

A CALL TO ACTION • 2026 & BEYOND

# Eleven Pillars of Change

*A Comprehensive Blueprint  
for American Renewal*

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BY JARED SPENCE

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## Foreword: A Word to the Skeptic

*If you picked up this document and your first instinct was suspicion, good. That instinct has been earned. You have watched politicians of both parties promise change and deliver disappointment. You have watched the rules get rewritten in favor of people who were already winning. You have watched the country you love get more divided, more expensive, more chaotic, and more unfamiliar with every passing year. And you have watched a political establishment that seems more interested in fighting each other than solving anything tell you, over and over again, that the answer is to trust them one more time.*

*Your skepticism is not ignorance. It is experience. And it deserves to be met honestly.*

So let me be direct with you about what this document is and what it is not.

It is not a socialist manifesto. Not one proposal in these pages calls for the government to own your business, confiscate your property, or tell you how to live your life. What it calls for is something far more traditional: a government that does its job, spends your money wisely, plays by the same rules it enforces on everyone else, and stops letting the most powerful interests in the country write the rules in their own favor.

*And let me be especially clear about one thing, because it matters and because it has been deliberately obscured: this document is not an attack on the American Dream. It is a defense of it.*

The American Dream, the belief that any person regardless of where they were born or who their parents were can build a good life through hard work, ingenuity, and perseverance, is one of the most powerful ideas in human history. It is worth protecting. And the greatest threat to it right now is not taxation. It is a system so thoroughly rigged in favor of those who are already at the top that the ladder of opportunity is being pulled up behind them.

There is a difference, a profound and important difference, between a person who built a business, employed people, took risks, and earned their success, and a person who inherited a financial empire, employs an army of accountants and lobbyists to avoid paying taxes, and uses that accumulated political power to write the rules in their own favor. This document has no quarrel with the first person. It has a very serious quarrel with the second.

The reforms proposed in these pages are not designed to punish success. They are designed to ensure that success is actually possible, for everyone, not just those who started with the most. A nurse who works double shifts. A contractor who built a company from nothing. A teacher who spent thirty years investing in other people's children. A veteran who came home and started over. These are the people whose hard work the current system undervalues, overtaxes at their income level, and systematically excludes from the opportunities it reserves for those already at the top.

Here is the economic truth that rarely gets stated plainly: a society where more people have the opportunity to succeed is a society where more people do succeed, and where the government collects more revenue to fund the investments that make success possible in the first place. This is not redistribution. It is the basic math of a functioning economy. The more Americans who are healthy, educated, housed, and empowered to participate fully in economic life, the more Americans who start businesses, hire workers, pay taxes, and build the kind of broad-based prosperity that benefits everyone, including the people at the top.

What this document proposes is not the elimination of wealth. It is the elimination of the rigged game: the loopholes that let billionaires pay lower tax rates than their employees, the political influence that lets corporations write the regulations governing their own industries, the dark money that lets the ultra-wealthy buy policy outcomes unavailable to everyone else. Level the playing field. Enforce the rules fairly. And then get out of the way and let Americans do what Americans do.

*The millionaire who earned it has nothing to fear from these pages. The billionaire who rigged it does.*

It is not an attack on your values. The values that animate every page of this document, dignity, fairness, hard work, community, responsibility, and love of country, are not liberal values or conservative values. They are American values. If you believe that a person who works hard and plays by the rules deserves a fair shot, that no one should be above the law regardless of their wealth or power, that the government exists to serve the people and not the other way around, and that the next generation deserves to inherit a country worth inheriting: then you already share the foundational convictions of this document. We may disagree, sometimes sharply, about how to get there. But we are not as far apart as the people who profit from our division want us to believe.

It is not naive about government. This document does not pretend that government is the solution to every problem. It is not. The creativity, resilience, and ingenuity of the American people, expressed through families, businesses, communities, and individual lives lived with purpose and integrity, are the true foundation of American strength. Government's role is not to replace that foundation but to stop undermining it: to ensure the playing field is fair, that the rules apply to everyone, and that the investments necessary for a functioning society are made with accountability and wisdom.

Here is what I want you to consider.

The programs that have done the most to build and protect the American middle class were not socialist experiments imported from Europe. Social Security was signed by Franklin Roosevelt because elderly Americans were dying in poverty at catastrophic rates. The GI Bill was signed by Harry Truman because the men who fought World War II deserved to come home to an opportunity, not a breadline. The Interstate Highway System was built by Dwight Eisenhower because a modern economy requires modern infrastructure. Medicare was signed by Lyndon Johnson because no senior citizen should lose everything they spent a lifetime building because they got

sick. The Environmental Protection Agency was created by Richard Nixon because Americans were watching their rivers catch fire and their children breathe poisoned air.

None of these were socialism. All of them were America deciding that some problems are too big and too serious to leave entirely to the market, and that a government of, by, and for the people has an obligation to act on behalf of all of its people, not just the ones at the top.

Consider what the tax code actually looked like during America's greatest period of middle class growth. From the New Deal through the early 1960s, the top marginal income tax rate was 91 percent on income above a threshold equivalent to roughly \$2.5 million in today's dollars. That rate held under Truman, under Eisenhower — a Republican — and into the Kennedy administration. During those same decades, America built the Interstate Highway System, sent men to the moon, created Medicare, funded the GI Bill, and produced the largest and most broadly shared prosperity in the history of the world. When the top rate was gradually cut — reaching 28 percent under Reagan — the great American middle class began its long decline. That is not a coincidence. The question worth asking is: who benefited from that change, and who has been paying for it ever since?

The proposals in this document stand in that same tradition. They are not about expanding government for its own sake. They are about fixing specific, documented, costly failures: a healthcare system that bankrupts families and produces worse outcomes than every other developed nation, an education system that guarantees inequality by design, a tax code riddled with loopholes that let billionaires pay lower rates than their secretaries, a political system so saturated with dark money that ordinary citizens have effectively lost their voice, and a gun violence epidemic that kills tens of thousands of Americans every year while we argue about whether we are even allowed to study it.

These are not partisan problems. They are American problems. And they have American solutions, if we are willing to set aside the tribal reflex long enough to look at the evidence honestly.

I want to speak directly to one more thing.

You have been told, repeatedly and loudly, that people who support policies like the ones in this document want to destroy the America you know and replace it with something foreign and frightening. That framing is deliberate. It is designed to make you angry, keep you defensive, and prevent you from asking the question that the people doing the framing most fear: angry at whom, exactly, and in whose interest?

The corporations that have spent decades shipping your jobs overseas while lobbying for their own tax breaks have an interest in you being angry at immigrants instead of at them. The billionaires who have rigged the tax code in their own favor have an interest in you being angry at teachers' unions instead of at them. The politicians who have taken dark money from every special interest imaginable have an interest in you being angry at the other party instead of at them. Division is not an accident. It is a strategy. And it has worked extraordinarily well for the people at the top while the rest of us fight over the scraps.

This document is an argument that we deserve better than that. All of us. Including you.

You do not have to agree with everything in these pages. You will not. Some proposals will strike you as too far, too fast, or simply wrong. That disagreement is legitimate, and it is welcome. A document that everyone agreed with entirely would not be serious. These are hard problems, and reasonable people can and do disagree about the best solutions.

But I am asking you to read it. Not to be converted. Not to abandon your values or your identity. But to engage honestly with the evidence, to consider whether the people who have been telling you that your neighbors are your enemies have actually been serving your interests, and to ask yourself whether the America you want for your children looks more like what we have now or more like what is possible.

The work ahead is hard. It always has been. But it has always been worth doing.

*That is what this document is about.*

— Jared Spence, 2026

# Introduction: A Nation Worth Fighting For

*“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”*

These words — written more than two hundred and fifty years ago by a man who owned slaves, in a nation that denied the vote to women, that had stolen its land from indigenous peoples, and that would spend the next century tearing itself apart over the question of whether some human beings could be the legal property of others — are nonetheless among the most powerful and most consequential words ever committed to paper. Not because they described the America that existed in 1776. But because they described the America that could exist. The America that should exist. The America that millions of people across generations have given their lives, their freedom, and their deepest energies trying to bring into being.

That America — the America of the ideal rather than the America of the moment — is what this document is about.

## Where We Are

America is at a crossroads. The symptoms are visible everywhere: in the corrosive dysfunction of a political system held hostage by extremism and dark money, in the widening chasm between the wealthy few and the struggling many, in the crumbling infrastructure of a nation that once built the greatest public works in human history, in the epidemic of preventable deaths from gun violence, addiction, and lack of healthcare, in the accelerating destruction of the natural world on which all human life depends, and in the deliberate, systematic assault on the institutions of democracy itself by those who have calculated that they can only hold power by undermining the systems that are supposed to constrain it.

These are not partisan observations. They are documented realities that affect Americans of every political persuasion, every race, every religion, every income level, and every geography. The farmer in Iowa and the teacher in Atlanta and the factory worker in Ohio and the nurse in Los Angeles are all living in the same country: a country of extraordinary potential and profound dysfunction, of breathtaking wealth and inexcusable poverty, of noble ideals and persistent failure to live up to them.

The question before us is not whether America has problems. It does. The question is whether we have the courage, the clarity, and the collective will to address them honestly: to look at what is broken without flinching, to propose solutions that are equal to the scale of the challenges, and to build the political coalition necessary to turn those solutions into reality.

This document is an attempt to answer that question with a resounding yes.

## What This Document Is

This is not a partisan manifesto. It is not an attack on any political party, any religion, any region, or any group of Americans. It is a policy vision, grounded in evidence, animated by values, and oriented toward the future, that takes seriously the full complexity of the challenges facing the United States and proposes comprehensive, interconnected solutions that reflect the scale of those challenges.

The eleven pillars that follow cover the full spectrum of federal policy: from democratic reform and economic justice to education, healthcare, national security, environmental protection, immigration, and gun reform. They are interconnected; the health of our democracy affects the fairness of our economy, which affects the quality of our education, which affects the strength of our workforce, which affects the security of our nation. You cannot fix one pillar without attending to the others. That is why this document addresses all of them.

Each pillar is grounded in a simple but radical proposition: that the purpose of government is to serve the people. All of the people. Not the wealthy donors who fund campaigns. Not the corporations that employ armies of lobbyists. Not the ideological movements that seek to impose their vision of America on everyone else. The people; the three hundred and thirty million human beings of every background, belief, and circumstance who call this country home and whose lives are shaped every day by the decisions made in their name in Washington.

## What This Document Is Not

This document does not pretend that the solutions it proposes will be easy, cheap, or without controversy. Many of them will require constitutional amendments, landmark legislation, sustained political will, and the kind of broad public support that only comes from honest, persistent, and courageous advocacy. Some will face fierce resistance from the powerful interests that benefit from the status quo. All of them will require compromise, patience, and the recognition that progress in a democracy is rarely linear.

This document does not pretend that government is the solution to every problem. It is not. The creativity, resilience, generosity, and ingenuity of the American people, expressed through families, communities, businesses, religious institutions, civic organizations, and individual lives lived with purpose and integrity, are the true foundation of American greatness. Government's role is not to replace that foundation but to create the conditions under which it can flourish: to ensure that the playing field is fair, that the rules are enforced, that the most vulnerable are protected, and that the investments necessary to sustain a just and prosperous society are made with wisdom and accountability.

And this document does not pretend that the America it envisions can be built overnight. The challenges it addresses have been building for decades, in some cases for centuries. The solutions will take years, in some cases generations, to fully realize. That is not a reason for despair; it is a call for sustained commitment. Every generation of Americans has inherited a nation that was imperfect and has had the opportunity to make it more perfect. That is not a burden; it is a privilege.

## The Values That Animate This Vision

The eleven pillars that follow are grounded in a set of core values that are neither liberal nor conservative; they are American:

### **Dignity.**

Every human being, regardless of race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, national origin, economic status, or circumstance of birth, possesses inherent dignity that demands respect and protection. Policy that degrades human dignity, in any form, for any person, is incompatible with American values.

### **Fairness.**

The rules must apply equally to everyone. The wealthy and the powerful must be subject to the same laws and the same accountability as everyone else. The playing field must be level: not because everyone will end up in the same place, but because everyone deserves an equal opportunity to go as far as their talent and effort can take them.

### **Truth.**

Democracy cannot function without a shared commitment to truth: to evidence, to science, to honest accounting of history, and to the rejection of deliberate misinformation as a political tool. A nation that cannot agree on basic facts cannot make the collective decisions that self-governance requires.

### **Responsibility.**

Rights and responsibilities are inseparable. The rights guaranteed by the Constitution carry with them obligations: to the community, to future generations, and to the democratic institutions that protect those rights. Freedom is not the absence of responsibility; it is the exercise of responsibility in the service of a life well lived and a society worth inhabiting.

### **Community.**

Americans do not thrive in isolation. We are bound together by geography, by history, by shared institutions, and by the simple fact that what happens to our neighbors, our communities, and our fellow citizens happens, in some measure, to all of us. The health of the community is inseparable from the wellbeing of the individual, and the wellbeing of the individual is inseparable from the health of the community.

### **Hope.**

The American story, at its best, is a story of hope: the stubborn, evidence-based conviction that tomorrow can be better than today, that injustice can be confronted and overcome, that human beings are capable of building systems and institutions that bring out the best rather than the worst of our nature. That hope is not naïve; it is hard-

won, tested by history, and sustained by the example of every generation that has moved the arc of the moral universe a little closer to justice.

## **A Word About Courage**

The reforms proposed in this document will not be popular with everyone. Some will be fiercely opposed by powerful interests that have built their wealth and influence on the systems this document seeks to change. Some will be mischaracterized, distorted, and attacked by those who prefer the comfort of the status quo to the challenge of genuine change.

That is expected. That is, in fact, a measure of how necessary these reforms are: because the things most worth doing are almost always the things that face the most resistance.

What is required is courage. The courage to say clearly what is broken and why. The courage to propose solutions that are equal to the scale of the problems rather than politically safe half-measures. The courage to trust the American people with honest information and ambitious vision, rather than treating them as obstacles to be managed or constituencies to be placated.

The American people, at their best, respond to courage. They responded to it in 1776, when a group of colonists declared independence from the most powerful empire on Earth. They responded to it in 1863, when a president issued a proclamation that would cost him his life and transform the nation. They responded to it in 1964, when a Congress passed a Civil Rights Act over the fierce opposition of those who preferred the injustice they knew to the justice they feared. They responded to it in every generation when leaders and citizens alike found the courage to do what was right rather than what was easy.

They will respond to it again.

## **An Invitation**

This document is not the final word. It is the beginning of a conversation: a comprehensive, honest, ambitious conversation about the kind of country we want to be and the work required to get there. It is an invitation to every American, regardless of party, region, religion, or background, to engage with these ideas, to challenge them, to improve them, and ultimately to join in the work of building the more perfect union that the founders promised and that every generation since has had the responsibility to pursue.

The America worth fighting for is not a memory or a myth. It is a possibility: one that becomes more real with every act of courage, every honest conversation, every reform achieved, and every generation that refuses to accept that the way things are is the way they have to be.

That America is worth fighting for.

**Let us begin.**



# PILLAR 1: DEMOCRATIC INTEGRITY

*Democracy is not self-sustaining. It requires constant vigilance, honest institutions, fair processes, and a citizenry that demands accountability from its representatives. The health of American democracy has been in serious and accelerating decline, threatened by the undue influence of money in politics, the systematic suppression of voting rights, the deliberate manipulation of electoral maps, the weaponization of social media for disinformation, and the dangerous concentration of power in the executive branch. Restoring democratic integrity is not one priority among many; it is the foundation upon which every other reform in this document depends. Without it, nothing else is possible.*

## Separation of Church and State

The First Amendment's Establishment Clause is not a suggestion; it is a constitutional mandate. Government has no business promoting, endorsing, subsidizing, or legislating the doctrines of any religious tradition. This principle protects not just non-believers and religious minorities, but believers themselves, from the corruption that inevitably follows when religious institutions become entangled with the coercive power of the state.<sup>[1]</sup>

### *How:*

Enforce the Johnson Amendment, which prohibits tax-exempt religious organizations from endorsing or opposing political candidates, closing the enforcement gap that has allowed many religious institutions to function as de facto political operations while retaining their tax-exempt status.<sup>[2]</sup>

Prohibit the use of public funds for religious instruction, including voucher programs that direct public education funding to religious schools that are not subject to the same accountability, curriculum, and non-discrimination standards as public schools.<sup>[3]</sup>

Establish clear legal guidelines prohibiting government bodies at all levels from displaying religious symbols, reciting religious texts, or opening official proceedings with sectarian prayer, consistent with Supreme Court precedent protecting the separation of church and state.<sup>[4]</sup>

Protect the right of every American to practice their religion freely, or to practice no religion at all, without government interference, preference, or penalty. Religious freedom is a personal right, not a license for theocratic governance.<sup>[5]</sup>

## Taxing Politically Active Religious Organizations

The tax-exempt status granted to religious organizations under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code was designed to protect the independence of genuinely charitable institutions from government interference. It was never intended to subsidize the accumulation of vast real estate empires, the payment of multi-million dollar executive salaries, or the explicit direction of political activity from the pulpit. Yet some of the wealthiest religious organizations in the United States function as commercial enterprises and political operations while paying no federal taxes, no

property taxes, and no taxes on investment income. This is not religious freedom. It is a taxpayer subsidy of political and commercial activity that no other sector of the economy enjoys.*How:*

Establish a tiered financial disclosure requirement for all religious organizations with annual revenues exceeding \$500,000, requiring public disclosure of total revenue, executive compensation, real estate holdings, investment portfolios, and any expenditures on political or advocacy activities. These disclosures shall be filed with the IRS and made publicly available, consistent with the transparency requirements applied to all other tax-exempt organizations.<sup>[6]</sup>

Religious organizations that accumulate net assets above a defined threshold, proposed at \$500 million, shall be subject to a modest endowment tax on investment income equivalent to that applied to large university endowments under the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017, recognizing that the justification for tax exemption is charitable mission, not the mere fact of religious status.<sup>[7]</sup>

Strengthen enforcement of the Johnson Amendment, which prohibits 501(c)(3) organizations including religious institutions from endorsing or opposing political candidates. Establish a dedicated IRS enforcement unit with adequate staffing and resources to investigate credible complaints of political activity by tax-exempt organizations, with meaningful penalties for violations including loss of tax-exempt status for repeat or egregious offenders.<sup>[8]</sup>

## **Gerrymandering & Electoral Maps**

Partisan gerrymandering has transformed the fundamental premise of representative democracy. Rather than voters choosing their representatives, representatives choose their voters, drawing district maps so precisely engineered that outcomes are predetermined regardless of how the electorate actually votes.<sup>[9]</sup>

*How:*

Establish independent, nonpartisan redistricting commissions in all fifty states and for all federal congressional districts, with membership drawn from pools of qualified citizens who are not current or recent elected officials, political party officers, lobbyists, or political consultants.<sup>[10]</sup>

Mandate that all redistricting processes be conducted in public, with full transparency of the data and criteria used, robust opportunities for public input, and independent judicial review of final maps against clearly defined fairness criteria including compactness, contiguity, respect for existing political subdivisions, and partisan symmetry.<sup>[11]</sup>

Prohibit the use of partisan registration data, voting history by party, and incumbent home addresses as inputs in the redistricting process, limiting the data used to draw maps to population counts, demographic data required for Voting Rights Act compliance, and geographic features.<sup>[12]</sup>

## Campaign Finance Reform

The Supreme Court's decision in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* opened the floodgates to unlimited corporate and dark money spending in American elections, fundamentally corrupting the democratic process by allowing the wealthiest individuals and corporations to exert influence over elections that is orders of magnitude greater than that of ordinary citizens.<sup>[13]</sup>

### *How:*

Pursue a constitutional amendment to overturn *Citizens United* and establish that constitutional rights belong to human beings, not corporations, and that Congress and the states may regulate the raising and spending of money in political campaigns without constitutional limitation.<sup>[14]</sup>

Pass comprehensive campaign finance legislation establishing public funding for federal elections, allowing candidates who demonstrate sufficient grassroots support through small donations to access matching public funds and compete effectively without dependence on large donors.<sup>[15]</sup>

Require immediate, real-time online disclosure of all political contributions and expenditures above a defined minimum threshold, making all donor information publicly searchable in a user-friendly federal database.<sup>[16]</sup>

## Voting Rights & Access

The right to vote is the most fundamental right in a democracy, and that right has been systematically attacked through voter ID laws, voter roll purges, polling place closures, restricted early voting, and the gutting of the Voting Rights Act by the Supreme Court's decision in *Shelby County v. Holder*.<sup>[17]</sup>

### *How:*

Pass the John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, restoring and strengthening the preclearance requirements of the Voting Rights Act to prevent states and localities with histories of voting discrimination from implementing changes that disenfranchise minority voters.<sup>[18]</sup>

Establish automatic voter registration for all eligible citizens at age 18, with universal same-day registration available through Election Day, eliminating the bureaucratic barriers that prevent millions of eligible Americans from voting.<sup>[19]</sup>

Establish a national minimum of fifteen days of early in-person voting for all federal elections, mandatory no-excuse absentee voting, and prohibit the closure of polling places without federal preclearance demonstrating that no discriminatory impact will result.<sup>[20]</sup>

Establish federal standards for voter ID requirements that ensure no eligible voter is disenfranchised, requiring that any ID requirement be accompanied by a free, easily accessible government-issued ID option and robust provisional ballot protections.<sup>[21]</sup>

Make Election Day a federal holiday, ensuring that working Americans are not forced to choose between their jobs and their right to vote.<sup>[22]</sup>

## **An Affirmative Constitutional Right to Vote**

Every amendment to the Constitution that has addressed voting has done so in the negative: the right to vote shall not be denied or abridged on account of race, sex, age, or failure to pay a poll tax. The Constitution has never affirmatively guaranteed the right to vote as a positive right belonging to every American citizen. This negative formulation has allowed the Supreme Court, in decisions including *Shelby County v. Holder* and *Brnovich v. DNC*, to systematically dismantle the legal infrastructure protecting voting access while technically staying within the letter of existing constitutional text. An affirmative right to vote, stated positively and protected by the full force of federal law, would fundamentally change the constitutional landscape for voting rights litigation and close the loopholes that have allowed discriminatory voting laws to survive legal challenge.<sup>[23]</sup>

### *How:*

Pursue a constitutional amendment establishing an affirmative right to vote for every American citizen eighteen years of age or older, stated in positive terms: the right of citizens of the United States to vote shall be guaranteed by the federal government. This formulation shifts the constitutional burden from requiring plaintiffs to prove discrimination to requiring government to affirmatively protect access, fundamentally changing the legal standard for voting rights challenges.<sup>[24]</sup>

Pending constitutional amendment, pass comprehensive federal voting rights legislation that restores and strengthens the full preclearance requirements of the Voting Rights Act, explicitly overrides the *Brnovich* decision's weakening of Section 2, and establishes clear federal standards for early voting, mail voting, voter ID, and polling place adequacy that no state may fall below. Establish automatic restoration of voting rights for individuals upon release from incarceration, recognizing that civic participation is essential to successful reentry.<sup>[25]</sup>

## **Election Infrastructure & Administration**

Free and fair elections require not just legal protections for voting rights but robust physical and administrative infrastructure: secure, accessible polling places, reliable vote counting equipment, trained election workers, adequate funding for election administration, and clear, consistent standards that voters and election officials can rely on. The Election Assistance Commission, established in the wake of the 2000 election crisis, has been chronically underfunded and understaffed, leaving states and localities to manage federal election infrastructure without adequate federal support. At the same time, the politicization of state-level election administration and the targeting of election workers for harassment and intimidation have created a staffing crisis that threatens the operational integrity of American elections.<sup>[26]</sup>

### *How:*

Fully fund the Election Assistance Commission and expand its authority to establish binding minimum federal standards for election administration, including paper ballot requirements for all federal elections, mandatory post-election audits using statistically sound risk-limiting audit methodologies, and standardized training and certification requirements for election officials and poll workers.<sup>[27]</sup>

Establish federal protections for election workers against harassment, intimidation, and threats, including enhanced federal criminal penalties for interference with the performance of election duties and a federal civil right of action for election workers who are targeted. Invest in election worker recruitment, training, compensation, and retention to address the documented staffing crisis created by the hostile political environment surrounding election administration.<sup>[28]</sup>

## Ranked Choice Voting

The current plurality voting system, in which the candidate with the most votes wins regardless of whether they represent the genuine preference of the majority, systematically produces outcomes that most voters oppose and creates the spoiler effect that discourages third-party and independent candidacies.<sup>[29]</sup>

### *How:*

Mandate ranked choice voting for all federal primary and general elections, allowing voters to rank candidates in order of preference and ensuring that winners have the genuine support of a majority of voters rather than merely the largest plurality in a crowded field.<sup>[30]</sup>

Provide federal funding and technical support for states and localities implementing ranked choice voting, ensuring that the transition is smooth, well-administered, and accompanied by robust voter education programs.<sup>[31]</sup>

## Lobbying Reform & Special Interest Accountability

Lobbying is constitutionally protected and serves a legitimate function: individuals and organizations have the right to petition their government. The problem is not lobbying itself but the vast asymmetry between the resources available to corporate and special interests and the resources available to ordinary citizens attempting to make their voices heard. When a single industry can deploy hundreds of lobbyists and spend hundreds of millions of dollars to influence legislation, the formal equality of democratic participation becomes a fiction. The result is a system in which legislation is routinely written by the industries it is supposed to regulate and the public interest is a secondary consideration at best.<sup>[32]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish a comprehensive lobbying reform framework that dramatically expands the definition of lobbying activity subject to registration and disclosure, requiring registration for all individuals who receive compensation for attempting to influence federal policy regardless of the percentage of time spent on lobbying activities. Current thresholds allow significant lobbying activity to go unregistered and undisclosed.<sup>[33]</sup>

Establish a publicly funded counter-lobbying office within Congress that provides legislators and their staff with independent policy analysis, economic modeling, and technical expertise on legislation that is the subject of intensive industry lobbying, ensuring that Congress has access to information and analysis that does not originate with the industries seeking favorable legislative outcomes. Strengthen the

Congressional Budget Office, the Congressional Research Service, and the Government Accountability Office as the institutional infrastructure of legislative independence.<sup>[34]</sup>

## Congressional Reform

Congress has systematically abdicated its constitutional responsibilities: delegating legislative authority to the executive branch, failing to exercise meaningful oversight of executive power, allowing itself to be corrupted by the revolving door between government service and lobbying, and permitting a broken appropriations process to result in government shutdowns that cost taxpayers billions and damage public trust in democratic institutions.<sup>[35]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish strict post-government employment restrictions prohibiting members of Congress and senior congressional staff from engaging in paid lobbying of their former chambers or committees for a minimum of five years after leaving office.<sup>[36]</sup>

Reform the congressional appropriations process to prevent government shutdowns. In the event that Congress fails to pass a federal budget by the statutory deadline, an automatic continuing resolution at the previous year's funding levels shall immediately take effect. Members of Congress shall forfeit their salaries during any shutdown period and shall be required to remain in session until a funding agreement is reached.<sup>[37]</sup>

Explicitly exempt the Department of Defense, all active duty military personnel, and critical national security agencies from government shutdowns. A dedicated surplus reserve fund shall be established and maintained at a level sufficient to fund DoD operations for a minimum of 90 days, ensuring that national defense is never compromised by political dysfunction.<sup>[38]</sup>

Establish an independent ethics enforcement office for Congress, replacing the current system in which members police themselves, with the authority to investigate complaints, compel testimony, and impose binding sanctions for violations of ethics rules.<sup>[39]</sup>

Prohibit members of Congress and their immediate families from trading individual stocks while in office. Require that all investments above a defined threshold be held in blind trusts or broad index funds, eliminating the conflicts of interest created by legislators who vote on matters affecting their own portfolios.<sup>[40]</sup>

## House of Representatives Reform

The United States House of Representatives has been capped at 435 members since the Permanent Apportionment Act of 1929, despite the national population nearly tripling since that time. The result is that each member of Congress now represents an average of more than 760,000 constituents, making genuine representation increasingly impossible. By comparison, most peer democracies maintain far lower constituent-to-representative ratios. A House frozen at 435 members in a nation of

330 million people is a House that cannot adequately represent the diversity, complexity, or geographic breadth of the American electorate.<sup>[41]</sup>

*How:*

Pass legislation expanding the size of the House of Representatives using the Wyoming Rule, under which the size of the House is determined by dividing the national population by the population of the smallest entitled unit, currently Wyoming, producing a more proportional and representative body. Independent modeling suggests this would expand the House to approximately 550 members under current population figures, improving geographic and demographic representation without requiring a constitutional amendment.<sup>[42]</sup>

Mandate ranked choice voting for all House of Representatives primary and general elections, consistent with the broader RCV proposal in this document, ensuring that representatives are elected with genuine majority support rather than narrow plurality wins in crowded primary fields.<sup>[43]</sup>

Establish term limits for members of the House of Representatives of twelve years (six two-year terms), with a corresponding prohibition on lobbying former colleagues for a period of five years following departure from office. Term limits alone are insufficient without corresponding reforms to the revolving door and to campaign finance, but combined with those reforms they represent a meaningful check on the entrenchment of political power.<sup>[44]</sup>

## Senate Representation

The current Senate structure does not accurately reflect the political will of the American people. Many states are effectively represented by two senators of the same party, silencing a significant portion of their population in the upper chamber of Congress. True representative democracy requires that every state's full political voice be heard in the Senate regardless of that state's dominant political lean.<sup>[45]</sup>

*How:*

Pursue a constitutional amendment restructuring Senate representation so that each state is represented by one Republican senator and one Democrat or Independent senator, ensuring balanced representation regardless of a state's political lean. In the event of a 50/50 Senate tie, the matter shall be resolved by a non-partisan independent arbiter selected through a transparent, merit-based process from a panel of retired senior jurists and former officials, serving a single fixed term with no partisan political activity permitted during tenure.<sup>[46]</sup>

## Supreme Court & Federal Judiciary Reform

The federal judiciary, and the Supreme Court in particular, has become increasingly politicized, with appointment processes that reward ideological loyalty over legal excellence and a lifetime tenure system that has allowed the Court to become an unaccountable counter-majoritarian institution whose composition is determined by the accident of which president is in office when a seat becomes vacant.<sup>[47]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish eighteen-year term limits for Supreme Court justices, with justices serving staggered terms that allow each presidential term to include two Supreme Court appointments, reducing the political stakes of any single vacancy while maintaining judicial independence.<sup>[48]</sup>

Expand the Supreme Court from nine to eleven justices: five appointed by Democratic presidents, five appointed by Republican presidents, and one designated Tiebreaker Justice selected by a nonpartisan panel of retired senior federal circuit court judges through a merit-based process with no partisan political activity permitted during their tenure. The Tiebreaker Justice shall serve the same eighteen-year term as associate justices under this reformed structure. This composition ensures that the Court reflects the political diversity of the nation, eliminates the destabilizing effect of single-vacancy political battles, and provides a principled mechanism for resolving genuinely contested constitutional questions without a predetermined partisan outcome.<sup>[49]</sup>

Establish a binding recusal standard for Supreme Court justices, requiring mandatory recusal in any case where a justice has a documented financial, personal, or prior professional relationship with a party before the Court, and establishing an independent recusal review panel with authority to enforce recusal decisions. The current system, in which individual justices self-determine their own recusal obligations, is inconsistent with basic principles of judicial impartiality.<sup>[50]</sup>

Reform the lower federal judiciary to address the concentration of cases in specific district courts that have become venues for nationwide injunctions by litigants who choose their court based on the ideology of its judges. Establish a random assignment requirement for cases seeking nationwide injunctive relief, preventing forum shopping that allows a single district court judge to unilaterally block federal policy for the entire country. Address the Senate practice of leaving federal judicial vacancies unfilled for political reasons by establishing statutory timelines for Senate action on judicial nominations.<sup>[51]</sup>

Establish a binding Supreme Court Code of Ethics with an independent enforcement mechanism, closing the gap in judicial ethics oversight that has allowed Supreme Court justices to accept undisclosed gifts, travel, and financial benefits from parties with interests before the Court.<sup>[52]</sup>

Establish clear statutory limits on presidential immunity from criminal prosecution, consistent with the principle that no person is above the law, addressing the dangerous precedent created by recent Supreme Court decisions expanding presidential immunity.<sup>[53]</sup>

