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new progressives  
voices & services

FDR, Madison Square Garden, 31 October 1936

For twelve years this Nation was afflicted with hear-nothing, see-nothing, do-nothing Government. The Nation looked to Government but the Government looked away. Nine mocking years with the golden calf and three long years of the scourge! Nine crazy years at the ticker and three long years in the bread-lines! Nine mad years of mirage and three long years of despair! **Powerful influences strive today to restore that kind of government with its doctrine that that Government is best which is most indifferent.**

For nearly four years you have had an Administration which instead of twirling its thumbs has rolled up its sleeves. We will keep our sleeves rolled up. We had to struggle with the old enemies of peace: business

# **NEW PROGRESSIVE VOICES**

## **VALUES AND POLICIES FOR THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

**a project of the progressive ideas network**

**EDITED BY JAMES LARDNER, DEMOS**  
**COORDINATED BY NATHANIEL LOEWENTHEIL, ROOSEVELT INSTITUTION**

# **preface**

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Ideas hold the unique potential to unify and empower today's progressive movement, bringing together our leaders, grassroots advocates, communications networks and supporters around shared values. Recognizing this, leaders of progressive think tanks and activist organizations from across the country convened in December 2007. We gathered to look beyond the short-term interests of our individual institutions in order to envision how, together, we could work more effectively on behalf of our common goals. We emerged with a commitment to form an alliance – the Progressive Ideas Network – that would provide opportunities for collaboration and coordinated action, offer service and training to its members, and create a forum for crafting long-term strategies and ideas.

The members of the Progressive Ideas Network believe in the possibilities for bold, transformational change in American society, and our business is to generate the ideas and policies needed to create that change. Our organizations contain hundreds of original thinkers in progressive politics, and our networks reach thousands of talented activists who fight every day for the rights and well-being of millions of Americans. We have come together at this auspicious moment to lay out a course for genuine progress in the government and governance of this country and all its people.

The essays in "New Progressive Voices: Values and Policy for the 21st Century" present three elements of change: long-term vision, fundamental values and prescriptions for immediate action. The nine leaders who authored these essays speak for and with the unheard voices in our society, and the ideas contained here are born out of service to them. We call for all Americans to build tomorrow's society together, with creativity, wisdom, morality, ethics, and love – and with no more hidden costs, to us or to our children.

We would like to thank all of the people who made this project possible. The steering committee members dedicated countless hours to creating a vision and direction for the project. Special thanks are owed to Deepak Bhargava, Jim Harkness, Larry Mishel, Miles Rapoport and Andrea Batista Schlesinger; Seth Borgos played an especially important role in this process. Our editor, Jim Lardner, worked with dedication, patience, and incredible editorial skill, complemented by our designer, Caitlin Howarth. Finally, Nate Loewenthal organized and coordinated the many people and elements involved in producing this work.

As we all look toward the November election, with its potential to mark the start of a new progressive era in the United States, we offer these ideas to you. We invite you to share your responses at [www.newprogressivevoices.com](http://www.newprogressivevoices.com), and to contribute your ideas for positive change. We're looking forward to the years of shared conversation, decision-making, hard work, and true progress that lie before us.

Stephanie Robinson, Esq.  
President and CEO, The Jamestown Project

Co-Chairs, Progressive Ideas Network

Barry Kendall, Ph.D.  
Executive Director, Commonweal Institute

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# INTRODUCTION

Deepak Bhargava and Nathaniel Loewentheil

America stands at a pivotal moment. A long and painful episode in our national story is nearing an end; a new and more promising chapter is about to open.

Conservative politicians and ideologues, and their financial backers, have commanded the stage for decades. Through action and inaction, they have propelled our country toward crisis on multiple fronts. From energy and climate to poverty and inequality to race and immigration and the role of the United States in the world, we inherit huge, interrelated problems, problems that call for a collective response on an unprecedented scale. At such a critical moment, there are at last promising signs that the political tide is shifting. But no election – not even the most sharply defined presidential contest in memory – can be more than a first step: Neither the weakening grip of conservative ideology nor a new regime in Washington will produce the kind of wholesale change that our country so badly needs.

At critical times in the past, progressives have stepped forward with bold visions and policies that transformed American politics, culture, and society. The progressive era, the New Deal, the civil rights revolution, and the Great Society all came about through a combination of grassroots activism, visionary thinking, and political leadership. In each case, the impetus for change and many of the big transformative ideas originated with progressive organizations and leaders operating outside the channels of mainstream politics.

In recent decades, progressivism has faltered. It was conservatives who developed and moved the big ideas, while progressives triangulated, tweaked, and tinkered. Since the 1960s, progressives have been running on the fumes of the New Deal and Great Society, confining themselves largely to narrow issue silos and poll-tested phrases and positions. Content to play defense in many of the major political battles of the day, they have all too often been cowed into submission by the vitality and confidence of the other side.

Now that is changing. Instead of obsessing about what we are against, progressives have begun to think about what we're for – to prepare once again to play our role as agents of bold ideas and political and social transformation. Finding new confidence and imagination, we have begun to renew our intellectual capital. The essays in this volume draw on that new store of capital to sketch the outlines of a progressive agenda for 21st-century America. The authors cover a wide array of topics, and, in their policy recommendations, present a



**THE PROGRESSIVE IDEAS NETWORK** is an alliance of multi-issue think tanks and activist organizations working together to amplify the power of ideas in advancing today's progressive movement. Its mission is to provide opportunities for collective action, offer service and training to its members, and create a forum for crafting long-term strategies and ideas. Together, we're building a policy infrastructure to power a new era in progressive politics.

few conflicting ideas. But all these essays reflect a belief in the need for fundamental change. The problems discussed here cannot be solved, the authors agree, through charity, volunteerism, or even by well-meaning local and state governments, though surely all have a role. Individually and cumulatively,

## We have renewed our intellectual capital and are prepared to resume our role as agents of bold, transformative change.

the essays make the case for the kind of concerted action that can come only through the agency of our national government. People have lost sight of the power of good government; we need programs that serve our national needs and encourage faith in our public institutions, creating a positive cycle of political change and space for further reform.

Yet the authors are also united in their recognition that profound change cannot be ordered from on high. It won't happen without courageous and farsighted political leadership; but that kind of leadership won't happen without political pressure – and creative thinking – from below and outside Washington. And both, history tells us, are more likely to come from the margins than from the center of established political discourse. It is no coincidence that a good many of the authors are women or people of color, and many are relatively young. In that respect, they reflect the future of the progressive movement, which will be bolstered by the coming-of-age of the Millennial generation and find its strength in the growing diversity of our nation. Many of the organizations represented here are young themselves - part of a burgeoning set of progressive institutions founded in reaction to the center-right politics of recent years.

The essays follow a parallel structure. Each begins with broad principals and proceeds to more specific proposals. That format, too, reflects a belief shared by all the authors: our policy ideas must be linked to a picture of the nation

and the world we hope to achieve, a vision that energizes our ideas and builds the political will for meaningful change.

Optimism is another recurring theme. In our greatest challenges, these authors see the greatest of opportunities. Climate change brings with it a renewed focus on

## collective action from the margins seizing opportunity

our connection to the earth and underscores the unmistakable fact of humankind's shared fate. Technological progress promises increased interconnection and potentially paradigm-shifting innovations. Poverty and inequality are social realities, not inevitable outcomes of globalization: a new social contract is possible. We can make enormous progress in the short term – by empowering workers, creating green jobs and fostering opportunity, for example – while rebuilding public confidence in a role for government and collective action.

Our optimism is central to our vision. There are many good reasons

to be worried at this critical moment in human history; we'll need a rare combination of ideas, action, resolve and leadership to meet the challenges that lie before us. These essays provide very good reason to be hopeful.

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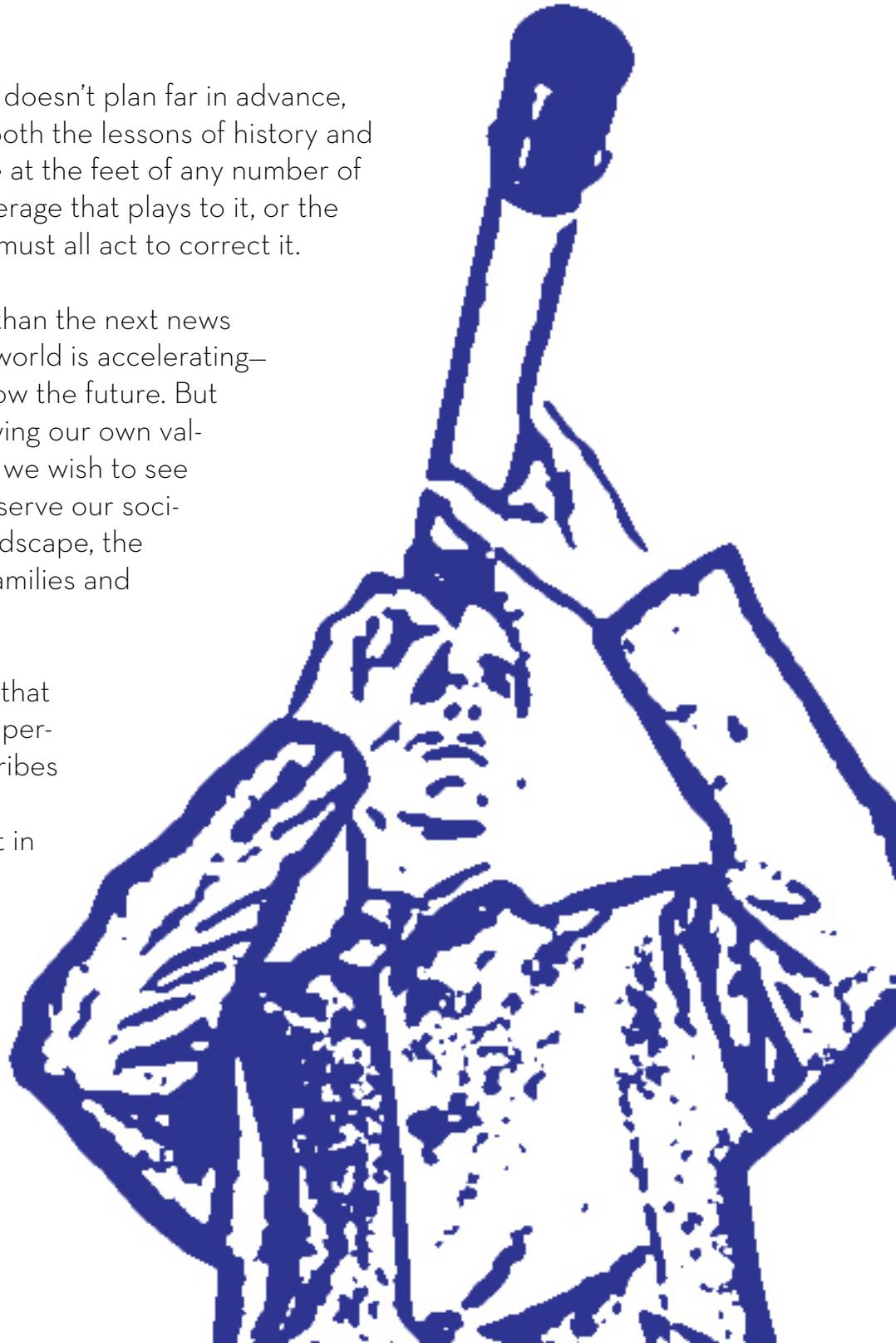


Political America has become a land of short-term thinking. It doesn't plan far in advance, and it doesn't look far behind; public debate largely ignores both the lessons of history and the glaring realities of the future. We can choose to lay blame at the feet of any number of causes: our increasingly short attention-spans, the media coverage that plays to it, or the political pandering that preys on it. The fact remains that we must all act to correct it.

The first step is to simply start looking ahead. Farther ahead than the next news cycle, the next election or even the next administration. The world is accelerating—the rate of change only increases every day—and we can't know the future. But we can start preparing for it. Any good plan begins with knowing our own values and goals; we must have a serious discussion about what we wish to see in the world, on how our economy and our government best serve our society. We can begin by shaping the intellectual and political landscape, the frameworks and key policies, to serve the real needs of our families and businesses in the future.

In the essays that follow, the authors lay out powerful visions that require significant changes not only to our policies but in our perspectives. The essay from the Economic Policy Institute describes an economy of shared prosperity that puts the interest of all citizens first. The Roosevelt Institution encourages investment in our shared future through renewed emphasis on critical public goods. To move from here to there will require not only government action but moral leadership and widespread debate. But change is possible—we must look no further than ourselves.

# looking ahead



# BUILDING SHARED PROSPERITY

Lawrence Mishel and Nancy Cleeland

For the better part of three decades, our country has been stuck on a single, simplistic idea about the economy: less government equals more prosperity. American leaders have sought to create a marketplace unfettered by rules and regulations. Let people fend for themselves, they said, and innovation and entrepreneurship will flourish, the economy will grow as never before, and the benefits will eventually lift the fortunes of all.

That was the promise. We have seen – and lived - the reality. From 1989 to 2006, the highest-earning ten percent of U.S. households collected over 90 percent of the nation's income gains. Today the top 1 percent of American families receives 23 percent of all personal income, up from just 10 percent in 1979. Corporate executives earn 275 times as much as average workers, compared with 27 times in 1973.

It's been a fine time to be a CEO or a hedge fund manager, in other words. But the great majority of Americans are less secure and hopeful than they were a generation ago. Jobs are disappearing. Real family incomes are falling. Retirement security is a fading ideal. Health care is becoming a privilege rather than an expectation. In the struggle to keep up with expenses (or avoid falling too far behind), Americans are working longer hours, borrowing more, and living closer to the financial edge.

By degrees, the United States has become a more economically unequal country than at any time since the 1920s, and the most unequal of all of the world's developed nations today. By that measure, in fact, we are drifting away from the relatively egalitarian pattern of Western Europe and the Pacific Rim countries – toward the orbit of Russia and Latin America.

This is not a safe path. Extreme inequality hobbles mobility, leaving poor and working-class Americans and their children with little chance to

move into higher-paid and more rewarding jobs. The stress of constant financial worry among the majority stifles innovation and technological progress. In an economy that relies heavily on consumer spending, the shortage of disposable income makes a bad situation worse.

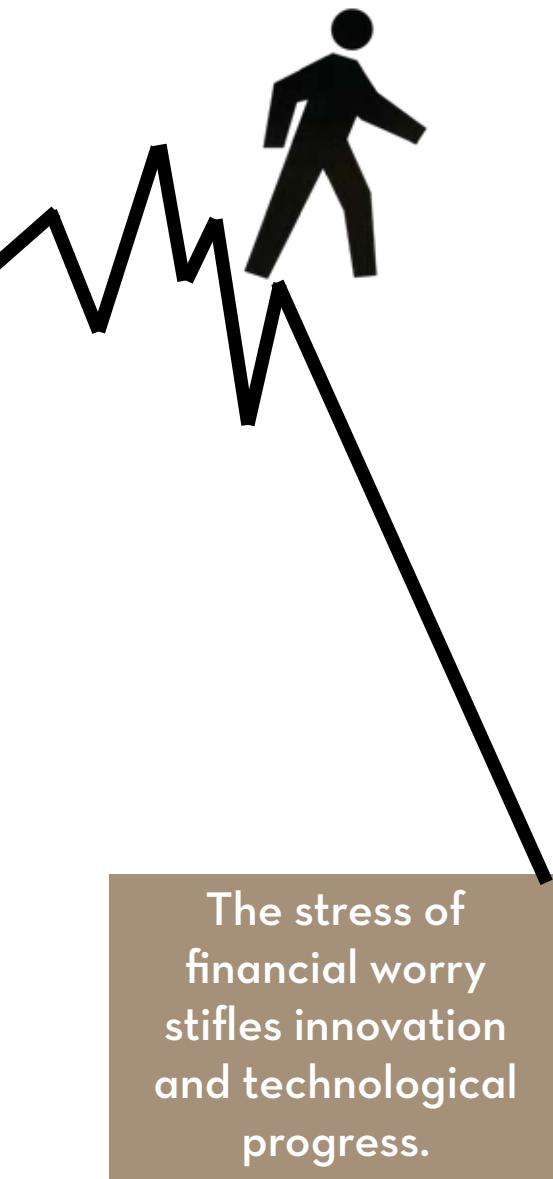
Our leaders used to understand the danger. "The welfare of each of us is dependent fundamentally upon the welfare of all of us," said a Republican president, Theodore Roosevelt, at a time not unlike our own, when the rich had been getting ever richer while workers struggled with low pay, unsafe conditions, and the ever-present dread of falling off a financial cliff.

