A PROGRESSIVE AGENDA FOR DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL

A Comprehensive Platform for Restoring Democracy,
Economic Justice, Civic Participation,
and Ecological Sustainability

Rights without responsibilities are entitlements that can breed overconfidence and passivity.
Responsibilities without rights equate oppression.
Only when rights and responsibilities are thoughtfully balanced do they constitute the social contract of a thriving and resilient democratic society.

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INTRODUCTION: WHY THIS AGENDA, AND WHY NOW?

The Democratic Party is failing. Not in the ordinary sense of losing a close election or coming up short on a legislative priority, *but failing in being unable to meet this historical moment*. The party that should be the vehicle for democratic renewal has become, in far too many ways, part of the problem it claims to oppose. This agenda was drafted because the existing progressive infrastructure — the Democratic National Committee, congressional leadership, the consultant class, and donor networks — has proven incapable of producing a coherent, ambitious, honest response to the most serious threat to American democracy since the Civil War.

The evidence of this failure is comprehensive and damning.

2024 election. The Democratic Party lost the 2024 presidential election to Donald Trump — a candidate who was impeached twice, indicted on 91 felony counts across four jurisdictions, convicted on 34 of those counts, found civilly liable for sexual abuse, and who incited an insurrection against the United States Capitol. He presided over the worst pandemic response among developed nations, the only net job loss of any president since Herbert Hoover, and the dismantling of environmental, labor, and consumer protections across the federal government. He openly promised to use the Department of Justice to prosecute political enemies, to pardon convicted insurrectionists, to deport millions, and to consolidate executive power beyond any precedent in American history. *And the Democratic Party could not beat him.* This wasn't a narrow loss to a formidable opponent. It was a catastrophic failure against a candidate whose unfitness for office was not a matter of partisan interpretation but indisputable public record.

Collapse of public trust. As of September 2025, only 17% of Americans trust the federal government to do what is right just about always or most of the time — near the lowest point in nearly seven decades of measurement, down from 22% just the year before, and a staggering decline from 73% when the question was first asked in 1958.[1] Among Democrats specifically, that figure has collapsed to just 9% — the lowest ever recorded for members of either party.[1] More than distrust of the opposition, this is Democrats' own voters losing faith in the capacity of government to function. Meanwhile, the Democratic Party's favorability rating has also fallen to 34% — the lowest Gallup has recorded in its trend dating back to 1992.[2] Democrats in Congress fare even worse: their approval rating stands at just 24%, lower than any prior Gallup metric.[3] Are these numbers that describe a party capable of leading an urgent democratic renewal? Or do they describe a party that has lost the confidence of the public, including its own base?

Flight from party affiliation. A record 45% of American adults now identify as political independents — the highest figure ever recorded by Gallup.[4] Among Gen Z adults, the number is 56%. Among millennials, it is a majority. [4] These are the demographics the Democratic Party most needs to build a durable coalition, and they are abandoning partisan affiliation entirely. Critically, the Democratic Party's gains in party identification since 2024 aren't the result of Americans warming to the party — they are a consequence of Americans recoiling from an extremely unpopular Republican president, and are seemingly driven by shifts among lukewarm independents whose loyalty is provisional and easily reversed. [2] Critically, the party has gained ground not through its own appeal but through the repulsiveness of the alternative. That is not a strong foundation for governance.

Failure to capitalize on popular positions. The Democratic Party holds majority public support on nearly every substantive policy issue: healthcare, gun safety, reproductive rights, climate action, minimum wage, taxing the wealthy, and protecting Social Security and Medicare. Progressive economic positions routinely command 60–70% support across partisan lines. And yet the party cannot translate this support into durable electoral power or legislative achievement. The Green New Deal — which polled favorably with a majority of Americans, including significant Republican support for its jobs and clean energy components — was allowed to die without a floor vote, with Democratic leadership treating it as a messaging liability rather than a governing priority. The $15 minimum wage, supported by over two-thirds of Americans, was stripped from the American Rescue Plan by the party's own, partisanly one-sided parliamentarian deference. The Build Back Better Act was gutted by members of the party's own caucus. The pattern is consistent: popular progressive priorities enter the legislative process to emerge unrecognizable or dead, killed not by Republican opposition alone but by Democratic timidity, internal division, and institutional capture.