## **Social Security Administration Independence**

The Social Security Administration is not a policy agency in the conventional sense. Its primary function is to administer earned benefits that more than 70 million Americans depend on for their basic economic security. The SSA's commissioner serves a six-year term specifically to insulate the agency from political pressure. The politically motivated removal of an SSA commissioner outside the established process is not merely a personnel dispute; it is an attack on the independence of an institution that processes disability claims, retirement applications, and survivor benefits for the

most vulnerable Americans. When the SSA is politicized, real people lose benefits they have earned and paid for throughout their working lives.<sup>[54]</sup>

*How:*

Codify in statute that the Commissioner of Social Security may only be removed for cause, defined as documented neglect of duty, malfeasance, or conduct unbecoming the office, with a mandatory congressional notification and review period before removal takes effect. Establish an independent SSA oversight board with authority to review and report on any politically motivated interference in the SSA's benefit administration, staffing, or operational decisions.<sup>[55]</sup>

Prohibit any reduction in SSA staffing, office closures, or degradation of claims processing capacity above a defined threshold without congressional approval and a public impact assessment demonstrating that benefit delivery to current and future recipients will not be materially impaired. The SSA's capacity to process claims accurately and timely is not an administrative detail; it is the mechanism through which a fundamental social contract is honored.<sup>[56]</sup>

## **The Electoral College**

The Electoral College was designed for a world that no longer exists. In the modern era, it has produced outcomes in which the winner of the popular vote lost the presidency, fundamentally undermining the democratic principle of majority rule.<sup>[57]</sup>

*How:*

Pursue a constitutional amendment establishing the direct popular election of the president, ensuring that every American's vote carries equal weight regardless of the state in which they live.<sup>[58]</sup>

In the interim, encourage all states to join the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact, which would guarantee the presidency to the winner of the national popular vote once states representing a majority of electoral votes have adopted it.<sup>[59]</sup>

## **United States Postal Service as Democratic Infrastructure**

The United States Postal Service is older than the nation itself. It is enshrined in the Constitution, universally accessible, and relied upon by tens of millions of Americans for prescription medications, small business commerce, Social Security checks, absentee ballots, and connection to communities that private carriers will not serve at any price. The deliberate operational degradation of the USPS in the months before the 2020 election, including the removal of mail sorting machines and the slowing of mail delivery during a period of unprecedented mail-in voting, demonstrated that postal infrastructure can be weaponized against democratic participation. That vulnerability must be permanently closed.<sup>[60]</sup>

*How:*

Establish the USPS as protected critical democratic infrastructure through legislation that prohibits operational changes, equipment removals, or service standard

reductions above a defined threshold without congressional approval and a minimum 90-day public notice and comment period. The Postmaster General shall be prohibited from implementing changes designed to reduce mail delivery speed or capacity during the 120 days preceding any federal election.<sup>[61]</sup>

Resolve the USPS's chronic financial crisis through legislation that eliminates the uniquely burdensome pre-funding requirement for retiree health benefits that no other government agency or private company faces, and that was the primary cause of the USPS's reported financial losses for over a decade. Invest in the modernization of the USPS vehicle fleet, processing infrastructure, and technology to ensure that it can compete effectively and serve every American community regardless of geography or income.<sup>[62]</sup>

## Anti-Authoritarianism Protections

The January 6th attack on the United States Capitol, the systematic effort to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election, and the Supreme Court's expansion of presidential immunity have exposed dangerous vulnerabilities in the democratic guardrails that Americans have long assumed would protect their system of self-governance.<sup>[63]</sup>

### *How:*

Codify the norms of democratic governance that have historically been maintained by tradition rather than statute, including the peaceful transfer of power, the independence of law enforcement and prosecutorial decisions from political direction, and the prohibition on using federal agencies as instruments of political persecution.<sup>[64]</sup>

Strengthen the Insurrection Act and related statutes to prevent the misuse of military force against lawful civilian protest or political opposition, and establish clear congressional oversight requirements for any deployment of federal law enforcement in response to civil unrest.<sup>[65]</sup>

## Presidential Accountability & Term Limits

The presidency is the most powerful office in the American government. That power demands clear accountability mechanisms before, during, and after service. No person, regardless of the office they hold or have held, is above the law. The norm of presidential immunity from criminal accountability has been stretched and exploited in ways that the framers never intended and that the American people cannot afford to tolerate.<sup>[66]</sup>

### *How:*

Reaffirm and codify in federal statute that no sitting or former president is immune from criminal investigation or prosecution for acts committed outside their official duties, closing the ambiguity created by recent judicial interpretations.<sup>[67]</sup>

Require comprehensive financial disclosure from all presidential candidates and sitting presidents, including full tax return disclosure, blind trust requirements for all business

interests, and regular independent audits of compliance with emoluments clause obligations.<sup>[68]</sup>

## Protecting Federal Law Enforcement from Political Weaponization

The Department of Justice, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Internal Revenue Service exist to enforce the law impartially on behalf of all Americans. When these institutions are directed to investigate, prosecute, or audit political enemies and shield political allies, they cease to be instruments of justice and become instruments of political control. This is not a hypothetical threat. The documented use of federal law enforcement resources for political purposes, including the targeting of perceived political opponents for investigation and the application of prosecutorial discretion based on political affiliation, is among the most serious institutional corruptions a democracy can experience. It is also among the hardest to reverse once established as a norm.<sup>[69]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish a statutory Prosecutorial Independence Protection Act that prohibits the president and White House staff from directing, influencing, or communicating with the Department of Justice regarding specific investigations or prosecutions of named individuals, with criminal penalties for violations. All contacts between the White House and DOJ regarding specific cases shall be documented, reported to the inspector general, and disclosed to Congress within a defined period.<sup>[70]</sup>

Establish equivalent protections for the IRS, prohibiting any executive branch official from directing IRS audit selection, enforcement priorities, or collection activities with respect to named individuals or organizations for political purposes. Require that any communication between the White House and the IRS regarding named taxpayers be immediately reported to the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration and disclosed to the Senate Finance Committee.<sup>[71]</sup>

## Federal Civil Service & Merit System Protections

The professional, nonpartisan federal civil service is one of the most important and most underappreciated institutions of American democracy. The Pendleton Civil Service Reform Act of 1883 established the principle that federal employment should be based on merit rather than political patronage, replacing the spoils system that had corrupted federal governance for decades. That principle is now under direct assault. The reclassification of tens of thousands of career civil servants as at-will political appointees, through mechanisms like Schedule F, represents the most significant attack on the merit-based civil service since the spoils system it replaced. A politicized civil service is not a more efficient civil service. It is a more corruptible one.<sup>[72]</sup>

### *How:*

Permanently prohibit Schedule F and any equivalent reclassification mechanism that converts career civil servants into at-will political employees, through legislation that codifies merit-based employment protections for all career federal positions and

explicitly requires congressional approval for any future reclassification of civil service positions as political appointments above current levels.<sup>[73]</sup>

Strengthen the Merit Systems Protection Board with enhanced authority, adequate staffing, and clear statutory timelines for adjudicating appeals from federal employees who believe they have been dismissed, demoted, or penalized for political rather than performance-based reasons. Ensure that whistleblower protections for federal employees who report waste, fraud, abuse, or illegal activity are robust, consistently enforced, and extend to retaliation by political appointees.<sup>[74]</sup>

Establish clear statutory limits on the use of reductions in force, agency reorganizations, and deferred resignation programs as tools for mass dismissal of career employees for political purposes. Any reduction in force above a defined threshold shall require a workforce impact assessment reviewed by the Government Accountability Office and a 90-day congressional notification period before implementation.<sup>[75]</sup>

Establish a Federal Workforce Independence Commission tasked with conducting a comprehensive audit of all politically motivated dismissals, forced resignations, and reclassifications of career federal employees that occurred outside established civil service procedures, with authority to recommend reinstatement, back pay, and other remedies for employees whose merit-based employment protections were violated.<sup>[76]</sup>

## Checking the Concentration of Executive Power

The Founders designed a government of separated powers precisely because they understood, from hard experience, that the concentration of power in a single person or faction was the most reliable path to tyranny. The constitutional system of checks and balances is not a technicality or an obstacle to effective governance; it is the mechanism by which the rights of the people are protected against the ambitions of the powerful. That system is now under sustained and explicit assault. The assertion that the president has unreviewable authority over the entire executive branch, that appropriations passed by Congress can be impounded at presidential discretion, that independent agencies can be dismantled without legislative authorization, and that the president is immune from criminal accountability for official acts, collectively represents the most serious challenge to the constitutional order since the Civil War.<sup>[77]</sup>

### *How:*

Pass a comprehensive Presidential Accountability and Separation of Powers Restoration Act that codifies the limits on presidential impoundment of congressionally appropriated funds, establishes clear statutory requirements that the president faithfully execute all laws passed by Congress, and affirms the authority of independent agencies to operate free from presidential direction on their regulatory and enforcement functions. Establish expedited judicial review procedures for separation of powers disputes to prevent administrative delay from becoming a tool of constitutional avoidance.<sup>[78]</sup>

Pass legislation that explicitly and unambiguously overrides the presidential immunity framework established in *Trump v. United States*, establishing that no person, including the president, is immune from criminal prosecution for acts that violate federal law, regardless of whether those acts were taken in an official capacity. The

principle that no one is above the law is not merely a political slogan; it is the foundational premise of a government of laws rather than of men.<sup>[79]</sup>

Strengthen the protection of inspectors general as independent watchdogs by requiring that any removal of a presidentially appointed inspector general be preceded by thirty days written notice to Congress with specific cause stated, and that cause be limited to documented performance failures or ethical violations. The mass dismissal of inspectors general without cause or notice eliminates the primary internal accountability mechanism of the executive branch and must be made permanently illegal.<sup>[80]</sup>

## Emergency Powers Reform

The executive branch's emergency powers, while necessary in genuine crises, have been repeatedly expanded, abused, and used to circumvent congressional authority in ways that undermine the separation of powers and democratic governance. Emergency powers must have clear limits, meaningful oversight, and automatic expiration mechanisms that prevent their indefinite extension.<sup>[81]</sup>

### *How:*

Pass legislation establishing clear statutory limits on presidential emergency powers, specifying the circumstances under which they may be invoked, the actions they authorize, and the duration for which they remain in effect without congressional reauthorization. Require automatic expiration of all declared national emergencies after 30 days unless affirmatively reauthorized by Congress.<sup>[82]</sup>

Strengthen the War Powers Resolution to ensure that the president cannot commit American forces to sustained combat operations without meaningful and timely congressional authorization, closing the loopholes that have allowed successive administrations to conduct military operations without formal declarations of war.<sup>[83]</sup>

## Office of Public Integrity: Draining the Swamp for Real

The promise to drain the swamp has been made by politicians of both parties for decades. It has never been kept, because the people most responsible for draining it are the same people who benefit most from its existence. What is needed is not another promise but a permanent, independent institution with the authority, resources, and genuine insulation from political pressure necessary to investigate and hold accountable any public official, regardless of party, who abuses the public trust. The existing ethics enforcement infrastructure, spread across the Office of Congressional Ethics, agency inspectors general, and the Department of Justice, is fragmented, underpowered, and subject to political interference that too often allows the powerful to escape accountability.<sup>[84]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish an Office of Public Integrity as a permanent, fully independent federal entity outside all three branches of government, funded through a dedicated appropriation protected from ordinary budget politics. The Office shall have jurisdiction to investigate

credible allegations of corruption, bribery, abuse of office, and conflicts of interest involving all federal elected officials, appointees, contractors, and lobbyists, regardless of party affiliation.<sup>[85]</sup>

The Office of Public Integrity shall be led by a board of seven directors appointed through a nonpartisan merit selection process by a panel composed of retired federal judges, former inspectors general, and senior bar association ethics officials. Directors shall serve single fixed ten-year terms with no possibility of reappointment, no concurrent government employment, and no private sector employment in lobbying or government relations for five years following their terms.<sup>[86]</sup>

The Office shall have subpoena power, the authority to refer cases for criminal prosecution to an independent special prosecutor with guaranteed tenure, and the ability to impose civil penalties and recommend removal from office. All findings shall be made publicly available. Whistleblowers who provide information to the Office in good faith shall receive the full protections of federal whistleblower law.<sup>[87]</sup>

No sitting president, member of Congress, or senior executive branch official shall have the authority to dismiss, defund, or interfere with the operations of the Office of Public Integrity. Any attempt to do so shall itself constitute a federal offense subject to the Office's jurisdiction. The Office shall report quarterly to Congress and to the public, with findings that are binding unless overturned by a federal court of competent jurisdiction.

## **Foreign Interference & Dark Money**

The policy framework for countering foreign interference in American elections and closing dark money loopholes is addressed comprehensively in Pillar 5: Truth & Transparency, under the sections Foreign Interference in American Elections & Democratic Processes and Dark Money & Political Finance Transparency. Those sections establish binding platform requirements, mandatory disclosure of foreign contacts by federal candidates, a standing Foreign Election Interference Task Force, comprehensive dark money disclosure legislation, and the closure of the 501(c)(4) loopholes that allow undisclosed funds to flow into American politics. Democratic integrity and informational integrity are inseparable, and the full treatment of these issues is placed in Pillar 5 because the threat to democracy from foreign interference is fundamentally a truth-and-transparency challenge.

## PILLAR 2: ECONOMIC JUSTICE

*The American economy produces extraordinary wealth. The problem is not scarcity; it is distribution. For decades, the gains of economic growth have flowed overwhelmingly to the top, while working and middle class Americans have seen their wages stagnate, their costs rise, their debt accumulate, and their economic security erode. This is not the inevitable result of market forces; it is the predictable outcome of deliberate policy choices: tax structures that reward wealth over work, labor laws that have been systematically weakened, trade policies that prioritized corporate profit over American workers, and a financial system that extracts value from the economy rather than creating it. Economic justice does not mean equality of outcome; it means fairness of opportunity, dignity in work, and a floor of basic security below which no American should fall.*

### Tax Reform & Closing Loopholes

The current federal tax system is a monument to the political power of wealth. While working Americans pay income tax on every dollar they earn, the ultra-wealthy pay preferential rates on investment income, exploit carried interest loopholes, defer taxes indefinitely on unrealized capital gains, and pass vast fortunes to their heirs with minimal taxation.<sup>[88]</sup>

#### *How:*

Close the carried interest loophole, requiring that income earned by investment fund managers be taxed as ordinary income rather than as capital gains, eliminating the preferential tax treatment that allows some of the wealthiest Americans to pay lower effective tax rates than their administrative assistants.<sup>[89]</sup>

Establish a federal wealth tax on net worth above \$50 million, with a higher rate on net worth above \$1 billion, generating revenue for public investment while addressing the extreme concentration of wealth that distorts democracy and undermines economic mobility.<sup>[90]</sup>

Restore the top marginal income tax rate to historically proven levels, establishing a genuinely progressive rate structure that ensures the highest earners contribute proportionally to the public investments that made their wealth possible.<sup>[91]</sup>

Establish a mark-to-market taxation system for unrealized capital gains held by individuals above a defined wealth threshold, preventing the indefinite deferral of taxation on investment gains that allows the ultra-wealthy to accumulate and pass on vast fortunes while paying minimal taxes during their lifetimes.<sup>[92]</sup>

Reform the estate tax to ensure that dynastic wealth accumulation is limited, establishing a progressive rate structure on large inheritances and closing the stepped-up basis loophole that currently allows the wealthy to pass appreciated assets to heirs without ever paying capital gains tax.<sup>[93]</sup>

Conduct a comprehensive audit of the federal tax code to identify and eliminate all loopholes that allow corporations and wealthy individuals to shelter income and avoid taxation, including offshore tax havens, shell company structures, and other mechanisms designed to obscure taxable income.<sup>[94]</sup>

## Retirement Income Security & Tax Relief

Millions of Americans who spent their working lives contributing to Social Security, pension funds, and retirement accounts now find that a portion of that income is subject to federal taxation in retirement. The taxation of Social Security benefits was introduced in 1983 as a budget measure during a period of fiscal crisis, not as a principled policy position. Franklin Roosevelt's original vision for Social Security was that it would be a guaranteed floor of retirement security, free from the anxiety of taxation. For lower and middle income retirees living on fixed incomes, the tax on Social Security benefits represents a genuine financial burden that undercuts the program's core purpose.<sup>[95]</sup>

### *How:*

Exempt Social Security retirement benefits from federal income taxation for individuals with total annual income below \$75,000 and couples with total annual income below \$150,000, restoring the original intent of Social Security as a guaranteed, tax-free floor of retirement security for working and middle class Americans. For individuals above these thresholds, the current taxation structure shall remain in effect.<sup>[96]</sup>

Exempt military retirement pay from federal income taxation for all retired service members, recognizing that those who sacrificed years of their lives in service to the nation deserve the full benefit of the retirement compensation they were promised. Many states already exempt military retirement pay from state income taxes; federal parity is overdue.<sup>[97]</sup>

Expand and strengthen the Saver's Credit, which provides a tax credit to lower and middle income workers who contribute to retirement accounts, increasing the credit rate and raising the income eligibility threshold to encourage retirement savings among the Americans who can least afford not to save.<sup>[98]</sup>

## Labor Rights & Worker Protections

The strength of America's economy has always been its workers. Yet decades of anti-union legislation, stagnant minimum wages, and the rise of the gig economy have eroded worker power and left millions of Americans without adequate wages, benefits, or protections. The systematic dismantling of worker bargaining power is not an accident; it is a policy choice, and it can be reversed.<sup>[99]</sup>

### *How:*

Raise the federal minimum wage to a livable wage, indexed to inflation and the cost of living, so that it automatically adjusts over time without requiring repeated legislative action. No person working full time in America should live in poverty.<sup>[100]</sup>

Strengthen and protect the right of workers to organize and collectively bargain. Repeal legislation that undermines union formation and penalize employers who engage in illegal union-busting activities. Unions are a proven mechanism for raising wages and improving working conditions across entire industries.<sup>[101]</sup>

Pass federal legislation establishing clear standards for gig economy worker classification, ensuring that companies cannot exploit contractor status to avoid their

obligations to workers. Workers in the gig economy deserve fair pay, safe working conditions, and access to benefits.<sup>[102]</sup>

Establish a federal minimum of six months and a federal target of twelve months of fully paid parental leave for the primary caregiver following the birth, adoption, or foster placement of a child, with full job protection and continuation of benefits. Establish a federal minimum of three months and a federal target of six months of fully paid parental leave for secondary caregivers. Employers are free to exceed these federal floors, and are encouraged and incentivized to do so. The developmental science is clear: research consistently identifies twelve months as the minimum duration for a primary caregiver to support secure infant attachment and optimal early brain development, and this document treats twelve months as the policy goal even where the federal mandate begins at six.<sup>[103]</sup>

Establish a federal minimum of four weeks of paid vacation annually for all full-time workers, and ten days of paid sick leave annually for all workers, separate from vacation time. No American should be forced to choose between their health and their economic security.<sup>[104]</sup>

Establish the right to disconnect from work outside of designated working hours, prohibiting employers from requiring employees to respond to work communications outside their scheduled hours without additional compensation.<sup>[105]</sup>

Strengthen enforcement of existing workplace safety, anti-discrimination, and wage theft laws. Increase funding for the Department of Labor and OSHA to ensure robust oversight and meaningful penalties for violations.<sup>[106]</sup>

## Corporate Accountability

American corporations benefit enormously from American infrastructure, education systems, and consumer markets. In return, they have an obligation to invest in the country and the people that make their success possible. Corporations that exploit tax loopholes, offshore jobs, and undermine American workers while reaping record profits represent a betrayal of that social contract.<sup>[107]</sup>

### *How:*

Corporations that offshore jobs or manufacturing shall face meaningful financial penalties, including the elimination of all federal tax benefits and exclusion from federal contracts. Establish robust incentive programs for corporations that manufacture domestically and hire American workers, with federal procurement policies that prioritize American-made goods and services.<sup>[108]</sup>

Strengthen and modernize antitrust laws to address the concentration of corporate power in the modern economy. Break up monopolies and oligopolies that stifle competition, suppress wages, and harm consumers, including big tech, pharmaceutical, agricultural, and media conglomerates.<sup>[109]</sup>

Publicly traded corporations shall be required to disclose the ratio of CEO compensation to median worker compensation. Corporations with excessive ratios shall face graduated tax penalties, incentivizing more equitable distribution of profits.<sup>[110]</sup>

Establish a modern Glass-Steagall framework separating commercial and investment banking to protect ordinary Americans' deposits from speculative risk, and strengthen the Securities and Exchange Commission's enforcement capabilities and independence.<sup>[111]</sup>

## **Bankruptcy Reform & Financial Fresh Start**

The 2005 Bankruptcy Abuse Prevention and Consumer Protection Act made it dramatically harder for ordinary Americans to discharge debt through bankruptcy while leaving most corporate bankruptcy protections intact. The result is a system in which corporations can use Chapter 11 to shed obligations to workers, pensioners, and communities, while individuals facing medical catastrophe or student loan debt have no comparable relief available. Medical debt is the leading cause of personal bankruptcy in the United States. Student loan debt cannot be discharged in bankruptcy under virtually any circumstances. These are not accidents of policy design; they are the predictable results of legislation written by the financial services industry.<sup>[112]</sup>

### *How:*

Restore meaningful access to bankruptcy relief for individuals facing catastrophic medical debt, allowing medical debt above a defined threshold to be fully dischargeable in Chapter 7 bankruptcy regardless of means test outcomes. Establish a dedicated medical bankruptcy track that provides expedited relief for individuals whose insolvency is primarily attributable to healthcare costs.<sup>[113]</sup>

Restore the ability to discharge federal and private student loan debt through bankruptcy for borrowers who have made good-faith repayment efforts for a defined period and who can demonstrate that continued repayment would impose an undue hardship, applying a clear statutory standard rather than the nearly impossible Brunner test that courts currently apply. No other category of consumer debt is as categorically exempt from bankruptcy relief as student loan debt.<sup>[114]</sup>

## **Private Equity, Asset Stripping & Essential Services**

Private equity firms have in recent decades acquired ownership of hospitals, nursing homes, emergency medical services, newspapers, veterinary practices, child care centers, and other services that communities depend on and that cannot simply be replaced when they fail. The private equity business model, which involves acquiring businesses using borrowed money, loading the acquired company with debt to repay that borrowing, extracting fees and dividends, and selling or closing the business within a defined investment horizon, is fundamentally incompatible with the long-term stewardship of essential services. When a private equity firm acquires a hospital, the hospital's patients become the collateral for a financial transaction they never consented to and cannot exit.<sup>[115]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish mandatory disclosure requirements for private equity acquisitions of essential services including hospitals, nursing homes, emergency medical services, and childcare facilities, requiring that acquirers disclose the terms of any debt loaded

onto the acquired entity, the fee arrangements between the acquired entity and the acquiring firm, and the projected financial impact on services and employment. Establish a presumption against regulatory approval for private equity acquisitions of essential services in markets where the acquisition would reduce competition or jeopardize service continuity.<sup>[116]</sup>

Establish a clawback mechanism allowing courts to recover fees, dividends, and debt payments extracted from essential service businesses by private equity owners in the years preceding bankruptcy or service closure, making private equity firms financially responsible for the communities damaged by their asset-stripping practices. Prohibit management fees charged by private equity owners to companies in which they hold a controlling interest in sectors providing essential public services.<sup>[117]</sup>

## Gig Economy Reform & Worker Classification

The deliberate misclassification of workers as independent contractors rather than employees is one of the most widespread forms of wage theft in the American economy. When a company controls when, where, and how a worker performs their work, that worker is functionally an employee regardless of what the contract says. By misclassifying these workers, companies avoid paying payroll taxes, providing workers compensation insurance, offering benefits, and complying with minimum wage and overtime laws, shifting billions of dollars in costs onto workers, taxpayers, and public safety net programs. The gig economy has not created a new category of free and flexible entrepreneurship for most workers; it has created a new mechanism for denying employment protections to people who have no meaningful ability to negotiate the terms of their engagement.<sup>[118]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish a federal worker classification standard based on the ABC test, under which a worker is presumed to be an employee unless the hiring entity can demonstrate that the worker is free from control, performs work outside the company's usual business, and is engaged in an independently established trade or business. This standard, already adopted in several states, closes the classification loophole that has been systematically exploited to deny workers the rights and protections they are legally owed.<sup>[119]</sup>

*A note on scope and balance: any worker classification standard must be carefully designed to protect genuinely independent workers who prefer flexible arrangements and who exercise real control over their work. The goal of this reform is to prevent the exploitation of workers who are functionally employees but denied employee protections, not to eliminate legitimate independent contracting arrangements. Implementation shall include clear safe harbors for workers who affirmatively choose independent status with full knowledge of the tradeoffs, and for industries where genuine independent contracting is the established norm and serves workers' interests.*

## Consumer Financial Protections

The financial system exists to serve the American people, not to exploit them. Yet predatory lending, discriminatory financial practices, and the systematic targeting of vulnerable communities by financial institutions have caused immeasurable harm to millions of American families. The hard-won consumer protections established in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis have been systematically weakened or eliminated, leaving ordinary Americans once again exposed to the same predatory practices that devastated the economy and destroyed generational wealth.<sup>[120]</sup>

### *How:*

Restore and strengthen the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's independence, funding, and enforcement authority, ensuring that it has the tools and mandate necessary to protect American consumers from predatory financial practices.<sup>[121]</sup>

Establish federal interest rate caps on all consumer lending products, including payday loans, credit cards, and installment loans, ensuring that no American is charged usurious interest rates that make debt mathematically impossible to escape.<sup>[122]</sup>

Restore the full scope of the Community Reinvestment Act, ensuring that financial institutions serve the communities in which they operate, including low-income and minority communities, rather than extracting wealth from them. Reinstate and strengthen anti-discrimination protections in lending, housing, and financial services.<sup>[123]</sup>

Regulate and where necessary prohibit financial products that have no legitimate purpose beyond wealth extraction from vulnerable consumers, including certain forms of rent-to-own contracts, title loans, and high-fee check cashing services.<sup>[124]</sup>

## Cryptocurrency & Digital Asset Regulation

The rapid growth of cryptocurrency and digital asset markets has created enormous opportunities for innovation and investment alongside equally enormous opportunities for fraud, money laundering, tax evasion, and consumer harm. The current regulatory vacuum surrounding digital assets has allowed bad actors to exploit ordinary investors while legitimate innovators operate without clear legal frameworks. Comprehensive, thoughtful regulation is essential both to protect consumers and to ensure that America remains a leader in financial innovation.<sup>[125]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish a comprehensive federal regulatory framework for cryptocurrency and digital assets, clarifying the jurisdiction of existing regulatory agencies, including the SEC and CFTC, and filling gaps with new legislation where existing frameworks are inadequate.<sup>[126]</sup>

Require registration, transparency, and consumer protection standards for all cryptocurrency exchanges and digital asset platforms operating in the United States, ensuring that investors have access to accurate information and meaningful recourse in cases of fraud or platform failure.<sup>[127]</sup>

Establish clear tax reporting requirements for cryptocurrency transactions, closing the tax evasion loophole that currently allows significant wealth to escape taxation through digital asset transactions.<sup>[128]</sup>

## Universal Basic Income

The concept of a Universal Basic Income, a regular, unconditional cash payment to all American citizens, has gained significant attention as automation, artificial intelligence, and structural economic changes threaten to displace workers faster than new employment opportunities can absorb them. UBI is not a fringe idea; it has been seriously studied, piloted, and advocated by economists, technologists, and policymakers across the political spectrum. It deserves honest, evidence-based consideration as part of a comprehensive approach to economic security in the 21st century.<sup>[129]</sup>

### *How:*

Commission a comprehensive, independent study of Universal Basic Income models, examining their economic impacts, fiscal costs, effects on work incentives, and potential to reduce poverty and economic insecurity, drawing on the growing body of domestic and international pilot program data.<sup>[130]</sup>

Fund and expand UBI pilot programs in partnership with state and local governments to generate rigorous American-specific data on the impacts of unconditional cash transfers on employment, health, education, and community wellbeing.<sup>[131]</sup>

Remain open to adopting a UBI or targeted guaranteed income program if the evidence supports its effectiveness as a tool for reducing poverty, supporting economic security, and managing the transition to an increasingly automated economy.<sup>[132]</sup>

## Equal Pay & Compensation Equity

Equal pay for equal work is a fundamental principle of economic justice. Yet pay disparities based on race, gender, disability, and other protected characteristics persist across virtually every sector of the American economy, representing both a moral failure and an enormous waste of human potential.<sup>[133]</sup>

### *How:*

Pass and enforce comprehensive equal pay legislation that explicitly prohibits pay discrimination on the basis of race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, national origin, religion, or age, with meaningful penalties for violations and accessible legal remedies for affected workers.<sup>[134]</sup>

Require annual pay equity audits for all federal contractors and publicly traded corporations, with public disclosure of findings, mandatory corrective action plans for organizations with documented disparities, and independent verification of compliance.<sup>[135]</sup>

Prohibit employers from requiring salary history disclosures during the hiring process, a practice that perpetuates historical pay disparities by anchoring new compensation to discriminatory past wages.<sup>[136]</sup>

## **Immigration & Labor Market Integrity**

The relationship between immigration policy and labor market integrity — including enforcement against employers who exploit undocumented workers to undercut wages, the use of guest worker programs as a mechanism for wage suppression, and the economic evidence on immigration's net effects on American workers — is addressed comprehensively in Pillar 10: Immigration, under the sections Immigration Enforcement & Due Process and H-1B Visa Reform & Skilled Worker Immigration. Labor market and immigration policy are inseparable; the full policy framework is consolidated in Pillar 10 to avoid fragmentation across pillars.

