifted. Congress must step in to **prevent voter suppression tactics** by outlawing direct attempts to discourage Americans from voting, especially through racial targeting.
- Our next president must **forcefully stand up against foreign interference** in American elections, including through economic sanctions and other penalties that will deter bad actors from denying Americans' free and fair elections.
- Congress must make **significant investments to beef up election security**, including appropriations to states for administrative costs in line with recommendations to make elections more secure at all levels.
- Finally, **voting information must be made widely accessible**, easy to follow, distributed in different languages, and posted online without complexity that often creates a barrier to vote. State election officials can make major investments to streamline and modernize their voter information portals online.

## Getting Money out of Politics

In American politics, lax campaign finance laws have allowed big corporate special interests to have an outsized impact on our elections, effectively drowning the voice of regular voters. Americans deserve a government in which their elected leaders work for them – not a narrow band of special interests that have elected officials bought and paid for to enact their desired policy outcomes. By getting money out of politics, we can strengthen our democracy and make our government work for the people.

- We must **pass and enact into law H.R. 1 For the People Act of 2019** to reduce the influence of money and politics and give every American the freedom and a fair shot to make their voices heard in our democracy.
- Voters deserve to know who is spending money in elections in order to make informed decisions. Congress must ensure **real time disclosure** and information must be conveniently posted on easy-to-read online portals.
- States can ensure that companies that spend electoral money must have **approval by shareholders** and the amount and recipients of their contributions are disclosed.
- Every state should meet the federal level requirements that **corporate contributions cannot be made to candidate committees**. Allowing corporations to do so and impose undue influence on state lawmakers.
- Similarly, **corporate political action committees (PACs) should be barred from making contributions to candidates**.



- In addition to easily accessible public portals, outlets (whether digital or otherwise) that run political advertisements must be required to **publicly track and post those purchase requests**.
- Congress and state legislatures can implement public **financing of elections through small dollar match programs**. This reduces financial barriers to get involved in politics and makes it easier for all candidates to run for office, no matter their personal net worth.
- We must **reform presidential inaugural committees** so Americans are aware of who gave to those committees and what potential or actual conflicts of interest there might be in a new administration. Congress must exercise its full oversight authority to prevent corruption or undue influence from big donors.
- Congress **must close loopholes in federal regulations that allow foreign-owned or foreign-funded companies to spend money** in American elections
- Registered **lobbyists must be banned from donating and fundraising for candidates**, especially those that they lobby on legislative matters.
- We must take a close look at **online and digital advertising and regulate these platforms like we do for cable and radio advertising**. It should not be up to the large technology companies to self-regulate political advertising – especially when social media can breed dangerous misinformation and disinformation.
- **Congress can enact legislation to ensure that SuperPACs are in fact operating independently of campaigns**, including closing any loopholes that allow those close to candidates to coordinate with single-candidate SuperPACs run by large donors.
- We must **close the federal contractor loophole** so that federal contractors earning income from government contracts cannot contribute to federal candidates.

### **Promoting Ethics in America's Government**

Americans have increasingly lost faith and trust in our government. For too long, Americans have not seen changes made in the halls of Congress or in state capitols impact their everyday lives. We must restore trust in government with clear ethical standards that every elected official is held to. Cleaning up corruption in the government itself is a foundational approach to strengthening our democracy and putting the public interest before any corporate special interest. Here's where we can start:

- As with safeguarding the right to vote and getting big money out of politics, we must **pass and enact into law H.R. 1 For the People Act of 2019** to restore ethics in government.
- Along with H.R. 1, we must pass and enact into law the **Protecting Our Democracy Act** to stop executive branch abuses of power before the start, restore checks and balances between America's three branches of government, and forcefully defend our elections against foreign interference so Americans trust their democratic processes are in line with the will of the voter.
- Congress **must exert oversight over inaugural committees and presidential transitions** and be a stronger check to political appointees – especially those that were large campaign contributors.
- In addition to oversight, Congress must hold executive branch officeholders accountable to **swiftly and completely release financial disclosures** and establish regulations around conflicts of interest that most presidents customarily have addressed.

- Candidates for president and vice president as well as office holders must be required to annually **release their tax returns**.
- Congress must address and close loopholes that allow dark-money groups to exact outsized influence over appointments and confirmations to the **federal courts**, including the Supreme Court.
- The federal judiciary should be party to the development of a **code of ethics** that their members must adhere to.
- Regulators must **enforce violations of the Hatch Act**.
- We must **end the revolving door of lobbying** and **ban foreign government use of lobbyists**.
- The American public should be privy to who is lobbying and who is one the receiving end of lobbying **by expanding lobbying disclosure requirements**.
- Executive branch officials must be **required to divest from stock, bonds or other holdings** that may be influenced by the actions of their agency in which they work.
- The same standard should be **extended to members of Congress**.
- We must **end the loophole that allows public officials to transfer assets into trusts controlled by family members** to skirt around financial disclosure requirements.
- Congress must **strengthen whistleblower protections** so federal employees are empowered to report misdeeds and potential threats to national security.
- Congress must also ensure that the **executive branch not abuse its power by interfering in federal investigations** or other specific cases and prosecutions.
- Strict limits must be placed on what **constitutes cause to relieve inspectors general** of their duties. Inspectors general should have total and complete independence from officials in the executive branch agencies in which they preside.
- The next administration must reduce and **eliminate conflicts of interest between for-profit contractors that do business with the government** and officials within the government.
- The federal government must take **substantial steps toward diversity, equity and inclusion** so those working in our government accurately reflect they people they serve.
- Finally, we must **improve government customer service** and give Americans far better access to their elected representatives at every level. This includes equipping official offices with state-of-the-art CRM technologies, training staffers in best practices to communicate and meet the needs of constituents, and holding elected officials accountable to these standards as well.

## Conclusion

There will be much work to do to rebuild Americans' trust in our government and in democracy itself. From that trust we as a nation can build toward policies that improve the lives of all Americans – from making healthcare more affordable to investing in our infrastructure, creating a more inclusive economy with better wages for all and tackling the climate crisis head-on. Strengthening America's democracy so it moves closer toward meeting its promise is the foundation to accomplishing these legislative priorities.

Rooting out corruption, empowering Americans to have a voice with their vote, reducing the influence of corporate special interests that want to spend untold sums of money to deny Americans their voice, and restoring ethics and integrity in our government are core to making our democracy work for the people.