Bit by bit, against fierce opposition, the reformers of Teddy Roosevelt's day succeeded in enacting an early set of consumer and worker protections. But it took additional decades and a Great Depression before the country was ready to put solid legal weight behind the ideal of shared welfare. That happened when another Roosevelt - Teddy's Democratic fifth cousin - pushed through the landmark legislation that we remember as the New Deal.

**Corporate executives  
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compared with 27 times  
in 1973.**

From the 1940s into the 1970s, leaders of both parties carried on the effort to promote broad-based economic security and opportunity. Although not all racial and ethnic groups benefited equally, the laws and programs that became the postwar social contract helped tens of millions of Americans enter a middle class that was the envy of the world.

Then came the harsh ideology (concealed in the sunny rhetoric) of the "Reagan Revolution." Since the early 1980s, Reagan and his heirs have hacked away at FDR's legacy. Years of deregulation, de-unionization, skewed tax policies, and lax enforcement of worker protections have tipped the scales in favor of corporate and financial insiders, and against the great majority of American workers and families. Those same policies have fed waves of financial speculation. In one of the most recent



and destructive of these episodes, millions of Americans were talked into booby-trapped mortgages. Many now face the threat of losing their homes; others stand to lose much of their home-equity wealth.

Clearly, the economy will be the first order of business for the new leaders who take office in January 2009. Just as clearly, the old answers – the familiar mix of tax cuts and fiscal and monetary tinkering – will no longer do. But America needs more than a new set of economic policies; we need a new purpose for economic policy.

The mission before us is to build an economy of shared prosperity. That will mean taking steps to reduce economic insecurity and give Americans a chance to breathe easier and plan for the future without dread. Another key piece of a shared-prosperity agenda (discussed in the essay that follows) is public investment in our crumbling infrastructure, in education, and in job creation. Finally, we must shape a new brand of globalization that serves ordinary people in exporting and importing countries alike.

Most Americans grasp the need for bold action. Polls show a widespread recognition that the current economic model is not sustainable. But while the old mythology has failed disastrously on the ground, it still echoes powerfully in Washington and other centers of influential opinion; the push for an agenda of shared prosperity promises to be a mighty struggle. But the outcome will be worth struggling for: a world of less stress, more opportunity, greater mobility, more fairness, and renewed confidence.

And there is every reason to expect that an economy of shared prosperity will be a stronger economy, too. “We have always known that heedless self-interest was bad morals,” said Franklin Roosevelt, looking out on the damage wrought by the laissez-faire policies and corporate excesses of the 1920s. “We know now that it is bad economics.”

We knew it then, and we know it now. This time, America must not forget.

## AUTHORS

**LAWRENCE MISHEL** is President of the Economic Policy Institute, where he's worked since 1987. As EPI's first research director, then vice president and now president, he has played a significant role in building EPI's research capabilities and reputation. A nationally recognized economist, he has researched, written, and spoken widely on the economy and economic policy as it affects middle- and low-income families. He is principal author of a major research volume, *The State of Working America* (published every even-numbered year since 1988), which provides a comprehensive overview of the U.S. labor market and living standards.

**NANCY CLEELAND** has been External Affairs Director at EPI since early 2008. She is a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist with an extensive background in labor, immigration and international trade. During a decade at the Los Angeles Times, she covered major labor disputes, including a port shutdown and several regional strikes, and exposed harsh conditions faced by immigrant workers. She was a lead writer on a 2004 series about Wal-Mart's labor policies and sourcing practices that won the Pulitzer, Polk and other prestigious awards. Earlier, she specialized in coverage of the U.S.-Mexico border and Latin America, including a 3-year stint as a Mexico City bureau chief.

## PROSPERITY IDEAS

### ADDRESSING KEY ROOTS OF ECONOMIC INSECURITY

Skyrocketing health care costs are hurting U.S. businesses as well as families and individuals. The current system denies access to some 45 million Americans while pushing costs higher than those in comparable countries. Employers faced with these rising costs are cutting benefits or passing on costs to their workers, who are increasingly foregoing health insurance altogether. Medical bills now account for half of all bankruptcies.

Retirement has also become increasingly risky for Americans, who can no longer count on the pension plans that were once a standard employment benefit. Today, a shrinking number of employers provide any sort of retirement plan, and those who do overwhelmingly favor personal accounts such as 401(k)s, which are managed by employees and often require matching contributions. Financially, the baby boomers are ill-prepared for retirement: more than one-third of those 55 and older have less than \$25,000 in savings, and a growing number are dipping into retirement accounts to fund routine expenses.

This double dose of risk is bad news for the overall economy as well as the individuals involved. But there are ways to rebuild stability into these two important features of life. The Health Care for America Plan, detailed elsewhere in this book, combines employer-provided health insurance with a set of public plans to cover all Americans, at a net savings to national health spending. It reduces costs for responsible employers and puts all businesses on a level playing field.

A fix to retirement insecurity is also within reach. First, it should be recognized that Social Security, always designed as a supplement to retirement, is fully-funded for decades to come. Raising the earnings cap – now set at a low \$102,000 – so that top-earners contribute a fair share would eliminate shortfalls down the line. The system was originally intended to draw revenues from 90 percent of all wages; that ratio should be restored.

In addition, a plan known as the Guaranteed Retirement Account (GRA), authored by economist Teresa Ghilarducci of the New School University and released by the Economic Policy Institute, would augment Social Security payments so that all Americans can retire in dignity. The accounts



would be funded by employer and worker contributions with a guaranteed payout after retirement. The new system would cut tax subsidies that mainly benefit the very rich in order to provide the retirement contributions for low-income workers.

**“The welfare of each of us is dependent fundamentally upon the welfare of all of us.”**

*-Theodore Roosevelt*

## INVESTING IN COMPETITIVENESS

From the nation's earliest years, federal infrastructure projects — in such things as highways, railroads, electricity and water systems — have helped fuel economic growth while improving the quality of life for all. But such investments have been woefully inadequate for years. The American Society of Civil Engineers estimates it would take \$1.6 trillion over five years to bring the nation's bridges, dams, sewer systems and other infrastructure up to good condition. Schools are also badly in need of public investment for repairs and maintenance. And we must invest money in broadband build out, so that all parts of the nation can participate in technology-related productivity growth.

In addition to improving public health and safety, these projects have the added benefits of stimulating the weakening economy and creating millions of good jobs. For example, a \$20 billion investment in school repairs would generate an estimated 250,000 jobs. To make the most of this approach, we must ensure that all jobs associated with this public spending offer fair pay and benefits and policies that allow for work/life balance.

We can also rebuild the nation's important manufacturing base

while improving the environment by promoting jobs in the area of renewable energy. Having a comprehensive green job strategy involves not only doing the work, but ensuring that the components used to generate energy from the wind, the sun and other alternative sources are made domestically. With the right policies, the United States can have a revitalized manufacturing sector that brings with it good jobs, rapid innovation and environmental sustainability.

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## RECONNECTING PAY AND PRODUCTIVITY

Productivity has risen 20 percent since 2000, and yet most benefits of that economic growth have gone to the very rich, while typical workers' incomes have stagnated or declined. The growing disparities reflect the declining power of workers to demand their fair share of growth. There are a number of practical steps to restore the necessary economic balance between employers and employees.

One is to restore the ability of workers to freely join unions by passing the Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA), which permits unionization if a majority of workers sign union cards. The benefits of union membership are clear:

members earn 14 percent more on average than non-members and are far likelier to have a pension plan and health insurance.

The federal government also has an important role in this area. The Labor Department must return to vigorously enforcing and improving the laws that govern wages, hours, overtime premiums and occupational health and safety. The minimum wage should be raised to match half the average wage (as it once was) and maintained at that level.

More fundamental, we as a nation should set a goal of full employment, which in itself will empower workers. It is no coincidence that income grew and poverty rates fell across all population groups in the late 1990s, when a roaring economy created millions of jobs and briefly drove unemployment rates down to historic lows.

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## TRADE AND PROSPERITY: HOME AND ABROAD

American workers are losing ground in the global marketplace, where corporate interests have trumped all others in rulemaking for international trade. The United States has shed 7 million jobs tied to trade since the late 1970s, when imports began to grow faster than

exports. Changes in technology and economic policy have facilitated the movement of jobs offshore, and now some 50 percent of all manufacturing production of U.S.-based companies is located in foreign countries. As outsourcing expands, globalization's losers extend well beyond the least-educated and unskilled. The idea that trade's negative impacts could be reversed with job training and education clearly has not been borne out.

A serious response to these trends must begin with public investment at home— supporting education, job assistance and innovation. Meanwhile, we should declare a strategic pause in trade agreements, and insist that any future agreements include provisions for enforceable labor rights. Another key step is to enforce current trade policies and to eliminate perverse tax incentives that favor overseas investments, and consider instituting value-added taxes that favor exports over imports, as other nations do. Finally, we should promote a more stable and equitable global financial system.

**"We have always known that heedless self-interest was bad morals. We know now that it is bad economics." - FDR**

# INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE

Nathaniel Loewentheil and Vera Eidelman

Americans have always expected life to be better for the next generation. But now, according to recent polls, they no longer do. Let's take pause: For the majority of Americans, the past is brighter than the future. The American dream is becoming an American memory.

This pessimism reflects an alarming trend: as a country, we have stopped investing our resources in a shared future. In previous eras, a vision of a shared future united the country around great national initiatives. In the mid-1800s, federal legislation spurred the railroad boom, opening the country to a growing population. In the 1930s the Tennessee Valley Authority permanently transformed an entire region, creating a completely new set of industries and opening a new way of life for millions. In the decades following the Great Depression and World War II, encouraged by our victories over great forces, we made even greater investments. Through legislation like the GI Bill and the early Highway Acts, we manifested a sense of collective power and interdependence not matched before or after. In the 1950s and 1960s, federal infrastructure investment peaked at almost two percent of GDP; at the same time, we spent seven percent of our economic output on education and two percent on research and development. The results proved the power of public investment—in the decades that followed, the U.S. enjoyed one of the most remarkable periods of economic growth in world history.

But then a strange myth took hold, propagated by conservative thinkers and politicians, that all private spending was wise and productive, all public spending foolish and wasteful. Beginning in the 1970s the federal government began deregulating industries, lowering taxes and abandoning public investments in favor of the inviolable invisible hand. For the last thirty years, as conservatives are quick to point out, the economy has continued to grow. The market has provided private goods in abundance—as many cars and televisions as we could ask for. But without the hand of government and provision for public goods, we have fallen behind on the

things the market cannot provide, things that secure our shared economic future: our children's education and our physical infrastructure. Today, infrastructure spending as a percentage of GDP has decreased nearly fifty percent since its peak. Education spending as a percentage of GDP has remained stagnant since 1969, while research and development funding has declined by half in the same time period.

Through a self-reinforcing set of public attitudes and government actions, we've largely abandoned our intergenerational responsibilities. The most important distinction isn't between public and private spending. It's between short-term and long-term thinking. We don't need to cut our spending; we need to invest more and more wisely.

The decline in national investments come at a precarious moment as the United States engages an increasingly competitive global economy. The country lost 3.3 million manufacturing jobs in the last ten years and trade imbalances are equally disheartening. Even in areas of strength, the United States lags behind; we have become a net importer of high-technology products. Our national debt—the world's largest—is set to grow to almost \$15 trillion in the next decade. Meanwhile, the economic growth rates of developing countries like China and India are nearly three times that of the U.S.

The engines of the 21st century economy will be made of the most refined materials, built by the strongest tools. America once had both: a fiercely competitive school system and the strongest industrial infrastructure in the world. Today, the situation is different. Many of our high school students never graduate, and too few of those who do are adequately prepared for college level courses. Meanwhile, socioeconomic and racial inequalities remain staggering. When it comes to infrastructure, the situation is equally grim; the American Society of Civil Engineers gives our current infrastructure a failing grade and estimates that it would cost \$1.6 trillion to bring our system back into good condition.

Global competition. Investment gaps. Debt. There are reasons for serious concern. But as Franklin Roosevelt recognized at a time of far greater uncertainty, fear remains our greatest threat. Throughout the 20th century,

America stepped forward to confront the world's greatest challenges and succeeded. The current historical moment is one of great opportunity. If we meet it with a positive vision of the future, a plan for how to get there and the faith and will to invest in ourselves, we will succeed.

Next is a set of proposals that will push our economy forward. Conservatives will argue that our country cannot afford public investments, but our short-term thinking is far more costly. Substantial investments in fundamental public goods—education and infrastructure—sustain a healthy free-market system. A 21st century economy requires a world-class education system, an infrastructure that encourages sustainable development and innovation, and a country committed to its own future.



#### AUTHORS

**NATHANIEL LOEWENTHEIL** hails proudly from Baltimore, Maryland. He graduated cum laude from Yale University in 2007, majoring in the Program in Ethics, Politics and Economics with distinction. In early 2005, while in his sophomore year, he helped found the Roosevelt Institution and now serves as executive director. Nathaniel serves on the advisory board of the New Leaders Council and the Drum Major Institute's Young Scholars Program.

**VERA EIDELMAN**, born in St. Petersburg, Russia and raised in Columbia, MD, is a senior at Stanford University majoring in Economics and Sociology. Her policy interests include international trade and the role of art in development. She has worked with several artist-activists in the Baltimore area and has conducted research on the efficacy of art in protest at Stanford, as well as the role of performing arts programs in prison. This summer, she served as an Academy Fellow at the Roosevelt Institution, where, in addition to working on this essay, she also researched trade adjustment assistance programs.

#### TEAMING TOGETHER TO IMPROVE K-12 SCHOOLS

Creating a 21st century education system constitutes an enormous undertaking. It means investing capital in our schools and the materials necessary to equip them, increasing access to technology and broadband, developing more intelligent funding and taxation structures, and substantively revising our curricula. Furthermore, to significantly improve educational outcomes for low-income students, we must face up to systemic poverty and the impact it has on the lives of students inside and outside of class.

But our investments will go only as far as the quality of teaching can take them. Teachers have proven time and again to be the most important in-school factor controlling educational outcomes. Our country needs a 21st century teaching corps supported by the best ideas and resources we have to offer, one able to recruit our brightest to serve.

Young people are ready. Programs like Teach for America have proven that many high-performing college graduates are eager to teach. This new generation of educators can redefine education if we can keep them teaching. More than twenty percent of teachers leave within three years of entering, just as they become significantly more effective, while retirees account for less than one in six teacher departures. Each lost teacher costs schools approximately \$50,000 in administration and training; the total annual cost of teacher departure nationwide is estimated at \$4.9 billion. This does not include the cost of decreased educational outcomes, which may be up to three times as high.

## INVESTMENT IDEAS

The first step toward building the teaching corps of the future is to better train and retain young teachers. Mentorship programs are one important approach with good models already in place. For example, through the University of California at Santa Cruz's New Teacher Program (NTP) experienced educators from around the country train with professionals and then serve as mentors for new teachers over the course of two years. The program costs only \$6,500 per mentored teacher. Research has shown that the program has boosted morale, increased retention rates to ninety-five percent, and significantly improved educational outcomes.

This kind of mentorship program should be expanded. **We propose a national Teacher Education and Mentorship (TEAM) initiative.** The Teacher Education and Mentorship initiative would provide funding to grow and replicate programs like NTP, which would encourage collaboration between regional

universities and K-12 schools, in 150 school districts. The success of the NTP program depends on careful planning and thoughtful training, and legislators must make provisions for careful implementation of TEAM, the total cost of which would be \$150 to \$200 million. However, by allowing for some flexibility in the 150 pilot programs, we could encourage the replication of best practices at a national scale (if and when TEAM results match or exceed those of existing programs).