## **Worker Ownership, Cooperatives & Community Wealth Building**

The dominant corporate model, in which ownership is concentrated among shareholders whose primary interest is return on investment, is not the only viable model for organizing productive enterprise. Worker-owned cooperatives, employee stock ownership plans, community development financial institutions, and other alternative ownership models have demonstrated that businesses can be productive, competitive, and sustainable while distributing ownership and decision-making authority more broadly. These models tend to produce more stable employment, more equitable compensation, stronger community ties, and greater resilience through economic downturns.<sup>[137]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish a federal Office of Worker Ownership within the Department of Labor tasked with providing technical assistance, legal support, and financial incentives for worker buyouts of businesses whose owners are retiring or exiting, converting viable businesses into worker-owned cooperatives rather than allowing them to be acquired by private equity or closed. Provide federal loan guarantees and tax incentives for the establishment of new worker-owned enterprises.<sup>[138]</sup>

Expand the Community Reinvestment Act to require that financial institutions provide meaningful support for community development financial institutions, credit unions, and cooperative financial institutions that serve low and moderate income communities. Establish a federal Community Wealth Building Fund providing grants, loans, and technical assistance for community land trusts, cooperative housing developments, and other community-owned assets that build permanent affordable housing and community wealth outside of the speculative real estate market.<sup>[139]</sup>

## Buy American & Domestic Manufacturing

The deindustrialization of the American heartland, driven by trade policies that prioritized the interests of multinational corporations over American workers and communities, has devastated manufacturing communities across the country, eliminated middle-class jobs that did not require a college degree, and created dangerous dependencies on foreign supply chains for critical goods.<sup>[140]</sup>

### *How:*

Strengthen and expand Buy American requirements for all federal procurement, establishing domestic content thresholds that incentivize the onshoring of supply chains for critical goods including semiconductors, pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, clean energy technology, and defense materials.<sup>[141]</sup>

Establish a federal domestic manufacturing investment program providing targeted grants, loans, and tax incentives for companies that commit to building or expanding manufacturing facilities in the United States, with enhanced incentives for investments in communities that have experienced significant manufacturing job loss.<sup>[142]</sup>

## PILLAR 3: SOCIAL INVESTMENT & OPPORTUNITY

*A nation's greatness is not measured by the size of its military or the wealth of its billionaires, but by how it treats its most vulnerable citizens. Social investment is not charity; it is the responsible use of public resources to ensure that every American has access to the foundational necessities of a dignified life. Healthcare, housing, nutrition, and opportunity are not luxuries. They are the building blocks of a productive, healthy, and truly free society. A rising tide lifts all boats: but only if everyone has access to the water.*

### Universal Healthcare

The United States remains the only developed nation that does not guarantee healthcare as a right to its citizens. The result is a system where medical bankruptcy is common, preventable deaths are routine, and the quality of care one receives is largely determined by the size of one's bank account. This is a moral failure that demands structural correction.<sup>[143]</sup>

#### *How:*

Establish a universal healthcare system that guarantees comprehensive medical coverage for every American citizen, regardless of employment status, income, or pre-existing conditions.<sup>[144]</sup>

Transition to a single-payer or robust public option model that eliminates the predatory practices of private insurance while preserving patient choice in providers.<sup>[145]</sup>

Implement federal negotiation of prescription drug prices, ending the practice of Americans paying multiples of what citizens of other developed nations pay for the same medications.<sup>[146]</sup>

Expand Medicare and Medicaid as bridging mechanisms during the transition to universal coverage. Cap out-of-pocket medical expenses for all Americans, ensuring that no family is financially destroyed by illness or injury.<sup>[147]</sup>

### Mental Health

Mental health is health. For too long, mental healthcare has been treated as secondary to physical healthcare, resulting in chronic underfunding, inadequate access, and a stigma that prevents millions of Americans from seeking the help they need. The consequences are visible in our communities every day: in homelessness, addiction, violence, and despair.<sup>[148]</sup>

#### *How:*

Mandate full mental health parity in all insurance coverage, public and private, ensuring that mental health services are covered at the same level as physical health services.<sup>[149]</sup>

Dramatically increase federal funding for community mental health centers, crisis intervention services, and outpatient care facilities, particularly in rural and underserved communities.<sup>[150]</sup>

Integrate mental health education and early intervention programs into public schools at all grade levels. Address the mental health workforce shortage through student loan forgiveness and scholarship programs targeting mental health professionals who commit to serving in underserved areas.<sup>[151]</sup>

Develop a national strategy for addressing the intersection of mental health, homelessness, and addiction, replacing criminalization with treatment-focused approaches that address the underlying conditions.<sup>[152]</sup>

## **Making America Truly Healthy**

Good health begins long before a doctor's office visit. It begins with the food we eat, the information we trust, and the regulatory systems designed to protect us. The United States faces a chronic disease epidemic driven in large part by an under-regulated food and supplement industry, a profit-driven healthcare system that treats symptoms rather than causes, and a rising tide of health misinformation promoted by unqualified influencers for personal financial gain.<sup>[153]</sup>

### *How:*

Expand the FDA's authority and funding to include rigorous regulation of dietary supplements, which currently enter the market with minimal oversight. Supplements shall be required to demonstrate safety and accurate labeling before reaching consumers, as is required of pharmaceuticals.<sup>[154]</sup>

Health claims made in advertising, on product packaging, and on social media shall be subject to strict federal standards requiring scientific substantiation. Corporations and individuals who make false or misleading health claims for financial gain shall face meaningful penalties enforced by the FDA and FTC.<sup>[155]</sup>

Individuals who leverage social media platforms to promote health products or dietary regimens for financial gain shall be required to clearly disclose their financial relationships with the products they promote. Those without recognized, accredited credentials shall be prohibited from making specific medical or nutritional claims.<sup>[156]</sup>

Establish an independent panel of nutritional scientists to review and update dietary guidelines free from food industry influence. Incentivize the production and accessibility of whole, nutritious foods in food deserts and low-income communities through targeted subsidies and community investment.<sup>[157]</sup>

## **Affordable Housing & Community Investment**

The American housing crisis is not a shortage of land or building materials; it is a failure of priorities. While developers build housing that most Americans cannot afford, existing affordable housing sits vacant and deteriorating in communities across the country. The solution is not more luxury development: it is strategic investment in the communities and housing stock we already have.<sup>[158]</sup>

### *How:*

Direct federal housing investment toward the rehabilitation and modernization of existing affordable housing stock, including low-income apartments, public housing, and community residences, rather than subsidizing new luxury developments.<sup>[159]</sup>

Establish federal guidelines limiting the conversion of forested land, wetlands, and green spaces into housing developments when adequate existing housing stock can be rehabilitated to meet community needs.<sup>[160]</sup>

Large corporate entities purchasing single-family homes en masse drive up prices and remove affordable inventory from the market. Legislation shall limit the ability of corporate entities to acquire large portfolios of single-family residential properties, preserving homeownership opportunities for individual Americans.<sup>[161]</sup>

Require that a meaningful percentage of all new housing developments receiving federal subsidies or tax incentives include units priced at genuinely affordable rates for low and middle income families. Provide federal support for state and local rent stabilization programs that protect existing residents from displacement.<sup>[162]</sup>

## **SNAP, WIC & Social Safety Net**

Social safety net programs are not handouts; they are investments in the stability and productivity of the American people. A family that can afford nutritious food, stable housing, and basic necessities is a family that can contribute to the economy, raise healthy children, and participate fully in society. Cutting these programs in the name of fiscal responsibility is a false economy that costs far more in the long run than it saves.<sup>[163]</sup>

### *How:*

Fully fund and expand SNAP and WIC programs to meet demonstrated need, ensuring that no American goes hungry. Streamline and modernize the application and administration processes to reduce barriers to access for those who qualify.<sup>[164]</sup>

Eliminate punitive and bureaucratic restrictions that prevent eligible Americans from accessing benefits they are entitled to. Invest in wraparound support services that help recipients build long-term stability, with the goal of reducing dependency through opportunity rather than through deprivation.<sup>[165]</sup>

## **Food Access, Food Deserts & Nutrition Equity**

Access to nutritious food is not equally distributed in America. Food deserts, areas where residents lack access to affordable fresh fruits, vegetables, and other nutritious foods, are concentrated in low-income communities and communities of color. The consequences are documented and severe: higher rates of obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and diet-related illness that compound the existing health disparities faced by these communities. The problem is not individual dietary choices; it is a structural failure of the food system that systematically provides different levels of access to different communities based on income and race.<sup>[166]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish a federal Food Access Equity Initiative that provides grants, low-interest loans, and technical assistance for the development of full-service grocery stores, farmers markets, and community food hubs in identified food deserts, with priority given to community-owned and cooperative food retail models that build permanent community assets rather than extracting profits from underserved communities.<sup>[167]</sup>

Expand SNAP benefits to include prepared foods and hot meals for elderly, disabled, and homeless recipients who lack cooking facilities, and extend SNAP eligibility to college students experiencing food insecurity. Reform SNAP benefit levels to reflect the actual cost of a nutritious diet as determined by the Thrifty Food Plan, which was substantially updated in 2021 but remains inadequate for many households.<sup>[168]</sup>

## **Welfare-to-Work & Trade Training Pipeline**

Public assistance is most effective when it serves as a bridge to self-sufficiency rather than a permanent station. Every American who is able to work deserves the opportunity to develop marketable skills, earn a living wage, and build a stable life for themselves and their families. A robust welfare-to-work pipeline, grounded in real trade and vocational training with genuine employment outcomes, is both a moral and economic imperative.<sup>[169]</sup>

### *How:*

Welfare recipients who are able to work shall be enrolled in accredited trade or vocational training programs of their choosing, including electrician, plumbing, HVAC, medical certifications, culinary arts, information technology, and other in-demand fields. Training programs shall be fully funded through federal investment.<sup>[170]</sup>

Participants shall be given up to 24 months to complete their chosen program, with built-in milestone checkpoints to ensure meaningful progress and active job placement assistance upon completion. Childcare shall be provided at no cost to welfare-to-work participants for the duration of their training.<sup>[171]</sup>

Participants shall continue to receive benefits at a gradually reduced rate as their income increases following employment, preventing the benefits cliff that currently penalizes newly employed Americans for earning more. Recipients enrolled at least half-time in an accredited public university shall be exempt from the welfare-to-work timeline.<sup>[172]</sup>

Businesses that hire welfare-to-work graduates and provide them with living wages and benefits shall receive meaningful federal tax incentives, creating a virtuous cycle of investment and employment.<sup>[173]</sup>

## **Loneliness, Social Isolation & Community Connection**

In 2023 the United States Surgeon General issued an advisory declaring loneliness and social isolation a public health epidemic. Americans report fewer close friendships, less civic participation, and weaker community ties than at any point in recorded survey history. The health consequences are severe: chronic loneliness is associated

with a 26 percent increased risk of premature death, equivalent in health impact to smoking fifteen cigarettes a day. The social consequences are equally serious: isolated individuals are more vulnerable to radicalization, addiction, mental illness, and the manipulation of bad actors who offer community as a recruitment tool. This is a policy problem that demands a policy response.<sup>[174]</sup>

#### *How:*

Establish a federal Office of Community Connection within the Department of Health and Human Services, tasked with coordinating across agencies to address loneliness and social isolation as a public health priority. Invest in community infrastructure, including libraries, community centers, parks, and public gathering spaces, that provide venues for the organic social connection that has been eroded by the privatization of public space and the decline of civic institutions.<sup>[175]</sup>

Integrate social connection and community engagement into the design of federal social programs, recognizing that isolation is both a cause and consequence of poverty, illness, and marginalization. Expand AmeriCorps and national service programs as mechanisms for building cross-demographic social connection and civic participation, recognizing that shared service across lines of race, class, and geography is one of the most evidence-based approaches to bridging social division.<sup>[176]</sup>

## **Childcare as Economic Infrastructure**

The United States treats childcare as a private consumer expense to be managed by individual families. Every peer nation treats it as public infrastructure essential to economic participation and child development. The consequences of the American approach are severe and well-documented: American families pay more for childcare as a percentage of income than families in almost any other wealthy nation, often spending more than they pay for housing or college tuition; women disproportionately leave the workforce or reduce their hours because they cannot access or afford childcare; children from lower-income families receive lower-quality early care that compounds existing developmental disadvantage; and the childcare workforce, which is predominantly female and disproportionately women of color, is among the lowest-paid in the entire economy despite doing work of documented importance to child development.<sup>[177]</sup>

#### *How:*

Establish a universal childcare program that caps childcare costs at a defined percentage of family income, directly subsidizes childcare providers to ensure quality, and significantly increases compensation for childcare workers to bring it in line with the educational qualifications and developmental importance of the work. Model this program on the evidence from states and nations that have implemented universal childcare, which consistently shows positive returns in women's workforce participation, child outcomes, and economic productivity that more than offset the public investment.<sup>[178]</sup>

## Child Welfare & Family Support

Children are our most important national resource and investment. Yet millions of American children grow up in poverty, without adequate nutrition, childcare, or family support. Addressing child welfare is not only a moral imperative; it is an economic one, as early investment in children produces generational returns for society.<sup>[179]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish universal, affordable childcare and pre-K programs accessible to all American families, regardless of income, recognizing that quality early childhood education is among the highest-return investments a society can make.<sup>[180]</sup>

Expand and strengthen the Child Tax Credit as a meaningful anti-poverty tool, ensuring that no child in America goes without basic necessities. The monthly direct payment model has proven effective at reducing child poverty and should be made permanent.<sup>[181]</sup>

Invest in foster care reform, prioritizing family preservation, trauma-informed care, and improved outcomes for children in the system. Strengthen child protective services through increased funding, improved training, and better inter-agency coordination.<sup>[182]</sup>

Expand school nutrition programs to ensure that every child has access to healthy meals during the school day, free from the stigma of income-based qualification. Provide universal free school breakfast and lunch for all students.<sup>[183]</sup>

## Addiction Treatment & Recovery

Addiction is a public health crisis, not a moral failing. The United States has lost hundreds of thousands of lives to the opioid epidemic alone, and addiction to alcohol, methamphetamine, fentanyl, and other substances continues to devastate communities across the country, cutting across every demographic, geographic, and economic boundary. For too long, addiction has been treated as a criminal justice issue rather than a healthcare issue, resulting in mass incarceration, broken families, and preventable deaths while doing virtually nothing to reduce addiction rates.<sup>[184]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish addiction treatment as a fully covered healthcare service under the universal healthcare framework, ensuring that every American who needs treatment can access it regardless of income, insurance status, or geography. Dramatically expand access to evidence-based addiction treatment including medication-assisted treatment, behavioral therapy, and integrated mental health care.<sup>[185]</sup>

Invest in harm reduction programs, including needle exchange programs, naloxone distribution, and supervised consumption sites, that save lives and connect people with treatment while reducing the public health costs of active addiction.<sup>[186]</sup>

Hold pharmaceutical companies, distributors, and prescribers accountable for their role in creating and perpetuating the opioid epidemic, ensuring that settlement funds are directed toward treatment, recovery, and community investment. Invest in long-term recovery support services including sober housing, peer support programs, and employment assistance.<sup>[187]</sup>

## Elder Care & Aging with Dignity

America is aging. The baby boom generation is entering its final decades, and the demands on elder care systems are growing faster than our current systems can accommodate. At the same time, elder abuse, nursing home neglect, and the financial exploitation of seniors represent a growing and largely unaddressed crisis. A nation that does not care for its elders with dignity and respect has failed a fundamental test of its values.<sup>[188]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish a comprehensive federal long-term care benefit that covers home and community-based care, assisted living, and nursing home care for all Americans who need it, reducing the devastating financial burden that long-term care currently places on middle-class families.<sup>[189]</sup>

Establish and enforce rigorous federal standards for nursing home staffing, quality of care, and resident rights, with regular unannounced inspections, transparent public reporting of quality metrics, and meaningful penalties for facilities that fail to meet standards.<sup>[190]</sup>

Invest significantly in home and community-based care programs that allow seniors and people with disabilities to age in place with dignity, reducing both the human and financial costs of unnecessary institutionalization. Recognize and support family caregivers through tax credits, respite care programs, and Social Security credit for caregiving years.<sup>[191]</sup>

Establish a comprehensive federal elder abuse prevention and response framework, including mandatory reporting requirements, enhanced penalties for financial exploitation of seniors, and investment in adult protective services that are currently chronically underfunded.<sup>[192]</sup>

## Maternal Health & Reproductive Rights

The United States has the highest maternal mortality rate of any developed nation, and the crisis is most acute among Black women, who die from pregnancy-related causes at rates two to three times higher than white women. This is not inevitable; it is the predictable outcome of systemic inequities in healthcare access, quality, and the treatment of Black patients by a medical system riddled with implicit bias.<sup>[193]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish a national maternal health initiative with dedicated funding, research, and accountability mechanisms specifically targeting the reduction of maternal mortality and severe maternal morbidity, with explicit goals for eliminating racial disparities. Expand Medicaid coverage for postpartum care to a full year.<sup>[194]</sup>

Mandate implicit bias training for all healthcare providers involved in obstetric and gynecological care, addressing the documented pattern of Black women's pain and concerns being systematically dismissed by medical providers. Invest in the maternal health workforce including midwives, doulas, and community health workers.<sup>[195]</sup>

Protect the constitutional right to reproductive healthcare, including access to contraception and abortion, as fundamental components of women's health, autonomy, and equality.<sup>[196]</sup>

## **Maternal & Infant Mortality: A National Crisis**

The United States has the highest maternal mortality rate of any wealthy nation, more than twice the rate of Canada, three times the rate of the United Kingdom, and ten times the rate of Norway. The maternal mortality rate for Black women is approximately three times the rate for white women, a disparity that persists across income and education levels and that reflects the documented impact of structural racism on medical care. More than 80 percent of maternal deaths in the United States are preventable. The infant mortality rate follows a similar pattern, with the United States ranking behind most peer nations and with stark racial disparities that reflect the same systemic failures. These are not statistics. They are preventable deaths of American mothers and babies that represent a comprehensive failure of the healthcare system and the social supports that determine pregnancy outcomes.<sup>[197]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish a National Maternal Mortality Reduction Initiative with binding targets for reducing maternal mortality rates and closing racial disparities, with dedicated funding for perinatal care, postpartum support, implicit bias training for obstetric providers, and expansion of midwifery and doula services in communities with the worst maternal health outcomes. Extend Medicaid postpartum coverage to twelve months, recognizing that the majority of maternal deaths occur in the weeks and months after birth when coverage has historically ended.<sup>[198]</sup>

Address the specific drivers of racial disparities in maternal mortality through targeted investment in community health workers, birth centers, and culturally competent prenatal care in communities of color; mandatory implicit bias training for all obstetric providers receiving federal funding; and robust enforcement of civil rights laws in obstetric care settings. Establish a federal standard of care for obstetric emergencies based on best practices from states and countries with the best outcomes.<sup>[199]</sup>

## **Arts, Culture & the Humanities**

A nation's greatness is expressed not just in its economic output or military power but in its culture: in the art it creates, the stories it tells, the history it preserves, and the creativity it nurtures. Federal investment in arts, culture, and the humanities is investment in the national soul. It supports the creative industries that contribute billions to the economy, preserves the cultural heritage that connects Americans to their history and to each other, and nurtures the creativity and critical thinking that drive innovation across every sector of society.<sup>[200]</sup>

### *How:*

Restore and significantly increase federal funding for the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Corporation for Public

Broadcasting, reversing the chronic underfunding and repeated attempts at elimination that have weakened these vital institutions.<sup>[201]</sup>

Invest in arts education in public schools, ensuring that every American child has access to music, visual arts, theater, and creative writing as part of a well-rounded education. Support community arts organizations, local theaters, museums, and libraries as anchors of community identity and civic life.<sup>[202]</sup>

Fund public media, including public broadcasting, community radio, and digital public media, as an essential public service that provides trusted, non-commercial information and cultural programming to all Americans regardless of their ability to pay for private media subscriptions.<sup>[203]</sup>

## Rural America

Rural communities face a distinct set of challenges that are often overlooked in national policy conversations dominated by urban and suburban perspectives. From healthcare deserts and broadband gaps to agricultural consolidation and economic decline, rural America has been systematically left behind by economic and policy trends that have concentrated opportunity in metropolitan areas. A truly equitable national policy must explicitly address the needs and opportunities of rural communities.<sup>[204]</sup>

### *How:*

Address the rural healthcare crisis through targeted investment in rural hospitals, clinics, and healthcare workforce programs. Expand telehealth infrastructure and reimbursement to extend the reach of healthcare services in areas where in-person care is not accessible.<sup>[205]</sup>

Complete the job of extending high-speed broadband to every rural community in America, treating broadband internet access as essential infrastructure. Without reliable internet access, rural communities cannot participate fully in the modern economy, education system, or healthcare system.<sup>[206]</sup>

Invest in rural economic diversification, supporting the development of new industries including clean energy, advanced manufacturing, and technology in rural communities that have historically been dependent on single industries vulnerable to automation and market shifts.<sup>[207]</sup>

Recognize that the opioid and addiction crisis has hit rural communities with particular severity, and direct addiction treatment and recovery resources explicitly toward rural areas where treatment options are most limited and the crisis most acute.<sup>[208]</sup>

## PILLAR 4: EDUCATION

*Education is the foundation upon which every other pillar of a just and functioning society rests. It is the great equalizer: the mechanism by which a child born into poverty can access the same opportunities as one born into privilege, and by which a diverse and complex nation can find common ground. Yet for decades, American public education has been systematically underfunded, politicized, and undermined. A genuine commitment to education is a commitment to the future of America itself: not just its economy, but its democracy, its values, and its soul.*

### Early Childhood Brain Development: The First Three Years

The scientific evidence on early childhood brain development is among the most robust and most consequential in all of social science. Approximately 90 percent of brain development occurs before age five, and the first three years of life are uniquely critical: the neural connections formed during this period are the biological foundation for all subsequent learning, language, emotional regulation, and cognitive development. Chronic stress, trauma, inadequate nutrition, and lack of responsive caregiving during this period cause documented, measurable neurological harm that no amount of later intervention can fully repair. Conversely, investment in nurturing, stable, and stimulating early environments produces returns that no other educational investment can match.<sup>[209]</sup>

#### *How:*

Establish a federal Early Brain Development Initiative that extends quality early childhood programming to all children from birth through age three, not just from age three or four as current programs primarily target. This includes home visiting programs for new parents, high-quality infant and toddler childcare, and pediatric developmental screening that identifies and addresses developmental delays at the earliest possible point.<sup>[210]</sup>

Establish a federal minimum of six months and a federal target of twelve months of fully paid parental leave for the primary caregiver, and a federal minimum of three months and a federal target of six months for the secondary caregiver. Employers are free to exceed these floors. The developmental science is unambiguous: twelve months is the minimum duration that research consistently identifies as necessary to support secure infant attachment and optimal early brain development, and this document treats twelve months as the policy goal even where the federal mandate begins at six months. Ensure that paid leave is equally available to all caregiving parents regardless of gender, employment status, or income, recognizing that the children who most need the benefits of secure early attachment are those in the most economically precarious families.<sup>[103]</sup>

### Teacher Compensation & Support

Teachers are among the most important professionals in our society. They shape the minds, values, and futures of every generation of Americans. Yet they are chronically

underpaid, under-resourced, and overworked. The message this sends to teachers, to students, and to society is that education is not truly valued. That message must be decisively reversed.<sup>[211]</sup>

#### *How:*

Establish a federal minimum salary standard for public school teachers that is competitive with other professions requiring equivalent levels of education and expertise, adjusted annually for inflation and cost of living.<sup>[212]</sup>

Provide federal supplemental funding to ensure that teachers in low-income districts receive compensation equivalent to their counterparts in wealthier districts, eliminating the inequity created by property tax-based school funding.<sup>[213]</sup>

Invest in teacher retention programs including loan forgiveness, housing assistance in high cost-of-living areas, and meaningful professional development opportunities.<sup>[214]</sup>

Reduce administrative burdens and standardized testing requirements that consume teaching time without improving educational outcomes, allowing teachers to focus on actual instruction.<sup>[215]</sup>

Ensure that every classroom is adequately resourced with modern materials, technology, and support staff, so that teachers are not spending their own money to supply their students.<sup>[216]</sup>

## **Teacher Diversity & Cultural Responsiveness**

Students of color consistently demonstrate improved outcomes, including higher graduation rates, higher test scores, and lower disciplinary referral rates, when taught by teachers who share their racial or ethnic background. Yet the teaching workforce in the United States is approximately 80 percent white while the student population is now majority non-white. This mismatch is not merely a matter of representation; it reflects a documented and consequential inequity in the quality and nature of the educational experience available to students of color.<sup>[217]</sup>

#### *How:*

Establish a dedicated federal pipeline program for recruiting, training, and supporting teachers of color, including scholarships, mentoring programs, and loan forgiveness specifically targeted at individuals from underrepresented groups who commit to teaching in schools serving predominantly minority student populations. Address the documented disparities in how discipline is applied to student teachers of color during certification programs and in how teachers of color are evaluated, assigned, and retained in their first years of teaching.<sup>[218]</sup>

## **School Funding Reform**

The current model of funding public schools primarily through local property taxes is a structural guarantee of educational inequality. Wealthy communities have well-funded schools with modern facilities, experienced teachers, and robust extracurricular programs. Poor communities have underfunded schools with crumbling infrastructure,

high teacher turnover, and bare-bones curricula. This is not an accident; it is a predictable outcome of a funding model that was never designed with equity in mind.<sup>[219]</sup>

#### *How:*

Transition public school funding away from local property taxes toward an equitable federal and state funding model that directs resources based on student need rather than community wealth.<sup>[220]</sup>

Establish a federal baseline funding standard ensuring that every public school in America meets minimum requirements for facilities, staffing, technology, and educational materials.<sup>[221]</sup>

Direct supplemental federal funding toward Title I schools serving high concentrations of low-income students, English language learners, and students with disabilities.<sup>[222]</sup>

Conduct a national audit of public school infrastructure and establish a federal investment program to modernize and repair school buildings, particularly in low-income and rural communities.<sup>[223]</sup>

## **Free Public College & Student Loan Relief**

Higher education has become a financial barrier rather than an equalizing opportunity. The promise that hard work and a college degree would lead to a stable, prosperous life has been broken for millions of Americans who did everything right and still find themselves buried under mountains of debt. Restoring that promise requires both forward-looking investment and backward-looking relief.<sup>[224]</sup>

#### *How:*

Establish tuition-free access to all public universities, community colleges, and accredited vocational and technical institutions for all American citizens.<sup>[225]</sup>

Extend federal student loan forgiveness to borrowers who attended public institutions, with a means-tested framework ensuring that relief is directed toward those who need it most.<sup>[226]</sup>

Cap interest rates on all remaining federal student loans and eliminate the practice of capitalizing unpaid interest, which causes loan balances to grow even when borrowers are making payments.<sup>[227]</sup>

Increase Pell Grant funding and expand eligibility to ensure that low and middle income students have meaningful financial support beyond tuition coverage for living expenses, books, and other costs of attendance.<sup>[228]</sup>

## **Student Debt, Predatory Colleges & Higher Education Access**

Americans collectively owe more than \$1.7 trillion in student loan debt, a figure that has grown to this scale through a combination of rapidly rising tuition costs, declining state investment in public higher education, inadequate grant funding, and the predatory practices of for-profit colleges that recruited vulnerable students with false promises of employment outcomes while saddling them with debt for credentials of

questionable value. The student debt crisis is not primarily a problem of irresponsible individual choices; it is the predictable outcome of policy decisions that shifted the cost of higher education from public investment to individual debt, while allowing a largely unaccountable for-profit sector to feed on federal loan programs at students' expense.<sup>[229]</sup>

#### *How:*

Reform the federal student loan system to establish income-driven repayment as the default option for all federal borrowers, with automatic enrollment, a cap on total repayment at a defined percentage of income over a defined period, and automatic cancellation of remaining balances after a reasonable repayment period. Establish a debt relief program for borrowers defrauded by for-profit colleges, fully implementing and expanding the borrower defense to repayment rule.<sup>[230]</sup>

Establish robust federal oversight of for-profit colleges, including binding gainful employment standards that require institutions to demonstrate that graduates earn enough to repay their debt, and automatic loss of federal funding eligibility for institutions that consistently fail this standard. Prohibit for-profit colleges from spending more on marketing, recruitment, and executive compensation than on instruction, and establish strong protections for students against high-pressure recruiting tactics.<sup>[231]</sup>

## **Critical Human Rights Theory**

America is a nation of extraordinary diversity. That diversity is our greatest strength, but it has also been the source of profound historical injustice, systemic inequality, and ongoing discrimination. A nation that does not honestly reckon with its history is a nation condemned to repeat it. Critical Human Rights Theory, an expansion and broadening of Critical Race Theory, provides a framework for understanding not just the history and ongoing reality of racial injustice, but the full spectrum of human rights, dignity, and equality as they apply to all Americans.<sup>[232]</sup>

#### *How:*

Mandate the integration of Critical Human Rights Theory into public school curricula nationwide, implemented in age-appropriate frameworks from elementary school through high school.<sup>[233]</sup>

At the elementary level, CHRT shall focus on foundational concepts of kindness, fairness, inclusion, and respect for human differences. At the middle school level, CHRT shall expand to include age-appropriate exploration of American history including its injustices, the diversity of human cultures and identities, and the concept of human rights. At the high school level, CHRT shall encompass a rigorous examination of systemic inequality, historical and contemporary human rights issues, and the tools for recognizing and combating discrimination in all its forms.<sup>[234]</sup>

Curriculum materials shall be developed by qualified educators, historians, and human rights scholars, free from political interference, and grounded in peer-reviewed historical and social science research.<sup>[235]</sup>

Teacher training programs shall include CHRT competency as a requirement, ensuring that educators are equipped to teach these subjects with accuracy, sensitivity, and confidence.<sup>[236]</sup>

## Civics & Critical Thinking

A functioning democracy requires informed, engaged, and critically thinking citizens. Yet civics education has been steadily eroded in American schools, and critical thinking is rarely taught as a dedicated subject. Reversing this trend is not optional; it is existential for our democracy.<sup>[237]</sup>

### *How:*

Restore and strengthen civics education at all grade levels, ensuring that every American graduate understands the structure and function of their government, the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, and the history of American democracy including its failures and ongoing struggles.<sup>[238]</sup>

Mandate a dedicated Critical Thinking course as a graduation requirement for all high school juniors or seniors, covering logic and reasoning fundamentals, media literacy and source evaluation, identifying misinformation and propaganda techniques, understanding cognitive biases, basic scientific literacy and the evaluation of peer-reviewed research, and civic reasoning and the appraisal of political claims.<sup>[239]</sup>

Partner with universities and community organizations to develop standardized, high quality Critical Thinking curriculum materials available to all public schools at no cost.<sup>[240]</sup>

Integrate media literacy and source evaluation into existing subjects across grade levels, so that critical thinking becomes a cross-curricular habit rather than a standalone subject.<sup>[241]</sup>

## Vocational Life Skills Education

Every American, regardless of whether they pursue college or a trade career, will need to maintain a home, manage a vehicle, handle basic repairs, and navigate the practical demands of adult life. Yet these fundamental life skills are almost entirely absent from American education. The result is a generation of adults who are dependent on expensive professionals for tasks they could reasonably handle themselves. Vocational life skills education is not a consolation prize for non-college-bound students; it is universal preparation for adulthood.<sup>[242]</sup>

### *How:*

Mandate a required Vocational Life Skills curriculum for all middle and high school students, covering basic automotive maintenance including oil changes, tire rotation, brake inspection, and understanding warning systems; basic home repair and maintenance including light carpentry, basic plumbing, electrical safety, and HVAC filter maintenance; basic financial literacy including budgeting, understanding credit, taxes, insurance, and basic investment concepts; and basic first aid and emergency preparedness.<sup>[243]</sup>

Ensure that vocational life skills courses are taught by qualified instructors and are treated with the same academic seriousness as other required subjects. Frame

vocational life skills education explicitly as universal preparation for adulthood, not as a track for non-college-bound students, eliminating any associated stigma.<sup>[244]</sup>

Partner with trade unions and vocational organizations to develop curriculum and provide instructors, creating a pipeline of interest in skilled trades among students who discover an aptitude and passion for them.<sup>[245]</sup>

## **Nutrition & Physical Fitness Education**

America faces a chronic health crisis that begins in childhood. Obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and mental health disorders are reaching epidemic levels, driven in large part by poor nutrition, sedentary lifestyles, and a fundamental lack of education about how to care for one's body. Schools are uniquely positioned to address this crisis by equipping every student with the knowledge and habits necessary for a lifetime of health.<sup>[246]</sup>

### *How:*

Mandate comprehensive nutrition education at all grade levels, grounded in peer-reviewed science and free from food industry influence, teaching students how to make informed dietary choices, understand nutritional labels, and develop healthy eating habits.<sup>[247]</sup>

Reform school lunch and breakfast programs to meet rigorous nutritional standards developed by independent nutritional scientists, ensuring that the food served in schools models the healthy eating habits being taught in classrooms.<sup>[248]</sup>

Mandate quality physical fitness education at all grade levels, with age-appropriate programs focused on lifelong physical wellness, body literacy, and the mental health benefits of regular physical activity.<sup>[249]</sup>

Address food insecurity as a barrier to healthy eating by ensuring universal access to school meals and investing in nutrition support programs for low-income families.<sup>[250]</sup>

## **Special Education & Inclusive Learning**

Every child deserves an education that meets their needs, nurtures their potential, and prepares them for a fulfilling life. Children with disabilities, learning differences, and developmental challenges are not less capable of learning; they learn differently, and a truly excellent education system creates the conditions for every child to succeed on their own terms. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act established important protections and rights for students with disabilities, but chronic underfunding, inadequate teacher training, and inconsistent implementation have meant that the promise of a free and appropriate public education remains unrealized for millions of American children.<sup>[251]</sup>

### *How:*

Fully fund the federal government's commitment under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which has never been met since the law's passage, closing the chronic funding gap that forces states and districts to absorb costs that Congress promised to share.<sup>[252]</sup>

Invest in special education teacher recruitment, training, and retention, addressing the severe shortage of qualified special education professionals that leaves many students with disabilities without adequate support.<sup>[253]</sup>

Promote inclusive education models that integrate students with disabilities into general education settings with appropriate support, recognizing that inclusion benefits all students.<sup>[254]</sup>

Address the disproportionate representation of students of color in special education and disciplinary systems, ensuring that implicit bias does not result in the misidentification of minority students.<sup>[255]</sup>

Strengthen transition planning for students with disabilities approaching adulthood, ensuring that they have meaningful pathways to employment, higher education, and independent living after leaving the K-12 system.<sup>[256]</sup>

## Adult Literacy & Continuing Education

Education does not end at graduation. Millions of American adults lack the literacy, numeracy, and digital skills necessary to participate fully in the modern economy, and millions more need opportunities to update their skills as technology and labor markets evolve. Investing in adult education is investing in the productivity, economic security, and civic participation of the entire adult population.<sup>[257]</sup>

### *How:*

Dramatically increase federal investment in adult literacy programs, ensuring that every American adult who needs basic literacy and numeracy instruction has access to it free of charge in their community.<sup>[258]</sup>

Expand adult education and workforce training programs that help working adults develop new skills, earn credentials, and advance in their careers, with particular focus on workers in industries facing automation and structural economic change.<sup>[259]</sup>