Leadership failure. For over a decade, the Democratic Party's congressional leadership has been dominated by figures whose rhetorical style, strategic instincts, and policy ambitions were formed in a political era that no longer exists. The mealy-mouthed bureaucrat-speak of institutional Democrats — the cautious hedging, the focus-group euphemisms, the reflexive centrism that mistakes timidity for pragmatism — is more than ineffective. It is actively alienating tens of millions of Americans who are experiencing economic distress and who need to hear, in the plain language of empathic conviction, that someone understands what is happening to them *and has a plan to fix it*. When the Right speaks with clarity and emotional certainty — however dishonest or distracting the content may be — and the Democratic establishment responds with procedural talking points and appeals to norms, the results are predictable: *people follow the voice that sounds like it cares, even when it is lying to them*. As of late 2025, fully 74% of Americans say they are dissatisfied with the way things are going in the country. [3] Democrats have no credible claim to offer a compelling alternative when their own voters can't articulate what the party stands for beyond opposition to Trump.

Sabotage of progressive populism. The Democratic National Committee's conduct during the 2016 primary — the scheduling of debates to minimize exposure for Bernie Sanders, the coordination between DNC leadership and the Clinton campaign documented in leaked emails, the use of superdelegates to create an aura of inevitability before a single vote was cast — was more than a tactical decision. *It was a declaration that the party's institutional leadership would rather lose a general election than allow a genuinely progressive populist to lead the party.* The subsequent years confirmed this priority: the DNC's resistance to Sanders in 2020, its sidelining of progressive candidates in favor of "electable" moderates, and its systematic marginalization of the most progressive members of Congress — members whose policy positions, ironically, command the broadest public support. Within the party's own ranks, 58% of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents now say the party needs 'major changes' or must be 'completely reformed' — nearly double the figure from 2022.[5a] When asked what they mean, the answers are not calls for ideological retreat. They are demands that the party become more responsive to working people, more aggressive in fighting for them, and less captive to institutional habits that have made it synonymous with overpromising and underdelivering. Ninety percent of Democratic voters believe government can make people's lives better. Only 7% believe it is currently doing so.[5b] Only 42% of Democrats approve of their own party's congressional leadership — meaning a majority of Democrats disapprove of the people leading their own party.[5c] These aren't the numbers of a base demanding less ambition; they are the numbers of a base that yearns for competence, conviction, and results — and has received none of these.

Corruption and self-dealing. Members of Congress from both parties have enriched themselves through stock trades that coincide rather suspiciously with their access to nonpublic information. But for Democrats, who claim to represent working people against the interests of concentrated wealth, this conduct isn't just unethical — it's a betrayal of the party's stated purpose and erodes whatever remaining trust the public places in its sincerity. When Democratic members of Congress vote on legislation affecting industries within which they hold personal financial stakes, and when their portfolio returns consistently outperform the market in ways that suggest informational advantage, the party's credibility as a vehicle for economic justice collapses. Two-thirds of Americans — 67% — now agree that the federal government is "corrupt." [6] Democrats cannot credibly campaign against plutocratic corruption when they themselves are participating in it.

The neutering of progressive voices. The Congressional Progressive Caucus, once a vehicle for advancing bold policy, has been systematically marginalized within the party's power structure. Progressive committee assignments are traded for loyalty to leadership priorities. Primary challenges from the Left are met with institutional opposition — the DCCC has explicitly blacklisted consultants and firms that work with progressive primary challengers.[34] The message from institutional Democrats is clear: progressive ambition is tolerated as a fundraising tool and a base-mobilization strategy, but it is not permitted to influence *actual governance*. The result is that the most popular policy positions in the party's platform are championed by its least empowered members.

Institutional confidence in freefall. Democrats' average confidence in key American institutions has dropped to a new low point in Gallup's trend dating back to 1979.[7] More than some abstract dissatisfaction, this reflects a visceral recognition among Democratic voters that the institutions they once trusted to protect democratic governance have been captured, corrupted, or rendered ineffective. For the presidency, the military, the police, the criminal justice system, newspapers — confidence among Democrats has plummeted across the board.[7] When a party's own voters have lost faith in every institutions the party relies on to govern, the party has a crisis that no amount of fundraising emails or celebrity endorsements can resolve.