As young people, we have seen first-hand the role that support networks play in our peers' career choices. Passionate as they may be to enter the teaching profession, recent graduates are anxious and inexperienced. Mentorship programs provide much needed guidance and support. They are the most effective short-term way to increase young teacher retention and thus serve as the crucial first step towards increasing educational outcomes while decreasing unnecessary costs.

## ONGOING PUBLIC EDUCATION

Less than a third of today's American workforce holds a college degree. Yet, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, forty-two percent of new jobs this decade will require one; less than three in ten did in 2000. We believe that all Americans deserve an education that will prepare them for a successful career, and more and more of those careers will require more than a high school education. It is our responsibility to provide ongoing education.

To significantly increase educational attainment, we must re-orient our education system. Private colleges and state universities serve slightly more than half of those pursuing bachelor degrees and do so at an extremely high per-student cost. While we can and must reduce these costs, expanding this system on a large scale is not economically feasible. We must instead create a system for universal ongoing public education that builds off of and expands our community college structure.

We envision a system in which entrance into community college is the standard course for high school graduates. Today, our system automatically enrolls eighth graders in public high schools, while leaving open private or charter alterna-

tives. We propose expanding that system to automatically enroll graduating seniors in community college, leaving open the choice to enter the workforce, a private institution or a four-year public program instead.

Such a system seems unobtainable by today's standards. But our standards today are outdated—we must redefine our conception of education for the new century. Ongoing public education will not require the costly construction

# OPEN

of thousands of new community colleges. Many classes will be held early in the mornings and later in the evenings; we can take advantage of existing institutions like libraries, community centers, and public schools themselves. Instruction does not require intensive one-on-one classroom time. New studies have found that well-designed online learning modules can yield powerful results; the best courses were found to improve test scores in half the standard course time when combined with limited class-



room instruction. Combined with other innovations, like open-source textbooks and improved communication systems, these new tools can change the way we conceive of, and pay for, ongoing education.

We propose an **Ongoing Public Education Network (OPEN) program**. The Ongoing Public Education Network would strengthen ties between community colleges and high schools while simultaneously encouraging innovation and experimentation in online learning by:

1. Creating \$250 million in funding incentives for community colleges to expand continuity-of-learning programs between high school and college;
2. Creating trial programs in 50 school districts to enroll all graduating seniors directly in fully funded continuing public education programs, at an estimated average cost per district of \$325,800.
3. Providing a \$200 million grant to top experts in education and computer science to develop a high-quality, online curriculum of 50 basic courses, which could then be distributed free-of-cost directly to students and throughout the public community college system.

## RETHINKING INFRASTRUCTURE

Public investments in infrastructure drive patterns of development, transportation and private spending. In the last century, we invested in highways and roads, encouraging the market to create car-dependent systems. The result: less than 5 percent of our workforce uses mass transit to commute to work and, taking into account the cost of road maintenance per driver, bus riders actually pay more for each mile traveled than do car users. It is becoming increasingly clear that our current transportation patterns are economically and environmentally unsustainable. We need to reform our policies to impose the true cost of driving on drivers while simultaneously creating attractive, viable public transportation options.

Drivers today pay less than half as much for each mile traveled as they did in 1959; more than 15 years have passed since the tax's last nominal increase and federal highway funding is expected to run dry by 2009. The gas tax is not only too low but also indirect. We need to tax drivers for the true social and economic costs of the pollution they cause and the wear and tear they impose on our public road system. We recommend replacing the indirect gas tax with a direct vehi-

cle-miles-traveled fee to be paid by private vehicle users. A tax of 1.2 cents/mile would raise as much as the current gas tax revenue—the federal government must set this as a minimum and allow states to make further increases.

It will take more than higher taxes to get people out of their cars, though. Because of historical underinvestment in public transportation, many buses and metros lack the benefits that attract American consumers; the result is widespread psychological distaste of systems that are perceived as crowded, slow, unreliable and dirty. We need to invest in creating comfortable, appealing transit systems and marketing them as 21st century transportation solutions.

It begins with our buses. Buses currently account for more than 80% of all transit rides. They provide the flexibility of non-fixed routes and can serve existing patterns of development. We need to

improve the speed and reliability of buses, and also highlight and strengthen their natural advantages over cars: they allow users to relax, engage in other activities, and socialize.

We propose the establishment of a national \$1.5 billion Get on the Bus program through the Department of Transportation's Congestion-Reduction Program. This program would fund trials in ten cities to (a) create bus-only lanes and priority at traffic signals, (b) invest in buses with larger, more comfortable seats, (c) provide free wireless Internet for riders, and (d) fund broad advertising programs promoting fresh positive visions of bus systems. Cities around the world have already been successful in similar efforts: London has increased bus ridership by 40 percent through a bus-priority program and Chicago is in the first stages of instituting a similar system.





# realizing our values

The foundational beliefs of the progressive movement contain compelling intellectual power and moral clarity. Throughout the last century, the movement cemented these ideas in the public consciousness. But reactionary forces fight on. Conservative forces maintain power through Byzantine election finance law and a dysfunctional electoral system. Debates

over poverty and immigration scarcely conceal deep-seated prejudices of race and class. Our foreign policy—on agriculture, trade, and international governance—is narrow, shortsighted and nationalistic. The right constantly finds new ways to fight for old injustices.

As we confront the challenges of the 21st century, we cannot lose sight of the marginalized members of our

community. Less still can we abandon the urgent struggle to realize a more just and democratic society – not just because the struggle is the right one, but because when we act on our values, we build a stronger nation. The crises

we face in the years to come will require the very best our country has to offer, and we are at our best only when every member of society contributes meaningfully. Only by creating a just society at home can we inspire the world to embrace a shared vision of our shared world.



# CAPTURING DEMOCRACY'S SURGE

*Stuart Comstock-Gay and Miles Rapoport*

In this extraordinary and groundbreaking election year, old assumptions about what a presidential candidate had to look like have been retired forever. The 2008 campaign would have produced the first female presidential nominee of a major party - had it not given us the first African American nominee instead. After the Democrats had made their decision, the Republicans delivered the second-ever female nominee for Vice President.

But well before anyone had been nominated or elected, democracy itself was the winner. The supposedly "frontloaded" Democratic race was longer and closer than anyone expected, with hotly contested results far beyond the usual battlegrounds. More than 58 million Americans voted in primary contests across the country this year. That's a 65 percent increase over the previous record of 35 million, set in 1988. Youth voter participation doubled over its 2004 level; in a few states, it rose four-fold and more. African Americans voted in numbers that conventional wisdom and party insiders had considered impossible. In states where people could register and vote on primary day, over 300,000 people made use of the opportunity. The number of people contributing to political campaigns through the Internet and other small-donor channels increased dramatically. So did the number of people working for candidates. More than two million people have given money to the Obama campaign this year. Nearly as many are said to have volunteered.

We should be inspired by the 2008 story – inspired to think hard about how to capture the transforming energy of a remarkable political year, and build it into our politics over the long term. That will mean major structural reforms of a kind that have been impossible to achieve up until now; otherwise, democracy could easily slip back into the shrunken and distorted condition that has been the modern norm.

**We should be inspired by the 2008 story.**

Americans are struggling mightily today. That should be no surprise. In recent decades, economic policy decisions have consistently favored a wealthy few, while making life more precarious and volatile for others. Since the early 1980s, after-tax income has increased 176 percent for the highest-earning one percent of Americans; it has gone up just six percent for the bottom fifth. The agenda of a powerful minority has taken precedence because of the failure of our democracy.

Three parallel trends brought us to this pass: a drop in voter participation; a simultaneous rise in the influence of money; and a decline in civic engagement generally and confidence in government in particular. Voter turnout, which plummeted after Vietnam and Watergate, continued to decline until 2004. In its decline, political participation gradually became a mirror of our racial, age, and class divide, with the graphs of income and voting running along almost parallel lines.

Some citizens have been entirely pushed out of the process. More than five million Americans are currently without their voting rights as a result of a felony conviction – a policy with a greatly disproportionate impact on racial minorities. In some states, 25 percent of African American men have been declared ineligible to vote. Restrictive voter registration deadlines and other barriers have kept countless Americans from taking part. Federal and state governments have failed to implement the 1993 Motor Voter law, letting millions of poor people go unregistered. Young people have been notoriously disengaged from politics, despite the fact that youth volunteerism doubled between 1989 and 2005.

**We won't get our country right until we get our democracy right.**

As voter turnout has declined, the influence of money has become more pronounced. At every level, campaigns have become exponentially more expensive, forcing candidates to spend vast amounts of time raising money and meeting with donors – and leaving them with woefully little time, photo ops aside, for encounters that might help them understand the concerns of ordinary people. Predictably, many government

policies have been shown to benefit those wealthy supporters. Our money-infused system hurts everyday Americans, hurts candidates, and hurts American principles of fairness and equality. Many citizens understandably see our politics as an insiders' game of money and influence.

Voter participation went into its steep decline in the 1960s. That's also when Americans began to have less overall confidence in government and the officials who personify it. In recent polling, two-thirds of Americans have expressed distant and disconnected feelings about government, which they see as serving special interests over the common interest. Much of that response is the result of a systematic undermining of government by those who fear its potential to play a countervailing role to private wealth and power. When conservative strategist Grover Norquist promised to shrink government "down to the size where we can drown it in a bathtub," he expressed what has been the dominant political ideology of the past three decades.

Our democracy's deficits have been a major contributor to economic insecurity and hardship, and a significant factor in the diminished sense of national confidence that has been a recurring theme of public opinion surveys recently. The administrative nightmares of the 2000 election, and some more since, have only exacerbated people's concerns about how America's democracy is managed.

America needs an election process that is efficient, trustworthy, and welcoming. We need a renewed sense of citizenship and service, and a government that people can believe in. The next administration should work hard to bring all voices into the democratic game, energetically expand voting and civic participation, and lead the country toward a new understanding of government's role.

These are not trivial afterthoughts to the real world of economic policy. In today's America, elections and civil engagement are questions of policy, not just process; and democracy policy ranks right up there with (because it has become inseparable from) health care policy, energy policy, trade policy, and the rest. We won't get our country right until we get our democracy right.

## AUTHORS

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## DEMOCRACY IDEAS

### NATIONAL ELECTION STANDARDS

To assure election integrity and rebuild voter confidence, we need a firm set of national election standards. Our elections are a patchwork quilt of thousands of different jurisdictions, which vary wildly in funding and competence. Many states do an excellent job. Others do not. The Election Assistance Commission (EAC) was established after the 2000 Florida debacle as part of the Help America Vote Act, to oversee and help fund improvements in election administration. But it has been underfunded, and was by design not given any enforcement capability. The EAC needs the resources and the authority to set and enforce national standards in a number of critical areas. Key issues include voting machines with public software and stringent audits, accurate voter lists, adequate poll worker preparation, identification requirements that do not discourage voters, and expanded voter registration opportunities.

The Department of Justice must recommit itself to enforcing the voting rights laws now on the books. Over the past ten years, the DOJ has ignored the National Voter Registration Act and has shown little interest in upholding the Voting Rights Act. During the current administration, many DOJ enforcement actions were designed to shrink the rolls rather than expand participation. When con-

fronted with evidence of deceptive voter practices in African American and Hispanic communities, the DOJ did nothing. It must energetically play its role in ensuring that all eligible citizens can cast a meaningful vote.

**States with  
Election Day  
Registration  
experience voter  
participation 8 to 10  
points higher than  
states without it.**

### EXPANDED ACCESS

We need a legislative agenda to move the country toward universal voter registration. Election Day Registration is a key and achievable reform; EDR states have voter participation levels 8 to 10 points higher than states without it. Voting opportunities should be expanded through early voting over a three-week period prior to Election Day, through the wider use of mail-in ballots, and through polling places with a sufficient number of machines and full accessibility. Residents of the District of Columbia should have full representation. Efforts to discourage people from voting through intimidation or deceptive practices must be outlawed and penalized.

### CAMPAIN FINANCING

The President should take the lead in enacting a comprehensive public financing system for federal elections. The presidential financing system is broken, and there is no public financing for congressional elections. Despite Obama's success, most candidates are still beholden to the high-stakes pay-for-play fundraising system. Senators Richard Durbin and Arlen Specter, and Representative John Larson have proposed a public funding system for Congress based on the successful model pioneered in Maine, Arizona, and Connecticut. Research by Americans for Campaign Reform shows that \$6 per person would fully fund all congressional races. Small-donor interest should be encouraged alongside meaningful public financing.



Anna Salzberg,  
Student Association for Voter Empowerment

### DELIBERATIVE DEMOCRACY

Democracy has too often been discussed only in terms of elections. For democracy to be truly vibrant, citizens need to connect with the decisions that matter in their lives. Research and practice show there is tremendous value in deliberative gatherings to debate and discuss important issues. Whether these meetings are large-scale conferences or a series of weekly get-togethers, whether they are intended to address problems of racism, zoning, health care, or schools, these deliberative sessions allow a diversity of voices to be heard, and better decisions to be made. Efforts at active civic engagement have taken root in communities around the country over the last two decades, and they ought to be encouraged in multiple venues at the local, state, and federal levels.

Technology plays a role here, too. People who care about the same issues do not always live in the same physical communities. Through Web sites, blogs, Twitter, and even deliberative chat sessions, they can gather and deliberate online, to the great benefit of our democracy. These practices can help make citizens more committed not just to the topic at hand, but to civil society in general.

In addition, it is time to put citizenship education back into school curricula, so that the next generation knows how to play the democracy game. And while we're at it, our new models of engagement – deliberative

and high-tech - ought to be part of that education.

Citizens should also be encouraged to engage in national service. One possibility is a program of universal national service linked to scholarship aid for college and occupational education. Such a program would have the dual benefit of making college more affordable and reviving a universal notion of citizenship.



## A CITIZEN-FRIENDLY GOVERNMENT

A critical element of reviving citizenship is restoring a belief in government as the place where we all, as citizens, come together to solve our common problems and plan for the future. An important starting point is to make government function in a way that is citizen-friendly. The next administration should work to increase the transparency of government and lift the veil of secrecy that all too often has been placed on budgeting and rule-making. Taking as a starting point the new law requiring the federal budget to be accessible on the Web, the administration should make ever-increasing amounts of information available online.

Ronald Reagan was a leader in undermining people's faith in government. The next president should lead in regaining the people's trust in government as a place where problems are solved. We need to not just rebuild our infrastructure, but to teach the public about the critical importance of maintaining it. Not just to increase Head Start funding, but to articulate the rationale for public investment in children. Not just to re-regulate areas of the economy that have run amok, but to explain why a fair set of rules and regulations is essential to economic growth. For these tasks, leadership will be as important as policy change.

## OFFICE OF CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Restoring our democracy will require an ambitious and multifaceted agenda. A new White House Office of Civic Participation could have a key role to play. This new body could work with agencies throughout the federal government to encourage collaborative governance, dramatically enhancing levels of participation in decision-making. It could also encourage new and more creative forms of democratic participation at all levels of government. It could support grant programs for civic participation initiatives in the non-profit sector. And it could be a focal point for meaningful election reform.

As a long-term mission, it could work to develop a new relationship between Americans and their government. As government becomes more open and more of a place of citizen participation, new understandings will emerge to replace the negative views currently held by so many. And new discussions on making American democracy as inclusive and vibrant as possible can occur. For instance, a White House Conference on Citizenship could begin to engage Americans in the understanding of citizenship itself, which could enliven our national discourse, and help shift the immigration debate away from polarization and toward a national dialogue on what it means to be American.



**Public funding for congressional races would cost \$6 per person.**

# UPHOLDING COMMUNITY VALUES

Deepak Bhargava and Seth Borgos

Between the defeat of Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan's election to the presidency, American conservatives forged a cogent and effective political narrative. The signature policies of the conservative movement – tax cuts, privatization, deregulation – were grounded in a simple set of guiding principles: freedom is the highest public value; competition is the engine of progress; markets are intrinsically fair and rational; big government constrains liberty and fosters dependency. These principles, in turn, rested on a starkly individualistic worldview that emphasized the autonomy of the self and the voluntary character of society. While conservatives did not win every battle, they succeeded in establishing their ideology as the norm; it became the default position in American politics, giving the Right a structural advantage that proved decisive over time.