Invest in digital literacy programs for adults who lack the technology skills necessary to participate in the modern economy, access government services, or engage with online health and educational resources.<sup>[260]</sup>

Support English language learning programs for adult immigrants, recognizing that language acquisition is the single most important factor in immigrant economic integration and civic participation.<sup>[261]</sup>

Create pathways for adults to earn high school equivalency credentials, college degrees, and vocational certifications through flexible, affordable programs that accommodate the schedules and responsibilities of working adults and caregivers.<sup>[262]</sup>

## School Safety

Every child has the right to attend school without fear. Yet gun violence in American schools has become so normalized that active shooter drills are a routine part of childhood. This is not acceptable, and it is not inevitable. Addressing school safety requires a comprehensive approach that goes beyond hardening physical facilities to

address the root causes of school violence, including untreated mental illness, social isolation, bullying, and the easy accessibility of weapons of mass harm. The specifics of gun reform are addressed in Pillar 11; this section focuses on the broader school safety ecosystem.<sup>[263]</sup>

#### *How:*

Invest in school-based mental health services, ensuring that every school has access to qualified counselors, psychologists, and social workers in ratios that allow for meaningful relationships and early identification of students in crisis.<sup>[264]</sup>

Establish evidence-based threat assessment programs in all schools, providing trained teams of educators, counselors, and administrators with the tools to identify and intervene with students who may be at risk of harming themselves or others before tragedy occurs.<sup>[265]</sup>

Invest in positive school climate initiatives, including anti-bullying programs, restorative justice practices, and social-emotional learning curricula, that address the social and emotional conditions that contribute to school violence.<sup>[266]</sup>

Reform zero-tolerance disciplinary policies that have been demonstrated to increase dropout rates, increase involvement in the criminal justice system, and disproportionately impact students of color, replacing them with restorative justice approaches.<sup>[267]</sup>

## **Transgender Rights & the Assault on Gender Identity**

Transgender Americans, and transgender youth in particular, are the targets of an escalating legislative assault that has produced more than 600 anti-transgender bills in state legislatures since 2021. These bills restrict access to gender-affirming healthcare that major medical organizations including the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the American Psychological Association recognize as safe, effective, and often life-saving. They bar transgender students from participating in school sports consistent with their gender identity. They restrict the use of bathrooms and facilities. They prohibit teachers and school counselors from acknowledging a student's gender identity. The stated justification for these measures, the protection of children, is directly contradicted by the medical evidence, which consistently shows that access to gender-affirming care significantly reduces depression, anxiety, and suicidality in transgender youth.<sup>[268]</sup>

#### *How:*

Establish federal protections for transgender Americans' access to gender-affirming healthcare by codifying the prohibition on discrimination in healthcare settings on the basis of gender identity under Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act, and prohibiting state laws that restrict minors' access to gender-affirming care when that care is recommended by qualified medical professionals and consented to by the patient and their parents or guardians.<sup>[269]</sup>

Prohibit the use of federal funds for programs, agencies, or state governments that discriminate against transgender individuals in employment, education, housing, or public accommodations. Establish clear federal guidance that Title IX protections extend to transgender students, protecting them from discrimination in educational

settings including restroom access, participation in extracurricular activities, and recognition of their gender identity by school staff.<sup>[270]</sup>

## Book Bans, Curriculum Censorship & Academic Freedom

More books were banned from public school libraries in the 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 school years than in any comparable period in American history. The targets of these bans follow a clear pattern: books by and about people of color, books addressing LGBTQ+ identities and experiences, books that present accurate accounts of American history including slavery, segregation, and indigenous genocide, and books that deal honestly with the complexity of human experience. The same political movement that promotes these bans also promotes legislation restricting what teachers can say about race, history, gender, and identity in the classroom. This is not parental rights activism. It is an organized effort to control what American children are allowed to know, see, and think, and it represents a fundamental threat to the educated citizenry on which democratic self-governance depends.<sup>[271]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish federal protections for school library collections against politically motivated removal of books, requiring that any challenge to library materials follow a defined professional review process conducted by qualified librarians and educators, and prohibiting the removal of books based solely on the identity of the author or the identity groups portrayed. Establish clear First Amendment protections for educators teaching age-appropriate, educationally justified content, and prohibit the punishment of teachers for teaching accurate history or acknowledging the existence of LGBTQ+ students in their classrooms.<sup>[272]</sup>

Establish a federal standard requiring that all public school history and social studies curricula present accurate, evidence-based accounts of American history including the history of slavery, Reconstruction, segregation, indigenous displacement, and the ongoing struggle for civil rights. Students who do not understand the full history of their country cannot be effective citizens of it, and the whitewashing of American history is not patriotism; it is the denial of the experiences of millions of Americans whose stories are part of the American story.<sup>[273]</sup>

*A note on federalism and academic freedom: the proposal for federal curriculum standards engages a genuine tension between the goal of accurate historical education and the principle of local control over public schools, which has deep roots in American democratic tradition. The same federal authority that could require accurate history teaching could, under a different administration, be used to mandate content that this document's readers would find objectionable. This concern is taken seriously. The mechanism proposed here is therefore structured as a condition on federal education funding rather than a direct mandate, applying only to schools that receive federal Title I and other formula grant funding, and establishing minimum accuracy standards based on peer-reviewed historical scholarship rather than politically determined content. Schools that do not receive federal funding would not be subject to these standards.*

## Department of Education Independence & Civil Rights Enforcement

The United States Department of Education serves two critical functions that are distinct but equally essential: it distributes federal education funding to states and school districts, and it enforces federal civil rights law in educational settings. The ongoing effort to eliminate the Department of Education entirely represents a fundamental misunderstanding of both functions. Eliminating the department would not reduce the federal role in education; it would eliminate the accountability mechanisms that ensure federal funds are spent equitably and that students' civil rights are protected. The question is not whether the federal government has a role in education. It does, and it always has. The question is whether that role is exercised with accountability and integrity.<sup>[274]</sup>

### *How:*

Codify the Department of Education in statute as a permanent cabinet-level agency that cannot be eliminated through executive action alone, requiring affirmative congressional legislation to restructure or dissolve. Establish clear independence protections for the department's Office for Civil Rights, ensuring that its enforcement of Title IX, Title VI, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is based on law and evidence rather than political direction.<sup>[275]</sup>

Restore the Office for Civil Rights to full staffing and enforcement capacity, addressing the backlog of civil rights complaints and ensuring that every student who files a complaint receives a timely, thorough, and impartial investigation. Prohibit the rollback of civil rights guidance documents without notice, public comment, and a demonstrated evidentiary basis.<sup>[276]</sup>

## STEM & Innovation Education

America's future competitiveness, security, and prosperity depend on a robust domestic pipeline of scientists, engineers, technologists, and mathematicians. Investment in STEM education is investment in national capability: in the discoveries, technologies, and solutions that will define the next century.<sup>[277]</sup>

### *How:*

Increase federal investment in STEM education programs from K-12 through graduate level, with particular focus on expanding access in underserved and rural communities where STEM resources are most scarce.<sup>[278]</sup>

Establish partnerships between public schools and universities, research institutions, and technology companies to provide students with real-world exposure to STEM careers and hands-on learning opportunities.<sup>[279]</sup>

Invest in recruiting and retaining qualified STEM teachers through competitive salaries, loan forgiveness, and professional development programs.<sup>[280]</sup>

Ensure that STEM education includes ethics, civic responsibility, and the human dimensions of technology and science, producing not just technically capable graduates but thoughtful and responsible innovators.<sup>[281]</sup>

## PILLAR 5: TRUTH & TRANSPARENCY

*Democracy cannot function without truth. An informed citizenry is the bedrock of self-governance; but that foundation is under unprecedented assault. Corporate media consolidation, algorithmic manipulation, deliberate foreign disinformation campaigns, and the unchecked spread of health and political misinformation have created an environment in which many Americans can no longer agree on basic facts. This is not an accident. It is the predictable result of systems, economic, technological, and political, that profit from confusion, outrage, and division. Restoring a shared foundation of truth is not about controlling speech or mandating belief. It is about creating the conditions under which honest information can reach citizens, bad actors are held accountable, and the institutions of democracy can function as intended.*

### Truth in Media & Advertising

A free press is essential to democracy. But a press consolidated under a handful of corporate owners, driven by engagement metrics rather than journalistic integrity, and financially dependent on the very interests it should be scrutinizing, is not truly free. Similarly, advertising that makes false or misleading claims, whether about products, health, or politics, corrupts the information environment that citizens depend on to make informed decisions.<sup>[282]</sup>

#### *How:*

Strengthen and enforce existing truth in advertising laws, extending their application explicitly to political advertising, health claims, and social media content.<sup>[283]</sup>

Restore and strengthen the Fairness Doctrine or an equivalent modern framework requiring that broadcast media present balanced coverage of matters of public concern.<sup>[284]</sup>

Break up media monopolies through aggressive antitrust enforcement, preventing the concentration of media ownership that reduces the diversity of voices and perspectives available to the public.<sup>[285]</sup>

Establish federal standards for journalistic transparency, requiring that news organizations disclose their ownership, funding sources, and any financial relationships that could influence their coverage.<sup>[286]</sup>

Prohibit political advertising that contains demonstrably false factual claims, enforceable through the FEC with meaningful penalties for violations.<sup>[287]</sup>

### Truth in Media Labeling & Broadcast Accountability

The First Amendment protects the right to broadcast opinions, commentary, and entertainment. It does not protect the right to brand entertainment as news or to mislead audiences about the nature of the content they are consuming. In recent years, major broadcast organizations have successfully argued in court that their programming constitutes protected opinion or entertainment, while simultaneously marketing that same programming to audiences as authoritative news coverage. This is not a free speech issue. It is a consumer protection and democratic integrity issue.

The systematic presentation of deliberately false factual claims as news reporting, while legally claiming entertainment status to avoid liability, is a form of fraud against the public that undermines the informed citizenry on which democracy depends.<sup>[288]</sup>

#### *How:*

Establish a mandatory on-air disclosure requirement for any broadcast organization that has successfully argued in any court proceeding that its news-branded programming constitutes opinion, entertainment, or non-factual commentary rather than news reporting. Such organizations shall be required to display a standardized, prominently visible disclaimer during all news-branded programming stating that the content has been legally classified as opinion or entertainment, not factual news reporting. This is a disclosure requirement, not a content restriction, and is fully consistent with the First Amendment framework governing commercial speech and consumer protection.<sup>[289]</sup>

*A note on First Amendment limits: compelled speech, including required disclaimers, is subject to First Amendment scrutiny even when the compelled statement is factually accurate. The Supreme Court has upheld commercial disclosure requirements under a more permissive standard than content-based speech restrictions, but has also struck down disclosure mandates that were not sufficiently tailored to a substantial government interest. This proposal is designed to survive that scrutiny by limiting the disclosure requirement to organizations that have themselves made the legal argument, in court, that their programming is not factual news, making the required disclosure a restatement of the organization's own legal position rather than a government-imposed characterization. The constitutional case is defensible but not guaranteed, and the legislative drafting of any implementing statute should be reviewed by First Amendment counsel.*

Strengthen the FCC's authority to condition broadcast license renewals on compliance with truthfulness standards for programming explicitly branded as news, restoring and modernizing the public interest obligations that have historically been the legal basis for broadcast regulation. Establish a dedicated FCC enforcement division for news broadcasting integrity, with the authority to investigate complaints, issue fines, and recommend license non-renewal for systematic, documented patterns of presenting known falsehoods as factual news reporting.<sup>[290]</sup>

Establish a national media literacy initiative through the Department of Education and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting that teaches Americans of all ages how to distinguish news from opinion, identify the markers of credible journalism, evaluate sources, and recognize the techniques of propaganda and media manipulation. A population that can critically evaluate the media it consumes is the most durable long-term defense against disinformation.<sup>[291]</sup>

## **Net Neutrality**

The internet is the public square of the modern age. It is where citizens access news, communicate with their government, conduct commerce, pursue education, and participate in public life. Allowing internet service providers to control, throttle, or monetize access to online content based on their own financial interests is fundamentally incompatible with a free and open democratic society.<sup>[292]</sup>

### *How:*

Restore and permanently codify net neutrality through federal legislation, establishing the principle that all internet traffic shall be treated equally regardless of source, destination, or content.<sup>[293]</sup>

Classify broadband internet as a public utility, subjecting it to the same regulatory framework as other essential public services.<sup>[294]</sup>

Invest in expanding broadband access to underserved rural and low-income communities, ensuring that the benefits of a free and open internet are available to all Americans regardless of geography or income.<sup>[295]</sup>

## **Section 230 Reform & Platform Accountability**

Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which grants social media platforms broad immunity from liability for content posted by their users, was designed for a pre-social media internet in which platforms were passive conduits for user expression. The modern algorithmic platform is something fundamentally different: it does not merely host content but actively amplifies, curates, and recommends it based on algorithms optimized to maximize engagement. When a platform algorithmically amplifies content it knows to be false, harmful, or radicalizing because that content drives higher engagement and therefore higher advertising revenue, it is no longer a neutral host. It is an active participant in the harm. Section 230 immunity was never intended to protect that behavior, and it should not.<sup>[296]</sup>

### *How:*

Reform Section 230 to remove immunity protection for content that is algorithmically amplified or recommended by a platform, while maintaining full immunity for purely passive hosting of user-generated content. This distinction preserves the original purpose of Section 230, protecting platforms from liability for what users say, while holding platforms accountable for their own editorial decisions about what to amplify, recommend, and surface to users.<sup>[297]</sup>

Require that social media platforms with more than a defined number of users publish algorithmic transparency reports detailing the criteria used to amplify and recommend content, the known effects of their algorithms on user behavior and wellbeing, and the steps taken to mitigate documented harms. Establish an independent federal Digital Platform Commission with the authority to audit algorithmic systems, investigate complaints of algorithmic harm, and establish binding standards for platform design that prioritizes user wellbeing over engagement maximization.<sup>[298]</sup>

## **Cybersecurity & Digital Infrastructure**

America's digital infrastructure, from power grids and water systems to financial networks and government databases, represents both our greatest technological asset and one of our most significant vulnerabilities. Cyberattacks by foreign adversaries, criminal organizations, and state-sponsored actors pose a genuine threat to national security, economic stability, and democratic institutions.<sup>[299]</sup>

### *How:*

Significantly increase federal investment in cybersecurity infrastructure across all critical sectors, including energy, water, financial systems, healthcare, and government networks. Establish and fully fund a National Cybersecurity Agency with the authority and resources to coordinate cybersecurity standards, incident response, and threat intelligence across public and private sectors.<sup>[300]</sup>

Mandate minimum cybersecurity standards for all operators of critical infrastructure, with regular audits, mandatory breach reporting, and meaningful penalties for non-compliance.<sup>[301]</sup>

Require social media platforms operating in the United States to implement robust measures against inauthentic accounts, bot networks, and coordinated inauthentic behavior. Platforms shall be required to disclose the origin of political advertising and to remove demonstrably false content that poses a threat to public safety or electoral integrity.<sup>[302]</sup>

Designate foreign disinformation campaigns, including state-sponsored troll farms, bot networks, and coordinated influence operations, as national security threats. Empower intelligence and law enforcement agencies to identify, expose, and counter these operations.<sup>[303]</sup>

Mandate paper ballot backups for all federal elections, regular security audits of election infrastructure, and federal funding for states to modernize and secure their election systems against both cyber and physical threats.<sup>[304]</sup>

## **Data Privacy & Big Tech Accountability**

Americans generate enormous amounts of personal data every day, data that is collected, aggregated, sold, and exploited by technology companies with minimal regulation or consumer consent. The concentration of data and market power in a handful of technology giants poses risks not just to individual privacy but to competition, democracy, and national security.<sup>[305]</sup>

### *How:*

Pass comprehensive federal data privacy legislation establishing clear rights for Americans over their personal data, including the right to know what data is collected, the right to correct inaccurate data, the right to delete personal data, and the right to opt out of data collection and sale.<sup>[306]</sup>

Strengthen antitrust enforcement against big technology companies that use their market dominance to stifle competition, acquire potential rivals, and entrench their positions.<sup>[307]</sup>

Regulate algorithmic systems that have significant impacts on public life, including content recommendation algorithms, hiring algorithms, and credit scoring systems, requiring transparency, regular auditing, and accountability for discriminatory or harmful outcomes.<sup>[308]</sup>

## Artificial Intelligence, Deepfakes & Synthetic Disinformation

Artificial intelligence has made it possible to generate photorealistic video, audio, and images of real people saying and doing things they never said or did, at scale, at negligible cost, and with rapidly decreasing detectability. The political and social consequences of this technology, deployed in the context of elections, military conflicts, criminal justice, and everyday life, are potentially catastrophic. A democracy in which citizens cannot reliably distinguish real from fabricated audiovisual evidence is a democracy that cannot function. The regulatory framework for addressing AI-generated disinformation is currently almost entirely absent at the federal level, and the gap between the technology's capabilities and the law's reach is widening rapidly.<sup>[309]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish a federal Synthetic Media Disclosure Act requiring that all AI-generated or AI-manipulated audio, video, or images of real people be clearly and prominently labeled as synthetic, with criminal penalties for the creation or distribution of unlabeled synthetic media designed to deceive viewers about its authenticity. Apply heightened penalties for synthetic media deployed in the context of elections, criminal proceedings, or national security matters.<sup>[310]</sup>

Establish a federal AI governance framework that requires pre-deployment safety assessments for high-risk AI applications, establishes liability standards for AI systems that cause documented harm, and creates a standing federal AI Safety Board with the authority to investigate AI-related incidents and recommend binding safety standards. Ensure that AI systems used in consequential decisions, including hiring, lending, criminal justice, and healthcare, are subject to audit requirements that detect and remedy discriminatory outcomes.<sup>[311]</sup>

## Artificial Intelligence Oversight

Artificial intelligence represents one of the most transformative and potentially disruptive technologies in human history. Its applications range from medicine and scientific research to surveillance, warfare, and the mass generation of disinformation. The United States must lead in establishing ethical, transparent, and accountable frameworks for AI development and deployment before the technology outpaces our ability to govern it.<sup>[312]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish a federal AI oversight framework that requires transparency in the development and deployment of high-impact AI systems, including disclosure of training data, known limitations, and potential risks.<sup>[313]</sup>

Prohibit the use of AI systems in high-stakes decisions, including criminal justice, hiring, lending, and healthcare, without human oversight, explainability, and meaningful avenues for appeal.<sup>[314]</sup>

Regulate the use of AI-generated content in political advertising and news media, requiring clear disclosure when content is AI-generated and prohibiting the use of deepfakes and synthetic media for political manipulation.<sup>[315]</sup>

## Intelligence Community Accountability & Oversight

The United States intelligence community comprises seventeen agencies that collectively spend an estimated \$90 billion annually and operate under a cloak of secrecy that makes meaningful democratic accountability exceptionally difficult. The mass surveillance programs revealed by Edward Snowden in 2013 demonstrated that intelligence agencies had developed capabilities far beyond what Congress or the public had authorized or was aware of. The FISA court, which is supposed to provide judicial oversight of intelligence surveillance, operates entirely in secret, hears only the government's side of each case, and has approved the vast majority of government requests. This is not meaningful oversight. It is a formal mechanism that provides the appearance of judicial review without the substance.<sup>[316]</sup>

### *How:*

Reform the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court to require the appointment of a standing public advocate in all cases involving novel legal questions or significant new surveillance capabilities, ensuring that the court hears adversarial argument rather than only the government's position. Establish binding statutory limits on bulk collection of communications data involving American citizens, requiring individualized suspicion for the collection of any communications content involving U.S. persons.<sup>[317]</sup>

Strengthen the congressional intelligence oversight committees by providing them with independent legal staff and technical experts not subject to executive branch clearance requirements, ensuring that congressional oversight is not dependent on executive branch cooperation to be effective. Establish a mandatory declassification timeline for all intelligence programs, collection authorities, and significant legal interpretations, with public notification when new surveillance authorities are first authorized.<sup>[318]</sup>

## Government Transparency & Accountability

Citizens have a right to know how their government operates, how their tax dollars are spent, and what decisions are being made in their name. Transparency is not just a democratic value; it is a practical check on corruption, abuse of power, and the kind of institutional rot that erodes public trust over time.<sup>[319]</sup>

### *How:*

Strengthen and modernize the Freedom of Information Act, reducing response times, closing loopholes that allow agencies to withhold information, and establishing meaningful penalties for non-compliance.<sup>[320]</sup>

Mandate full financial disclosure for all elected officials and senior government appointees, including blind trust requirements for investments that could represent conflicts of interest.<sup>[321]</sup>

Protect and strengthen whistleblower protections for government employees and contractors who report waste, fraud, abuse, or illegal activity in good faith.<sup>[322]</sup>

## Independence of Federal Scientific & Regulatory Agencies

Federal scientific and regulatory agencies, including the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Food and Drug Administration, the National Institutes of Health, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Federal Communications Commission, and the Federal Election Commission, were established to serve the public interest through the application of scientific expertise and independent professional judgment. Their effectiveness depends entirely on their insulation from political pressure. When agency decisions are driven by the political priorities of the administration in power rather than by evidence, professional standards, and the public interest, the consequences are measured in human lives, environmental damage, and the erosion of public trust in institutions that Americans depend on.<sup>[323]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish a statutory framework for each major federal scientific and regulatory agency that designates it as operationally independent from White House direction on scientific findings, regulatory determinations, and public health communications. The political leadership of these agencies shall set broad priorities and budgets subject to congressional oversight, but shall not direct, alter, suppress, or delay scientific findings or regulatory decisions.<sup>[324]</sup>

Reform the appointment process for the directors of the CDC, FDA, NIH, and EPA to require that nominees demonstrate verifiable scientific or public health credentials recognized by their professional peers. Nominees shall be evaluated by a confirmation panel that includes representatives of the relevant scientific and professional communities alongside Senate confirmation, ensuring that professional qualifications are assessed independently of political considerations.<sup>[325]</sup>

Establish and enforce a government-wide scientific integrity policy with binding standards for the communication of scientific findings, explicit prohibitions on political interference in peer review processes, and meaningful whistleblower protections for scientists and researchers who report violations. Agency scientific integrity officers shall report to Congress independently of agency leadership.<sup>[326]</sup>

Fund the CDC, FDA, NIH, and EPA at levels commensurate with their public health and environmental protection mandates, reversing the chronic underfunding that has forced these agencies to rely on industry funding and has compromised their independence. No federal regulatory agency shall accept industry funding for any aspect of its regulatory review function.<sup>[327]</sup>

## National Science Board & Scientific Advisory Body Independence

The National Science Board, which governs the National Science Foundation and advises Congress and the president on science policy, is composed of distinguished scientists, engineers, and educators appointed to fixed six-year terms specifically to provide independent, nonpartisan scientific guidance. When members of the National Science Board are dismissed for political reasons, the foundational premise of evidence-based policymaking is undermined. The same principle applies to the scientific advisory boards of every federal agency: they exist to provide honest scientific counsel, and their value is destroyed the moment they become subject to political removal.<sup>[328]</sup>

### *How:*

Pass legislation explicitly prohibiting the removal of National Science Board members, scientific advisory board members, and members of presidentially appointed scientific advisory committees except for cause, defined as documented failure to perform duties, ethical violations, or criminal conduct. Partisan political disagreement with a member's scientific findings shall not constitute cause for removal.<sup>[329]</sup>

Establish statutory independence protections for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, whose climate, weather, and ocean data are essential to national security, disaster preparedness, agricultural planning, and environmental policy. NOAA's scientific findings shall not be subject to political review, alteration, or suppression by any executive branch official. The NOAA Administrator shall serve a fixed six-year term removable only for cause.<sup>[330]</sup>

Strengthen the independence of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, ensuring that its safety determinations and licensing decisions are based solely on technical and scientific criteria and are fully insulated from political or industry pressure. Establish similar independence protections for the National Transportation Safety Board, ensuring that accident investigations and safety recommendations are never subject to interference by the industries being investigated.<sup>[331]</sup>

Reconstitute all dismissed or politically removed scientific advisory board members through an emergency reappointment process, and conduct a comprehensive audit of all federal scientific advisory committees to identify and remedy any politically motivated dismissals or restructurings that compromised the independence of scientific counsel to the federal government.<sup>[332]</sup>

## **Independence of Cultural, Humanities & Arts Institutions**

American cultural and humanities institutions, including the Smithsonian Institution, the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the Library of Congress, the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, represent the nation's collective investment in its cultural identity, historical memory, and creative life. These institutions derive their value precisely from their independence: their ability to preserve, present, and fund work that reflects the full complexity of the American experience without political interference or ideological direction from the administration in power. That independence is not guaranteed by statute and has been repeatedly tested by administrations of both parties.<sup>[333]</sup>

### *How:*

Restructure the governance of the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts to remove the sitting president from its board of trustees, replacing the presidential seat with a position filled through a merit-based selection process by a panel of arts professionals, cultural leaders, and former Kennedy Center trustees. The nation's premier performing arts center must be governed by people whose primary commitment is to artistic excellence and public access, not political affiliation.<sup>[334]</sup>

Codify the independence of the Smithsonian Institution through legislation that establishes clear protections against political interference in its curatorial decisions,

exhibition content, research programs, and personnel decisions. The Smithsonian's Board of Regents shall include the Vice President and members of Congress as currently structured, but operational independence from political direction shall be explicitly protected by statute, with the Secretary of the Smithsonian serving a fixed term and removable only for cause.<sup>[335]</sup>

Establish fixed, staggered terms for the Librarian of Congress, the Archivist of the United States, and the directors of the National Endowment for the Arts and National Endowment for the Humanities, with removal only for cause and with confirmation processes that emphasize professional qualifications over political alignment. These positions steward the nation's cultural and historical record and must be protected from use as tools of political patronage.<sup>[336]</sup>

Restore and permanently fund the Corporation for Public Broadcasting at levels sufficient to sustain genuinely independent public media, insulating it from the annual appropriations battles that make its funding a perennial political football. Establish a dedicated, multi-year funding mechanism for CPB that requires supermajority congressional approval to reduce, ensuring that public media cannot be defunded as a political act.<sup>[337]</sup>

## Foreign Interference in American Elections & Democratic Processes

The intelligence community has consistently assessed, across multiple administrations and with high confidence, that foreign state actors including Russia, China, Iran, and others have conducted systematic campaigns to interfere with American elections, amplify social division, undermine confidence in democratic institutions, and influence American policy through disinformation and covert operations. These campaigns have grown more sophisticated and more pervasive with each election cycle, exploiting social media platforms, hacking operations, dark money channels, and relationships with American political actors to advance foreign interests at the expense of American democracy. Foreign interference in American elections is an attack on American sovereignty that demands a response equal to its seriousness.<sup>[338]</sup>

### *How:*

Require mandatory disclosure of all contacts between federal candidates, campaigns, and senior government officials with representatives of foreign governments or foreign-controlled entities, with criminal penalties for failure to disclose. Establish a standing Foreign Election Interference Task Force within the FBI with dedicated resources and a mandate to investigate, disrupt, and publicly attribute foreign interference operations in real time rather than after the fact.<sup>[339]</sup>

Establish binding platform requirements for social media companies to identify and remove foreign-controlled accounts and coordinated inauthentic behavior within defined timeframes, with civil penalties for failure to comply. Require that all political advertising on digital platforms disclose the true source of funding and prohibit the purchase of political advertising by any entity with foreign ownership or control. Declassify and publicly release assessments of foreign interference operations at the earliest point consistent with source and method protection.<sup>[340]</sup>

## Dark Money & Political Finance Transparency

The corrupting influence of dark money, undisclosed and unlimited funds flowing into American politics through opaque nonprofit and corporate structures, represents one of the most serious threats to democratic integrity in the modern era. When billionaires, corporations, and foreign interests can pour unlimited money into political campaigns and issue advocacy without disclosure, the fundamental principle of government by the people is replaced by government by the highest bidder.<sup>[341]</sup>

### *How:*

Pass comprehensive dark money disclosure legislation requiring that all political spending above a defined threshold, regardless of the organizational vehicle through which it is channeled, be publicly disclosed with full identification of the original funding source.<sup>[342]</sup>

Close the 501(c)(4) and other nonprofit loopholes that currently allow unlimited undisclosed money to flow into political advertising and issue advocacy, establishing that any organization spending above a defined threshold on political activity must register as a political organization and comply with full disclosure requirements.<sup>[343]</sup>

Require social media platforms to maintain publicly accessible, searchable databases of all political advertising, including the identity of the purchaser, the amount spent, the targeting parameters used, and the original funding source.<sup>[344]</sup>

## Ending Regulatory Capture

Regulatory capture, the phenomenon by which the industries subject to federal regulation gain effective control over the agencies that regulate them, is one of the most pervasive and least discussed problems in American governance. It occurs through multiple channels: the revolving door between industry and regulatory agencies, industry funding of agency activities, the appointment of industry insiders to leadership positions, and the quiet attrition of regulatory capacity that leaves agencies dependent on industry expertise to perform their basic functions. The result is a regulatory system that systematically prioritizes the interests of the regulated over the interests of the public it is supposed to protect.<sup>[345]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish a five-year cooling off period for senior officials of any federal regulatory agency before they may be employed by or consult for any entity they regulated in their official capacity, extending and strengthening existing revolving door restrictions. Apply equivalent restrictions in the reverse direction, requiring that individuals with significant recent industry roles in regulated sectors recuse themselves from matters directly affecting their former employers for a period of four years following their appointment.<sup>[346]</sup>

Prohibit federal regulatory agencies from accepting industry funding for any aspect of their regulatory review, standard-setting, or enforcement functions. Establish independent, publicly funded research capacity within each major regulatory agency sufficient to allow the agency to evaluate industry submissions without dependence on industry-funded science.<sup>[347]</sup>

## Corporate Whistleblower Protections

The public interest is served when individuals with knowledge of corporate wrongdoing, including fraud, environmental violations, consumer harm, financial manipulation, or other illegal activity, are able to report that wrongdoing without fear of personal or professional destruction. Yet corporate whistleblowers face enormous pressure, retaliation, and legal risk that deters the reporting of misconduct that harms millions of Americans.<sup>[348]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish comprehensive federal whistleblower protection legislation covering all industries and sectors, providing clear, enforceable protections against retaliation for employees who report illegal activity, fraud, consumer harm, environmental violations, or other misconduct.<sup>[349]</sup>

Establish a federal whistleblower reward program providing meaningful financial incentives for reporting corporate misconduct that leads to successful enforcement action, recognizing that the personal and professional risks of whistleblowing require commensurate incentives.<sup>[350]</sup>

## The Local News Crisis & Public Interest Journalism

More than 2,500 newspapers have closed in the United States since 2005. More than 200 counties have no local news outlet of any kind. The communities that have lost local news coverage show measurable increases in municipal borrowing costs, lower voter turnout, and higher rates of government corruption, because the accountability function that local journalism serves has no adequate substitute. The collapse of local news is not primarily a business failure; it is the consequence of the extraction of local advertising revenue by national digital platforms that created no local journalism in return. What is being lost is not just an industry. It is the informational infrastructure of local democracy.<sup>[351]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish a Local Journalism Sustainability Act providing tax credits for local news organizations that employ journalists covering state and local government, subscribe to investigative reporting services and wire services, and maintain editorial independence from ownership with demonstrated conflicts of interest. Extend the nonprofit status available to public radio and television to nonprofit local news organizations, enabling philanthropic investment in local journalism infrastructure.<sup>[352]</sup>

Establish a Public Interest Journalism Endowment funded through a fractional levy on the digital advertising revenue of the major technology platforms that have most directly displaced local news advertising, recognizing that the platforms that extracted value from local news ecosystems bear some responsibility for restoring what was destroyed. Distribute endowment funds through a competitive grant process administered by an independent board, with grants available to nonprofit and for-profit news organizations that serve local and underserved communities.<sup>[353]</sup>

## Press Freedom & Journalist Protections

A free press is the fourth estate of democracy: the institution that holds power accountable, exposes corruption, and ensures that citizens have the information they need to govern themselves. Yet journalists face growing threats, from government surveillance and prosecution of sources, to physical intimidation, strategic lawsuits designed to silence reporting, and the economic collapse of local news that has created vast information deserts across the country.<sup>[354]</sup>

### *How:*

Pass a federal shield law providing journalists with strong protections against being compelled to reveal their sources, recognizing that the ability to protect sources is fundamental to the ability to report on government misconduct and other matters of public interest.<sup>[355]</sup>