What this agenda demands. This progressive agenda isn't just a think-piece, wish list, or academic exercise. It is a desperate, urgent call to action for everyone who identifies with progressive values — whether they are in the Democratic Party, outside of it, or alienated from partisan politics entirely — to unite around a platform that is genuinely transformative, comprehensive, and honest about the scale of the crisis.

The Right has spent fifty years building the infrastructure to dismantle democratic governance and undermine progressive values. They have succeeded to a degree that would have seemed impossible a generation ago. And the Democratic Party, as currently constituted, is not capable of mounting an effective counter-strategy. Its leadership is too cautious, its donor dependencies too constraining, its institutional habits too deeply entrenched, and its willingness and ability to fight for progressive principles seems beaten out of it. Yet the answer is not a third party, nor mass movements alone, nor waiting for generational change to resolve the crisis organically. America's winner-take-all electoral structure makes third parties structurally nonviable on any relevant timeline, mass movements can create conditions for change but cannot by themselves govern, and the converging crises outlined in this document — climate collapse, democratic erosion worldwide, the race toward artificial general intelligence — will not wait for a more convenient political vehicle to be built from scratch. The Democratic Party's existing infrastructure — its ballot access in all fifty states, its institutional memory of

governance, its staffing pipelines and legal standing — is irreplaceable on the timeline that matters, *which means the task to fundamentally transform the party rather than abandon it*.

So this agenda proposes what fighting back actually looks like. It is an affirmative vision of the society we want to build — *that needs to be built to preserve our values*. It draws on a body of work by T.Collins Logan, developed over some twenty years and grounded in the insights of thinkers from Plato to Tocqueville, Arendt to Kohlberg, and Freire to Ostrom, as well as the long tradition of progressive, socialist, and civil rights activism that has, at so many critical times throughout our history, saved American democracy from the forces hell-bent on destroying it.

Of dire necessity, this agenda is also a direct counter to the most comprehensive and operationally specific blueprint for authoritarian governance ever produced by the American Right: the Heritage Foundation's Project 2025. That 920-page document — drafted by more than 400 contributors, many of whom now hold positions in the Trump administration — should not be misread as a policy wish list. It is an operational manual for dismantling democratic governance from within, using the executive branch's own machinery to gut the agencies that enforce environmental law, labor protections, consumer safety, civil rights, and the regulatory constraints that prevent concentrated private power from operating without public accountability. As of early 2026, the administration has initiated or completed more than half of Project 2025's domestic policy recommendations — including the reimposition of Schedule F to convert the career civil service into a patronage system, the rescission of the EPA's greenhouse gas endangerment finding, the effective dismantlement of USAID, the elimination of clean energy offices within the Department of Energy, and the systematic rollback of civil rights protections across virtually every federal agency. The Center for Renewing America, founded by the administration's own Office of Management and Budget director, has identified Christian nationalism as a top priority for the second Trump term. And the Heritage Foundation's president has declared that the country is in "the process of the second American revolution." Every structural reform, every institutional safeguard, every democratic mechanism proposed in the following pages is designed not only to build a more civically engaged society but to make the kind of institutional capture that Project 2025 represents structurally impossible — to ensure that no future administration, of any party, can use the executive branch as a weapon against the republic it was created to serve.

Lastly, we can’t ignore the elephant in the room. Donald Trump is, as of this writing, systematically dismantling the institutions of American democracy, the rule of law, our domestic and global economies, and the international relationships on which American security depends — and he is doing so at an accelerating pace. He has launched an illegal war against Iran that costs at minimum a billion dollars a day, threatened war crimes against civilian infrastructure on social media, presided over the killing of American citizens by federal agents on American streets, gutted federal science agencies, weaponized the Department of Justice against his perceived enemies, routinely attacked the independence of the judiciary, enriched his family through the office of the presidency in ways that would constitute criminal corruption in any functioning legal system, and, as of this writing, driven his approval rating down to thirty-six percent — a figure that, in a healthy democracy, would trigger the institutional checks the Constitution provides but that, in this one, produces only performative hand-wringing from a compliant congressional majority. His remaining time in office will almost certainly produce escalation instead of moderation. This is the pattern that historians like Heather Cox Richardson have documented in real time: as each initiative fails, as the Iran war produces no victory and mounting costs, as the economy deteriorates, as legal walls close in, the response is not recalibration but another desperate lunge — another escalation, another constitutional violation, another crisis manufactured to displace the last

one. She calls them Trump's "Hail Marys." And these spasms will become more frequent and more destructive as the distance between the regime's claims and reality becomes impossible to bridge.