After more than quarter-century, the conservative chokehold has begun to loosen. The obvious part of the story involves a disastrous war, a deteriorating economy, and an unpopular president. Conventional political analysis (unable to see beyond the obvious) would have the next administration use its mandate to advance policies with broad, poll-tested support – “low-hanging fruit” left over from the Bush years – instead of questioning the foundational principles that have defined our public discourse for the past generation.

But that would be a profound misreading of the public mood. Underneath the disenchantment with the Bush Administration lies a widespread if inchoate sense that the go-it-alone ethos has been taken too far, that a conception of public good solely based on competition and consumption is lacking some essential moral dimension. Even conservative elites express disquiet and creeping doubt about where their ideas have led. This is precisely the moment to challenge the ideological underpinnings of the conservative revolution and frame an alternative

vision that, like the right-wing narrative, proceeds from values to principles to policies.

For the past three years, the Center for Community Change has been working with leaders from more than a hundred grassroots organizations to construct a political story rooted in their own aspirations and experiences. American communities, with all their diversity, embody a common ethical ideal. In a healthy community, people feel connected to each other. They care for each other and take shared responsibility for the future. They are willing to sacrifice personal interests for the common good. Everyone has something of value to offer. Everyone is included. Everyone belongs.

**Even conservative elites  
express disquiet and  
creeping doubt about  
where their ideas have led.**

When these norms are universalized and applied to the body politic, we refer to them as community values. Interdependence, mutual responsibility, shared fate – this communal ideal has deep roots in American culture, where it has lived in creative tension with the ideal of self-reliance that is also a part of our national heritage. All of our best moments as a nation have reflected a marriage of these two ideas --

personal liberation and collective uplift. The radical individualism of the conservative ideologues destroyed that generative balance. After thirty years of exile in the wilderness, community values need to be restored to their central place in our politics, not in a stealthy, furtive way but openly and forthrightly.

What does embracing community values tell us about the world as it is and the world as it should be? From hundreds of conversations with grassroots leaders, five overarching principles have emerged:

1. Our shared quality of life is more important than the open-ended accumulation of wealth. In the standard economic story, wealth-seeking investors and entrepreneurs get almost all of the credit for growth and innovation. As long as this core assumption remains in place, any proposal to limit the pursuit of wealth or distribute income more equitably

can be dismissed as illegitimate or counterproductive. To change the terms of the debate, we must:

- Tell a different story about wealth creation and economic growth, one in which all of us – workers, communities, caregivers, teachers, public servants – play a central role.
- Develop policies that go beyond redistributing income and regulating corporate behavior to changing the operating rules and assumptions of business enterprises.

2. Patterns of racism and inequality are deeply embedded in our nation, and will only be erased through deliberate, targeted efforts. We are all in this together, but we don't all start from the same place. There are legacies of discrimination, exclusion, and violence whose destructive impact on our collective life cannot be healed simply by instituting color-blind or gender-blind policies. To create a genuinely inclusive American community, we must:

- Face our history squarely, not to stir guilt or recrimination but to create a shared recognition of the ways in which past injustices have shaped the current patterns and structures of our society.
- Combine “universal” social programs with policies designed to heal the communities most affected by the destructive legacies of the past.

3. Government is an essential tool for doing together what we cannot do on our own. Few Americans believe in government as an abstraction. When the debate is cast as one over the appropriate size or scope of government, the outcome is rarely in doubt. The question we need to be asking instead is whether the fundamental things we value as a community -- shared responsibility and shared sacrifice -- can be achieved without a strong role for government. The answer is clearly no, but to carry that point we must:

- Be explicit and persistent about the failure of market mechanisms to deliver a society where everyone has a good

education, good health, decent income, decent housing, and a sense of security and opportunity.

4. Democracy means having real voice and power in all of the institutions that affect our lives. As John Dewey and other progressive pioneers long ago recognized, democracy is not just a process; it is an ethos animated by the ideals of inclusion, individual worth, and collective responsibility. By identifying democracy with the act of voting, we have lost touch with this ideal and helped make Americans deeply cynical about the gap between democratic rhetoric and reality. To reanimate the democratic spirit we must:

- Restore the credibility of our political process through root-level reforms (a topic addressed elsewhere in this document).
- Begin to apply democratic principles to the full range of institutions that govern our lives, including neighborhoods, schools, and business enterprises.

5. The security and prosperity of Americans is inseparable from the security and prosperity of other nations. Progressives have been inconsistent about the role of the United States in the world, appealing to moral universalism and altruism on some issues (foreign aid, human rights), and to isolationist, “America-first” sentiments on other issues (trade, military intervention). Our failure to resolve this tension has come home to roost in the immigration debate, creating deep fissures within the progressive community and making it very difficult to articulate a coherent alternative to the current system. To get out of this box, we must:

- Be clear and unapologetic in saying that the actions and policies of the United States have had profound effects on other nations, and that it is neither morally nor practically feasible to address our national problems in isolation from the rest of the world.
- Develop policy initiatives that embody the deep linkages between migration, trade, and economic development, that build on recognition of our shared fate in an interconnected world rather than on appeals to charity or national chauvinism.

In 2009, progressives have a unique opportunity to offer a vision of the nation's future that is consistent with our deepest beliefs. We must seize this moment, when the public is thirsting for change, to challenge the radical individualism of the conservative revolution and resurrect the ideal of community, with its core values of interdependence, inclusion and mutual responsibility. We must translate these values into substantive principles and be honest about their political implications, as the conservatives were thirty years ago. And we must be ready to test those principles against reality with bold policy initiatives rather than falling back into timid ideas and derivative thinking. In this way – perhaps only in this way – we can expand the boundaries of the possible and create a new moral foundation for the next era in our national life.

#### AUTHORS

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## COMMUNITY IDEAS

The principles we have articulated are not gauzy platitudes but substantive ideas with substantive implications – that is what makes them worth debating as a nation. In this debate, some Americans will immediately align pro or con, but many will hesitate. They will be attracted to community values, which are deeply rooted in our moral traditions, but question their application to practical politics. Hence, the ultimate test of these principles is whether they are a compelling basis for public policy.

The following four scenarios demonstrate what it would mean to translate community values into action.

### STAKEHOLDER CAPITALISM

There is a fundamental conflict between community values and the idea that corporations are solely accountable to their stockholders and capital markets. The looming crisis in the economy offers an opportunity to rethink the relationship between corporations and society. As we consider bailouts and rescue operations for industries imperiled by the downturn, we should implement a broad set of policies to assure that business enterprises enhance our collective quality of life rather than undermine it, including:

- A requirement that the boards of larger corporations include community and worker representatives.

- Development of a shared code of ethical conduct for corporations (in labor, consumer, and environmental practices) and a system of public rewards and sanctions to encourage businesses to observe the code.
- Systematic support for the formation and growth of businesses that are structurally accountable to their communities via employee ownership, cooperative ownership, and other mechanisms.

### COMMUNITY HEALTH

In the current drive to win universal health coverage for Americans, it is easy to forget the larger goal, which is health itself. Lack of access to health care is only responsible for about 20 percent of the disparities that – to cite one shocking example – have reduced women's life expectancy in nearly a quarter of U.S. counties over the past decade. Other critical risk factors involve education, housing, employment, nutrition, environmental quality, and the strength of social networks. As a nation, we need to commit ourselves to specific targets for improving collective indices of community health over the next decade, and invest in a range of strategies to achieve that end, including:

- Expansion of community health centers, promotoras, and other systems that have proven effective in delivering low-cost, preventive health care.
- A healthy communities Superfund

that would make long-term investments in projects (such as cleanup of toxic hazards, expansion of recreational facilities, anti-violence programs, farmers markets) with demonstrated impact on community health outcomes.

- Requiring a community health assessment – analogous to an environmental impact assessment – for all major public policies.

### POVERTY

Sharp disparities of wealth, status, and opportunity are incompatible with community values. After a span of decades when the struggle against poverty was effectively abandoned, we need to recommit the nation to the work of addressing the economic legacies of racism and discrimination. This will require an array of strategies targeted to the most intractable problems in low-income communities of color, including:

- A comprehensive program for bringing the unemployed (particularly young people and ex-offenders) into the workforce, including basic education, job training, apprenticeships, local hiring agreements, green jobs, and a mobile corps of paid community workers.
- A national housing trust fund to produce the affordable housing in low-income neighborhoods that cannot be generated by market forces alone.
- Redirecting investment in transportation and public infrastruc-

ture from promoting growth in affluent, outer-ring suburbs to the renewal of older, higher-need communities.

### IMMIGRATION

Rather than treating immigration as a law enforcement problem, we need to accept labor mobility as a reality of our current global economic system while working over the long term to ensure that people are not forced to migrate by the lack of opportunity in their home countries. Our immigration policy needs to work on at least three levels:

- For immigrants who are already here, and already an integral part of our communities, we need a path to citizenship, access to higher education, and other measures to assure that they are not excluded from our democracy.
- For future flow, we need a regulated system of labor migration and transparent labor markets that fosters flexibility and mobility while protecting both migrants and native-born workers from the most destructive effects of job competition.
- To catalyze debate on the broader factors driving labor migration, we should create a demonstration program that targets infrastructure investments (water, transportation, education, health care, credit) to communities worldwide that are generating the highest rates of migration to the U.S.

# REJOINING THE WORLD

Jim Harkness and Alexandra Spieldoch

Sixty years ago, it was the United States that advocated most eloquently for passage of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the first global expression of the inherent rights of all people. We were the richest and most powerful country on earth, and the problems of other nations seemed to have little practical bearing on our prosperity; nevertheless, the American commitment to multilateral solutions was bold and unwavering. Today, by contrast, many of our biggest challenges are clearly global in nature. Yet even as domestic policy has become more and more obviously intertwined with foreign policy, the United States has chosen to distance itself from international organizations and negotiations.

In one area of policy after another, the Bush administration has taken a go-it-alone approach, to the shame of our country and the dismay of the rest of the world. Climate change is an obvious and appalling example. Policies that encourage sprawl and runaway consumption here at home lead to higher temperatures and water levels in Myanmar and Miami alike. As the largest greenhouse-gas emitter, the United States bears a special burden of responsibility. Yet, over the past eight years, Washington has stood conspicuously apart from global climate negotiations. As a result, the United States itself now looms as a huge barrier to progress in convincing poorer countries to adopt more sustainable practices. On economic questions, the administration has consistently carried the water for private capital, leading to policies that have lowered wages, widened the chasm between rich and poor, and left millions with little choice but to migrate (from rural areas to cities, from one country to another) in pursuit of a more secure life. On the national security front, the administration took a concern shared by many nations – terrorism – and turned it into an American-branded war

of us against an ill-defined them. Through blatant disregard for suspects' rights and the rule of law, American leaders have alienated many of our natural allies.

This new unilateralism has deepened our problems and diminished the U.S. position as a global leader. For our own sake and the world's, the next administration should act quickly to chart a new course of global cooperation. The United States must reengage with international institutions and conventions, while, at the same time, reasserting the public interest over the corporate interest and honoring the links between our national well-being and international development, human rights, and the environment. A new approach in just four areas—the United Nations, trade, the environment, and food policy—would send a strong message to the international community that the United States has decided to rejoin the global community.

The economy, our food system, the environment and security – all call for global solutions, which can only emerge from a renewed commitment to international cooperation.

At the United Nations, we stand near the back of the line when it comes to ratifying international treaties and conventions. Through prompt action on just a few of the many pending agreements that protect workers, children, women and the environment, the next administration can signal its readiness to help revive the United Nations as a tool for solving global problems and keeping the peace.

Over a span of decades, American leaders have aggressively pushed a corporate-led free trade model rooted in the twin principles of deregulation and privatization. Through the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and other trade pacts, recent U.S. policy has increased economic growth for large multinational corporations at the expense of workers, farmers and the environment on both ends of our trading relationships. Trade agreements should support social, economic and environmental goals. They should operate within international conventions that protect the public interest. The next administration must provide a new vision for trade that puts people, communities, and the environment first.

The current food crisis requires immediate attention. In mid-2007, before prices shot up, an estimated 850 million people lived in a state of crippling hunger, which the United Nations defines as continuously getting too little food to maintain a healthy and minimally active life. Another 50 million have now joined those ranks, and the number will continue to grow if the current pattern of food-price volatility continues, as many predict it will. Three quarters of the world's extremely poor people - 1.2 billion of us - live and work in rural areas where agriculture is the dominant sector of the economy. But decades of underinvestment in agriculture, combined with the "free trade" and deregulation thrust of U.S. policy, have turned countries that used to produce their own food into net food importers. Today, many of the world's largest agricultural producers, including the United States itself, face acute water shortages in vital areas of arable land. Our industrial, export-oriented brand of agriculture is deeply dependent on oil and strongly linked to high greenhouse gas emissions. Whole new agricultural systems are needed—systems that support local food needs, can withstand climate change, and maintain the health of the land and natural resources on which our food system depends. Better agricultural, financial and food aid policies could protect people against price volatility and scarcity.

In the postwar decades, the United States led the way in creating a multilateral order. The World Bank; the International Monetary Fund; the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (later to become the World Trade Organization); the U.N. Declaration on Human Rights; and, of course, the United Nations itself – American leaders were present at the birth of all these enduring institutions, which were intended to facilitate international cooperation in law, human rights, economic development, social progress and global security. Those same principles are a good starting point for American policy today. The economy, our food system, the environment and security – all call for global solutions, which can only emerge from a renewed commitment to international cooperation.



## AUTHORS

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# GLOBAL IDEAS

## THE U.S. AND THE U.N.: A TIME FOR RECONCILIATION

Most Americans believe that the United Nations plays an important part in the world and would like to see its powers increased, despite justified criticism of its inability to effectively deal with human rights abuses and international peacekeeping needs. In fact, today's United Nations is a far cry from the organization envisioned by world leaders at its founding in San Francisco in 1945. That is true, in large part, because the Bush administration has abandoned the United Nations as the primary locus of global cooperation. By slashing funding, ignoring rules, refusing to join new institutions such as the International Criminal Court and appointing a U.N. Ambassador who was openly hostile to the institution, the administration has sought to undercut the United Nations at nearly every turn. A renewed U.S. commitment could both help solve global problems and improve the effectiveness of the institution.

The first challenge is to rebuild trust with other U.N. members. The new administration should begin by paying its back dues. It should appoint a U.N. ambassador with stature—and with a strong commitment to internationalism and an explicit mandate to help make the United Nations more effective, including steps to improve its efficiency and financial accounting practices. The next ad-

ministration should actively support a fairer decision-making process within international bodies, particularly those dealing with global trade and finance, so that all countries, not just the biggest or most intransigent, have a voice. Through these first steps, the next administration can establish its credibility – and the nation's – as a sincere partner in the pursuit of a more engaged and enlightened multilateral system.

The next big step will be to support the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the U.N. treaty system that serves as a framework for human and social rights. The United States has signed on to the MDGs, which range from halving extreme poverty to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS to providing universal primary education, all by 2015, but has done little to support them. By ratifying several important treaties, we can help restore our credibility as a supporter of international human rights. Those treaties include the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the conventions on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and on the Rights of the Child.



## PROTECTING OUR COMMON ENVIRONMENT

Environmental challenges demand global action. The United States has lagged behind the rest of the world in supporting the U.N. treaty system to protect the environment. The new administration should create a presidential Office of the U.S. Representative on Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) that would have a mandate comparable to the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, and a concomitant budget and staffing level. This new position would work with the UN and the U.S. Congress to find global solutions to urgent problems.