Strengthen legal protections against Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation that powerful individuals and corporations use to silence journalists, establishing a federal anti-SLAPP statute with mandatory fee-shifting that makes frivolous suits financially untenable for plaintiffs.<sup>[356]</sup>

Invest in local journalism through tax incentives for local news organizations, grants for nonprofit investigative journalism, and support for public interest reporting in communities that have lost local news coverage.<sup>[357]</sup>

## PILLAR 6: NATIONAL SECURITY & PEACE

*America is not a nation of war. We are a nation of ideals: of liberty, justice, and the belief that human dignity is worth defending. Our strength is not measured solely by the size of our military budget or the reach of our weapons systems, but by the integrity of our alliances, the wisdom of our diplomacy, and the wellbeing of the men and women who volunteer to defend us. A truly secure America is one that leads with moral authority, invests in the human beings who serve, reforms the systems that waste and defraud, and pursues peace not as a weakness but as the highest expression of national strength. We must be prepared to defend ourselves and our allies with overwhelming capability: but that capability must always be in service of peace, not profit.*

### Department of Defense Reform

The Department of Defense represents the largest single discretionary expenditure in the federal budget. Yet decades of unchecked contractor relationships, cost overruns, and systemic waste have meant that enormous sums of public money have been spent with insufficient accountability or return. Reform is not about weakening our defense; it is about ensuring that every dollar spent on defense actually makes America safer.<sup>[358]</sup>

#### *How:*

Conduct a comprehensive audit of all DoD contracts and contractors, with particular scrutiny of those with consistent cost overruns, performance failures, or inability to provide adequate justification for expenditures. Contracts that cannot demonstrate legitimate value shall be terminated.<sup>[359]</sup>

Establish rigorous cost controls and competitive bidding requirements for all DoD procurement, with mandatory penalties for contractors who exceed agreed budgets without sufficient justification. Reform supply chain contracting to ensure that the DoD pays fair market prices for equipment, supplies, and support services.<sup>[360]</sup>

Establish an independent DoD Inspector General with enhanced authority, resources, and independence to investigate fraud, waste, and abuse within the defense establishment, with findings reported directly to Congress and made publicly available.<sup>[361]</sup>

### Service Member Wellbeing

The men and women who serve in the United States military make extraordinary sacrifices in defense of their nation. They deserve not just our gratitude but our genuine, sustained investment in their physical health, mental wellbeing, professional development, and quality of life. A military that takes care of its people is a military that retains its best people and projects strength through excellence.<sup>[362]</sup>

#### *How:*

Establish a standardized initial boot camp structure across all branches of the military, with a rigorous and evidence-based focus on nutrition education, physical fitness

training, and foundational warrior skills. The physical and discipline standards of the Marine Corps boot camp model shall serve as the benchmark, with branch-specific follow-on training succeeding a common foundation.<sup>[363]</sup>

Reform military nutrition programs to ensure that service members have access to high quality, nutritious food throughout their service. Integrate nutrition education into boot camp and ongoing training, equipping service members with the knowledge to maintain their health throughout their careers and lives.<sup>[364]</sup>

Dramatically expand access to mental health services for active duty service members and their families, eliminating the stigma around seeking help and ensuring that mental health care is as available and normalized as physical health care. Address the veteran suicide crisis as a national emergency, with dedicated funding, research, and intervention programs.<sup>[365]</sup>

Invest in military housing, family support programs, childcare, and education benefits to ensure that service members and their families are not financially penalized for their service. Ensure that diversity, equity, and inclusion programs are grounded in merit-based advancement that addresses structural barriers and implicit biases.<sup>[366]</sup>

Reform the military justice system to ensure that service members have access to independent legal representation, that sexual assault and harassment cases are prosecuted effectively and without command interference, and that accountability applies equally regardless of rank.<sup>[367]</sup>

## Veterans Affairs Reform

Those who have served deserve a government that honors its commitments to them, not just in rhetoric but in action. The Veterans Affairs system has been chronically underfunded, mismanaged, and allowed to fail the very people it exists to serve. This is a national disgrace that demands urgent and sustained reform.<sup>[368]</sup>

### *How:*

Conduct a comprehensive audit of the VA system to identify systemic failures, backlogs, and areas of chronic underperformance, with a commitment to transparent public reporting of findings and progress. Dramatically reduce the VA claims backlog through increased staffing, modernized processing systems, and streamlined claims procedures.<sup>[369]</sup>

Expand VA mental health services with a specific focus on PTSD, traumatic brain injury, military sexual trauma, and veteran suicide prevention. Mental health care shall be available to all veterans regardless of discharge status.<sup>[370]</sup>

Reform the discharge review process to ensure that veterans with less than honorable discharges, many of whom were discharged for issues related to undiagnosed mental health conditions or trauma, have a clear, accessible pathway to discharge upgrade and access to earned benefits.<sup>[371]</sup>

Address veteran homelessness as a national priority, with targeted investment in housing, wraparound support services, and the coordination of federal, state, and local resources necessary to end veteran homelessness.<sup>[372]</sup>

Establish robust transition assistance programs that prepare separating service members for civilian life, including career counseling, education benefits navigation, mental health screening, and financial planning support.<sup>[373]</sup>

## Defense Through Deterrence

America's military posture must be oriented toward the defense of the homeland and our allies through strength, readiness, and the credible deterrence of aggression: not toward military adventurism, regime change, or the projection of power in service of corporate or geopolitical interests that do not align with American values or the wellbeing of the American people.<sup>[374]</sup>

### *How:*

Maintain robust investment in the capabilities necessary to deter and if necessary defeat any adversary that threatens the United States or its allies, including conventional forces, nuclear deterrence, cyber capabilities, and space-based assets.<sup>[375]</sup>

Invest in research and development of next-generation defense technologies, including advanced cyber defense, directed energy weapons, autonomous systems, and space-based capabilities, ensuring that America maintains a decisive technological edge over potential adversaries.<sup>[376]</sup>

Reform the Authorization for Use of Military Force framework to ensure that military action is always subject to meaningful congressional oversight and that the executive branch cannot unilaterally commit American forces to sustained combat operations without congressional approval. Establish clear, principled criteria for the use of military force that prioritize diplomatic solutions and require exhaustion of non-military options.<sup>[377]</sup>

## Nuclear Arsenal & Nonproliferation

The existence of nuclear weapons represents the single greatest existential threat to human civilization. The United States, as one of the world's largest nuclear powers, has a special responsibility to lead the world toward meaningful arms control, nonproliferation, and ultimately disarmament. This is not weakness; it is the highest expression of strategic seriousness.<sup>[378]</sup>

### *How:*

Renew and expand the New START treaty framework or successor agreements with Russia, maintaining verifiable limits on deployed nuclear warheads and delivery systems while pursuing negotiations toward deeper mutual reductions.<sup>[379]</sup>

Pursue a no-first-use nuclear policy and lead international efforts to prevent nuclear proliferation, using diplomatic engagement, security guarantees, and targeted sanctions to discourage states from pursuing nuclear weapons programs.<sup>[380]</sup>

## Pandemic Preparedness & Bioterrorism Defense

COVID-19 demonstrated with devastating clarity that America was unprepared for a major pandemic despite years of expert warnings. More than one million Americans died, in significant part because the preparedness infrastructure that had been built over decades was allowed to atrophy through chronic underfunding and political disregard. Pandemic preparedness is not a public health issue alone; it is a national security imperative.<sup>[381]</sup>

### *How:*

Rebuild and permanently fund the White House pandemic preparedness office and the National Security Council global health security directorate, ensuring that pandemic preparedness is treated as a permanent national security priority. Invest in domestic vaccine manufacturing capacity, strategic reserves of personal protective equipment, and the public health infrastructure necessary to detect, respond to, and contain emerging infectious disease threats.<sup>[382]</sup>

Strengthen international health surveillance and early warning systems, investing in the WHO and bilateral partnerships to ensure that the next pandemic is detected and contained before it becomes a global catastrophe.<sup>[383]</sup>

## Foreign Policy & Global Diplomacy

America's strength in the world has never rested solely on military power. It has rested on the credibility of our values, the reliability of our commitments, and our ability to lead coalitions of nations toward shared goals. Decades of military adventurism, unilateral action, and the erosion of diplomatic institutions have weakened America's standing in the world and left a vacuum that adversaries have been eager to fill. Restoring American leadership means restoring American credibility: as a nation that keeps its commitments, respects international law, and leads by example.<sup>[384]</sup>

### *How:*

Reaffirm America's commitment to its treaty alliances, including NATO and bilateral defense agreements in the Indo-Pacific, making clear that American security guarantees are reliable and not subject to the whims of individual administrations. Allies must be able to trust American commitments across administrations and political cycles.<sup>[385]</sup>

Reverse the hollowing out of the State Department and the Foreign Service through sustained investment in diplomatic personnel, training, and infrastructure. Diplomacy is cheaper than war and more effective than sanctions in most circumstances; it deserves commensurate investment.<sup>[386]</sup>

Reengage fully with international institutions including the United Nations, the World Health Organization, the World Trade Organization, and the Paris Climate Agreement, recognizing that global challenges require global cooperation and that American withdrawal from these institutions cedes influence to adversaries.<sup>[387]</sup>

Establish human rights as a genuine cornerstone of American foreign policy, not just a rhetorical talking point. Apply consistent standards to all nations, allies and

adversaries alike, and use diplomatic, economic, and where appropriate legal tools to advance human rights globally.<sup>[388]</sup>

Maintain firm, principled stances toward adversarial nations including Russia, China, North Korea, and Iran, using a full spectrum of diplomatic, economic, and military tools to deter aggression, protect American interests, and defend democratic values, while always leaving open credible pathways to diplomatic resolution.<sup>[389]</sup>

Reaffirm America's commitment to foreign aid as a tool of both humanitarian responsibility and strategic national interest. A world with less poverty, disease, and instability is a world that is safer for America. Foreign aid is not charity; it is investment in global stability.<sup>[390]</sup>

## State Department Independence & Diplomatic Merit

The United States Department of State is the primary institution through which American diplomacy is conducted and American values are projected abroad. Its effectiveness depends on a professional, experienced Foreign Service workforce whose expertise is built over careers spanning decades. The systematic hollowing out of the State Department through hiring freezes, forced departures, and the sidelining of career diplomats in favor of political loyalists has degraded American diplomatic capacity at a moment when that capacity is more needed than at any point since the Cold War. Rebuilding it is a national security imperative.<sup>[391]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish a statutory requirement that a minimum of seventy percent of all U.S. ambassador appointments be drawn from the career Foreign Service, with any political appointee ambassador required to demonstrate relevant diplomatic, regional, or substantive expertise evaluated by an independent panel before Senate confirmation. The practice of awarding ambassadorships to major campaign donors with no relevant expertise has damaged American credibility and interests in countries where experienced diplomatic representation is most critical.<sup>[392]</sup>

*A note on constitutional limits: the appointment of ambassadors is an express constitutional power of the president, subject to Senate confirmation. Congress may condition foreign affairs funding and establish qualifications for Senate confirmation, but a statutory requirement mandating the percentage of career versus political appointments would face separation of powers challenge. This proposal is therefore best implemented through a combination of Senate confirmation standards, which are clearly within congressional authority, and State Department internal policy, rather than through a mandatory statutory quota. The Senate Foreign Relations Committee should establish and enforce a practice of requiring demonstrated expertise as a condition of confirmation for any ambassador nominee to a post designated as high-priority.*

Restore and substantially increase State Department funding and staffing, reversing years of budget cuts and hiring freezes that have left critical diplomatic posts understaffed and have forced the department to rely on military channels for functions that should be conducted through civilian diplomacy. The ratio of defense spending to diplomatic spending in the United States is among the most imbalanced of any major

democracy and reflects a fundamental misunderstanding of how American interests are best served.<sup>[393]</sup>

Establish a Foreign Service Independence Protection Act that codifies protections for career diplomats against politically motivated reassignments, forced departures, and retaliation for providing honest assessments that conflict with administration policy preferences. The integrity of diplomatic reporting depends on diplomats being able to tell policymakers what they need to hear rather than what they want to hear.<sup>[394]</sup>

## **USAID, International Development & American Soft Power**

The United States Agency for International Development was, for more than six decades, the primary instrument of American development assistance and humanitarian aid abroad. USAID funded health programs that saved tens of millions of lives, supported democratic institutions in fragile states, provided famine relief, built schools, trained journalists, and advanced American interests through the tools of diplomacy and development rather than military force. Its effective dismantling represents one of the most consequential and least understood foreign policy decisions of the modern era, with damage that extends far beyond the immediate humanitarian consequences to the long-term credibility and influence of the United States globally.<sup>[395]</sup>

### *How:*

Restore USAID as a fully funded, fully staffed, and fully independent federal agency with a permanent statutory basis that cannot be gutted through executive action alone. Require congressional authorization for any reduction in USAID staffing or programming above a defined threshold, establishing that the dismantling of a major foreign policy instrument requires legislative consent rather than executive fiat.<sup>[396]</sup>

Rebuild USAID's workforce through a comprehensive hiring and retention program, prioritizing the re-engagement of experienced foreign service officers and development professionals who were dismissed or driven out, and investing in the training pipeline necessary to restore institutional knowledge and capacity. Foreign service expertise takes years to build and cannot be reconstituted overnight.<sup>[397]</sup>

Reestablish and expand American international development programming as a core instrument of national security strategy, recognizing that development assistance is among the most cost-effective tools available for preventing the conditions that breed terrorism, instability, and mass migration. Restore funding for the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), the President's Malaria Initiative, and other flagship health programs whose interruption has already resulted in preventable deaths.<sup>[398]</sup>

Restore the Millennium Challenge Corporation as an independent, results-driven development finance institution that provides assistance to developing nations conditioned on demonstrated commitments to democratic governance, economic freedom, and investment in their own people. Expand the Peace Corps back to full operational capacity, recognizing its irreplaceable role in building people-to-people connections that advance American interests and values in communities around the world.<sup>[399]</sup>

## Private Military Contractors & Accountability

The United States government spent an estimated \$370 billion on private military and security contractors in the two decades of war in Iraq and Afghanistan. These contractors, whose employees operated alongside and sometimes instead of American service members, existed in a legal gray zone: not subject to the Uniform Code of Military Justice, rarely subject to meaningful prosecution under domestic law, and often operating in environments where host nation law was unenforceable. The documented abuses committed by private military contractors, including the Nisour Square massacre in Iraq and the systematic abuse of detainees at Abu Ghraib involving contractor personnel, represent a accountability gap that has never been fully closed.<sup>[400]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish clear statutory jurisdiction for the prosecution of private military and security contractors for crimes committed in the course of their government-contracted work abroad, closing the legal ambiguity that has allowed documented abuses to go unprosecuted. Require that all private military and security contractors operating under U.S. government contracts comply with the same rules of engagement and use-of-force standards as U.S. military personnel, with equivalent accountability mechanisms for violations.<sup>[401]</sup>

## International Alliances & the Postwar Order

The international alliance system built by the United States after World War II, including NATO, the network of bilateral security agreements in the Pacific, the World Trade Organization, and the multilateral institutions of the United Nations system, has been the foundation of the longest period of great-power peace in recorded history. These alliances are not charity. They are the architecture of American security and American prosperity, maintained at relatively modest cost compared to the alternative of a world in which the United States confronts threats alone. The deliberate undermining of these alliances through unreliability, public humiliation of allies, and the suggestion that American security commitments are conditional on financial arrangements, is not a negotiating strategy. It is the destruction of eighty years of carefully constructed security infrastructure that cannot be quickly rebuilt once dismantled.<sup>[402]</sup>

### *How:*

Pass legislation affirming the United States' commitment to its NATO obligations under Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty and prohibiting any president from withdrawing from NATO without Senate approval by a two-thirds vote. Restore and expand American participation in multilateral institutions and agreements including the World Health Organization, the Paris Climate Agreement, and other international frameworks from which the United States has withdrawn or threatened to withdraw for political reasons, recognizing that American leadership in multilateral institutions serves American interests.<sup>[403]</sup>

Restore American foreign assistance and development programming to its full scope and reestablish the credibility of American security guarantees by fulfilling existing

commitments to partners including Ukraine, Taiwan, and other nations that have structured their security and foreign policy around the reliability of American partnership. The cost of abandoning allies is not merely financial; it is the destruction of the credibility on which all future American diplomacy depends.<sup>[404]</sup>

## Domestic Terrorism & Extremism

Domestic terrorism, particularly from white nationalist, militia, and anti-government extremist movements, represents one of the most serious and growing threats to American safety and democratic institutions. The January 6th attack on the United States Capitol was a stark demonstration of what domestic extremism, left unchecked, can do to the foundations of democracy itself.<sup>[405]</sup>

### *How:*

Designate domestic terrorism as a federal crime with penalties commensurate with the threat it poses to democratic institutions and public safety. Invest in counter-extremism programs that address the radicalization pipeline, working with communities, technology platforms, and mental health professionals to identify and intervene before individuals commit acts of violence.<sup>[406]</sup>

## White Nationalist Extremism & Domestic Terrorism

The Federal Bureau of Investigation has consistently identified racially or ethnically motivated violent extremism, and white nationalist extremism in particular, as the most lethal form of domestic terrorism in the United States. White nationalist and white supremacist groups were responsible for the majority of domestic terrorism fatalities in the years between 2015 and 2022. Yet federal law enforcement's resources for combating domestic terrorism are a fraction of those devoted to international terrorism, and the absence of a dedicated domestic terrorism statute has created legal gaps that allow violent extremists to organize, fundraise, and recruit with fewer legal constraints than foreign terrorist organizations face. Naming this threat accurately and resourcing the response proportionally is not a political act. It is a public safety imperative.<sup>[407]</sup>

### *How:*

Pass a domestic terrorism statute that establishes federal criminal jurisdiction over acts of violence committed with the intent to intimidate or coerce civilian populations based on race, ethnicity, religion, or national origin, providing law enforcement with legal tools equivalent to those available for combating international terrorism. Establish dedicated FBI and DOJ units for investigating and prosecuting domestic terrorism with resources proportional to the documented threat level.<sup>[408]</sup>

Establish a federal program for deradicalization and counter-extremism intervention that provides resources for communities, schools, families, and mental health providers to identify individuals at risk of radicalization and intervene before they commit violence. Invest in research on the pathways to violent extremism and the evidence-based interventions that are most effective at interrupting those pathways, drawing on the successful models developed in Europe and adapted for the American context.<sup>[409]</sup>

## Department of Homeland Security Reform

The Department of Homeland Security was established in the wake of September 11, 2001 with a clear mandate: to protect the American homeland from terrorism and catastrophic threats. In the years since, it has grown into a sprawling bureaucracy encompassing disaster response, immigration enforcement, airport security, and cybersecurity. Reform is not optional; it is a national security imperative.<sup>[410]</sup>

### *How:*

Restore and increase FEMA funding to levels commensurate with the growing frequency and severity of natural disasters driven by climate change. Rebuild FEMA's staffing and operational capacity. Ensure that FEMA leadership is comprised of qualified emergency management professionals, not political appointees without relevant experience.<sup>[411]</sup>

Increase TSA officer compensation to competitive levels that reduce turnover. Strengthen TSA training programs to ensure all officers receive comprehensive, consistently updated instruction in security protocols, threat identification, and passenger rights.<sup>[412]</sup>

Establish clear standards for ICE and CBP conduct, requiring that all agents be fully identified with visible badge numbers at all times during enforcement operations. Prohibit the use of masks or face coverings that obscure agent identity during law enforcement operations against civilians. Establish robust accountability systems including independent oversight, body camera requirements, and mandatory reporting of use of force incidents.<sup>[413]</sup>

## PILLAR 7: FISCAL RESPONSIBILITY & ECONOMIC STRENGTH

*Progressive policy and fiscal responsibility are not opposing forces; they are complementary ones. A nation that invests wisely in its people, its infrastructure, and its institutions is a nation that grows stronger, more productive, and more prosperous over time. The false choice between social investment and fiscal discipline has been used for decades to justify cutting programs that serve ordinary Americans while protecting tax breaks and subsidies that benefit the wealthy and powerful. True fiscal responsibility means spending wisely, taxing fairly, eliminating waste and fraud, growing the economy from the bottom up and the middle out, and making the long-term investments that reduce costs and expand prosperity for generations to come. It means treating the federal budget not as a political weapon but as a reflection of our national values and priorities.*

### Deficit Reduction

The federal deficit, the annual gap between what the government spends and what it collects in revenue, is a genuine long-term challenge that demands serious, honest attention. But deficit reduction achieved by gutting social programs, cutting education, or undermining the safety net is not fiscal responsibility; it is the transfer of costs from the federal budget onto the backs of ordinary Americans. True deficit reduction requires a combination of responsible spending, fair taxation, elimination of waste and fraud, and economic growth that expands the tax base.<sup>[414]</sup>

#### *How:*

Implement the tax reforms outlined in Pillar 2, closing loopholes, taxing unrealized gains of the ultra-wealthy, eliminating corporate tax shelters, and establishing a genuinely progressive income tax system, as the primary revenue-side mechanism for deficit reduction. A tax system that works as intended is the single most powerful tool available for closing the deficit without cutting services.<sup>[415]</sup>

Conduct a comprehensive audit of all federal spending to identify waste, fraud, redundancy, and programs that are not delivering meaningful results. Eliminate or consolidate programs that are duplicative or ineffective, redirecting resources toward programs with demonstrated impact.<sup>[416]</sup>

Establish a federal budgeting framework that requires long-term fiscal impact assessments for all major legislation, ensuring that policymakers understand the full cost and benefit of proposed spending and tax changes over ten and twenty year horizons.<sup>[417]</sup>

Reject austerity measures that cut essential social programs in the name of deficit reduction, recognizing that the long-term economic costs of untreated illness, uneducated workers, unstable housing, and poverty far exceed the short-term savings of cutting the programs that address them.<sup>[418]</sup>

## The Tax Gap: Collecting What Is Owed

The IRS estimates that the annual tax gap, the difference between taxes legally owed and taxes actually collected, is approximately \$600 billion per year. Over a decade, this represents roughly \$6 trillion in legally owed revenue that the federal government fails to collect, primarily because the IRS has been systematically defunded to the point where it lacks the capacity to audit high-income returns at meaningful rates. The top one percent of earners are responsible for an estimated 28 percent of all unpaid taxes. This is not a problem of tax law; it is a problem of enforcement capacity, and it is one of the most straightforward fiscal improvements available to the federal government.<sup>[419]</sup>

### *How:*

Restore IRS funding to levels sufficient to audit high-income and corporate returns at rates comparable to those achieved a decade ago, targeting enforcement resources at the income categories where the tax gap is largest and where the return on enforcement investment is highest. Every dollar invested in IRS enforcement capacity returns an estimated six to twelve dollars in additional revenue. Fully implement the IRS funding provided by the Inflation Reduction Act and protect it from legislative rollback.<sup>[420]</sup>

## National Debt Management

The national debt represents the accumulation of decades of deficit spending, tax cuts that were not offset by spending reductions, and the extraordinary expenditures required by national emergencies including wars, financial crises, and pandemics. Managing the national debt responsibly requires a long-term strategy that stabilizes debt as a percentage of GDP, reduces the burden of interest payments over time, and ensures that future generations are not saddled with an unmanageable fiscal burden.<sup>[421]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish a bipartisan National Fiscal Commission, insulated from short-term political pressures, tasked with developing a long-term debt reduction strategy that balances fiscal sustainability with the protection of essential programs and investments. Prioritize stabilizing the debt-to-GDP ratio as a primary fiscal target, recognizing that economic growth is as important as spending cuts in achieving long-term debt sustainability.<sup>[422]</sup>

Eliminate the debt ceiling as a political mechanism, replacing it with automatic stabilizers and mandatory fiscal review processes that address debt growth without creating artificial crises that threaten the full faith and credit of the United States.<sup>[423]</sup>

## GDP Growth & Economic Expansion

A growing economy is the most powerful long-term tool for fiscal health. When more Americans are working, earning living wages, starting businesses, and participating fully in the economy, tax revenues rise, safety net expenditures fall, and the capacity

to service the national debt improves. Economic growth is most robust and most sustained when it is driven from the bottom up and the middle out: when working and middle class Americans have the purchasing power, education, and opportunity to participate fully in the economy.<sup>[424]</sup>

*How:*

Pass a comprehensive infrastructure investment program covering transportation, broadband, water systems, energy grid modernization, and public facilities. Infrastructure investment creates immediate jobs, reduces long-term maintenance costs, improves economic productivity, and generates returns that far exceed their initial cost.<sup>[425]</sup>

Expand access to small business loans, reduce regulatory burdens for small businesses while maintaining meaningful consumer and worker protections, and establish federal procurement preferences for small and domestic businesses. Small businesses are the backbone of the American economy and the primary engine of job creation.<sup>[426]</sup>

Invest in workforce development programs that connect Americans with the skills needed for the jobs of today and tomorrow, including the trade training pipeline outlined in Pillar 3 and the educational investments outlined in Pillar 4.<sup>[427]</sup>

Invest in basic and applied research, STEM education, and public-private innovation partnerships that drive technological advancement and create the industries and jobs of the future.<sup>[428]</sup>

## **Eliminating Waste, Fraud & Abuse**

Every dollar lost to government waste, fraud, or abuse is a dollar that could have been invested in American families, infrastructure, or national security. Fiscal responsibility demands not just wise spending decisions but robust systems for identifying and eliminating wasteful and fraudulent use of public resources.<sup>[429]</sup>

*How:*

Establish a permanent, independent Office of Federal Fiscal Integrity with the authority to audit all federal agencies and programs, investigate credible allegations of waste and fraud, and publicly report findings with specific recommendations for corrective action.<sup>[430]</sup>

Modernize federal financial management systems, many of which are decades old and lack the capability for real-time tracking and anomaly detection that modern technology makes possible. Conduct regular sunset reviews of all federal programs, requiring affirmative reauthorization based on demonstrated effectiveness.<sup>[431]</sup>

Strengthen the False Claims Act and other whistleblower protection and reward mechanisms to incentivize the reporting of government contractor fraud.<sup>[432]</sup>

## **Federal Reserve Independence & Monetary Policy**

The Federal Reserve is the cornerstone of American monetary policy, responsible for managing inflation, maximizing employment, and maintaining the stability of the financial system. Its effectiveness depends entirely on its independence from political pressure. A Federal Reserve subject to political interference is a Federal Reserve that cannot do its job. The consequences of a politicized Federal Reserve would be felt by every American in the form of inflation, financial instability, and the erosion of confidence in the dollar as the world's reserve currency.<sup>[433]</sup>

#### *How:*

Codify the independence of the Federal Reserve in federal statute, establishing clear legal protections against presidential interference in monetary policy decisions, interest rate setting, and the appointment of Federal Reserve leadership. Establish rigorous qualification standards for Federal Reserve Board appointments, requiring demonstrated expertise in economics, monetary policy, or financial regulation.<sup>[434]</sup>

Strengthen the Federal Reserve's transparency and accountability to Congress through regular reporting, testimony, and audit mechanisms, while maintaining its operational independence from political direction, ensuring that democratic oversight does not become political interference.<sup>[435]</sup>

Engage in international monetary cooperation through the International Monetary Fund, the Bank for International Settlements, and bilateral central bank relationships, recognizing that global financial stability requires coordinated monetary policy and that American monetary policy has profound consequences for the global economy.<sup>[436]</sup>

## **Social Security & Medicare Long-Term Solvency**

Social Security and Medicare are the foundational pillars of retirement and healthcare security for tens of millions of Americans. They represent a social contract between generations: a promise that Americans who work hard and contribute throughout their lives will have security and dignity in their old age. That promise must be kept. Both programs face long-term funding challenges that demand honest, serious attention, but those challenges must be addressed in ways that strengthen these programs for future generations rather than cutting benefits for current or future recipients.<sup>[437]</sup>

#### *How:*

Address the long-term solvency of Social Security by eliminating the payroll tax cap, currently set at approximately \$160,000, ensuring that higher earners contribute proportionally to the system rather than stopping contributions above an arbitrary income threshold. This single reform would extend Social Security's solvency for decades without cutting a single dollar of benefits.<sup>[438]</sup>

Reject any proposal to cut Social Security benefits, raise the retirement age beyond current levels, or privatize any portion of the Social Security system, recognizing that these approaches transfer risk onto the most vulnerable Americans while solving the solvency challenge on the backs of those who can least afford it.<sup>[439]</sup>

Address Medicare's long-term funding challenges primarily through healthcare cost reduction, including prescription drug price negotiation, administrative simplification, fraud reduction, and the transition to value-based care models that improve outcomes while reducing costs, rather than through benefit cuts or eligibility restrictions.<sup>[440]</sup>

Expand Medicare to cover dental, vision, and hearing care, recognizing that these are not luxury healthcare services but essential components of overall health that disproportionately affect the elderly population.<sup>[441]</sup>

## Trade Policy & International Economic Relations

America's trade relationships profoundly shape the economic opportunities available to American workers and businesses. Trade policy must be developed and executed with a clear-eyed understanding of both the genuine benefits of international commerce and the real costs that poorly structured trade agreements have imposed on American workers and communities.<sup>[442]</sup>

### *How:*

Develop a comprehensive national trade strategy that explicitly prioritizes the interests of American workers alongside corporate interests, establishing clear criteria for evaluating trade agreements that include labor standards, environmental protections, intellectual property safeguards, and national security considerations.<sup>[443]</sup>

Establish a genuine Trade Adjustment Assistance program that supports workers and communities displaced by trade with meaningful retraining, income support, and economic development assistance, rather than the inadequate and poorly administered programs that have historically failed to deliver real help to trade-affected communities.<sup>[444]</sup>

Address the national security dimensions of trade dependency, particularly in semiconductors, pharmaceuticals, rare earth materials, and advanced technology, through domestic investment, allied reshoring, and strategic trade policy that reduces dangerous dependencies on adversarial nations.<sup>[445]</sup>

## Free Trade Agreements with Allies: A Middle Class Standard

International trade can be a powerful engine of shared prosperity, but only when trade agreements are designed with the interests of working people at their center rather than the interests of multinational corporations. The history of American trade policy since the 1990s is a cautionary tale: agreements that promised prosperity delivered deindustrialization, suppressed wages, and hollowed out communities that had no political power to resist the consequences. A new generation of trade agreements must be built on fundamentally different standards, with enforceable labor protections, genuine environmental standards, and binding requirements that the benefits reach the workers of all participating nations, not just the shareholders of their largest corporations.<sup>[446]</sup>

### *How:*

Negotiate and establish free trade agreements with close allied and partner nations that meet a binding middle class standard: agreements shall only be ratified if independent economic analysis projects net benefit to working and middle class Americans in terms of wages, employment quality, and purchasing power. Agreements that benefit corporate shareholders while suppressing wages or

eliminating jobs for American workers shall not be ratified regardless of their macroeconomic projections.<sup>[447]</sup>

Pursue a successor agreement to NAFTA and USMCA with Canada and Mexico that strengthens and fully enforces labor standards across all three nations, eliminates the wage suppression mechanisms that have historically allowed corporations to play American and Mexican workers against each other, invests in the border communities most directly affected by cross-border economic activity, and includes binding environmental protections with genuine enforcement mechanisms. The goal is not to eliminate trade with our closest neighbors but to ensure that trade serves the people of all three nations rather than only their wealthiest residents.<sup>[448]</sup>

Expand trade relationships with South and Central American nations through a comprehensive Western Hemisphere partnership framework that ties preferential trade access to verifiable progress on labor rights, democratic governance, environmental protection, and anti-corruption standards. Address the root causes of migration from the region by investing in the economic conditions that give people a viable future in their home countries, recognizing that trade and development cooperation are the most sustainable long-term approach to managing migration flows.<sup>[449]</sup>

## Infrastructure Investment as Economic Strategy

Infrastructure investment is among the highest-return investments a government can make. Every dollar invested in public infrastructure generates multiple dollars of economic activity, creates immediate jobs, reduces long-term maintenance costs, improves productivity, and enhances quality of life. Yet American infrastructure has been chronically underfunded for decades, resulting in a deteriorating physical foundation that constrains economic growth and compromises public safety.<sup>[450]</sup>

### *How:*

Pass and fully fund a comprehensive, long-term national infrastructure investment program covering transportation, broadband, water and wastewater systems, energy grid modernization, public buildings, and green infrastructure. Establish a National Infrastructure Bank that leverages federal investment to attract private capital, multiplying the impact of public investment.<sup>[451]</sup>

Prioritize infrastructure investment in communities that have been most underserved, including rural areas, low-income urban neighborhoods, and tribal lands. Establish lifecycle cost accounting as the standard for infrastructure investment decisions, ensuring that long-term maintenance costs are fully considered alongside initial construction costs.<sup>[452]</sup>

Integrate climate resilience into all infrastructure investment decisions, ensuring that new and upgraded infrastructure is designed to withstand the increasing frequency and severity of extreme weather events driven by climate change.<sup>[453]</sup>

## The Economic Case for Social Investment

The most powerful argument for the social investments outlined in this document is not moral, though the moral case is compelling; it is economic. A society that invests in healthcare, education, housing, nutrition, and opportunity is a society that reduces its long-term costs dramatically. Preventable illness treated in emergency rooms costs multiples of what preventive care costs. Incarceration costs multiples of what education and opportunity cost. Homelessness costs multiples of what stable housing costs. The false economy of cutting social programs to save money is one of the most expensive mistakes a government can make.<sup>[454]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish a federal framework for measuring the long-term return on investment of social programs, moving beyond simple cost accounting to capture the full economic value of healthier, better educated, more stably housed Americans. Require that proposals to cut or eliminate social programs include a comprehensive long-term cost analysis that accounts for the downstream economic consequences of reduced investment.<sup>[455]</sup>

Communicate clearly and consistently that social investment is not a drain on the economy; it is the foundation of a productive, prosperous, and growing one. The nations with the strongest social safety nets consistently rank among the most economically competitive and fiscally stable in the world.<sup>[456]</sup>

## A Fiscal Framework for Reform: What It Costs, How We Pay for It

Intellectual honesty demands that any comprehensive policy blueprint confront a direct question: can we actually afford this? The proposals in this document are not free. The answer is yes, but only under specific conditions, in a defined sequence, and with transparent accounting of both costs and revenue that policymakers and the public deserve to see before a single vote is cast.<sup>[457]</sup>

The major revenue proposals, if fully implemented, would generate an estimated \$1.1 to \$1.7 trillion in additional annual federal revenue from five sources: closing the tax gap through IRS enforcement (\$500 to \$600 billion per year); progressive tax reform on income above \$1 million (\$300 to \$500 billion); carried interest closure (\$100 to \$200 billion); estate tax reform (\$100 to \$150 billion); and corporate tax reform (\$100 to \$200 billion). These are conservative estimates based on existing congressional scoring.