So this agenda is not written for the world as Trump is trying to remake it. It is written for the world that must be built — or rebuilt — once the acute crisis of this presidency gives way to the chronic crisis he has exposed and deepened. Trump did not create the conditions that made his presidency possible; this agenda commits hundreds of pages to identifying the structural failures — the neoliberal hollowing of the economy, the corruption of the information commons, the capture of both parties by concentrated wealth, the decay of civic infrastructure — that produced the vacuum he filled. But he has made every one of those conditions worse, and the damage he will inflict in his remaining time in office will make the reconstruction this agenda proposes both more necessary and more difficult. The work begins now *— not after he leaves, but in spite of the fact that he hasn't left yet*.

And so…ultimately, in this fall's mid-term elections, we hope the question will not just be whether Democrats can win elections — **but whether, when they do, they will have the fortitude, vision, and comprehensive strategy to salvage the sinking ship of our Republic, and to keep it afloat and on course for future generations.**

Author's Note: The ideas, arguments, and analysis in this agenda are my own, developed over two decades of research, writing, and praxis — a body of work referenced throughout. During the drafting process, I used Claude (Anthropic) as a research and editing tool, particularly in challenging my assumptions, testing my reasoning, and identifying supportive references. Additionally, some sections of this essay remain in active development and will be expanded in future revisions. Part of that revision process will be obtaining feedback from folks I have asked to critique this work, including both subject matter experts and broader crowdsourcing. Once incorporated, and if they allow me to do so, I hope to credit everyone with their contributions.

PART I: A NEW BILL OF RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR DEMOCRATIC RENEWAL

These proposed rights are not gifts from a benevolent state. They are commitments that free people make to each other, as sustained through continuous, critical, active participation. In the tradition of Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy,[22] we affirm that liberation is not delivered to people by institutions — it is achieved through collective critical consciousness and action. In the tradition of Franklin Roosevelt's Second Bill of Rights, we also affirm that political freedom is meaningless without economic security. And in the tradition of what we will define as *integral liberty*, [15] we affirm that authentic freedom exists only within specific enabling conditions — a Goldilocks zone in which liberty is created and maintained by and for society, not magically endowed upon a lucky few.

We further affirm that such rights, if they aren't coupled with responsibilities, are entitlements that can breed overconfidence and passivity. In the same way, responsibilities without rights equate oppression. Only when rights and responsibilities are thoughtfully balanced do they constitute the social contract of a thriving and resilient democratic society.

I. Democratic Self-Governance. Every citizen has the right to equal participation in democratic governance through fair elections, direct democratic mechanisms, and continuous civic input. No person's vote shall count more than another's. No private interest shall have privileged access to government.

Responsibility: *Every citizen has a responsibility to participate: to vote, to deliberate in good faith, to stay informed through credible sources, and to engage in civic institutions — from community assemblies to national referenda.*

II. Meaningful Work and Shared Ownership. Every person has the right to meaningful work at a living wage, in safe conditions, with a voice in their workplace and an ownership stake in the enterprise to which they contribute.

Responsibility: *Every worker has a responsibility to contribute earnestly and honestly to their work, and to participate in the democratic governance of enterprises in which they hold a stake.*

III. Economic Security and Dignity. No person shall be destitute. Every person has the right to a guaranteed income floor and access to the basic necessities of a dignified life.

Responsibility: *Every person has the responsibility to contribute to the common welfare according to their capacity — through work, public service, care for others, or civic engagement.*

IV. Comprehensive Healthcare. Every person has the right to comprehensive physical and mental healthcare as a public good. Mental health is intrinsic to well-being.

Responsibility: *Every person has a responsibility to support public health and respect evidence-based medicine.*

V. Education and Knowledge. Every person has the right to high-quality education, a transparent information environment, and the cognitive and emotional tools for critical thinking, problem-solving, and life planning.