The recently introduced TRADE Act, officially titled the “Trade, Accountability, Development and Employment Act of 2008,” provides an excellent blueprint for a new fair trade system. The TRADE Act was introduced on June 4, 2008 by Sen. Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio) and Rep. Mike Michaud (D-Maine). It is supported by labor, consumer, environmental, family farm and faith groups and more than 50 co-sponsors in the House and the Senate. The TRADE Act goes further than providing a congressional space to review trade deals that are not working. It lists components that should be included and excluded from U.S. trade agreements so as to protect the environment, workers and communities. The TRADE Act also strengthens the role of Congress by allowing members to review and renegotiate existing trade agreements, such as NAFTA, in order to ensure they are in compliance with sustainable development goals. As well, it empowers Congress to require that all future trade agreements comply with its provisions. A new administration should work closely with Congress to use the TRADE Act as the basis for a new fair trade policy.



## GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY

The United States is an indispensable player in the work of stabilizing global food prices and preventing starvation. We are one of the world’s largest agricultural producers and set global prices for several key commodities. The United States is also the largest giver of food aid in the world, but does it badly. The new administration should use a global food sovereignty lens to assess its food and agriculture policies. At the global level, food sovereignty implies two related but distinct concerns: the right of countries to determine and implement their own food security policies, and the responsibility of all countries to protect every person’s human right to food, as set out in the UN Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Four actions could go a long way toward that goal:

- Support for a Global Food Convention. The U.S. should provide leadership within the UN in building towards a Global Food Convention, which would serve as a legal framework to address food sovereignty and the agricultural dimensions of climate change. The goal would be to establish binding commitments for all UN governments, with a strong framework for use by local and regional authorities. With a Global Food Convention supported by a multi-stakeholder international commission, governments would have sovereignty to define their own
- Regulation of commodity markets: Commodity speculation is one of the main drivers of price volatility - one that can and must be controlled. It is in everyone’s interest to ensure that food and agriculture markets can function properly, reflecting actual supply and demand. Speculation confuses the signals and contributes directly to hunger.
- Reformed – and increased - foreign aid: While the United States has promised to spend a mini-

food and agricultural policies, but would be held accountable to international environmental and human rights, including the Right to Food.

- Food sovereignty as a cornerstone of trade policy: Instead of a narrow focus on forcing open markets in other countries, the United States should advocate for rules that respect the right of all countries to safeguard their food sovereignty through support for farmers and agriculture, border measures and food reserves.
- A strategic grain reserve: The next administration should act quickly to establish farmer-held grain reserves, and should initiate a global dialogue on building a network of reserves around the world to stabilize global grain prices. Food reserves should be complemented by border measures to ensure that local prices are not destabilized by dumped imports.
- Regulation of commodity markets: Commodity speculation is one of the main drivers of price volatility - one that can and must be controlled. It is in everyone’s interest to ensure that food and agriculture markets can function properly, reflecting actual supply and demand. Speculation confuses the signals and contributes directly to hunger.
- Reformed – and increased - foreign aid: While the United States has promised to spend a mini-

mum of 0.7 percent of its Gross National Product on overseas development assistance, today it spends less than 0.2 percent. The new administration should move toward a cabinet-level Department of Global Development that works with Congress to coordinate foreign assistance programs, with a new focus on eradicating hunger and poverty, improving education and health, and helping countries reach the Millennium Development Goals. U.S. food aid programs urgently need reform. These programs are inefficient, expensive and untimely, and too often hurt local food markets in recipient countries. Instead, we should build on efforts initiated by President Bush toward programs that are free from requirements to source or handle the food in the U.S., and give priority to cash-based over in-kind donations so recipient countries can source food locally. This flexibility allows assistance to be delivered quickly to those who need it most. Food aid should work with international cooperation programs to build support for local food systems in developing countries.







# taking action

A shared sense of excitement and anticipation reverberates through these essays. The authors see an extraordinary opportunity for change, and a great need to make the most of it. But the windows for reform in American politics narrow quickly. The new administration must immediately push for bold legislation; the dilemmas we face are too serious for tentative steps or half-measures.

The legislation we enact on critical issues—providing health care and opportunity, addressing climate change and the middle class squeeze—must immediately improve lives. Too often, though, change evaporates with a new election or new crisis. We must demand reforms that permanently shift the ground on which future debates are held. The mark of true progressive legislation is sticking power.

Immediate action is the first priority, but our work must also set the stage for continued progress. Let us bear in mind the challenges we will face in the decades ahead; our leaders must not only pass legislation but shift the tone of debate, raise expectations of our national government, and define our national purpose. The right agenda can do exactly that.

# HEALTH CARE FOR AMERICA

Roger Hickey

Long before anyone had been nominated or elected, the voters of 2008 had gotten one message across loud and clear: *Fix our dysfunctional health care system!* For obvious reasons (and big reasons that aren't so obvious), the leaders of 2009 must heed that call.

America's health care system is in meltdown. More than 45.7 million of us have no health insurance. But even those with good insurance face rising costs and a growing risk of losing the protection they have. Every year, tens of millions of Americans go uninsured for long periods - when a layoff, a divorce, or illness itself disrupts their ability to get or pay for coverage. (Forty-one percent of working-age Americans making \$20,000 to \$40,000 per year lacked insurance for at least part of 2007.) Still more millions are seriously under-insured, though many don't realize it since insurance companies tend to be secretive about the conditions and procedures they refuse to cover - until we actually need the care.

In an economy that's gone bad and getting worse, countless American families – insured and uninsured alike – live in dread of being plunged into poverty or destitution by a major health problem. In fact, more than half of all individual and family bankruptcies are triggered by medical bills.

Health care is a momentous problem in its own right. It's also hugely important as part of the broader breakdown of economic security in our country, and as a symbol of political gridlock and unresponsive government. For all these reasons, it's an issue to be addressed boldly, decisively, and, at the same time, with an extra measure of care.

If we were starting from scratch, "single payer" might be the way to go. With one public insurance plan covering everyone, Americans could potentially realize hundreds of billions of dollars a year in savings on pointless bureaucracy and profits - more than enough to cover the uninsured and improve coverage for tens of millions of under-insured.

But we are not starting from scratch. During World War II, U.S. employers began providing health insurance as a way to attract scarce workers at a time of strict wage-price controls. Tax laws went on to codify our employer-based system, which even now provides health care for 160 million Americans – a majority of those not on Medicare. Their support was the critical missing piece in 1993. That's when the Clinton administration set out confidently down the path of health care reform – only to see its proposal cut to shreds by insurer-sponsored TV spots in which a middle-class couple called "Harry and Louise" warned of a sinister plot to "force us to pick from a few health care plans designed by government bureaucrats."

The good news is that Americans are much more suspicious of the insurance industry now than they were then. Many people have wised up to the way insurers compete by cherry-picking younger, healthier workers and employing armies of agents to deny claims – sometimes even when it means condemning someone to premature death or a lifetime of chronic illness. Of all the world's nations, the United States spends by far the most money on health care per capita and in total. Our health care system is enormously wasteful and chaotically organized – and Americans know it. About two-thirds of all voters are prepared to see taxes increase in order to provide high-quality health insurance for everyone. Even a majority of those who are satisfied with their coverage now grasp the need for major reform.

The sticking point for many, however, is the ability to keep the insurance they have. The answer is to guarantee that option, building it into a plan that also lets people choose from a menu of private insurance alternatives (with regulated benefits and costs) or sign up for a Medicare-like public plan, which can act as a benchmark for its private competitors. That's the concept behind Health Care for America, a proposal put together by the political scientist Jacob Hacker with the support of the Economic Policy Institute.

Health Care for America is simple and flexible enough to appeal to a majority of Americans, but bold enough to do the job of covering everyone and controlling health price inflation. And it holds the promise of

becoming better over time, as more and more Americans shift over to the public plan, lured by its higher efficiency and more generous benefits.

Employers would be required to provide quality health insurance or pay into a public fund to cover their employees. But even most big companies that already insure their workers would come out ahead, with total savings estimated at more than \$50 billion per year.. For small businesses that haven't been able to afford health insurance for their employees, payments into the public fund would be far smaller than the bill private insurance companies would charge them for employee premium costs. Even though many companies would be required to take more responsibility, the total health insurance burden on business would be greatly reduced.

## Success on the health care front will revive faith in the ability of our national government to do big, important things in service of the common good.

Progressives are united as never before in their commitment to quality and affordable care for all. This time around, reformers must coalesce behind a politically compelling proposal, and prepare to debate it openly and explain it clearly. They should be equally clear about what they're against.

Conservatives used to be content to defend a worsening status quo. For years, they have opposed almost all attempts to restrain the insurance and pharmaceutical industries or to expand coverage by, for example, bringing millions more children into the SCHIP program. But more recently, conservative leaders have been promoting more radical and dangerous proposals to tax the health benefits that most of us get at work. That's a sure-fire way to drive more employers out of the health care business. As many as 20 million Americans could lose their insurance under a plan backed by (among others) presidential candidate John McCain.

These new proposals come from the same ideological playbook (and the same extreme right-wing think tanks) as President Bush's effort to privatize Social Security. Americans rejected that idea decisively; that's also how most people will react to the Republican (and insurance industry) health-care agenda, once they understand it. The stark contrast between the conservative and progressive vision for health care should make for a robust public debate and build support for comprehensive reform.

Through a full-throated debate over health care, progressives can awaken Americans to the broader perils of a radical economic agenda that places the risks of a volatile global and financial economy squarely on our individual shoulders. But health care advocates – national and community leaders, grassroots activists and bloggers – need to make sure such a debate happens during the 2008 election campaign and beyond.

Fifteen years after the tragedy of the Clinton health care initiative; more than 60 years after Harry Truman proposed legislation “to assure the right to adequate medical care and protection from the economic fears of sickness;” decades after that idea became the norm among the rich countries of the world, the United States has a fresh chance – a real chance - to act.

For the next administration, for Congress, and for the nation as a whole, health care will be a defining battle. Comprehensive reform could be a crucial, confidence-building first step toward a 21st century social contract – a new national commitment to the kind of basic economic security that will encourage Americans to take chances, invest in the future, and thrive in years to come. Success on the health-care front will greatly improve the prospects for success on other fronts. It will revive faith in the ability of our leaders -the ability of our national government - to do big important things in service of the common good.

No other achievement on the political horizon promises to make such a large difference in so many lives. No other breakthrough will do so much to set the stage for a broad progressive breakthrough.

# HEALTH IDEAS

## PRINCIPLES FOR REAL HEALTHCARE

To turn the promise of quality, affordable health care into reality, a new coalition, called Health Care for America Now was launched in July 2008 with events in Washington, D.C., and in most of the fifty states. The mission of this coalition, which includes more than 230 national and local organizations, is to establish an unmistakable mandate for action, making the 2008 election campaign, which is already destined to revolve around the economy, a referendum on health care.



More than half of all individual and family bankruptcies are triggered by medical bills.

LET US RESOLVE  
THAT THE STATE  
OF A FAMILY'S  
HEALTH SHALL  
NEVER DEPEND  
ON THE SIZE  
OF A FAMILY'S  
WEALTH.

SENATOR EDWARD M. KENNEDY  
AUGUST 12, 1980

Decades after this idea was the norm in wealthy countries around the world, the U.S. has a fresh chance - a real chance - to act.

## QUALITY COVERAGE FOR ALL

Americans want an inclusive and accessible health care system that leaves no one out. That means, in the first place, high-quality insurance with comprehensive benefits – covering everything from preventive care to treatment of the most serious illness. And for low-income people and communities of color, it means a serious commitment to equity in access, treatment, research, resources – and outcomes.



## CHOICE

Americans need to be guaranteed health care options. If you like your current health insurance, you should be guaranteed that you can keep it – unlike radical conservative plans that would dismantle employer-provided health care, forcing millions to buy coverage with an inadequate voucher in the individual insurance market. Everyone should be able to choose a regulated private group plan. And everyone should also be able to sign up with something new: a public insurance plan, like Medicare, that is independent of private insurance middlemen.

Choice also means the right to pick your doctor and health care provider.

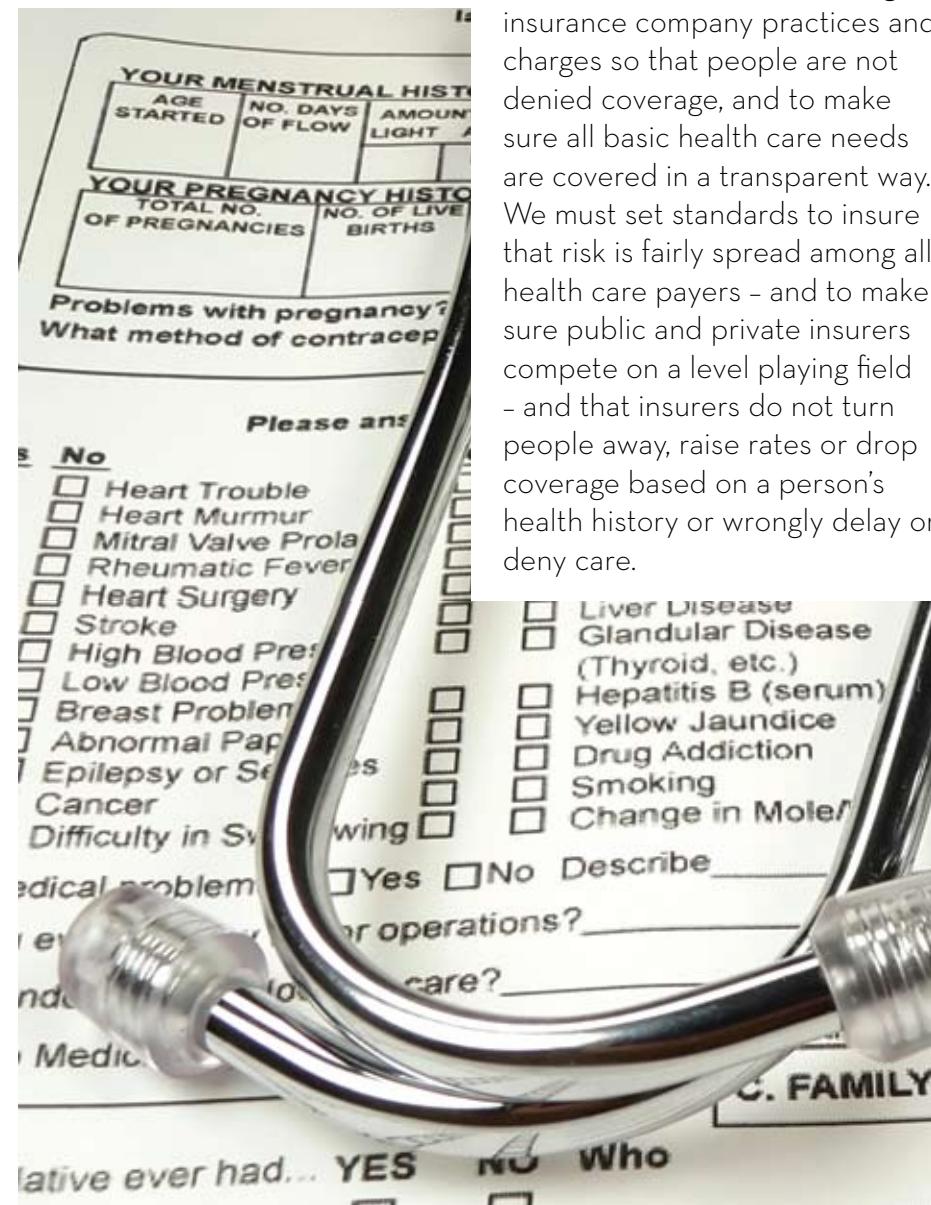
Employers, too, get expanded options. Those who prefer not to shoulder the burden of providing coverage as good as the law requires can decide to enroll their workers in the public plan at a modest cost. But they have to do one or the other, in order to ensure that affordable, quality health coverage is guaranteed for all.

## AFFORDABLE COVERAGE AND TREATMENT

Working families, retirees, large and small businesses and other employers - all need stable health care prices, with premiums and other charges based on a family's ability to pay. This will require effective cost controls that improve quality, lower administrative expenses, and encourage preventive care and active disease management. Health care reform should include performance standards and systems to reduce medical errors. And it must take advantage of public purchasing power to lower the cost of drugs and medical devices and services across the board.