The major spending proposals would require, at full implementation, an estimated \$2 to \$4 trillion in additional annual federal outlays. The largest item is healthcare: \$1.5 to \$3 trillion annually, offset by elimination of private insurance premiums and out-of-pocket costs. Universal childcare: \$500 billion. Free public college: \$80 to \$100 billion. Paid family leave: \$200 to \$300 billion — this figure represents the gross federal cost of a national paid leave insurance program covering all American workers, not federal employees alone, and would be substantially offset by employer and employee payroll contributions into the program fund, similar to how Social Security and unemployment insurance are financed. All other proposals combined: \$300 to \$500 billion annually.<sup>[458]</sup>

Three things make the gap between revenue and spending manageable. The first is phased implementation: IRS enforcement, tax gap closure, and progressive tax reform could generate \$800 billion to \$1 trillion within the first five years without a single new

social program. Spending programs are then phased in over ten to twenty years, beginning with the highest-return investments: early childhood education, childcare, and primary healthcare access.<sup>[459]</sup>

The second factor is economic multiplier effects. Early childhood education returns an estimated \$7 to \$13 for every dollar spent. Infrastructure generates \$1.50 in GDP per dollar. Universal healthcare reduces emergency room overutilization and allows workers to change jobs without fear of losing coverage. These are documented outcomes from comparable investments in peer nations and from domestic programs at smaller scale.<sup>[460]</sup>

The third factor is the cost of inaction. Childhood poverty costs an estimated \$1.03 trillion per year in lost productivity, crime, and healthcare. The \$600 billion annual tax gap subsidizes tax evaders. Infrastructure deterioration costs \$1 trillion annually. The investment case for these proposals is not merely defensible but affirmatively compelling.<sup>[461]</sup>

This document proposes the following fiscal discipline: revenue measures enacted before or concurrent with spending measures; CBO scoring of each major program before enactment; spending programs phased in leading with highest-return investments; and five-year reviews against actual outcomes. This is not the fiscal framework of a blank check. It is the fiscal framework of a serious, evidence-based, long-term investment that treats the public's money with the respect it deserves.

## Space Exploration & Scientific Research

Investment in science, research, and exploration is investment in the future. The discoveries of today become the technologies, medicines, and solutions of tomorrow. A nation that defunds scientific research in favor of short-term interests is a nation that surrenders its future to others.<sup>[462]</sup>

### *How:*

Restore and increase federal funding for NASA, with a renewed commitment to space exploration, planetary science, climate monitoring, and the long-term goal of sustainable human presence beyond Earth. Establish public-private partnership frameworks that leverage private sector innovation while ensuring that discoveries made with public funding remain accessible to the public.<sup>[463]</sup>

Increase federal investment in basic and applied scientific research through the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health, with funding decisions guided by independent peer review rather than political considerations.<sup>[464]</sup>

## PILLAR 8: ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT

*The Earth does not belong to us; we belong to it. The choices we make today about how we power our civilization, manage our natural resources, and respond to the climate crisis will determine the world our children and grandchildren inherit. This is not a partisan issue; it is a survival issue. The science is clear, the evidence is undeniable, and the window for meaningful action is narrowing. At the same time, the transition to a clean energy economy is not just an environmental imperative: it is one of the greatest economic opportunities in American history, offering the potential for millions of good-paying domestic jobs, reduced energy costs, enhanced national security through energy independence, and American leadership in the industries that will define the next century. We can protect our planet and grow our economy. These goals are not in conflict; they are inseparable.*

### Climate Change & Environmental Policy

The scientific consensus on climate change is overwhelming, unambiguous, and has been repeatedly confirmed by independent researchers across every relevant discipline. Human activity, primarily the burning of fossil fuels, is driving unprecedented changes in the Earth's climate with consequences that are already being felt in the form of more frequent and severe weather events, rising sea levels, prolonged droughts, and ecosystem collapse.<sup>[465]</sup>

#### *How:*

Reaffirm and strengthen America's commitment to the Paris Climate Agreement, working with international partners to raise ambition and ensure that global temperature increases are limited to the levels necessary to avoid the most catastrophic consequences of climate change.<sup>[466]</sup>

Establish legally binding national carbon reduction targets with regular review and accountability mechanisms, ensuring that progress is measurable, transparent, and enforceable.<sup>[467]</sup>

Restore and strengthen the Environmental Protection Agency's authority, funding, and independence, ensuring that it is led by qualified environmental scientists and professionals rather than political appointees with ties to the industries being regulated.<sup>[468]</sup>

### Clean Energy Transition

The transition from fossil fuels to clean, renewable energy is both an environmental necessity and an economic opportunity. Solar, wind, geothermal, hydroelectric, and nuclear energy represent a diverse portfolio of clean energy sources capable of meeting America's energy needs while dramatically reducing carbon emissions. The question is not whether this transition will happen: it is whether America will lead it or follow it.<sup>[469]</sup>

### *How:*

Dramatically increase federal investment in solar, offshore wind, onshore wind, geothermal, and hydroelectric energy through direct funding, tax incentives, and public-private partnerships. Set a national target for renewable energy as a percentage of the electricity grid with binding milestones and accountability mechanisms.<sup>[470]</sup>

Invest in the research, development, and deployment of modern nuclear energy technologies, including advanced fission reactors and fusion research, as part of a comprehensive clean energy portfolio. Modern nuclear energy is safe, reliable, and carbon-free, and has a critical role to play in providing baseload power during the transition away from fossil fuels.<sup>[471]</sup>

Invest in modernizing the American energy grid to accommodate distributed renewable energy generation, improve resilience against both physical and cyber attacks, and reduce transmission losses.<sup>[472]</sup>

Establish a responsible, phased transition away from fossil fuel dependency for energy generation, heating, and industrial use, with support programs for workers and communities whose livelihoods depend on fossil fuel industries. This transition must be just: workers must not bear the cost of an energy transformation that benefits the entire nation.<sup>[473]</sup>

Consumer energy choices shall be guided by incentives rather than mandates. Tax credits, rebates, and investment in clean energy infrastructure shall make clean choices the economically attractive choice, without forcing consumers into decisions they are not financially prepared to make.<sup>[474]</sup>

## **Coal Community Investment & Just Transition**

The transition away from coal is not optional; it is already underway, driven by market forces, falling renewable energy costs, and the unavoidable reality of climate change. The question is not whether coal communities will transition but whether they will transition with the support and investment of the federal government or be left to face it alone. The men and women who powered this country for generations through dangerous, physically demanding work in underground mines and processing facilities deserve better than the choice between environmental destruction and economic abandonment. And the communities built around coal deserve investment that respects their history, honors their contribution, and builds a future their children can stay for.<sup>[475]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish a Coal Community Transition Fund providing direct federal investment in former and transitioning coal communities for infrastructure modernization, broadband expansion, school renovation, healthcare facility construction, and community development projects that create immediate employment while building long-term economic foundations independent of coal extraction.<sup>[476]</sup>

Establish a Coal Miner Trade Retraining Program providing fully funded, paid retraining for active and recently displaced coal miners in high-demand trades including solar and wind energy installation and maintenance, electrical systems, HVAC, construction, advanced manufacturing, and mine reclamation. Training

programs shall be co-designed with unions, community colleges, and employers to ensure that credentials lead directly to employment, and participants shall receive full income replacement during training.<sup>[477]</sup>

Address the stigma of transition directly and explicitly. Federal communications about the coal transition shall acknowledge and honor the contribution of coal miners and coal communities to American prosperity and shall frame retraining not as a consolation prize for losing a way of life but as an investment in the next chapter of communities with decades of industrial skill and work ethic to offer the clean energy economy.<sup>[478]</sup>

Accelerate the cleanup and reclamation of abandoned mine sites under the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act, prioritizing communities where legacy contamination poses ongoing public health risks and where reclamation can create immediate construction employment. Repurpose suitable former mine sites for renewable energy development, advanced manufacturing, or conservation, in partnership with local communities and with priority given to projects that employ former miners.<sup>[479]</sup>

## Emissions & Environmental Standards

Reducing emissions from transportation, industry, and buildings is essential to meeting climate targets and improving public health. Air and water pollution disproportionately affect low-income communities and communities of color, making environmental protection inseparable from the pursuit of economic and racial justice.<sup>[480]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish and enforce progressively stricter vehicle emissions standards, pushing the automotive industry toward cleaner technologies through regulation while incentivizing consumer adoption of clean vehicles through tax credits and rebates.<sup>[481]</sup>

Restore and strengthen the Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act, reversing rollbacks that have weakened protections for air and water quality across the country.<sup>[482]</sup>

Address environmental justice by prioritizing enforcement of environmental standards in communities that bear disproportionate pollution burdens, and requiring environmental impact assessments that specifically evaluate impacts on vulnerable communities.<sup>[483]</sup>

## Public Lands & Natural Resources

America's public lands, national parks, forests, wildlife refuges, and wilderness areas, are a national treasure that belongs to all Americans, present and future. They provide irreplaceable ecological services, recreational opportunities, cultural and spiritual value, and the preservation of biodiversity that is essential to the health of our planet.<sup>[484]</sup>

### *How:*

Strengthen protections for national parks, monuments, wilderness areas, and wildlife refuges, reversing rollbacks that have opened protected lands to extractive industry.<sup>[485]</sup>

Establish a national biodiversity strategy that identifies and protects critical ecosystems, wildlife corridors, and endangered species habitats, recognizing that biodiversity loss is a crisis parallel to climate change in its long-term consequences.<sup>[486]</sup>

Protect and restore America's wetlands, forests, and coastal ecosystems, which provide critical carbon sequestration, flood protection, and biodiversity services.<sup>[487]</sup>

## **PFAS, Microplastics & Toxic Chemical Regulation**

Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, known as PFAS or forever chemicals, are a class of more than 12,000 synthetic compounds that do not break down in the environment or the human body. They are present in the drinking water of an estimated 200 million Americans, in the blood of virtually every American tested, and in environments ranging from Arctic ice to the deepest ocean trenches. Exposure is associated with cancer, thyroid disease, immune system disruption, reproductive harm, and developmental disorders in children. They were used for decades in firefighting foam, non-stick cookware, food packaging, and hundreds of industrial applications, often with the full knowledge of manufacturers who suppressed evidence of their harm.<sup>[488]</sup>

Microplastics, fragments of plastic smaller than five millimeters produced by the breakdown of larger plastic items, have now been found in human blood, breast milk, placentas, lung tissue, and brain tissue. The health consequences of microplastic accumulation in human tissue are only beginning to be understood, but early evidence suggests inflammatory, hormonal, and potentially carcinogenic effects. The combination of PFAS contamination and microplastic accumulation represents a slow-moving public health crisis of potentially enormous proportions that demands urgent regulatory action.<sup>[489]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish federal maximum contaminant levels for PFAS compounds in drinking water, food packaging, and soil at levels that protect public health based on current scientific evidence, enforced through the Safe Drinking Water Act and the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act. Require PFAS manufacturers and users to fund the remediation of PFAS contamination in drinking water supplies, applying the polluter pays principle that underlies the Superfund program.<sup>[490]</sup>

Phase out the use of PFAS in all non-essential applications within a defined timeline, beginning with food packaging, cookware, and consumer products where safer alternatives exist, and extend the phase-out to industrial applications as alternatives are developed. Establish a federal PFAS research program to accelerate the development of safer alternatives and to build the scientific evidence base necessary for comprehensive regulation.<sup>[491]</sup>

Establish federal standards requiring the replacement of plastic food and beverage containers with alternatives made from glass, stainless steel, or certified compostable materials, beginning with single-use plastic food packaging that is most likely to leach microplastics and chemical additives into food and beverages. Invest in the development and commercial scaling of safe, sustainable packaging alternatives through federal research grants and procurement preferences.<sup>[492]</sup>

## Environmental Justice & Frontline Communities

The communities that bear the greatest burden of environmental pollution in the United States are not randomly distributed. They are disproportionately low-income, disproportionately communities of color, and disproportionately located in the South and in rural areas. Hazardous waste facilities, industrial plants, highways, and other pollution sources are systematically sited in communities with the least political power to resist them, producing concentrated environmental health burdens that compound the other health disparities these communities already face. The children of Flint, Michigan, who were poisoned by lead in their drinking water, are one of the most visible examples of a pattern that is replicated in hundreds of communities across the country with far less visibility.<sup>[493]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish environmental justice as a legally enforceable standard in all federal environmental permitting decisions, requiring that environmental impact assessments include cumulative burden analysis that accounts for existing pollution loads in affected communities and that no new pollution source may be sited in a community already bearing disproportionate environmental burden without explicit findings that no less burdensome alternative exists. Provide communities with legal standing and resources to challenge permitting decisions on environmental justice grounds.<sup>[494]</sup>

Establish a federal Environmental Justice Remediation Fund that prioritizes cleanup of contaminated sites in frontline communities, with community involvement in cleanup planning and post-remediation land use decisions. Invest in lead pipe replacement, drinking water infrastructure upgrades, and air quality monitoring in communities with documented exposure to lead, particulate matter, and other priority pollutants at levels that cause measurable health harm.<sup>[495]</sup>

## Sustainable Agriculture & Food Systems

American agriculture is both a significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions and one of the sectors most vulnerable to the consequences of climate change. Transforming our food system toward greater sustainability is essential both for meeting climate goals and for ensuring the long-term resilience of America's food supply.<sup>[496]</sup>

### *How:*

Invest in research and adoption of sustainable agricultural practices that reduce emissions, improve soil health, conserve water, and maintain productivity, including regenerative agriculture, precision farming, and reduced tillage practices.<sup>[497]</sup>

Reform federal agricultural subsidies to support sustainable farming practices and diversified food production rather than the monoculture commodity crops that currently dominate federal support.<sup>[498]</sup>

Address the environmental impact of industrial animal agriculture through emissions standards, waste management requirements, and incentives for more sustainable protein production.<sup>[499]</sup>

## Animal Welfare & Factory Farming Reform

The industrial factory farming system that produces the majority of America's meat, dairy, and eggs subjects billions of animals to conditions of severe and unnecessary suffering, while simultaneously generating enormous environmental harm, public health risks, and the conditions that drive antibiotic resistance. Reforming this system is simultaneously an animal welfare imperative, an environmental imperative, and a public health imperative.<sup>[500]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish federal minimum animal welfare standards for all agricultural operations, ensuring that animals raised for food are provided with conditions that meet their basic behavioral and physiological needs.<sup>[501]</sup>

Phase out the most egregious factory farming practices, including gestation crates for pigs, battery cages for laying hens, and veal crates for calves, that cause severe suffering and have already been banned in numerous states and countries.<sup>[502]</sup>

Address the public health threat posed by the routine use of antibiotics in industrial animal agriculture through strict federal regulation limiting antibiotic use to the treatment of diagnosed illness rather than routine growth promotion in overcrowded conditions.<sup>[503]</sup>

## Domestic Climate Migration & Community Resilience

Climate change is already driving significant internal migration within the United States, as sea level rise, increasing wildfire risk, extreme heat, and water scarcity make some communities increasingly uninhabitable. Conservative estimates suggest that tens of millions of Americans will face climate-driven displacement within the next several decades. The federal government has no comprehensive framework for managing this displacement, protecting the communities most at risk, or planning the managed retreat that will be necessary in the most vulnerable locations. Addressing this challenge requires both mitigation, reducing the emissions that drive climate change, and adaptation, preparing communities to survive and in some cases relocate as conditions change.<sup>[504]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish a National Climate Resilience and Managed Retreat Fund that provides resources for communities to assess their climate vulnerabilities, invest in resilience infrastructure where feasible, and plan and execute managed retreat where continued habitation becomes untenable. Ensure that managed retreat programs are voluntary, fairly compensated, and designed to keep communities together rather than dispersing them, recognizing that displacement that destroys community cohesion compounds rather than solves the harm of climate disruption.<sup>[505]</sup>

## International Climate Commitments & the Paris Agreement

The Paris Agreement on climate change, signed by 196 nations, represents the most comprehensive international effort in history to address the existential threat of climate

change through coordinated national action. The United States has withdrawn from and rejoined the agreement in alternating administrations, undermining American credibility as a reliable partner in global climate action and creating enormous instability in the international framework. Climate change does not respect election cycles. The emission reductions required to avoid the worst outcomes must be pursued continuously and predictably over decades. An American climate commitment that is reversed with each change of administration is functionally no commitment at all.<sup>[506]</sup>

#### *How:*

Submit the Paris Agreement to the Senate for ratification as a treaty rather than leaving it as an executive agreement, making withdrawal subject to the same two-thirds Senate vote required to ratify. Establish domestic climate legislation that creates binding, enforceable emission reduction targets, insulating American climate policy from complete reversal by executive action alone and providing the business and investment community with the long-term regulatory certainty necessary to drive the clean energy transition.<sup>[507]</sup>

## **Western Water Rights & the Coming Scarcity Crisis**

The Colorado River, which supplies water to 40 million Americans across seven states and two Mexican states, is running out of water. Lake Mead and Lake Powell, the two largest reservoirs in the United States, have declined to historic lows. The 1922 Colorado River Compact was negotiated based on flow estimates that subsequent science has shown were significantly overestimated, and climate change is further reducing flows. The Ogallala Aquifer, which underlies eight Great Plains states and provides water for roughly 30 percent of all groundwater used for irrigation in the United States, is being depleted far faster than it is replenished. The coming water scarcity crisis threatens agriculture, urban water supplies, and entire regional economies and requires federal engagement at a scale that states and localities cannot achieve alone.<sup>[508]</sup>

#### *How:*

Establish a federal Western Water Compact Modernization Initiative that convenes the seven Colorado River Compact states, tribal nations with water rights, Mexico, and federal agencies to negotiate a updated framework for Colorado River water allocation based on actual sustainable supply rather than the overestimated historical flows on which the 1922 compact was based. Provide federal resources for water efficiency infrastructure, recycled water systems, and demand reduction programs that reduce the gap between current usage and sustainable supply.<sup>[509]</sup>

## **Water Security**

Fresh water is among the most precious and most threatened natural resources on Earth. Climate change is intensifying droughts, altering precipitation patterns, and threatening the water supplies that American communities, agriculture, and industry

depend on. Ensuring water security for all Americans is both an environmental and a national security imperative.<sup>[510]</sup>

*How:*

Invest in water infrastructure modernization, including the replacement of lead pipes, the rehabilitation of aging water treatment facilities, and the modernization of irrigation systems that waste enormous quantities of fresh water.<sup>[511]</sup>

Ensure that all Americans have access to clean, safe drinking water, addressing the persistent failures of water infrastructure in low-income communities and communities of color that have been documented from Flint, Michigan to Native American reservations across the West.<sup>[512]</sup>

## **Nuclear Waste: America's Unresolved Crisis**

The United States has accumulated approximately 90,000 metric tons of high-level nuclear waste at commercial power plants and federal facilities across the country, stored in temporary facilities that were never designed for permanent storage. The Yucca Mountain repository, the only site ever formally evaluated for permanent disposal, was effectively cancelled by political opposition despite billions of dollars of investment and decades of scientific study. The result is a growing inventory of extremely hazardous material with no permanent home, stored at over 100 sites in 35 states, creating ongoing security, environmental, and public health risks that will persist for thousands of years.<sup>[513]</sup>

*How:*

Restart the federal nuclear waste repository siting process with a scientifically rigorous, geologically based evaluation of suitable sites that is insulated from the kind of political interference that terminated the Yucca Mountain project. Establish a Nuclear Waste Management Commission with independent scientific authority and a dedicated funding mechanism that ensures the repository program cannot be defunded for political reasons. Address the interim storage gap by investing in the consolidation of nuclear waste into a smaller number of secure, state-of-the-art interim storage facilities while the permanent repository process proceeds.<sup>[514]</sup>

## **Environmental Cleanup & Superfund Reform**

Decades of industrial activity have left a toxic legacy across the American landscape, in the form of Superfund sites, abandoned mines, contaminated waterways, and polluted communities that bear the concentrated health consequences of a century of under-regulated industrial pollution. The communities most affected by environmental contamination are disproportionately low-income and communities of color, a pattern of environmental injustice that demands urgent remediation.<sup>[515]</sup>

*How:*

Dramatically increase funding for the Superfund program, addressing the massive backlog of contaminated sites awaiting cleanup and accelerating the remediation of sites that pose the greatest risks to human health and the environment.<sup>[516]</sup>

Strengthen the polluter pays principle through enhanced enforcement, expanded liability provisions, and the elimination of bankruptcy and corporate restructuring strategies that allow polluters to escape cleanup obligations.<sup>[517]</sup>

Prioritize environmental cleanup in communities that have borne disproportionate pollution burdens, establishing an environmental justice screening framework that directs remediation resources toward communities with the greatest need and the most severe health impacts.<sup>[518]</sup>

## Plastic Pollution & Waste Management

Plastic pollution has become one of the most pervasive environmental challenges of the modern era, contaminating oceans, waterways, soils, and even the human body with microplastics whose long-term health consequences are only beginning to be understood. The United States is one of the world's largest generators of plastic waste, and the current system of voluntary corporate commitments and inadequate recycling infrastructure has demonstrably failed to address the problem.<sup>[519]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish federal regulations phasing out the production and sale of unnecessary single-use plastic products for which viable, affordable alternatives exist, following the model of successful bans already implemented in numerous states and countries.<sup>[520]</sup>

Establish extended producer responsibility requirements for plastic packaging, requiring manufacturers to take financial responsibility for the end-of-life management of the plastic packaging they produce, creating powerful economic incentives for the reduction of plastic packaging.<sup>[521]</sup>

Invest in the modernization and expansion of America's recycling infrastructure, addressing the chronic underfunding and fragmentation of recycling systems that has resulted in low recycling rates and contamination of recycling streams.<sup>[522]</sup>

## Ocean Health & Marine Protection

America's oceans, stretching across three coastlines and encompassing some of the most biologically diverse marine ecosystems on Earth, regulate the global climate, generate a significant portion of the oxygen we breathe, support hundreds of billions of dollars of economic activity, and sustain the livelihoods and cultural identities of coastal communities across the country.<sup>[523]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish a national ocean health strategy with legally binding targets for the protection and restoration of marine ecosystems, including the expansion of marine protected areas to cover at least 30 percent of American ocean waters by 2030.<sup>[524]</sup>

Strengthen federal fisheries management to ensure that all American fisheries are managed sustainably, eliminating overfishing, rebuilding depleted fish stocks, and ensuring that the fishing industry has a viable future.<sup>[525]</sup>

Address the threat of ocean acidification driven by the absorption of atmospheric carbon dioxide through both domestic emissions reduction and international climate diplomacy, recognizing that ocean acidification threatens the entire marine food web and the coastal ecosystems that protect American shorelines.<sup>[526]</sup>

## Innovative Waste-to-Resource Technologies

One of the most powerful shifts in environmental thinking is the recognition that waste is not an endpoint: it is a misplaced resource. Every ton of glass, rubber, plastic, construction debris, or food waste that ends up in a landfill or polluting a waterway represents both an environmental failure and a missed economic opportunity. The technology to transform these waste streams into valuable resources already exists and is being developed and refined by innovative companies and researchers across the country.<sup>[527]</sup>

### *How:*

Invest in the development and deployment of glass pulverizing technology that grinds recycled glass into fine, sand-like particles suitable for beach restoration, coastal erosion mitigation, and other beneficial uses. America's beaches are disappearing at an accelerating rate due to rising sea levels, increased storm intensity, and coastal development. Glass-to-sand technology addresses both problems simultaneously, turning a recycling liability into a coastal restoration asset.<sup>[528]</sup>

Invest in the development and deployment of technologies that transform waste tires into valuable materials including crumb rubber for road surfaces, playground equipment, athletic tracks, and construction materials. Establish federal procurement preferences for products incorporating recycled tire rubber.<sup>[529]</sup>

Establish federal standards and incentives for the recycling and reuse of construction and demolition waste, including concrete, steel, wood, drywall, and asphalt, which constitutes one of the largest waste streams in the country. Require that federally funded construction projects meet minimum recycled content and construction waste diversion standards.<sup>[530]</sup>

Invest in technologies and infrastructure that convert food waste into valuable resources including compost, biogas, and animal feed. Establish federal food waste reduction targets and invest in the infrastructure necessary to divert food waste from landfills where it generates methane into productive uses.<sup>[531]</sup>

Establish a dedicated federal Waste-to-Resource Innovation Fund providing grants, loans, and tax incentives for startups, research institutions, and established companies developing innovative waste-to-resource technologies. Use the enormous purchasing power of the federal government to create reliable markets for waste-derived materials and products.<sup>[532]</sup>

## PILLAR 9: JUSTICE & RECONCILIATION

*A nation that does not honestly reckon with its past cannot build an equitable future. America's history is one of extraordinary achievement and profound injustice: of ideals that inspired the world and systems that betrayed those ideals for generations. The path forward is not to erase that history or to be paralyzed by it, but to acknowledge it honestly, make meaningful amends where possible, and build systems that deliver on the promise of equal justice under law for every American regardless of race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability, or background. Justice is not a zero-sum game. Lifting up those who have been systematically excluded does not diminish anyone else; it strengthens the entire nation. Reconciliation is not weakness. It is the most demanding and most necessary work a society can undertake.*

### Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives exist because the playing field has never been level. Systemic barriers in education, employment, housing, healthcare, and the justice system have prevented millions of Americans from fully participating in the opportunities that this nation promises. DEI is not about giving anyone an unfair advantage. It is about identifying and dismantling the unfair disadvantages that have been baked into our systems for generations.<sup>[533]</sup>

#### *How:*

Reinstate and strengthen DEI initiatives across all federal agencies and departments, with clear goals, measurable outcomes, and accountability mechanisms.<sup>[534]</sup>

Require pay equity audits for all federal contractors and publicly traded corporations, with public disclosure of findings and binding corrective action requirements for organizations with documented pay disparities.<sup>[535]</sup>

Protect DEI programs from political interference by establishing their legal foundation in civil rights law rather than executive order, making them resistant to reversal by future administrations.<sup>[536]</sup>

### Criminal Justice Reform

The United States incarcerates more people per capita than any other nation on Earth. Our criminal justice system disproportionately impacts communities of color, low-income communities, and people with mental illness, reflecting not just individual criminal behavior but the compounding effects of systemic inequality, inadequate mental health treatment, and policies that have prioritized punishment over rehabilitation. A just criminal justice system does not just punish; it rehabilitates, restores, and prevents.<sup>[537]</sup>

#### *How:*

Eliminate mandatory minimum sentences for nonviolent offenses, restoring judicial discretion and ensuring that sentences are proportional to the offense and the individual circumstances of the offender. Review and commute existing sentences that are disproportionate under reformed sentencing guidelines.<sup>[538]</sup>

Dramatically reduce incarceration rates through sentencing reform, expanded diversion programs, drug decriminalization for personal use quantities, and investment in the community-based alternatives to incarceration that address the root causes of criminal behavior.<sup>[539]</sup>

Transform the purpose of incarceration from purely punitive to genuinely rehabilitative. Every incarcerated individual shall have access to education, vocational training, mental health treatment, and substance abuse recovery programs. Reentry programs shall provide meaningful support for individuals leaving incarceration.<sup>[540]</sup>

Phase out the use of private, for-profit prisons and detention facilities, recognizing that the profit motive is fundamentally incompatible with the goals of justice, rehabilitation, and humane treatment.<sup>[541]</sup>

## **Police Reform & Accountability**

Law enforcement plays a vital and necessary role in maintaining public safety. The vast majority of police officers serve their communities with professionalism and dedication. But the documented pattern of excessive force, racial bias, and lack of accountability that has characterized too many interactions between law enforcement and communities of color represents a genuine crisis, of both justice and public trust. Reform is not anti-police. It is pro-accountability, and accountability makes institutions stronger.<sup>[542]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish federal minimum standards for use of force by law enforcement, requiring that force be used only as a last resort, be proportional to the threat, and prioritize de-escalation at every opportunity. Ban chokeholds and no-knock raids except in the most extreme circumstances.<sup>[543]</sup>

Establish a national law enforcement misconduct registry to prevent officers who have been dismissed for misconduct from simply moving to another jurisdiction. Require body cameras for all officers engaged in field operations with mandatory retention protocols and clear public release standards.<sup>[544]</sup>

Establish independent civilian oversight boards with real investigative authority and the power to impose binding disciplinary recommendations in all jurisdictions receiving federal law enforcement funding.<sup>[545]</sup>

Redirect mental health crisis calls away from armed law enforcement response toward trained mental health crisis teams, recognizing that armed officers are not the appropriate first responder for mental health emergencies in most circumstances.<sup>[546]</sup>

## **Native American Justice & Reconciliation**

The United States was built on the displacement, dispossession, and systematic destruction of the Native American peoples who inhabited this land for thousands of years before European arrival. The treaties signed with Native nations were repeatedly broken. The cultures, languages, and families of Native peoples were systematically attacked through policies of forced assimilation that constitute cultural genocide.