The new public plan would be similar to Medicare, where administrative costs run between 2 and 3 percent of total spending, much lower than the private sector, with its expensive advertising, complex billing systems, and other costs. Together, the new public plan and Medicare would function as two very large nationwide insurance pools covering more than half the population. By bargaining jointly with providers, hospitals, and pharmaceutical companies, they would have enormous combined leverage to hold down costs. To ensure that these economies did not come at

the expense of high-quality care, the new public plan would also monitor and improve the quality of care, learning from and applying successful methods from all parts of the health system.



healthcare

## A STRONG GOVERNMENT

### WATCHDOG

Guaranteeing quality and affordable health care for all will require consistent public leadership to set and enforce rules involving insurance company practices and charges so that people are not denied coverage, and to make sure all basic health care needs are covered in a transparent way. We must set standards to insure that risk is fairly spread among all health care payers - and to make sure public and private insurers compete on a level playing field - and that insurers do not turn people away, raise rates or drop coverage based on a person's health history or wrongly delay or deny care.

## AUTHOR

**ROGER HICKEY** is a founder and co-director of the Campaign for America's Future. He was also one of the founders of Americans United to Protect Social Security, a coalition of citizen leaders representing consumers, workers, women, seniors, young people, civil rights advocates, and community activists—united around the goal of strengthening Social Security and Medicare. Americans United is now working on Medicare prescription drugs and other issues. Hickey also helped found the Economic Policy Institute (EPI), a Washington think tank that looks at economics from the point of view of working Americans. Hickey served as EPI's vice president and director of communications. A graduate of the University of Virginia, Hickey began his career in the 1960s as an organizer for the Virginia Civil Rights Committee and the Southern Students' Organizing Committee.

Editing assistance for this piece was provided by **BILL SCHER**, who, among other things, is a blogger at OurFuture.org.

# AN INCLUSIVE GREEN ECONOMY

Van Jones and Jason Walsh

In the 21st century, America will be defined by its response to two great challenges: One is global warming, which threatens irreparable harm to our planet and its people. The other is the increasingly unequal economy of our own country, which is now more divided between rich and poor than at any time in living memory. The necessary response to these intertwined realities is to build an inclusive green economy, strong enough to lift people out of poverty.

A powerful logic connects the two missions. The shift to a more efficient, low-carbon economy will have profound health benefits for poor people, who suffer disproportionately from cancer, asthma, and other pollution-related ailments. And the effort to curb global warming and oil dependence contains enormous potential to create new jobs and avenues of opportunity, by creating pathways to ensure that the work that most needs doing – rebuilding, retrofitting, and restoring our cities and town, our infrastructure and public lands – is done by those who most need the work.

Politically as well as economically, it makes sense for the poor and disadvantaged to be key players in this process. A crucial early step will be the design and construction of a system that places a price on greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and invests the proceeds in mechanisms that drive us toward a low-carbon economy. No part of the transition to a sustainable economy is more urgently needed – and none will be more fiercely resisted by the industries that dominate our current pollution-based economy. Their opposition can be overcome only by expanding the coalition of support beyond the traditional environmental organizations that have been the loudest voices for change to date.

**Green jobs means:**

- **Better health**
- **New opportunities and career paths**
- **Smart spending on infrastructure that lasts**

Low-income Americans will be pivotal to the success of that coalition for action. But despite clear evidence that they will be disproportionately impacted by climate change, low-income people are ‘swing votes’ up for grabs in the unprecedented political battle that awaits us, and on which so much depends.

Polluters and their champions have a history of using economic scare tactics to defeat climate protection measures. That was a winning formula as recently as June 2008, when the Senate took up the Lieberman-Warner Climate Security bill to create a cap and trade system for GHG emissions. Opponents of that proposal made two claims, and repeated them endlessly: It would raise gas prices. It would wreck the U.S.

economy. Much of their rhetoric focused on the consequences for low-income Americans, and that proved to be a powerful line of argument, even when it came from Senators, like Mississippi’s Thad Cochran and Arizona’s John Kyl, known for consistently voting against legislation that would directly benefit poor people by, for example, raising the minimum wage or expanding children’s health insurance.

To counter such arguments and bring significant numbers of poor and working-class Americans into a winning coalition, climate protection has to be presented as economic policy based on core American values of opportunity and fairness. That means, for one thing, redefining the threat. While low-income communities are hardly monolithic, it is safe to say that polar bear habitat does not top the list of concerns in West Oakland, Newark, and Appalachia. To reach people where they are, it would make more sense to talk about the fact that it is poor people who can generally expect to be hit first and worst by climate catastrophes – witness Hurricane Katrina.

But words will not be enough. Even these realities of current risk remain somewhat distant questions for people struggling day-to-day with violence, joblessness, pollution, and lack of healthcare and affordable housing. Because nobody has “issue fatigue” like poor people, a climate



protection campaign must do more than speak to their immediate concerns; it must offer a lifeline of hope and possibility through investment in green-collar job creation and training.

The power of this approach goes beyond self-interest. It summons people into a compelling moral struggle that welcomes them as key players and co-creators of solutions. It appeals to a grand sense of purpose on a planetary scale. At the same time, it is grounded in meaningful action at the neighborhood scale – restoring communities with green space and green buildings, restoring bodies with healthy local food and clean air, and restoring families with purpose and paychecks.

By framing solutions to climate change as mechanisms for creating new jobs, opportunities, wealth, and health in low-income neighborhoods, we can win millions of members of this key constituency to the struggle for a sane climate policy. We can – indeed we have no choice but to – fight poverty, pollution and global warming at the same time.



## AUTHORS

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The Clean Energy Corps proposal was developed by the **CLEAN ENERGY CORPS WORKING GROUP**, which was formed in January 2007. In addition to the authors, its members include (institutional affiliations for identification purposes only): Kate Gordon of the Apollo Alliance; Jeremy Hays of Green For All; Bracken Hendricks of the Center for American Progress Action Fund; Billy Parish of Green For All’s Energy Action Coalition; Sally Prouty of the Corps Network; Joel Rogers of the Center on Wisconsin Strategy; The Center for State Innovation; Gene Sofer of the Susquehanna Group; Lisbeth Shepherd of Green For All; and Susan Stroud of Innovations in Civic Participation.

# GREEN IDEAS

## GREEN-COLLAR JOBS

To give meaning to the concept of an inclusive green economy, we will need to establish concrete and specific mechanisms for ensuring equal protection and opportunity in our climate and energy policies. We must do this, in part, through signature proposals that capture the imagination and propel the hope of millions.

We can start by building on an idea and term that has already captured the nation's imagination - green-collar jobs. There is enormous potential to use public policy to catalyze the creation of millions of green-collar jobs - well-paid, career track jobs that preserve or enhance environmental quality - and to expand opportunities for the many Americans who have too few of them in our current economy. Fighting climate change by investing in green economic growth and opportunity is more than a nice idea; it's happening in regional economies around the country and holds the promise of significant job creation if brought to scale.

A large part of this promise is based on the fact that green-collar jobs are location-dependent: because they focus on transforming the immediate natural and built environment, they are harder, in some

cases impossible, to offshore. No one will ship a building from Chicago to be retrofitted in China. The energy-efficiency industry provides perhaps the most exciting opportunity. Substantially reducing energy waste through systematic retrofitting and upgrading of residential and commercial buildings is one way to bring environmental and equity policy together, and create good jobs in plentiful numbers. The work requires a multi-skilled, local workforce, and it feeds a building-materials industry that is still largely domestic.

Bringing green-collar jobs to scale requires changing the rules of the game in our national economy. And this brings us back to climate protection policy. A system that places an economy-wide cap on GHG emissions, selling permits to polluters, would end the most destructive market failure in America's economic history: the ability of industries to pay no cost for baking the global commons to the brink of catastrophe.

In so doing, it would provide a powerful price incentive to the nation's economic actors - from manufacturers to utilities, from home builders to cities - to use renewable rather than fossil fuel sources for energy and to pursue greater energy efficiencies wherever possible.



## CLEAN ENERGY CORPS

Price signals alone won't be enough. The transformation to a just and sustainable economic future will require targeted investments in research and development, technology deployment, transition assistance to workers and consumers, and economic and workforce development strategies that maximize green-collar job creation and direct jobs and job training to those who need those opportunities most.

A cap and trade system would provide a new source of public revenue (tens to hundreds of billions of dollars annually generated by the auction of permits) to make such investments. In 2009, when we can expect a worsened budget deficit and mounting pressure from pay-go spending rules, this will be an invaluable and perhaps singular source of public funds to create an economy that works for our people and planet.

Money must be invested wisely, in a manner that meets the test of

good policy, on the one hand, and good politics, on the other. In order to do so, we must put forward a bold and simple proposal for massive green opportunities that captures the imagination and propels the hopes of millions of Americans. To that end, Green For All and its allies are developing a proposal for a national Clean Energy Corps. We envision the CEC as a combined service, training, and job creation effort, concentrated in cities and struggling suburban and rural communities, and designed to combat global warming, grow local and regional economies, and demonstrate the equity and employment promise of the clean energy economy.

Over the course of a decade, The CEC would invest in the energy efficiency in buildings – which account for 40 percent of national energy consumption – by creating financing mechanisms that would put public and private capital to work, covering up-front costs and capturing the energy savings. This part of the CEC program is largely

self-financing and would create local jobs and reduce greenhouse gas emissions on a vast scale. The CEC would work with a wide array of employers, community organizations, educational institutions and unions to connect working families to high-quality, career track green-collar jobs in the emerging clean energy economy. It would specifically seek to develop “green pathways out of poverty” for low-income and unemployed people, providing them the training, work experience, job placement, and other services needed to gain family-supporting jobs within that economy. And it would directly engage millions of Americans in diverse service and volunteer work related to climate protection.

We believe the time is right for such an effort. Our ailing economy needs a stimulus that is long-term, sustainable and focused on communities. The public urgently wants action to promote clean energy and curb global warming. Americans overwhelmingly support the idea

of voluntary national service and support a stronger national effort in this area. Young adults of the “greenest generation” are already volunteering in record numbers and would welcome the opportunity to serve the nation in combating climate change; so will a generation of skilled baby boomers looking for useful activities in their retirement. Blue-collar workers -- particularly those left on the bench by a stalled construction industry -- are looking for a chance to apply their skills to green-collar work that rebuilds our nation.

Low-income communities are also keenly aware of the economic promise of a clean energy economy, and wish to be in on the ground floor of building it. A bold visible national effort like the CEC would powerfully advance the national effort to stop global warming while widening economic opportunity and active citizenship. Helping to heal the planet, it would also help heal the nation.



# THE PROMISE OF OPPORTUNITY

*Alan Jenkins*

Opportunity is one of America's most deeply held values, and one of our most precious national assets. Throughout our history, Americans have been stirred by the vision of a society in which everyone gets a fair shake regardless of origins or ancestry. That ideal has inspired social movements and political breakthroughs. Universal public education developed our national genius and propelled millions out of poverty. Emancipation, Reconstruction, and women's suffrage acknowledged the equality and voice of all our people.

In the 20th century, the New Deal's assurance of basic economic security put the nation back on a stable economic footing even as it enabled millions of Americans to move from destitution to economic participation. The Civil Rights revolution led to legal safeguards that protected all Americans while integrating more millions into our economic engine and social fabric. It would be wrong to idealize the past; obviously, we have never fully realized the opportunity ideal. Nor have we fully overcome the legacies of discrimination and exclusion. Nevertheless, in fits and starts over two centuries, this country was moving in a direction that gave hope to most Americans, including those who needed hope the most.

In recent decades, however, our opportunity advance has largely stalled. The traditional stepping stones—a decent job at a living wage, affordable housing and health care, quality schools and a college education—have become more elusive and less secure. The 45.7 million Americans without health insurance, and the many more who are underinsured, grapple daily with threats to their physical, family, and economic security. Americans working full time at the minimum wage cannot afford adequate market-rate rental housing in virtually any local housing market. One in every hundred adult males are warehoused in jails or prisons, generally with little rehabilitation during their incarceration and daunting obstacles to economic and political participation after release.

In today's America, family resources and background are an increasingly accurate guide to lifelong achievement. Economic origins matter more than we would like to imagine, and more, sadly, than they did in our parents' and grandparents' time. But race, national origin, and gender also matter independently of class. Even with income and educational differences taken into account, for example, African-Americans and Latinos are less likely than other Americans to have regular and accessible health care. Irrespective of insurance status, people of color are less likely to receive necessary medical procedures, and more likely to receive undesirable forms of treatment, such as limb amputations for diabetes.

Opportunity is not only declining but, by many measures, becoming more unequal. In the criminal justice arena, state incarceration rates have gone up dramatically; the prison population has become more racially imbalanced at the same time. Juvenile justice outcomes are badly skewed. Young people of color are more likely to be placed in secure juvenile facilities, while white youths stand a better chance of being sent to private facilities or diverted from the juvenile system altogether. In 2006, three young people of color were in custody for every one white youth – and not because of differences in the severity of their offenses. (Two-thirds of all young people in custody were incarcerated for a nonviolent crime.) The same dynamics govern access to quality public schools, reputable banks and lenders, and even grocery stores and other sources of affordable, healthy food.

Research shows that these trends are due not to some change in the nature or drive of the American people, but to disinvestment in policies and systems that keep the doors to opportunity open. From the late 1940s until the 1970s, our country backed up its belief in opportunity with major policy initiatives, like the G.I. Bill, the Higher Education Act, the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the Equal Pay Act. These policies worked. They help explain why the postwar decades were a time of rising prosperity and opportunity for Americans across the board, and a time when millions of women, people of color, and immigrants entered the economic, political, and social mainstream.



What's been in short supply hasn't been discipline or effort - it's **national commitment.**

Opportunity doesn't just happen. It takes bold leadership, public investment, and shared as well as individual effort.

What's been in short supply since then isn't discipline or effort - it's national commitment. Opportunity doesn't just happen, in other words. It takes bold leadership, innovative ideas, public investment, and shared as well as individual effort.

Americans are ready for a new opportunity agenda – one that moves us all forward while continuing to address the structural barriers faced by people of color, women, and others. The pillars of such a policy agenda are easy to identify: health and health care, jobs and business, housing and lending, education, and criminal justice. But a 21st century approach needs to reflect 21st century realities: globalization, migration, new technology, and an increasingly diverse population have to be transformed from challenges into strengths. We need to proactively address subtle modern forms of racial, ethnic, class, and gender bias. New policies must ensure more equitable investment in place—in neighborhoods and regions, not just cities and states—as an instrument of more broadly shared prosperity.

Expanding opportunity for this and future generations is crucial to our nation's success, and must be a core responsibility of each presidential administration. It's a mission that should permeate nearly everything government does, rather than being relegated to a discrete set of "opportunity programs." Energy policies, infrastructure policies, economic policies, health care policies, and criminal justice policies, among others, should all pass through the opportunity filter. Though the breadth and equality of opportunity in our nation is currently threatened, we have it in our power to reinvent its promise for a new century.

#### AUTHOR

ALAN JENKINS is Executive Director of The Opportunity Agenda, a communications, research, and advocacy organization with the mission of building the national will to expand opportunity in America. He is co-editor, with Brian Smedley, of *All Things Being Equal: Instigating Opportunity in an Inequitable Time*. His previous positions include Assistant to the Solicitor General, U.S. Department of Justice; Director of Human Rights at the Ford Foundation; Associate Counsel to the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund; and Law Clerk to Supreme Court Justice Harry A. Blackmun.

## OPPORTUNITY IDEAS

### STARTING POINTS

One immediate step that a new administration should take is to make the expansion of opportunity an important and explicit consideration in the funding of state and local programs. The federal government distributes billions of dollars to state, municipal, and private institutions for medical services, highway construction, public housing, and law enforcement, among other activities. Each of these appropriations holds the potential to expand or equalize opportunity, or to perpetuate or worsen existing patterns of inequality.

A patchwork of federal statutes and regulations already offer the skeleton of a system that directs federal funding toward the expansion of opportunity. That skeleton includes, for example, provisions of the Hill Burton and Medicaid acts, various regulations of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the Uniform Relocation Act. Broadly, these policies were designed to protect against overt discrimination and provide some support for marginalized communities when affected by federal legislation. But with few exceptions, those provisions have not been enforced by the relevant

regulatory agencies. And there has never been a coordinated federal monitoring or enforcement strategy that spans their overlapping provisions and prioritizes opportunity. Regulations have been enforced defensively and in isolation, if at all. The federal courts, moreover, have systematically stripped Americans of the right to enforce these provisions through litigation. And there are, in any event, gaps in the coverage afforded by existing legislation.

The Executive Branch has the authority on Day One to implement a coordinated system for implementation and enforcement of those safeguards, as well as placing other conditions on the distribution and receipt of federal funds that expand opportunity. Either an interagency task force or a lead agency should be designated for the coordination of opportunity expansion across federally funded programs, potentially through the Department of Justice. Whatever formulation is adopted, the entity will need staffing, resources, investigative and enforcement authority adequate to implement its responsibilities.

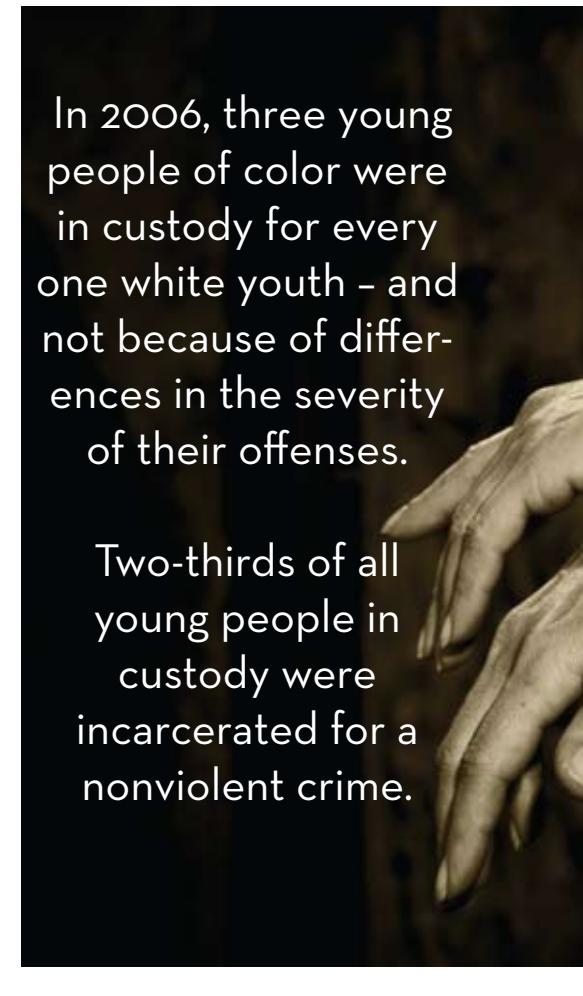
### IMPACT STATEMENTS

Agency leaders should work together to develop uniform guidelines for Opportunity Impact Statements (OIS) as a standard part of the disbursement process. As with the environmental impact statements currently required under the National Environmental Policy Act, the relevant agency would require the submission of information and collect and analyze relevant data to determine the positive and negative impacts of the proposed federally funded project. Here, however, the inquiry would focus on the ways in which the project would expand or constrict opportunity in affected geographic areas and whether the project would promote equal opportunity or deepen patterns of inequality.

While the measures of opportunity would differ in different circumstances, the inquiry would typically include whether the project would create or eliminate jobs, expand or constrict access to health care services, schools, and nutritious food stores, foster or extinguish affordable housing and small business development. At the same time, the OIS would assess the equity of the project's burdens and benefits, such as whether it would serve a diversity

of underserved populations, create jobs accessible to the affected regions, serve diverse linguistic and cultural communities, balance necessary health and safety burdens fairly across neighborhoods, and foster integration over segregation. As in the case of environmental impact statements, the OIS process will require public comment and participation, sometimes including public hearings.

Both independently and through the input of affected in-



In 2006, three young people of color were in custody for every one white youth – and not because of differences in the severity of their offenses.

Two-thirds of all young people in custody were incarcerated for a nonviolent crime.

dividuals and groups, the relevant agencies would assess the existence and viability of alternative approaches with a more positive impact on opportunity. Where needed, agencies would provide technical assistance to states, municipalities, and other putative fund recipients, strengthening their capacity to develop projects that expand opportunity, and to comply with the Opportunity Impact Statement process.



## OPPORTUNITY APPLIED

What would this process mean in the context of specific federally-funded projects in areas like health care or criminal justice? In the health care context, consider state-level agency decisions regarding the placement and certification of hospitals, as well as the allocation of health care resources and services. In every state, such agencies are the recipient of federal funds through the Medicaid program and, typically, through myriad other federal health programs. In a new administration, federal disbursement of such funds by the Department of Health and Human Services should be dependent upon submission and consideration of Opportunity Impact Statements showing how pending hospital certifications and related decisions will impact affected communities, in terms of availability and adequacy of access, services, jobs and economic development. Affected community members and groups would be afforded the chance to provide input on each of these dimensions. HHS would conduct a thorough analysis of relevant data, and the funding applicant would have an opportunity to make its own case. Particularly relevant would be the applicant's showing

Americans are ready for a new opportunity agenda – one that moves us all forward while continuing to address the structural barriers faced by people of color, women, and others.

of explicit and accessible mechanisms for ensuring opportunity.

In the criminal justice context, the U.S. Justice Department's Office of Justice Programs currently supports a range of juvenile justice and adult corrections programs. In a new Administration, renewed support for such programs should be contingent upon an OIS process that demonstrates the use of proven rehabilitative methods such as drug and alcohol treatment, drug courts, educational and supervised release programs. It should require explicit safeguards against racially disparate treatment in charging, sentencing, and detention. And it should inquire whether young people in the system are being housed with adults or under circumstances appropriate to their age. Here again, technical assistance is critical.

Each of these functions is well within the role and capacity of federal agencies, each of which is already responsible for ensur-

ing compliance with civil rights and other restrictions on federal funding. Every agency has administrative discretion in the method of fulfilling its mission. And many have significant experience in providing guidance and technical assistance to fund applicants and regulated entities. The federal government's authority under the Spending Clause of the Constitution, moreover, extends beyond its ordinary regulatory power, affording the Executive greater leeway in enforcing national policy. At the same time, states and localities have the option of declining federal funds, and, thereby, avoiding many of these requirements, if they find them too burdensome. Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the federal government to ensure that its investments expand opportunity, and the choice of state and local entities whether to seek those investments.

# A STRENGTHENED MIDDLE CLASS

*Andrea Batista Schlesinger and Amy Traub*

America did not ask to be divided into warring camps of red and blue. Across the country, people have far more in common than anyone would guess from the polarized politics of recent decades. Most Americans hope to achieve and hold onto a middle-class standard of living. That means, among other things, a job that pays enough to support a family; a safe and stable home; good schools for our children and the chance to help them go to college; health care that doesn't bury us in debt; a dignified retirement; and time off work for vacations and major life events.

We want these things not only for ourselves but for one another, because a large and stable middle class turns out to be the foundation of our well-being as families, as communities, and as a nation. Middle-class societies, as political thinkers from Aristotle to Thomas Jefferson have pointed out, are more socially cohesive than those divided by extremes of wealth and poverty. Concentrations of wealth threaten to turn economic power into political power and subvert democratic institutions. Poverty and economic insecurity leave people too caught up in their day-to-day struggles to engage with public and community affairs.

The American middle class did not arise by accident. After World War II, businesses, workers, and government forged a social contract that helped bring about an era of unprecedented growth and the rise of a middle class that was the envy of the world. Since the 1970s, our social contract has eroded. Fewer jobs provide health insurance, and the coverage is often riddled with gaps. Reliable pension plans have become rare. In the absence of a strong labor movement, employers play fast and loose with hard-won worker rights.

**We want these things not only for ourselves but for one another, because a large and stable middle class turns out to be the foundation of our wellbeing as families, as communities, and as a nation.**

The overwhelming majority of Americans still see themselves as middle class. But most also feel the effects of our frayed social contract. It has become more difficult to maintain a middle-class standard of living, Americans say. It is easier to fall behind.

The middle-class squeeze, as it has come to be known, is partly a matter of paychecks and prices. Gasoline and food have been the big sources of sticker shock lately. Over the longer term, costs for health care, housing, and higher education – the very goods that define a middle-class standard of living – have skyrocketed. Rising costs wouldn't be such a problem, of course, if middle-class incomes had kept pace. By and large, they haven't. Since the recession of 2001, corporate profits have soared, while median household income has not even returned to where it was in 1999.

The weak union movement is one major reason why incomes have stagnated. Today, employees simply don't have enough power in the labor market to demand that their incomes keep pace with the rising cost of living.

So Americans have tried other strategies to make ends meet. People have worked longer hours and sent more family members into the workforce. Americans are saving less and borrowing more. Thanks to the combination of a home-equity loan binge and a deregulated mortgage market, America faces an epidemic of foreclosures, and

nearly 10 percent of homeowners are in the scary position of owing more on their mortgages than their houses are worth. As debt grows, stress grows: In today's economy, one serious illness or the loss of a job can be enough to send a middle-class family tumbling into poverty or bankruptcy.

Diminished job security plays a large part in the increasingly precarious equation of middle-class life. Under intensified competition, businesses have resorted to mass layoffs to cut costs. The most recent economic

recovery produced relatively few jobs, making it harder for the displaced to find new work. When middle-class employees lose jobs, often through no fault of their own, they encounter an outdated and porous safety net. It's easy to become unemployed but far harder to qualify for unemployment insurance. Nationally, just 36 percent of unemployed workers are covered. In many states, benefits replace only a small proportion of middle-class salaries.

Layoffs are far from the only source of added economic volatility. The Family and Medical Leave Act, passed in 1993, was intended to provide some security for families facing another kind of instability – a sudden illness or a new child. The law guarantees 12 weeks of unpaid leave to Americans at companies with 50 or more employees. The FMLA is one of the nation's few policies to recognize that middle-class households increasingly depend on the paycheck of every adult; many of these workers also have family responsibilities. Two-thirds of families with children have all their adults in the workforce. One in five American adults is a caregiver for another adult.

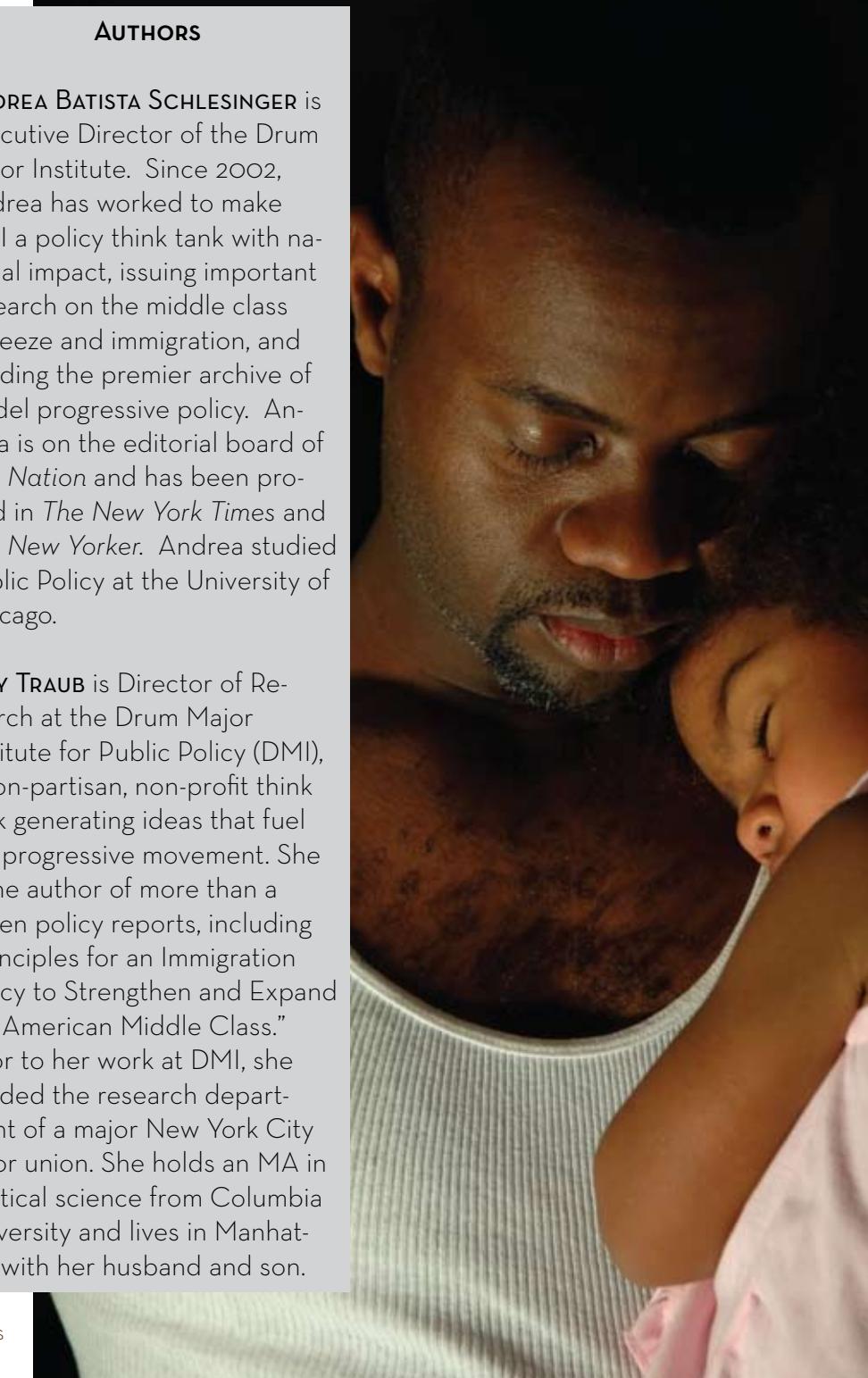
But the FMLA is severely limited. Because of restrictions on coverage, nearly half of working Americans receive no protection from the FMLA. Many who are covered still cannot afford to take unpaid time off and miss a paycheck. Despite this landmark legislation, millions of middle-class families have to make the awful choice between family health needs and job security.

Too often, politicians offer tax cuts as the answer to middle-class economic woes. But tax cuts fail to address the fundamental problems: economic insecurity, jobs that don't support a middle class standard of living, work arrangements based on the outdated assumption of a stay-at-home spouse acting as caregiver. Middle-class families aren't looking for a handout. What we need are fair rules and public policies that provide the means to maintain a middle-class standard of living. When the middle-class fundamentals are within reach of most of us, we are all better off economically, culturally, and democratically.

## AUTHORS

**ANDREA BATISTA SCHLESINGER** is Executive Director of the Drum Major Institute. Since 2002, Andrea has worked to make DMI a policy think tank with national impact, issuing important research on the middle class squeeze and immigration, and building the premier archive of model progressive policy. Andrea is on the editorial board of *The Nation* and has been profiled in *The New York Times* and *The New Yorker*. Andrea studied Public Policy at the University of Chicago.

**AMY TRAUB** is Director of Research at the Drum Major Institute for Public Policy (DMI), a non-partisan, non-profit think tank generating ideas that fuel the progressive movement. She is the author of more than a dozen policy reports, including "Principles for an Immigration Policy to Strengthen and Expand the American Middle Class." Prior to her work at DMI, she headed the research department of a major New York City labor union. She holds an MA in political science from Columbia University and lives in Manhattan with her husband and son.



# WORKING IDEAS

## THE EMPLOYEE FREE CHOICE ACT

In the 1950s, more than a third of American workers held a union card. By negotiating for higher wages and better working conditions, unions transformed “bad” jobs on manufacturing assembly lines into the “good” middle-class jobs we worry about losing to globalization today. Unions helped make health insurance and pension benefits part of the employment package for tens of millions of Americans in the postwar era.

Union members still earn significantly more money and have better health, retirement and other benefits than comparable non-unionized workers. Yet today, after decades of decline, only about 12 percent of U.S. employees – and a truly minuscule 7.5 percent of private-sector workers – belong to unions.