Acknowledging this history honestly and making meaningful amends is not just a moral obligation; it is a prerequisite for genuine national reconciliation.<sup>[547]</sup>

#### *How:*

Establish a federal reparations program for Native American tribes and individuals, developed in genuine partnership with tribal nations and grounded in honest accounting of the historical and ongoing economic harms caused by federal policy.<sup>[548]</sup>

Develop a comprehensive framework, in partnership with tribal nations, for the return of tribal lands that were taken in violation of treaties or through coercive or fraudulent means. Where direct land return is not possible, establish equivalent compensation mechanisms developed in partnership with affected tribes.<sup>[549]</sup>

Invest significantly in Native American communities, addressing the chronic underfunding of education, healthcare, housing, water infrastructure, and economic development on tribal lands.<sup>[550]</sup>

Reaffirm and strengthen the federal government's recognition of tribal sovereignty as a foundational principle of the government-to-government relationship between the United States and federally recognized tribal nations. This means honoring treaty obligations in full, consulting meaningfully with tribal governments before taking federal actions that affect tribal lands or interests, supporting tribal self-governance and self-determination in the administration of federal programs, and fully funding the Indian Health Service, Bureau of Indian Education, and other federal trust obligations at levels commensurate with treaty commitments and documented need.<sup>[551]</sup>

## **Black American Reparations**

The enslavement of African Americans was not merely a historical injustice; it was the foundational economic engine of American prosperity, built on the forced, uncompensated labor of millions of human beings who were legally classified as property. The formal end of slavery did not end the systematic economic and social oppression of Black Americans; it was followed by a century of Jim Crow laws, convict leasing, redlining, discriminatory exclusion from New Deal programs, GI Bill benefits, and federally subsidized homeownership opportunities that built the white middle class while systematically excluding Black Americans. The wealth gap between Black and white Americans today is not an accident; it is the direct, measurable, compounding consequence of centuries of deliberate government-sanctioned theft of Black labor, wealth, land, and opportunity.<sup>[552]</sup>

#### *How:*

Establish a federal Commission on Reparations for Black Americans, composed of historians, economists, legal scholars, community representatives, and descendants of enslaved people, tasked with conducting a comprehensive study of the economic and social impacts of slavery, Jim Crow, and subsequent discriminatory federal policies on Black Americans and their descendants.<sup>[553]</sup>

Address the specific harms caused by identifiable federal policies, including the discriminatory administration of New Deal programs, the GI Bill, and federally backed mortgage programs, through targeted remediation programs directed at the

descendants of those who were explicitly excluded from these wealth-building opportunities.<sup>[554]</sup>

Acknowledge formally and officially through congressional resolution and presidential proclamation the federal government's direct role in the establishment, perpetuation, and defense of slavery and the subsequent system of racial apartheid that denied Black Americans the full rights of citizenship for a century after emancipation.<sup>[555]</sup>

## LGBTQ+ Rights & Protections

Every American, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity, deserves the full protection of the law and the full enjoyment of the rights and opportunities that this nation promises. Discrimination against LGBTQ+ Americans in employment, housing, healthcare, and public accommodations is not a religious freedom; it is a civil rights violation that has no place in a just society.<sup>[556]</sup>

### *How:*

Pass and enforce comprehensive federal civil rights protections for LGBTQ+ Americans, explicitly prohibiting discrimination in employment, housing, healthcare, education, and public accommodations.<sup>[557]</sup>

Protect the right of transgender Americans to access medically necessary healthcare, including the right of transgender youth to receive appropriate medical care with the support of their parents and medical providers, free from government interference.<sup>[558]</sup>

Prohibit conversion therapy for minors nationwide, recognizing it as a discredited and harmful practice that causes lasting psychological damage.<sup>[559]</sup>

## Women's Rights & Reproductive Justice

Women's rights are human rights. The right of every woman to make decisions about her own body, health, and future is fundamental to her dignity, autonomy, and equal participation in society. The rollback of reproductive rights represents a profound assault on women's freedom and must be reversed and permanently protected.<sup>[560]</sup>

### *How:*

Codify the right to abortion into federal law, establishing a clear and enforceable national standard that protects women's access to reproductive healthcare regardless of the state in which they live.<sup>[561]</sup>

Address the maternal mortality crisis, which disproportionately impacts Black women, through investment in maternal healthcare, implicit bias training for medical providers, and expanded Medicaid coverage for postpartum care.<sup>[562]</sup>

Ensure universal access to contraception, reproductive healthcare, and comprehensive sex education, recognizing that prevention is both more humane and more effective than prohibition.<sup>[563]</sup>

Strengthen protections against workplace discrimination, sexual harassment, and gender-based violence, with robust enforcement mechanisms and meaningful penalties for violations.<sup>[564]</sup>

## Sexual Assault Laws & Enforcement Reform

Sexual assault is among the most underreported, underprosecuted, and inadequately addressed crimes in America. Estimates consistently show that the majority of sexual assaults are never reported to law enforcement, that a fraction of reported assaults result in arrest, and that an even smaller fraction result in conviction. Hundreds of thousands of rape kits sit untested in evidence storage facilities across the country, representing both a failure of justice for survivors and a documented public safety risk as serial offenders remain unidentified. The system's failures are not primarily the result of insufficient laws; they are the result of inadequate resources, institutional cultures that discourage reporting, and legal frameworks that place excessive evidentiary burdens on survivors.<sup>[565]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish and fully fund a National Rape Kit Backlog Elimination Program, requiring that all previously collected and untested rape kits be processed within five years, and mandating that all newly collected rape kits be tested within 120 days of collection. Provide federal grants to state and local law enforcement agencies to fund the personnel, laboratory capacity, and technology necessary to meet these timelines.<sup>[566]</sup>

Reform statute of limitations laws for sexual assault at the federal level and incentivize equivalent reform at the state level, recognizing that survivors often do not disclose assaults for years or decades due to trauma, shame, fear of disbelief, and the documented psychological effects of sexual violence. Civil and criminal statutes of limitations for sexual assault shall reflect the reality of trauma response rather than administrative convenience.<sup>[567]</sup>

Establish mandatory specialized training in trauma-informed investigation and prosecution techniques for all law enforcement officers and prosecutors who handle sexual assault cases, replacing investigation approaches that have historically discouraged reporting and increased the re-traumatization of survivors.<sup>[568]</sup>

Extend and strengthen the Violence Against Women Act, expanding its protections to all survivors regardless of gender, sexual orientation, immigration status, or tribal membership, ensuring that federal law enforcement tools and resources are available to every survivor in every community.<sup>[569]</sup>

Reform military sexual assault prosecution by removing the adjudication of sexual assault cases entirely from the chain of command, placing prosecution decisions in the hands of independent military prosecutors with no reporting relationship to the accused's commanding officer. This reform, long advocated by survivors and military justice experts, addresses the fundamental conflict of interest that has allowed sexual assault to remain pervasive in the military.<sup>[570]</sup>

## Disability Rights

Americans with disabilities deserve full participation in every aspect of public life, in employment, education, transportation, healthcare, and civic engagement. The Americans with Disabilities Act established important protections, but enforcement has been uneven and the needs of the disability community continue to outpace the systems designed to serve them.<sup>[571]</sup>

### *How:*

Strengthen enforcement of the ADA and related legislation, with increased funding for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division.<sup>[572]</sup>

Invest in accessible infrastructure, transportation, and public facilities to ensure that Americans with disabilities can participate fully in public life.<sup>[573]</sup>

Expand access to home and community-based services that allow Americans with disabilities to live independently and with dignity rather than in institutional settings.<sup>[574]</sup>

Ensure that healthcare systems fully address the needs of Americans with disabilities, including coverage for assistive technologies, therapies, and specialized care. Include disability representation and perspective in all policy development processes.<sup>[575]</sup>

## **Prison Conditions, Solitary Confinement & Juvenile Justice**

The United States incarcerates more people in absolute terms than any other nation on Earth and more per capita than all but a handful of the world's most authoritarian states. The conditions in which those people are held are, in too many cases, a second punishment layered on top of the sentence itself: overcrowding, inadequate medical and mental health care, endemic violence, and the use of solitary confinement for periods that international human rights law classifies as torture. These conditions are not the result of resource scarcity; they are the result of political choices that treat the humane treatment of incarcerated people as a low priority. They also produce worse outcomes: people released from inhumane conditions are more likely, not less, to reoffend.<sup>[576]</sup>

### *How:*

Prohibit the use of solitary confinement for more than fifteen consecutive days for any incarcerated person and ban it entirely for juveniles, pregnant individuals, and people with serious mental illness, consistent with the United Nations Nelson Mandela Rules. Establish federal minimum standards for prison conditions, healthcare, and mental health treatment that apply to all facilities holding federal detainees including private prisons under federal contract.<sup>[577]</sup>

Establish a comprehensive juvenile justice reform framework that raises the minimum age for adult prosecution to eighteen in all circumstances, prohibits the incarceration of juveniles in adult facilities, and mandates the use of restorative justice, diversion, and community-based alternatives to incarceration for all but the most serious juvenile offenses. The research is unambiguous: prosecuting and incarcerating young people as adults increases recidivism and destroys life prospects without improving public safety.<sup>[578]</sup>

Address the wrongful conviction crisis by establishing federal standards for post-conviction review, expanding access to DNA testing for incarcerated individuals who assert innocence, and requiring that prosecutors who engage in documented misconduct face professional consequences including disbarment. Establish a National Innocence Commission tasked with identifying and remedying systemic causes of wrongful conviction including eyewitness misidentification, false confessions, junk science, and prosecutorial misconduct.<sup>[579]</sup>

## Reentry, Civil Rights Restoration & the Second Chance

The United States imposes an extensive system of collateral consequences on people with criminal records that extends far beyond the sentence imposed by the court. These consequences, which include barriers to employment, housing, professional licensing, federal student aid, public housing, food assistance, and voting, amount to a second punishment that follows people for the rest of their lives long after they have served their legal sentence. More than 70 million Americans have a criminal record of some kind. The systematic exclusion of this population from full economic and civic participation is not only unjust; it is counterproductive, as it dramatically increases the likelihood of recidivism by making it nearly impossible for returning citizens to meet their basic needs through legitimate means.<sup>[580]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish a comprehensive Clean Slate Act providing for the automatic sealing or expungement of criminal records for non-violent offenses after a defined period of law-abiding conduct following the completion of sentence, removing the barrier of the criminal record from people who have demonstrated rehabilitation without requiring them to navigate a complex petition process. Abolish the federal ban on SNAP and public housing assistance for people with drug convictions, and restore eligibility for federal student aid for all formerly incarcerated individuals.<sup>[581]</sup>

## Department of Justice Reform

The Department of Justice must be and must be seen to be independent: an institution that applies the law equally to all Americans regardless of wealth, power, or political affiliation. When the DOJ is politicized, weaponized against political opponents, or shielded from accountability, the entire foundation of equal justice under law is undermined.<sup>[582]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish statutory protections for the independence of the Attorney General and the DOJ from direct presidential interference in specific investigations or prosecutions, codifying the norms of prosecutorial independence that have been eroded in recent years.<sup>[583]</sup>

Reform prosecutorial conduct standards, establishing clear accountability mechanisms for prosecutors who engage in misconduct including withholding exculpatory evidence, making false statements, or engaging in discriminatory charging decisions.<sup>[584]</sup>

Strengthen the DOJ's Civil Rights Division with increased funding, staffing, and a renewed mandate to actively investigate and prosecute civil rights violations, voting rights suppression, and hate crimes.<sup>[585]</sup>

Establish an independent Inspector General for the DOJ with enhanced authority to investigate allegations of political interference, prosecutorial misconduct, and civil rights violations within the department.<sup>[586]</sup>

Ensure that the equal application of the law is not just a principle but a practice: that no individual, regardless of wealth, political power, or connections, is above the law or immune from accountability for their actions.<sup>[587]</sup>

## **Anti-Asian Discrimination & Hate Crime Protections**

Anti-Asian hate crimes increased by more than 150 percent in major American cities during the COVID-19 pandemic, driven in part by the deliberate use of racially inflammatory language by political leaders to characterize the virus as foreign and Asian in origin. The surge of violence against Asian Americans exposed the persistent vulnerability of Asian American communities to scapegoating, discrimination, and violence, as well as the chronic undercounting of anti-Asian hate crimes due to underreporting and inconsistent law enforcement tracking. Asian Americans are the fastest-growing racial group in the United States and have faced discrimination embedded in American law and practice since the first Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.<sup>[588]</sup>

### *How:*

Fully implement and fund the COVID-19 Hate Crimes Act, including the establishment of the online hate crime reporting system and the deployment of additional DOJ resources for anti-Asian hate crime investigation and prosecution. Mandate consistent federal standards for hate crime tracking and reporting that capture anti-Asian incidents with the same rigor applied to other categories of hate crime, and invest in community-based organizations serving Asian American communities in prevention, reporting, and victim support.<sup>[589]</sup>

## **Anti-Semitism, Islamophobia & Religious Discrimination**

The United States was founded on the principle of religious freedom: the radical idea that government has no business dictating the faith of its citizens or discriminating on the basis of religious belief. Yet anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and discrimination against other religious minorities remain persistent and in recent years growing threats to the safety, dignity, and equal citizenship of millions of Americans.<sup>[590]</sup>

### *How:*

Strengthen federal hate crime laws to ensure that religiously motivated violence and harassment are prosecuted vigorously, and invest in security grants for religious institutions including synagogues, mosques, churches, temples, and other houses of worship that face documented threats.<sup>[591]</sup>

Mandate anti-bias and religious tolerance education in public schools as part of the Critical Human Rights Theory framework outlined in Pillar 4, ensuring that every American child grows up with an understanding of and respect for the diversity of religious traditions that make up the American mosaic.<sup>[592]</sup>

## Puerto Rico Statehood & The Forgotten Americans of U.S. Territories

The United States governs five permanently inhabited territories: Puerto Rico, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. Approximately 3.6 million American citizens and nationals live in these territories, pay federal taxes, serve in the United States military at rates that frequently exceed those of the fifty states, and are subject to federal law in all its dimensions. Yet they have no voting representation in Congress, cannot vote for president, and exist in a constitutional status that the Supreme Court described in the Insular Cases of the early twentieth century using the explicit language of colonialism. Puerto Rico alone has been an American territory for more than 125 years — longer than many of the fifty states have existed — and its 3.2 million citizens remain without full democratic representation. This is not a peripheral issue. It is a fundamental democratic deficit at the heart of the American system, and it demands a structural remedy.<sup>[593]</sup>

### *How:*

Conduct a federally administered, binding referendum on Puerto Rico's political status, offering clearly defined options including statehood, independence, and enhanced commonwealth status, ensuring that the process is transparent, well-informed, and genuinely reflective of the will of the Puerto Rican people. Congress shall commit in advance to honor the result.<sup>[594]</sup>

Address the legacy of federal policies that have contributed to Puerto Rico's economic challenges, including the Jones Act shipping restrictions that artificially raise the cost of goods on the island, and invest in targeted infrastructure, education, healthcare, and economic diversification. Extend Medicaid equity and Social Security equity to Puerto Rico regardless of the outcome of the status referendum, because these are rights that flow from citizenship, not from statehood.<sup>[595]</sup>

Extend full voting representation in Congress to the residents of all permanently inhabited U.S. territories, either through statehood for those territories that choose it, free association with full citizenship rights, or a new territorial representation framework developed in genuine partnership with the people of each territory through free and fair self-determination processes. No American who bears the obligations of citizenship should be denied the rights of citizenship.<sup>[596]</sup>

Extend presidential voting rights to all U.S. citizens residing in territories, recognizing that the commander in chief who sends territorial residents to war should be accountable to their votes. Eliminate Jones Act shipping restrictions that raise the cost of goods in all island territories and compound the economic disadvantages that territorial status already imposes.<sup>[597]</sup>

## Gun Violence as a Public Health Issue

Gun violence kills tens of thousands of Americans every year through homicide, suicide, domestic violence, mass shootings, and accidental discharge. It is the leading cause of death for American children and adolescents. It costs the American economy hundreds of billions of dollars annually in healthcare costs, lost productivity, and criminal justice expenditures. And yet it has been treated as an intractable political

problem rather than what it actually is: a preventable public health crisis that demands the same evidence-based, data-driven response that we apply to every other major cause of preventable death. The specifics of gun reform policy are addressed comprehensively in Pillar 11; this section establishes the public health framework through which gun violence must be understood and addressed.<sup>[598]</sup>

*How:*

Formally designate gun violence as a public health crisis, directing the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to conduct and fund comprehensive research into the causes, patterns, and prevention of gun violence.<sup>[599]</sup>

Establish a National Gun Violence Research Institute with dedicated, permanent funding to build the evidence base necessary for effective gun violence prevention policy, drawing on the models of successful public health research programs that have dramatically reduced deaths from motor vehicles, tobacco, and other preventable causes.<sup>[600]</sup>

Integrate gun violence prevention into the public health infrastructure through hospital-based violence intervention programs, community violence interruption programs, and the training of healthcare providers to identify and respond to gun violence risk factors.<sup>[601]</sup>

## PILLAR 10: IMMIGRATION

*America is a nation of immigrants. With the exception of Native Americans, every person in this country is either an immigrant or a descendant of immigrants, whether they arrived on the Mayflower, in the hold of a slave ship, through Ellis Island, across the Rio Grande, or on a flight from Lagos or Manila. Immigration is not a threat to the American identity; it is the American identity. The question is never whether America should be a nation of immigrants, but how we manage that reality with humanity, fairness, security, and fidelity to the values we claim to hold. A broken immigration system serves no one: not American citizens, not immigrants, not the economy, and not the rule of law. Fixing it requires honesty, courage, and a willingness to reject both the cruelty of mass deportation and the chaos of unmanaged borders. We can have secure borders and be a humane nation. These are not opposing goals; they are complementary ones.*

### A Humane & Just Immigration Framework

Immigration policy must be grounded in the recognition that the vast majority of people who come to America, whether through legal channels or out of desperation, are human beings seeking safety, opportunity, and a better life for their families. They are not invaders. They are not criminals. They are people, and they deserve to be treated as such regardless of their legal status. At the same time, a functioning democracy requires a functioning immigration system: one with clear rules, fair processes, and consistent enforcement that respects both the law and human dignity.<sup>[602]</sup>

#### *How:*

Establish a comprehensive immigration reform framework developed through genuine bipartisan cooperation, input from affected communities, and grounded in both security requirements and humanitarian obligations.<sup>[603]</sup>

Ensure that all immigration policies and enforcement actions comply with domestic and international law, including the 1951 Refugee Convention and its protocols, which the United States helped draft and is obligated to uphold.<sup>[604]</sup>

### Border Security

Secure borders are a legitimate and necessary component of national sovereignty. Border security and humanitarian treatment are not mutually exclusive; it is entirely possible to maintain effective border security while treating every individual encountered at the border with dignity and in accordance with the law. The militarization of the border and the deliberate use of cruelty as a deterrent are not security strategies; they are moral failures that have not demonstrably reduced unauthorized immigration while causing immeasurable human suffering.<sup>[605]</sup>

#### *How:*

Invest in smart, technology-driven border security that maximizes effectiveness while minimizing the need for large-scale physical infrastructure. This includes advanced

surveillance technology, sensor networks, and data-driven deployment of border personnel.<sup>[606]</sup>

Increase funding for ports of entry, the primary point of entry for both unauthorized immigrants and the vast majority of drug smuggling, ensuring adequate staffing, technology, and processing capacity.<sup>[607]</sup>

Address the root causes of migration from Central America and other source regions through targeted foreign aid, diplomatic engagement, and support for good governance, economic development, and security in sending countries. Stopping migration at the source is more effective and more humane than stopping it at the border.<sup>[608]</sup>

End the use of cruelty, including family separation, inhumane detention conditions, and illegal pushbacks, as immigration deterrence. These practices violate American law, international obligations, and basic human decency, and have been demonstrated to be ineffective as deterrents.<sup>[609]</sup>

## Asylum & Refugee Protection

The right to seek asylum is enshrined in international law and American statute. People fleeing persecution, violence, and life-threatening conditions have a legal right to present themselves at the border and request protection. Denying that right, criminalizing asylum seekers, or using procedural barriers to make asylum effectively inaccessible are violations of both the law and America's most fundamental values.<sup>[610]</sup>

### *How:*

Restore and strengthen the asylum system, ensuring that all individuals who present themselves at the border have a fair and timely opportunity to have their claims heard by qualified immigration judges.<sup>[611]</sup>

Dramatically increase the number of immigration judges and support staff to eliminate the massive backlog of asylum cases that currently leaves applicants waiting years for resolution, often in legal limbo and without the ability to work legally.<sup>[612]</sup>

Increase the annual refugee admissions ceiling to levels commensurate with global refugee needs and America's historical commitment to refugee protection.<sup>[613]</sup>

## Pathways to Legal Status

Millions of people live and work in the United States without legal status, contributing to their communities, paying taxes, raising American-born children, and building lives over decades. The existence of this large undocumented population is not primarily the result of individual lawbreaking; it is the result of a legal immigration system so broken, so backlogged, and so inadequate to the actual demand for immigration that millions of people have had no viable legal pathway available to them. Addressing this reality requires both enforcement and compassion.<sup>[614]</sup>

### *How:*

Provide a permanent legislative solution for DACA recipients and Dreamers, individuals who were brought to this country as children and have grown up as Americans in every meaningful sense. These individuals deserve a clear and accessible pathway to permanent legal status and citizenship.<sup>[615]</sup>

Establish a pathway to legal status for undocumented individuals who have lived in the United States for a significant period, have no serious criminal history, and have demonstrated ties to their communities. This is not amnesty; it is a practical and humane recognition of reality.<sup>[616]</sup>

Restore and strengthen family reunification as a cornerstone of legal immigration policy, and comprehensively review and reform the visa system to ensure that it is responsive to actual immigration needs and reduces bureaucratic barriers to legal immigration.<sup>[617]</sup>

## **Birthright Citizenship & the Fourteenth Amendment**

The Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution is unambiguous: all persons born or naturalized in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof are citizens of the United States. Birthright citizenship is not a policy choice. It is a constitutional right that has been recognized by every court to consider the question and affirmed by more than 150 years of legal precedent. Attempts to end birthright citizenship by executive order are not merely unconstitutional; they represent a direct assault on the Fourteenth Amendment, which was ratified specifically to ensure that the government could never again create a class of people born on American soil who are denied the rights of citizenship. The Fourteenth Amendment was written with that history in mind, and any attempt to circumvent it must be recognized and treated as the constitutional crisis that it is.<sup>[618]</sup>

### *How:*

Pass federal legislation explicitly affirming the birthright citizenship guarantee of the Fourteenth Amendment, codifying in statute what the Constitution already requires, and establishing that no executive order, regulation, or agency guidance may be used to deny citizenship to any person born on American soil. Establish expedited judicial review procedures for any executive action that purports to limit or condition birthright citizenship, with automatic injunctive relief pending final judicial resolution.<sup>[619]</sup>

## **Due Process in Immigration Enforcement & Limits on Military Deployment**

Immigration enforcement that bypasses due process, deports American citizens and legal permanent residents, and uses military resources for domestic law enforcement is not merely a policy disagreement. It is a constitutional crisis. The Fifth Amendment guarantees that no person shall be deprived of liberty without due process of law. The Posse Comitatus Act prohibits the use of the military for domestic law enforcement. The deportation of people to third countries without legal process, the detention of American citizens in immigration facilities, and the deployment of military units to participate in immigration enforcement operations are not aggressive immigration

enforcement. They are violations of constitutional rights that no administration is authorized to commit.<sup>[620]</sup>

#### *How:*

Establish statutory requirements that all immigration enforcement operations comply with Fourth and Fifth Amendment protections, including the right to a hearing before an immigration judge prior to removal, the right to counsel in removal proceedings for any person who asserts a claim to citizenship or legal status, and the prohibition on removal to any country where the individual faces a credible risk of persecution, torture, or death. Explicitly prohibit the use of military personnel in domestic immigration enforcement operations except as expressly authorized by Congress.<sup>[621]</sup>

Establish an independent Immigration Enforcement Oversight Board with authority to investigate complaints of constitutional violations in immigration enforcement operations, to compel the production of records from ICE and CBP, and to recommend disciplinary action for officers who violate constitutional rights. Require body camera use by all immigration enforcement officers during enforcement operations and mandate the preservation of footage for all operations resulting in detention or removal.<sup>[622]</sup>

Immigration enforcement must be conducted in accordance with the law, with respect for human dignity, and with full protection of the due process rights that the Constitution guarantees to all persons on American soil, not just citizens. Enforcement that targets law-abiding long-term residents, separates families, and operates without judicial oversight is not the rule of law; it is the abuse of power.<sup>[623]</sup>

Refocus immigration enforcement resources on individuals who pose genuine public safety threats, rather than the mass deportation of long-term residents, asylum seekers, and individuals with no criminal history beyond their immigration status.<sup>[624]</sup>

Guarantee due process rights for all individuals subject to immigration enforcement, including the right to a hearing before an immigration judge, the right to legal representation, and the right to appeal removal orders.<sup>[625]</sup>

End the practice of family separation as an immigration enforcement tool, recognizing it as a form of cruel and unusual punishment that causes lasting trauma to children and families.<sup>[626]</sup>

## **Integration & Citizenship**

Immigration does not end at the border. The successful integration of immigrants into American society, economically, socially, and civically, is essential both for the wellbeing of immigrants themselves and for the communities that receive them. America has a long and largely successful history of absorbing and integrating waves of immigration, and the institutions and programs that support integration deserve sustained investment.<sup>[627]</sup>

#### *How:*

Invest in English language learning programs, citizenship preparation courses, and civic integration resources that help immigrants become full participants in American society.<sup>[628]</sup>

Protect the right to citizenship by birth as guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment, rejecting any attempt to limit or eliminate birthright citizenship through executive action or legislation.<sup>[629]</sup>

Address the exploitation of immigrant workers, documented and undocumented, by strengthening labor law enforcement and protecting the right of immigrant workers to report violations without fear of deportation.<sup>[630]</sup>

## H-1B Visa Reform & Skilled Worker Immigration

The H-1B visa program was established with a legitimate and important purpose, allowing American employers to hire foreign nationals with specialized skills in fields where domestic talent is scarce. In practice, however, the program has been systematically abused by large corporations and outsourcing firms that use it not to fill genuine talent gaps but to replace American workers with cheaper foreign labor, undermining wages and working conditions in the very fields the program was designed to support.<sup>[631]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish a genuine prevailing wage requirement for H-1B workers that reflects actual market wages for the relevant occupation and geographic area, eliminating the wage floors that currently allow employers to pay H-1B workers significantly below market rates.<sup>[632]</sup>

Reform the H-1B lottery system to prioritize the highest-skilled and highest-wage positions, representing genuine specialized expertise not available in the domestic labor market, over the high-volume, lower-wage positions that currently dominate the program.<sup>[633]</sup>

Create clear, accessible pathways to permanent residency and citizenship for H-1B workers who have made genuine, long-term contributions to American innovation and economic competitiveness.<sup>[634]</sup>

## International Students

International students make enormous contributions to American universities, research institutions, and the broader economy, bringing diverse perspectives, filling critical graduate and research positions, generating billions of dollars in economic activity, and in many cases going on to found companies, make discoveries, and create jobs that benefit the entire country. At the same time, the international student visa system has created vulnerabilities to exploitation, fraud, and abuse, including diploma mills that exploit international students for visa fees without providing genuine education.<sup>[635]</sup>

### *How:*

Streamline and modernize the international student visa process, reducing bureaucratic barriers and processing delays that deter the world's best students from choosing American universities, recognizing that competition for global talent is intense and that America cannot afford to make itself an unwelcoming destination.<sup>[636]</sup>

Establish clear, accessible pathways for international students who graduate from American universities in high-demand fields to transition to work authorization and ultimately permanent residency, capturing the investment that American universities have made in their education rather than forcing them to take their skills elsewhere.<sup>[637]</sup>

Protect international students from exploitation by fraudulent educational institutions, including diploma mills, through rigorous accreditation standards, enhanced oversight of student visa sponsoring institutions, and robust enforcement against fraudulent operators. Ensure that international students have full access to legal protections against exploitation by employers, landlords, and others who prey on their vulnerability.<sup>[638]</sup>

Invest in programs that connect international students with American communities, industries, and research institutions, maximizing the mutual benefits of international student exchange and building the person-to-person relationships that strengthen America's global relationships and soft power.<sup>[639]</sup>

## Stateless Persons & Special Immigration Circumstances

Among the most vulnerable people in the world are those who are stateless, people who are not recognized as nationals by any country and who therefore exist in a legal limbo that denies them the most basic protections of citizenship anywhere. Statelessness can result from discrimination, the dissolution of states, gaps in nationality laws, or the circumstance of birth in no-man's-land between legal systems. The United States has a humanitarian obligation to address statelessness both domestically and through international leadership.<sup>[640]</sup>

### *How:*

Accede to the 1954 Convention Relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness, establishing a clear legal framework for the identification and protection of stateless persons in the United States. Establish a formal statelessness determination procedure that allows individuals who may be stateless to have their status formally assessed.<sup>[641]</sup>

Develop special immigration provisions for individuals fleeing climate-related displacement, a category of forced migration that international refugee law does not currently address but that is expected to affect hundreds of millions of people in coming decades, establishing America as a leader in developing the legal frameworks necessary to address this emerging humanitarian challenge.<sup>[642]</sup>

Establish clear immigration provisions for victims of human trafficking who have been brought to the United States against their will, ensuring they are treated as victims rather than violators of immigration law and have access to the legal status, support services, and protection they need to rebuild their lives.<sup>[643]</sup>

Establish a clear pathway to permanent residency for long-term TPS holders who have built lives, families, and careers in the United States, recognizing that individuals who have lived here for decades under repeatedly extended temporary protected status deserve a durable solution.<sup>[644]</sup>

## Immigration Court Reform

The immigration court system is in a state of profound crisis. A backlog of millions of cases means that individuals wait years, sometimes more than a decade, for their cases to be heard, living in legal limbo without the ability to fully work, travel, or plan their lives. Immigration judges are overwhelmed, under-resourced, and subject to political pressure that compromises their independence. The result is a system that delivers neither justice nor efficiency.<sup>[645]</sup>

### *How:*

Dramatically increase the number of immigration judges and support staff, with the goal of reducing the case backlog to a level that allows cases to be heard within a reasonable timeframe, no more than one year from filing for straightforward cases.<sup>[646]</sup>

Establish the immigration court system as a truly independent Article I court, removing it from the Department of Justice and insulating immigration judges from political pressure and executive branch interference in individual case outcomes.<sup>[647]</sup>

Ensure that all individuals appearing before immigration courts have access to legal representation, recognizing that the complexity of immigration law makes meaningful due process impossible without counsel.<sup>[648]</sup>

## Refugee Admissions & America's Humanitarian Tradition

The United States Refugee Admissions Program, established by the Refugee Act of 1980, is the world's largest and most established resettlement program. It represents one of the clearest expressions of American values: the belief that people fleeing persecution, violence, and genocide deserve a chance at safety and that the most powerful nation on Earth has both the capacity and the obligation to provide it. The near-elimination of refugee admissions through administrative action, reducing the annual ceiling to as low as 18,000, is not a national security measure. Refugees are the most thoroughly vetted immigrants who enter the United States, subject to security screening that can take two years or more. The reduction in refugee admissions is a choice about American values, and it is the wrong choice.

### *How:*

Restore the annual refugee admissions ceiling to at least 125,000 per year and work toward expanding it further in recognition of the scale of global displacement, which has reached record levels driven by climate change, conflict, and persecution. Invest in the refugee resettlement infrastructure, including the network of voluntary agencies and state and local resettlement offices, that was systematically dismantled during periods of reduced admissions and that cannot be quickly rebuilt.<sup>[649]</sup>

Reaffirm American leadership in international refugee protection through active participation in the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees resettlement program, bilateral cooperation with allies on burden-sharing, and advocacy for improved conditions in countries of first asylum. The United States cannot credibly claim global leadership while turning away those who need protection most. Restore and fully fund the State Department's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration to the staffing levels necessary to administer a robust admissions program.<sup>[650]</sup>

## PILLAR 11: GUN REFORM

*The Second Amendment is part of the Constitution of the United States, and the right of law-abiding Americans to keep and bear arms is a right that this document respects and upholds. This is not a pillar about taking guns away from responsible, law-abiding citizens. It is a pillar about the simple, undeniable, and morally urgent reality that the United States suffers from a level of gun violence that is without parallel in the developed world, and that this violence is not inevitable, not acceptable, and not beyond our ability to address. Tens of thousands of Americans die from gun violence every year. It is the leading cause of death for American children and adolescents. Mass shootings have become so routine that they barely register in the national consciousness before the next one occurs. Other developed nations have faced similar challenges and addressed them through sensible, evidence-based policy without eliminating civilian gun ownership. We can do the same. The question is not whether we value the Second Amendment; we do. The question is whether we value the lives of our children, our families, and our communities enough to do what the evidence tells us works. The answer must be yes.*

### Universal Background Checks

The single most basic, common-sense, and broadly supported gun reform in America is the universal background check: the requirement that every gun sale, regardless of where it occurs or who is selling, be subject to the same background check required of licensed dealers. Currently, the gun show loophole and private sale exemption allow millions of firearms to change hands every year without any background check whatsoever, providing easy access to weapons for people who are legally prohibited from owning them. There is no legitimate argument for this loophole. It serves no purpose beyond making it easier for dangerous people to obtain deadly weapons.<sup>[651]</sup>

#### *How:*

Pass federal legislation requiring that every firearm sale or transfer, including sales at gun shows, private sales between individuals, and online sales, be conducted through a federally licensed dealer and subject to a National Instant Criminal Background Check System check, with no exceptions beyond narrow circumstances such as transfers between immediate family members.<sup>[652]</sup>

Strengthen the NICS database by requiring that all relevant records, including mental health adjudications, domestic violence convictions, drug offenses, and other disqualifying factors, be reported to the system completely and promptly, closing the data gaps that have allowed prohibited persons to pass background checks due to incomplete records.<sup>[653]</sup>

Establish a maximum processing time for background checks with a clear protocol for cases that cannot be resolved within that timeframe that does not default to automatic approval, addressing the Charleston loophole that allowed the 2015 Charleston church shooter to purchase a firearm because his background check was not completed within three business days.<sup>[654]</sup>

## Red Flag Laws & Crisis Intervention

Red flag laws, also known as Extreme Risk Protection Orders, allow family members, law enforcement, and in some states other designated individuals to petition a court to temporarily remove firearms from a person who is demonstrating signs of imminent danger to themselves or others. These laws have been demonstrated to reduce gun suicides and have been used to prevent potential mass shootings in documented cases. They represent a targeted, due-process-based intervention that keeps guns out of the hands of dangerous individuals while respecting the rights of law-abiding gun owners.<sup>[655]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish a federal baseline red flag law that sets minimum standards for Extreme Risk Protection Orders, while allowing states to adopt stronger provisions, ensuring that this life-saving tool is available in every state regardless of state-level political dynamics.<sup>[656]</sup>

Ensure that all red flag laws include robust due process protections, including notice, the right to a hearing, and the right to legal representation, so that firearms are removed only when there is genuine evidence of imminent danger and the rights of individuals who do not pose a danger are fully protected.<sup>[657]</sup>

Complement red flag laws with robust crisis intervention programs, including mobile mental health crisis teams, crisis hotlines, and community-based intervention programs, that address the underlying mental health and social factors that drive gun violence risk.<sup>[658]</sup>

## Assault Weapons & High-Capacity Magazines

Military-style assault weapons and high-capacity magazines serve one purpose in civilian hands: maximizing the number of people who can be killed in the shortest possible time. They are not hunting weapons. They are not home defense weapons. They are weapons of war that have been used in virtually every mass shooting that has produced the largest death tolls in American history. The federal assault weapons ban that was in effect from 1994 to 2004 was associated with a significant reduction in mass shooting fatalities. Its expiration was followed by a dramatic increase in mass shooting deaths. The evidence is clear.<sup>[659]</sup>

### *How:*

Reinstate and strengthen the federal assault weapons ban, prohibiting the manufacture, sale, and transfer of semi-automatic assault-style weapons and high-capacity magazines to civilians, with a carefully defined scope that targets weapons designed for military use while explicitly protecting standard hunting and sporting firearms.<sup>[660]</sup>

Establish a voluntary buyback program for currently owned assault weapons and high-capacity magazines, providing fair market compensation to owners who choose to surrender their weapons, reducing the number of these weapons in civilian circulation over time.<sup>[661]</sup>

Prohibit the manufacture, sale, and possession of bump stocks, forced reset triggers, and other devices that effectively convert semi-automatic weapons into automatic fire, closing the regulatory loophole that allowed the Las Vegas shooter to fire into a crowd at a rate approximating fully automatic fire.<sup>[662]</sup>

Limit magazine capacity for civilian firearms to a maximum of ten rounds, recognizing that the ability to fire dozens of rounds without reloading is the critical factor that transforms a shooting incident into a mass casualty event.<sup>[663]</sup>

## Safe Storage & Responsible Ownership

Responsible gun ownership includes the obligation to store firearms safely, preventing access by children, reducing theft that puts guns into criminal hands, and minimizing the risk of impulsive suicide using a readily accessible firearm. Safe storage laws have been demonstrated to reduce accidental shootings, youth suicides, and gun theft without meaningfully impeding the ability of responsible gun owners to access their firearms for legitimate purposes.<sup>[664]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish federal safe storage requirements for all civilian firearms, requiring that guns be stored in a locked container or with a trigger lock when not in use, with enhanced requirements for households with children.<sup>[665]</sup>

Provide federal funding for safe storage device distribution programs that make gun safes, trigger locks, and other storage devices available at low or no cost to gun owners who cannot afford them, recognizing that the cost of safe storage should not be a barrier to responsible ownership.<sup>[666]</sup>

Establish civil liability for gun owners whose improperly stored firearms are accessed by children or stolen and subsequently used in crimes, creating meaningful financial incentives for responsible storage beyond criminal penalties.<sup>[667]</sup>

## Licensing, Training & Registration

Owning and operating a motor vehicle in the United States requires a license, training, registration, and insurance. These requirements do not prevent law-abiding Americans from owning and driving cars; they create a system of accountability and competency that makes roads safer for everyone. There is no principled reason why firearms, which are at least as dangerous as motor vehicles and which are specifically designed to cause harm, should be subject to fewer accountability requirements than automobiles.<sup>[668]</sup>

### *How:*

Establish a federal firearm owner licensing system requiring that all individuals who purchase or possess firearms obtain a license demonstrating completion of a comprehensive firearms safety and competency training course, a clean background check, and basic firearms knowledge.<sup>[669]</sup>

Establish a national firearms registration system that creates a reliable record of firearm ownership, facilitating the recovery of stolen weapons, the tracing of crime

guns, and the enforcement of laws prohibiting firearm possession by prohibited persons.<sup>[670]</sup>

Establish a mandatory waiting period of a minimum of fourteen days between the purchase and transfer of any firearm, providing a cooling-off period that has been demonstrated to reduce impulsive gun violence, particularly suicide, and allowing time for background checks to be thoroughly completed.<sup>[671]</sup>

## **Ammunition Regulation & Firearm Liability Insurance**

Comprehensive gun violence prevention requires addressing not just the acquisition and possession of firearms but the ammunition that makes them lethal and the financial accountability mechanisms that incentivize safe storage and responsible ownership. Background checks at the point of sale do not prevent a person who passes a check today from later becoming a prohibited person and retaining their firearm. Ammunition regulation and firearm liability insurance incentives address different dimensions of the same problem: ensuring that the people who own guns are vetted at the point of ongoing use, not just initial acquisition, and that the costs of gun violence are borne by gun owners rather than externalized onto victims, communities, and taxpayers.<sup>[672]</sup>

### *How:*

Require background checks for all purchases of ammunition above a defined quantity per month, limiting bulk ammunition purchases that have no legitimate sporting purpose and that provide the capacity for mass casualty events. Require that ammunition be serialized to enable law enforcement to trace ammunition used in crimes back to the point of sale, creating accountability in the supply chain analogous to the tracing system that exists for firearms themselves.<sup>[673]</sup>

Establish a Voluntary Firearm Safety Insurance Incentive Program that provides meaningful tax credits, reduced licensing fees, and federal grant incentives to firearm owners who obtain liability insurance coverage for harm caused by their firearm, whether through use, theft due to inadequate storage, or negligent handling. Insurance markets will create powerful financial incentives for safe storage, proper training, and responsible ownership without restricting the rights of law-abiding gun owners. A note on constitutional limits: while mandatory liability insurance for motor vehicle operation has been upheld as a condition of using public roads, a mandatory insurance requirement tied to the mere ownership of a firearm would face serious Second Amendment challenge under *District of Columbia v. Heller*, 554 U.S. 570 (2008), which protects the right to keep arms in the home independent of any licensing or fee condition. This proposal therefore operates through positive incentives rather than mandates, achieving the same goal of promoting financial accountability and safe ownership practices through voluntary participation.<sup>[674]</sup>

## **Addressing the Gun Trafficking Pipeline**

The majority of guns used in crimes in American cities did not originate in those cities; they traveled there through a pipeline of straw purchases, theft, and illegal trafficking

that exploits weak gun laws in some states to flood communities across the country with illegal weapons. Addressing gun violence in American cities requires addressing the trafficking pipeline that supplies those cities with illegal weapons.<sup>[675]</sup>

#### *How:*

Strengthen federal laws against straw purchasing, the practice of buying a gun on behalf of someone who cannot legally purchase one, with mandatory minimum sentences that reflect the serious downstream consequences of providing illegal weapons to prohibited persons.<sup>[676]</sup>

Strengthen the ATF's authority and resources to regulate and oversee licensed firearms dealers, addressing the small number of dealers who are responsible for a disproportionate share of crime guns through inadequate record keeping, failure to conduct background checks, and in some cases deliberate facilitation of illegal sales.<sup>[677]</sup>

Close the ghost gun loophole, which allows individuals to purchase firearms in kit form or manufacture them using 3D printers without serial numbers or background checks, by requiring that all firearm components capable of being assembled into a functional weapon be subject to the same regulations as completed firearms.<sup>[678]</sup>

Address the accelerating ghost gun crisis through binding federal regulations that require serial numbers on all firearm components capable of being readily converted into functional firearms, including unfinished frames and receivers, and that extend background check requirements to the purchase of firearm kits and components. Establish federal standards requiring that any device capable of producing functional firearm components be subject to the same registration and accountability requirements as conventional firearm manufacturers.<sup>[679]</sup>

## **Domestic Violence & Firearms**

The intersection of domestic violence and firearms is one of the most deadly and most preventable dimensions of America's gun violence crisis. The presence of a gun in a domestic violence situation increases the risk of homicide by approximately five times. Yet current law contains significant gaps that allow domestic abusers to retain or acquire firearms, and enforcement of existing prohibitions is inconsistent and inadequate. Closing these gaps is one of the highest-impact, most evidence-based steps America can take to reduce gun violence.<sup>[680]</sup>

#### *How:*

Close the boyfriend loophole, which currently exempts dating partners who are not married to or do not cohabit with their victims from the federal prohibition on firearm possession by domestic abusers, by extending the prohibition to all individuals convicted of domestic violence or subject to domestic violence restraining orders regardless of their relationship to the victim.<sup>[681]</sup>

Establish mandatory surrender requirements for individuals who become subject to domestic violence convictions or restraining orders, with active law enforcement follow-up to ensure that firearms are actually surrendered rather than simply required to be surrendered on paper.<sup>[682]</sup>

## Mental Health & Gun Violence

The relationship between mental illness and gun violence is more complex and more nuanced than political discourse typically acknowledges. The vast majority of people with mental illness are not violent and are far more likely to be victims of violence than perpetrators. Conflating mental illness with gun violence stigmatizes people who need help and diverts attention from the evidence-based interventions that actually reduce gun violence. At the same time, there are specific mental health conditions and crisis situations that do represent elevated risk, and addressing those risks through appropriate clinical and legal interventions is an important component of a comprehensive gun violence prevention strategy.<sup>[683]</sup>

### *How:*

Invest in the mental health system as outlined in Pillar 3, recognizing that the most effective mental health contribution to gun violence reduction is ensuring that people in crisis have access to timely, appropriate, and compassionate mental health care before they reach a point of danger to themselves or others.<sup>[684]</sup>

Establish lethal means counseling as a standard component of mental health crisis intervention, training mental health providers, emergency room staff, and crisis counselors to assess firearm access as a standard component of suicide risk assessment and to counsel patients and families on temporary firearm storage during periods of elevated risk.<sup>[685]</sup>

Reject the false and stigmatizing narrative that mental illness is the primary driver of gun violence. The evidence does not support this claim. The commitment must be to evidence-based interventions that address the specific, well-defined circumstances in which mental health and gun access intersect to create elevated risk.<sup>[686]</sup>

## CONCLUSION: THE WORK AHEAD

*“The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.”*

These words, spoken by Theodore Parker and echoed across generations by Martin Luther King Jr., are not a guarantee. They are not a promise that justice will arrive on its own, on schedule, without effort or sacrifice. They are an observation about the direction of travel when enough human beings commit themselves, with enough courage and enough sustained effort, to the work of bending it.

That work is never finished. It was not finished at Appomattox. It was not finished with the passage of the 19th Amendment. It was not finished with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, or the legalization of same-sex marriage in 2015. It will not be finished when the last reform proposed in this document is enacted, because the work of building a more perfect union is not a project with a completion date. It is a permanent commitment. A way of being a nation. A choice that every generation must make anew.

This generation’s choice is before us now.

### What We Have Proposed

The eleven pillars contained in this document represent a comprehensive, interconnected vision for the renewal of American democracy, the restoration of economic fairness, the investment in human potential, and the protection of the natural world and the institutions that sustain us. They are ambitious: deliberately, necessarily, unapologetically ambitious, because the challenges they address are serious, the stakes are high, and the cost of incrementalism is measured in human lives, in squandered potential, and in the slow erosion of the democratic foundations on which everything else depends.

We have proposed to restore and strengthen the democratic institutions that are under unprecedented assault, to protect the vote, clean up our elections, reform the systems of representation that have drifted from the will of the people, and reaffirm the principle that no person, regardless of the office they hold, is above the law.

We have proposed to build an economy that works for everyone, not just the wealthy few, by closing the loopholes that allow the ultra-rich to avoid taxation, protecting and empowering workers, holding corporations accountable to the communities they depend on, and investing in the infrastructure, innovation, and opportunity that generate broadly shared prosperity.

We have proposed to invest seriously and sustainably in the social foundations of a just society, in healthcare, education, housing, nutrition, mental health, and the safety net that catches Americans when they fall and helps them rise again, recognizing that these investments are not costs to be minimized but returns to be maximized.

We have proposed to tell the truth, about our history, about our present challenges, about the forces of disinformation and manipulation that threaten our ability to govern

ourselves, and to build the institutions and the culture of critical thinking necessary to sustain a democracy grounded in shared reality.

We have proposed to keep America safe, not through aggression, not through the abandonment of our allies, and not through the worship of military spending as an end in itself, but through the strength of our alliances, the wisdom of our diplomacy, the wellbeing of the men and women who serve, and the deterrence that comes from genuine preparedness and moral authority.

We have proposed to meet the existential challenge of our time, the climate crisis, with the seriousness it demands, seizing the economic opportunity of the clean energy transition while protecting the natural world that sustains all life.

We have proposed to reckon honestly with the debts of history, to Native Americans, to Black Americans, to every community that has been systematically excluded from the promise of American life, and to make the investments in justice and reconciliation that a morally serious nation cannot avoid.

We have proposed to manage our fiscal responsibilities with the same seriousness we bring to our social investments, recognizing that the two are not in conflict, that a well-invested nation is a productive and prosperous nation, and that the false choice between social justice and fiscal responsibility has been used for too long to justify the abandonment of both.

We have proposed to welcome the stranger with humanity and fairness, to secure our borders without cruelty, and to honor both the rule of law and the values of a nation that has always drawn its greatest strength from the diversity of those who have chosen to call it home.

And we have proposed to address the epidemic of gun violence that claims tens of thousands of American lives every year, not by dismantling the Second Amendment, but by applying the same common sense, the same evidence, and the same respect for human life that we bring to every other preventable public health crisis.

## **The Resistance We Will Face**

Let us be honest about what lies ahead. The reforms proposed in this document will face fierce, well-funded, and sophisticated resistance from the interests that benefit from the status quo. The corporations that profit from tax loopholes will fight tax reform. The fossil fuel industry will fight clean energy investment. The gun lobby will fight gun reform. The mega-donors who have purchased political influence through dark money will fight campaign finance reform. The ideological movements that seek to impose their vision of America on everyone else will fight the expansion of civil rights and the protection of democratic institutions.

This resistance is not a surprise; it is a measure of how necessary these reforms are. Every significant advance in American history has faced exactly this kind of opposition. The abolitionists were told they were dangerous radicals. The suffragists were told they were asking for too much too soon. The civil rights marchers were told they were going too far too fast. In every case, history has vindicated the reformers and condemned their opponents to the judgment of posterity.

The question is not whether this resistance will come. It will. The question is whether the American people, in sufficient numbers, with sufficient resolve, and with sufficient willingness to make their voices heard at the ballot box, in the streets, and in the halls of power, will overcome it.

History says they can. The evidence of our own experience says they have before. And the urgency of our current moment says they must.

## **A Call to Every American**

This document was written for every American: not just those who already agree with its proposals, but those who are skeptical, those who are uncertain, and those who have been told by one political tribe or another that their interests are incompatible with the interests of their fellow citizens.

To the working-class American who has watched factories close, wages stagnate, and politicians promise help that never comes: this document is for you. The economic reforms proposed here are designed to restore the basic bargain that hard work deserves fair reward, that corporations owe something to the communities that make their success possible, and that the rules of the economy should not be written by and for the people who are already winning.

To the small business owner who is drowning in healthcare costs, struggling to compete with corporate giants, and frustrated by a tax system that seems designed for everyone but you: this document is for you. A level playing field, a healthier workforce, and an economy that invests in the communities where small businesses thrive are not threats to your success; they are the foundation of it.

To the veteran who came home from service to find a VA system that couldn't meet your needs, a job market that didn't value your skills, and a political establishment that was happy to thank you for your service but not to fund it: this document is for you. The commitment to those who serve must be as serious, as sustained, and as well-resourced as the commitment to send them into harm's way.

To the parent who lies awake worrying about whether their child is safe at school, whether they will be able to afford college, whether the planet they are inheriting will be livable: this document is for you. The investments in education, school safety, clean energy, and the future that your children deserve are not luxuries; they are obligations.

To the farmer watching the weather grow more extreme, the costs grow higher, and the corporate consolidation of agriculture squeeze out the family farm: this document is for you. Rural America is not an afterthought in this vision; it is a vital, valued, and explicitly addressed part of the national community.

To the immigrant, documented or not, who came to this country seeking safety, opportunity, and a better life for your family, and who has contributed your labor, your culture, your taxes, and your dreams to the American project: this document is for you. America is what it has always been: a nation made greater by those who choose it.

To the young person who has grown up in an America of mass shootings, political dysfunction, climate anxiety, and student debt, and who wonders whether the system is capable of changing: this document is for you. It is, in fact, written most of all for you.

Because the America described in these pages is the America you will live in for the rest of your lives, and you have more at stake in its construction than anyone.

And to the conservative American who has been told that documents like this one are an attack on your values, your faith, your freedom, or your way of life: this document is also for you. The values that animate it, dignity, fairness, truth, responsibility, community, and hope, are not liberal values or conservative values. They are American values. The specific policy proposals may differ from your preferred approaches, and that disagreement is legitimate and welcome. But the underlying commitment to an America where everyone has a fair shot, where the rules apply to everyone, where the government serves the people rather than the powerful, and where the next generation inherits a country worth inheriting: that commitment is one that transcends the political divisions that have been deliberately cultivated to keep us from recognizing how much we share.

## The Stakes

Let us be clear about what is at stake. This is not a normal moment in American history. The institutions of democracy, the free press, the independent judiciary, the separation of powers, the peaceful transfer of power, the principle that no person is above the law, are under deliberate, sustained, and sophisticated assault. The natural systems that sustain human life, the climate, the oceans, the biodiversity of the living world, are approaching tipping points beyond which the consequences become irreversible. The economic foundations of middle-class life, stable employment, affordable healthcare, accessible education, attainable homeownership, are eroding for millions of Americans while wealth concentrates at the top at rates not seen since the Gilded Age.

These are not problems that will solve themselves. They are not problems that can be addressed by half-measures, political timidity, or the comfortable illusion that if we just wait long enough, things will somehow work out. They are problems that require the kind of clear-eyed, courageous, comprehensive response that this document attempts to provide.

The cost of inaction is not the preservation of the status quo. The status quo is already changing, rapidly, consequentially, and in ways that will be very difficult to reverse if left unaddressed. The cost of inaction is a more unequal economy, a more degraded democracy, a more dangerous climate, and a more divided society, one in which the distance between the America of the ideal and the America of the reality grows wider with every year that we fail to act.

That is not the America we are willing to accept. And we do not believe it is the America that the majority of our fellow citizens are willing to accept either, if they are given an honest accounting of what is at stake and a serious, credible vision of what is possible.

## The Promise

America has never been a finished project. It has always been a promise: imperfectly kept, unevenly distributed, perpetually contested, and perpetually renewed by the efforts of those who refused to let the gap between the ideal and the reality become permanent.

The founders made a promise they could not fully keep. The abolitionists held them to it. The suffragists expanded it. The civil rights movement demanded it be honored for everyone. The labor movement fought to extend its economic dimensions to working people. The LGBTQ+ rights movement insisted that it included them. The environmental movement argued that it extended to the planet itself and to future generations who have no voice in the decisions being made today.

Each of these movements faced resistance. Each was told it was asking for too much. Each was vindicated by history. Each left America more faithful to its founding promise than it found it.

This document stands in that tradition. It is an argument that the promise of America, of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness for all, is worth fighting for, worth investing in, worth the discomfort of honest reckoning with our failures, and worth the sustained, courageous, collective effort required to bring it closer to reality.

The work is hard. The resistance is real. The stakes are high. And the America worth fighting for is not a dream. It is a choice.

**Choose it.**

## APPENDIX A: REFERENCES BY PILLAR

The policy proposals contained in this document are grounded in peer-reviewed research, academic scholarship, government data, and the documented outcomes of programs and policies implemented at the state, national, and international levels. Citations are organized by pillar and provided throughout the document as endnotes. The following represents a curated selection of primary sources by pillar.

### Pillar 1: Democratic Integrity

Everson v. Board of Education, 330 U.S. 1 (1947) • Citizens United v. FEC, 558 U.S. 310 (2010) • Shelby County v. Holder, 570 U.S. 529 (2013) • Trump v. United States, 603 U.S. \_\_\_\_ (2024) • Brennan Center for Justice, Voting Laws Roundup (brennancenter.org) • Princeton Gerrymandering Project, 2020 Redistricting Report Card • FairVote, Ranked Choice Voting Research (fairvote.org) • Presidential Commission on the Supreme Court of the United States, Final Report (2021) • Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack, Final Report (2022) • Levitsky, Steven & Ziblatt, Daniel, How Democracies Die (Crown, 2018) • Dahl, Robert A., How Democratic Is the American Constitution? (Yale University Press, 2002)

### Pillar 2: Economic Justice

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### Pillar 3: Social Investment & Opportunity

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## **Pillar 4: Education**

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## **Pillar 6: National Security & Peace**

SIPRI, Military Expenditure Database (sipri.org) • GAO, Defense Acquisitions Annual Assessment (gao.gov) • Commission on Wartime Contracting, Transforming Wartime Contracting (2011) • RAND Corporation, Invisible Wounds of War (2008) • VA, National Veteran Suicide Prevention Annual Report (mentalhealth.va.gov) • Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, Doomsday Clock Statement (thebulletin.org) • Johns Hopkins, Global Health Security Index (ghsindex.org) • NSC, Pandemic Preparedness Playbook (2016) • Select Committee, January 6th Final Report (2022) • 9/11 Commission Report (2004) • GAO, DHS Management Research (gao.gov)

## **Pillar 7: Fiscal Responsibility & Economic Strength**

CBO, The Budget and Economic Outlook: 2023 to 2033 (cbo.gov) • GAO, Improper Payments in the Federal Government (gao.gov) • Simpson-Bowles, The Moment of Truth (2010) • SSA, 2023 Annual Report of the Board of Trustees (ssa.gov) • CMS, 2023 Annual Report of the Boards of Trustees (cms.gov) • ASCE, 2021 Infrastructure Report Card (infrastructurereportcard.org) • Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Pub. L. 117-58 (2021) • Blyth, Mark, Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea (Oxford University Press, 2013) • Bloomberg Innovation Index (bloomberg.com)

## Pillar 8: Energy & Environment

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## Pillar 9: Justice & Reconciliation

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## Pillar 11: Gun Reform

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## APPENDIX B: GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

**Single-Payer Healthcare:** A healthcare financing system in which a single public entity, typically the federal government, collects all healthcare fees and pays for all healthcare costs, replacing the current multi-payer system of private insurance companies. Under a single-payer system, healthcare delivery remains largely private, but billing and payment are centralized, eliminating the administrative complexity and profit extraction of private insurance.

**Universal Basic Income (UBI):** A government program in which every adult citizen receives a regular, unconditional cash payment regardless of employment status, income, or other criteria. UBI is distinct from means-tested welfare programs in that it is universal, received by all, and unconditional, with no work requirements or eligibility restrictions.

**Gerrymandering:** The manipulation of electoral district boundaries by the party in political power to give that party an unfair advantage in elections. Named after Massachusetts Governor Elbridge Gerry, gerrymandering can be used to concentrate opposing voters in a small number of districts (packing) or to spread them across many districts to dilute their influence (cracking).

**Citizens United:** Refers to the 2010 Supreme Court decision *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, which held that the First Amendment prohibits the government from restricting independent expenditures for political communications by corporations, associations, or labor unions. The decision effectively removed limits on corporate and union spending in elections and opened the door to dramatically increased dark money in American politics.

**Dark Money:** Political spending by nonprofit organizations that are not required to disclose their donors. Dark money groups, typically organized under sections 501(c)(4), 501(c)(5), or 501(c)(6) of the tax code, can spend unlimited amounts on political advertising and issue advocacy without revealing the source of their funding.

**Red Flag Laws:** Also known as Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPOs), these are laws that allow family members, law enforcement, and in some states other designated individuals to petition a court to temporarily remove firearms from a person who is believed to pose an imminent risk of harm to themselves or others. Red flag laws include due process protections including notice and hearings.

**Superfund:** The informal name for the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), enacted by Congress in 1980. The Superfund program gives the EPA the authority to clean up contaminated sites and holds responsible parties financially liable for cleanup costs.

**Net Neutrality:** The principle that internet service providers must treat all internet traffic equally, regardless of its source, destination, or content. Under net neutrality, ISPs cannot block, throttle, or create paid fast lanes for specific websites, applications, or services.

**Habeas Corpus:** A fundamental legal right, derived from Latin meaning “you shall have the body,” that protects individuals from unlawful detention by requiring that a person detained by the government be brought before a court to determine whether their detention is lawful.

**Due Process:** A constitutional guarantee found in both the Fifth and Fourteenth Amendments that the government cannot deprive any person of life, liberty, or property without fair legal procedures. Due process has two dimensions: procedural due process, which requires fair procedures before the government takes action, and substantive due process, which protects fundamental rights from government interference.

**Eminent Domain:** The power of the government to take private property for public use, with the requirement under the Fifth Amendment that just compensation be paid to the property owner.

**Reparations:** Compensation paid to individuals or groups for historical injustices, typically involving government-sanctioned harm, discrimination, or exploitation. In the American context, reparations most commonly refers to proposed compensation to Black Americans for the harms of slavery and subsequent discriminatory policies, and to Native Americans for land theft, forced removal, and cultural destruction.

**Critical Human Rights Theory (CHRT):** As used in this document, an expanded educational framework that builds on Critical Race Theory to examine the full spectrum of human rights, systemic inequality, and historical injustice as they relate to all Americans regardless of race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, disability, national origin, or economic status.

**Critical Race Theory (CRT):** An academic framework, developed primarily in American law schools beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, that examines how race and racism have shaped American law, policy, and institutions. CRT holds that racism is not merely the product of individual prejudice but is embedded in legal systems, policies, and institutions in ways that perpetuate racial inequality even in the absence of explicitly racist intent.

**Industrial Symbiosis:** A concept within industrial ecology in which businesses and industries exchange materials, energy, water, and byproducts in ways that create economic and environmental benefits. The waste or byproduct of one company becomes the raw material or energy source for another, reducing waste and environmental impact.

**Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR):** A policy approach that makes manufacturers financially responsible for the end-of-life management of the products they produce, including collection, recycling, and disposal. EPR shifts the cost of waste management from governments and taxpayers to the producers who create the products.

**Straw Purchase:** The illegal practice of buying a firearm on behalf of another person who is either prohibited from owning a firearm or who wants to avoid the background check process. Straw purchases are a federal felony and a significant source of illegally trafficked firearms.

**Ghost Gun:** A firearm that is assembled from parts or manufactured using a 3D printer, without a serial number and without going through the standard commercial sale process that requires a background check. Because ghost guns lack serial numbers, they are untraceable by law enforcement.

**Ranked Choice Voting (RCV):** An electoral system in which voters rank candidates in order of preference rather than casting a single vote for one candidate. If no candidate receives a majority of first-choice votes, the candidate with the fewest

votes is eliminated and their votes are redistributed according to voters' next preferences. RCV is designed to ensure that winners have broad support and to eliminate the spoiler effect.

**Constitutional Amendment Process:** The process by which the United States Constitution is formally changed. Under Article V, an amendment may be proposed by a two-thirds vote of both houses of Congress or by a constitutional convention called by two-thirds of state legislatures. A proposed amendment must then be ratified by three-fourths of state legislatures.

**Judicial Review:** The power of federal courts, and ultimately the Supreme Court, to review the constitutionality of laws passed by Congress and actions taken by the executive branch. Judicial review was established by the Supreme Court in *Marbury v. Madison* (1803) and is a fundamental check on legislative and executive power.

**Prevailing Wage:** The average wage, benefits, and overtime paid to the majority of workers in a specific occupation in a specific geographic area. Prevailing wage laws, such as the federal Davis-Bacon Act, require that workers on government-funded construction projects be paid at least the prevailing wage for their trade.

**Single-Use Plastics:** Plastic products designed to be used once and then discarded, including plastic bags, straws, cutlery, food packaging, and beverage containers. Single-use plastics are a major source of plastic pollution and a significant contributor to the microplastic contamination found in virtually every ecosystem on Earth.

**Asylum:** Protection granted by a country to someone who has left their home country as a refugee. Individuals who are present in or at the border of the United States may apply for asylum if they have a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

**Mandatory Minimum Sentencing:** Laws that require judges to impose a fixed minimum prison sentence for specific crimes, regardless of the individual circumstances of the offense or the offender. Mandatory minimums have been a major driver of mass incarceration in the United States and disproportionately impact communities of color.

**Emoluments Clause:** A provision of the United States Constitution that prohibits federal officeholders from receiving gifts, payments, or other benefits from foreign governments or domestic governments without congressional consent. The clause was designed to prevent foreign or domestic interests from improperly influencing federal officials.

**Plea Bargaining:** A negotiated agreement between a prosecutor and a defendant in which the defendant agrees to plead guilty to a lesser charge in exchange for a more lenient sentence or the dismissal of other charges. Estimates suggest that 90 to 97 percent of convictions in the United States are the result of guilty pleas rather than trials.

**Stateless Person:** An individual who is not considered a national by any country under the operation of its law. Stateless persons are among the world's most vulnerable populations, often denied access to education, healthcare, employment, and legal protection.

# APPENDIX C: ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

## Authorship & Purpose

Eleven Pillars of Change: A Comprehensive Blueprint for American Renewal was written by Jared Spence and completed in 2026. It represents a comprehensive federal policy reform vision grounded in the belief that democratic governance, economic justice, social investment, and environmental stewardship are not competing values but complementary ones.

This document is intended as a contribution to public discourse, not as a partisan campaign document. Its proposals are grounded in peer-reviewed evidence, established scholarship, and the documented outcomes of policies implemented at the state, national, and international levels. It is offered in the spirit of honest, serious engagement with the challenges facing the United States, and with the conviction that the American people are capable of meeting those challenges if they are given clear information, ambitious vision, and honest leadership.

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## APPENDIX D: HOW TO GET INVOLVED

The proposals in this document are only as powerful as the political will to enact them. That political will does not come from documents; it comes from people. If you believe in the vision articulated in these pages, here is how you can help turn it into reality:

### Vote

The single most important action any American can take is to vote in every election, from school board to presidential. Research candidates, understand their positions, and hold them accountable to the values and policies you believe in. Encourage everyone you know to register and vote.

### Engage

Contact your elected representatives at the local, state, and federal levels. Attend town halls. Write letters. Call offices. Show up. Elected officials respond to constituent pressure, and your voice matters. Make sure they hear it.

### Organize

Join or support organizations working on the issues you care most about. Volunteer your time, donate what you can, and help build the coalitions that make policy change possible. Every movement that has changed America was built by ordinary people who decided to act together.

### Share

Share this document with people you know, including those who might disagree with some of its proposals. The conversations that matter most are not the ones we have with people who already agree with us, but the ones we have across differences. Honest, respectful engagement across political divides is the foundation of democratic renewal.

### Run

If you have ever thought about running for office, from city council to Congress, this is the moment. The change this document envisions will only happen if people who believe in it are willing to fight for it from inside the halls of power. Your community needs you.

The America worth fighting for is not a memory. It is a possibility. And it will only become a reality if enough Americans decide that it is worth their time, their energy, their courage, and their commitment to build it.

**Let's get to work.**

## ENDNOTES

The following numbered endnotes correspond to the superscript reference numbers appearing throughout the body of this document.

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