The anti-labor stance of the National Labor Relations Board has played a significant part in this decline, undermining the ability of workers to organize and bargain collectively. Companies feel free to ignore many of the rules that theoretically remain in place. Today’s employers regularly hire “union avoidance” consultants, force employees to attend one-on-

one anti-union meetings with their supervisors, and engage in surveillance, intimidation and harassment. Faced with a union organizing drive, more than half of all employers threaten to close down a facility if the union wins. One in four companies fire workers involved in union activity. These practices are plainly illegal, but because of sluggish enforcement and slap-on-the-wrist penalties, increasingly routine.

The Employee Free Choice Act (EFCA), which passed the U.S. House of Representatives in 2007 before being killed by a Senate filibuster, streamlines procedures for employees to decide on union representation and bargain a first contract. Under its “majority sign up” process, a union is automatically recognized in a workplace when more than half of employees sign cards requesting representation. The bill establishes a process of mediation and binding arbitration if the employer and new union are unable to reach agreement on an initial contract. It sets meaningful penalties for violating labor laws. In the succinct words of American Rights at Work,

the bill “will allow workers to once again choose to form unions without the fear of being fired.”

EFCA is about more than growing the union ranks. By making it easier for Americans to join unions and bargain, the law would strengthen the ability of all working people to negotiate a better deal. Professionals, temporary and contingent workers, service-sector employees, and other groups that have not traditionally been unionized could be among the biggest beneficiaries. According to one conservative estimate, EFCA could help bring employer-based

health insurance to an estimated 3.5 million more Americans, and pension benefits to 2.8 million more. Similar gains can be expected in vacation time, wages, and other union benefits. Strong union contracts would raise standards for entire industries, improving the lot of non-union workers as well. By restoring workers’ power to band together and improve their own lives, EFCA will catalyze changes in living standards and job quality, providing untold power to strengthen and expand the American middle class.



## PAID LEAVE

What do Liberia, Papua New Guinea, Swaziland, and the United States have in common? They and we belong to the small community of nations without a law guaranteeing some form of paid leave for new parents. It’s time for the U.S. to join the longer list of (at last count) 169 countries that believe it is wrong to leave workers alone to cope with this momentous event.

Most families today need every adult in the paid workforce. To deal with that reality, America needs a paid leave program not just for new parents but also for employees dealing with a long personal or family illness.

Several states have already taken steps: California, New Jersey, and Washington have passed laws guaranteeing paid leave for personal or family illness and welcoming a new child. New York and Rhode Island have state disability insurance systems that help employees take time off to address their own health problems. A federal program providing paid family and medical leave would help middle-class families face a range of major life events with less risk of losing a job or taking on debilitating levels of debt.

The Family Leave Insurance Act, introduced in the U.S. House

of Representatives by Rep. Pete Stark, would help provide this security. The bill establishes an insurance fund financed by employer and employee contributions equal to 0.2 percent of annual earnings; businesses with fewer than 20 workers could opt out of the program or choose to make a smaller contribution. The fund would cover up to twelve weeks of paid leave per year for employees to care for a new child or a seriously ill family member, or to recuperate from a serious health condition of their own. Leave could also be used for emergencies that arise from a military deployment. Lower-income workers would receive their full paycheck while on leave; others would get a reduced portion of their usual earnings. The bill bans discrimination or retaliation against employees that make use of its provisions. All full-time employees who have paid into the fund for at least six months would be eligible for approved leave. States with a more comprehensive paid leave program could opt out, as could employers that choose to offer more generous leave. The bill could be improved by providing leave to part-time workers as well.

By ensuring that individuals and families can afford to take the time to recuperate from illness or wel-

come a new family member, paid family and medical leave recognizes that a middle-class standard of living requires both a steady income and time for working people to care for themselves and each other. Providing this guarantee is essential to strengthening the nation's middle class.

#### REFORMING

#### UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Families are thrown into turmoil when an income-earner suddenly loses a job; savings dwindle, household budgets constrict, and economic security evaporates. When unemployment becomes widespread, this wrenching dislocation can threaten entire communities. For millions of middle-class families, the joint federal-state unemployment insurance system offers the only protection. Yet the system is crucially flawed.

The Unemployment Insurance Modernization Act, introduced in both the U.S. House and Senate in 2007, would address many of the gaps. The bill uses \$7 billion from the federal unemployment trust funds to encourage states to reform their unemployment systems by making it easier for workers seeking part-time work to qualify, providing additional resources for job training, and raising the

caps on maximum benefits so that long-term unemployed workers get at least the full 26 weeks of benefits in addition to other reforms. According to an analysis by the National Employment Law Project, the bill would provide improved retraining and job-networking services for more than 500,000 workers a year. Congress should also go beyond this bill by encouraging states to raise their maximum benefit levels to a rate that will enable unemployed middle-class workers to stay out of poverty while they look for work.

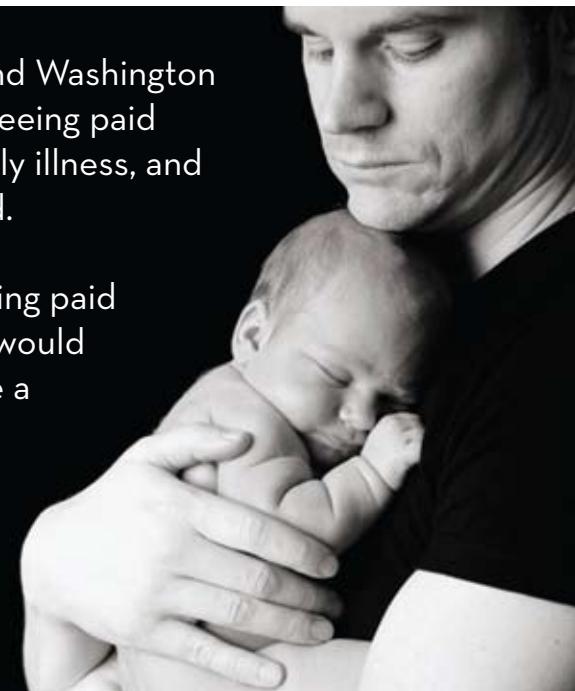
The Extended Benefits program, designed to provide additional weeks of unemployment benefits during recessions, should adopt a new trigger formula based on

a state's total number of unemployed workers so that benefits are automatically extended without the need for temporary emergency programs. Providing extended benefits not only helps those laid off from their jobs but also prevents further job loss: families hit by unemployment tend to spend their benefits quickly, getting money into circulation in their local economies immediately.

A steady job is the cornerstone of a middle-class standard of living. When working people become unemployed, they risk falling out of the middle class entirely. Strengthening the unemployment insurance safety net would help those who lose this critical support to regain their footing.

California, New Jersey, and Washington have passed laws guaranteeing paid leave for personal or family illness, and for welcoming a new child.

A federal program providing paid family and medical leave would help working families face a range of major life events without risk of job loss or undue debt.





# the progressive ideas network

**CAMPAGNI**AMERICA'S FUTURE



**COMMONWEAL**  
INSTITUTE  
*Advancing Ideas for the Common Good*

**Commonwealth Institute**

**C O W S**  
center on wisconsin strategy

**Dēmos** a network for ideas & action  
[www.demos.org](http://www.demos.org)

The Campaign for America's Future is a center for issue advocacy, communications, and coalition-building to forge a new American majority for progressive reform. The Campaign is shaping forward-looking alliances around strategic policy initiatives to produce expanded economic opportunity, social justice, a healthy environment, and a more democratic society. The Institute for America's Future (IAF) is an "action institute" conducting educational and research activities designed to empower citizens to shape the debate about our country's economic future.

The Center for Community Change (CCC) is a progressive 501(c)(3) organization founded in 1968 by the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial and leaders of the civil rights and labor movements to be a living memorial to Senator Kennedy's belief in community-based organizing as the best means to create sustainable positive change in the lives of America's poor. The Center's mission is to build the power and capacity of low-income people, particularly people of color, to change the policies and institutions that affect their lives.

The Center for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR) was established in 1999 to promote democratic debate on the most important economic and social issues that affect people's lives. In order for citizens to effectively exercise their voices in a democracy, they should be informed about the problems and choices that they face. CEPR is committed to presenting issues in an accurate and understandable manner, so that the public is better prepared to choose among the various policy options.

The Commonwealth Institute is a non-partisan alliance of independent thinkers leading conversations in media outlets and social networks about our shared values as Americans and progressive approaches to solving problems. We envision a society in which the advancement of human rights, civil liberties, participatory democracy, justice, strong and caring communities, and a more secure and sustainable future coexist with responsible global capitalism. Our goal is to engage all segments of society in the discovery and creation of a new harmony between private interests and the common good.

The Commonwealth Institute has programs in progressive approaches to national security, citizen action against climate change, and the study of progressive political strategy. The largest and longest running program is the Project on Defense Alternatives (PDA); PDA's work is premised on the belief that policy innovation can overcome the practical obstacles to progress toward more cooperative security postures -- however, it sees the prerequisite of innovation to be a close and critical engagement in the mainstream security policy debate. The Commonwealth Institute is an independent, nongovernmental public policy research center founded in 1987 and located in Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA

The Center on Wisconsin Strategy is a national policy center and field laboratory for high-road capitalism – a competitive market economy of shared prosperity, environmental sustainability, and capable democratic government. COWS' work is experimental and evidence-driven. Collaborating with business, government, labor, and communities, we try out new ideas, test their effectiveness, and disseminate those with promise. COWS, based at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, is a 501(c)(3) nonpartisan, educational and charitable organization funded by foundation and individual gifts and grants and technical assistance contracts.

Demos is a non-partisan public policy research and advocacy organization. Headquartered in New York City, Demos works with advocates and policymakers around the country in pursuit of four overarching goals: a more equitable economy; a vibrant and inclusive democracy; an empowered public sector that works for the common good; and responsible U.S. engagement in an interdependent world.

# the progressive ideas network



The Drum Major Institute for Public Policy is a non-partisan, non-profit think tank generating the ideas that fuel the progressive movement. From releasing nationally recognized studies of our increasingly fragile middle class to showcasing progressive policies that have worked to advance social and economic justice, DMI has been on the leading edge of the public policy debate. Founded during the civil rights movement, DMI equips those on the front lines with the tools to more effectively advance an agenda of social and economic justice, including research, model policies, policy-driven Web sites, and even young talent.

The Economic Policy Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan think tank that seeks to broaden the public debate about strategies to achieve a prosperous and fair economy. It was established in 1986 to broaden the discussion about economic policy to include the interests of low- and middle-income workers. Today, with global competition expanding, wage inequality rising, and the nature of work changing in fundamental ways, it is critical for these interests to be represented in the economic debate. With a staff of PhD economists, EPI adheres to strict standards of sound, objective research and analysis, and couples its findings with outreach and popular education.

Grassroots Policy Project, based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, brings political and social movement theory into practice by mining the best ideas from social and political sciences, as well as from movement history, applying these ideas to actual organizing -- base-building, coalition-building, campaign and electoral work. We bring our framework about power, worldview and strategy into our workshops and trainings with groups. GPP stays connected to groups over a long period of time, so that the implementation, evaluation and reflection phases are built-in to all of our programs on worldview and strategy development.

Green For All is a national organization dedicated to building an inclusive green economy strong enough to lift people out of poverty. By advocating for local, state and federal commitments to job creation, job training, and entrepreneurial opportunities in the emerging green economy – especially for people from disadvantaged communities – Green For All fights both poverty and pollution at the same time.

The Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy works locally and globally at the intersection of policy and practice to ensure fair and sustainable food, farm and trade systems. IATP was founded in 1986 to analyze the root causes of the farm crisis and advocate for policies that support family farmers, rural communities, consumers and the environment. IATP works to integrate sustainability throughout the entire food and farm system, from supporting family farmers and the environment to ensuring that everyone has access to healthy food.

The Institute for Policy Studies turns ideas into action for peace, justice and the environment. We strengthen social movements with independent research, visionary thinking, and links to the grassroots, scholars and elected officials. ([www.ips-dc.org](http://www.ips-dc.org))

The Jamestown Project is a diverse action-oriented think tank of new leaders who reach across boundaries and generations to make democracy real. Founded and operated primarily by people of color and women, The Jamestown Project consists of scholars, activists, and communities who use five broad strategies to achieve our mission: generating new ideas; promoting meaningful public conversations and engagement; cultivating new leaders; formulating political strategy and public policy; and using cutting-edge communications techniques that reach a broad public.

# the progressive ideas network



New Vision: An Institute for Policy and Progress is a national network of both young and established scholars who are committed to charting the next generation of domestic progressive public policy. We focus on setting the agenda rather than reacting to it, and we provide politically-relevant products without compromising analytical rigor. By building a bridge between academia and policy, New Vision is creating viable career paths for young scholars interested in work relevant to public policy. We are a critical element of the movement aimed at rejuvenating the role of ideas in progressive politics.

The Opportunity Agenda was founded in 2004 with the mission of building the national will to expand opportunity in America. Focused on moving hearts, minds and policy over time, the organization works closely with social justice organizations, leaders, and movements to advocate for solutions that expand opportunity for everyone. Through active partnerships, The Opportunity Agenda uses communications and media to understand and influence public opinion; synthesizes and translates research on barriers to opportunity and promising solutions; and identifies and advocates for policies that improve people's lives.

The Progressive States Network was founded in 2005 to drive public policy debates and change the political landscape in the United States, by focusing on attainable, progressive state actions. The Progressive States Network advances this agenda by providing coordinated research and strategic advocacy tools to forward-thinking state policymakers, legislative staff, and non-profit organizations. We function as a meeting space for progressive legislators, activists, and citizens, and serve as a hotbed of information exchange. We track legislation in all 50 states, helping to spark change across the country.

Redefining Progress is a nonprofit policy institute that works to balance economic well-being, environmental health, and social justice. Our initiatives address pressing environmental concerns such as global climate change and natural resource depletion while ensuring that both the burdens and the benefits of these policies are shared equally among affected communities. We prepare unbiased research about how economic policies and business practices affect people's lives and create innovative tools such as the Ecological Footprint and the Genuine Progress Indicator that help governments, businesses, and individuals measure their impact on the environment and society.

The Roosevelt Institution is a students' policy organization whose mission is to build a more progressive society. Roosevelt generates ideas and implements policy through a network of 7,000 students and 75 chapters on college campuses around the country. In the process of researching, writing, and organizing, we: educate ourselves about the political process; engage policymakers, inform public discourse and support activists; and prepare ourselves for a future of leadership and action. We are supported in our work by our parent organization, the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute, which is dedicated to preserving and promoting the legacy of their namesakes for future generations.

Sightline Institute is a not-for-profit research and communication center – a think tank – based in Seattle. Founded in 1993 by Alan Durning, Sightline's mission is to bring about sustainability, a healthy, lasting prosperity grounded in place. Our focus is Cascadia, or the Pacific Northwest. It's a slow-motion revolution, but it's happening. Since 1993, we've equipped Northwesterners with the research and tools they need to make progress on a range of solutions, from banning toxic chemicals that have shown up in our food and our bodies to defeating ruinous land-use ballot measures across the Northwest in 2006 and 2007. Nonpartisan and wholly independent, Sightline's only ideology is commitment to the shared values of community, fairness, responsibility, and opportunity.

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#### ENDNOTES

This volume both explicitly and implicitly references several studies, statistics, and other sources of information.

A complete set of these references is available online at [newprogressivevoices.org](http://newprogressivevoices.org).  
The full text of *New Progressive Voices* is freely available via [newprogressivevoices.org](http://newprogressivevoices.org).

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and financial monopoly, speculation, reckless banking, class antagonism, sectionalism, war profiteering. They had begun to consider the Government of the United States as a mere appendage to their own affairs. We know now that Government by organized money is just as dangerous as Government by organized mob. Never before in all our history have these forces been so united against one candidate as they stand today. They are unanimous in their hate for me, and I welcome their hatred. **I should like to have it said of my first Administration that in it the forces of selfishness and of lust for power met their match. I should like to have it said of my second Administration that in it these forces met their master.**

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