Responsibility: *Every person has a responsibility to pursue understanding, engage critically with information, share knowledge, and support the education of others.*

VI. Housing and Community. Every person has the right to safe, affordable, stable housing in a livable community with access to transit, services, and public space.

Responsibility: *Every person has a responsibility to contribute to community life as neighbors, stewards, and participants.*

VII. A Livable Planet. Every person has the right to clean air, clean water, a stable climate, and a thriving natural world. The economy must operate within ecological limits.

Responsibility: *Every person has a responsibility to live within ecological limits and support collective environmental stewardship.*

VIII. Equal Dignity. Every person has the right to equal treatment and freedom from discrimination.

Responsibility: *Every person has a responsibility to treat others with equal dignity, challenge bigotry, and build solidarity across differences.*

IX. Bodily Autonomy. Every person has sovereignty over their own body, including reproductive decisions.

Responsibility: *Every person has a responsibility to respect the bodily autonomy of others without exception.*

X. Privacy and Personal Sovereignty. Every person's data, communications, creative works, and personal information belong to them.

Responsibility: *Every person has a responsibility to respect the privacy of others and the authorship of their creative and intellectual contributions.*

XI. Community and Civic Participation. Every person has the right to community life, civic institutions, and the social infrastructure for belonging, deliberation, and mutual support.

Responsibility: *Every person has a responsibility to show up — to participate in assemblies, to serve when called, and to invest in civic and cultural life.*

XII. Just and Accountable Governance. Every person has the right to a government that serves the public interest through strict separation of corporation and state, free from corruption.

Responsibility: *Every person has a responsibility to hold power accountable, demand transparency, resist corruption, and defend democratic institutions.*

PART II: THE CASE FOR RENEWAL

A. The Central Conflict

The central conflict in American society is economic. It is the conflict between those who benefit from the concentration of wealth and power and those who are harmed by it. Every other division that dominates our political discourse — race, gender, sexuality, religion, partisan identity, cultural affiliation, the personalities of political leaders, brand loyalty, single-issue policy disagreements, etc. — is often either a manifestation of that economic conflict or a deliberate distraction from it. The neoliberal kleptocracy that has captured American governance would like us to remain focused on anything other than economic structures that benefit them. *But we can no longer afford to comply.*

Of course, racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression are profoundly real. But why do they persist in the face of active reforms? Are they simply bone-deep cultural habits that can't be softened? The contention here is that they persist in large part because they are economically useful to those in positions of economic privilege. Racial division has been a powerful tool in American history to prevent the cross-cutting class solidarity that could threaten concentrated wealth. From the colonial-era invention of “whiteness” to divide indentured European and enslaved African laborers, through the Southern Strategy, to the current culture-war apparatus, the pattern is consistent: when working people begin to organize across racial and cultural lines around shared economic interests, the powerful introduce or amplify identity-based divisions to fracture that coalition.

This is the analysis Martin Luther King Jr. was developing in the Poor People's Campaign, and the understanding W.E.B. Du Bois articulated in *Black Reconstruction* — that racism is real and must be fought, but persists because it is structurally useful to the ruling class. King wrote to Coretta Scott in 1952 that 'capitalism has outlived its usefulness,' and told the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1966 that 'there must be a better distribution of wealth and maybe America must move toward a democratic socialism.'[19] As sociologists, Du Bois and Oliver Cromwell Cox defined the dynamics of 'racial capitalism' extensively in their work, and Cedric Robinson carried that analysis forward, establishing that capitalism does not merely exploit existing racial divisions *but structurally requires and reproduces them*.[28] Rosa Parks was intimately involved with labor unions and Leftist organizations throughout her life as well. The linkages between progressives, socialists, labor movements, and civil rights activists have been deliberately obscured by revisionist accounts of our history — but in reality they are the foundation of every advance in American justice.[25] So the implication here is inescapable: unless the economic structure that generates division is itself transformed, addressing any single manifestation of oppression will only cause the system to invent or amplify another.[29]

B. The Seven Threads: A Convergence of Antagonistic Conditions in a 50-year Right-Wing Project

Seven historical threads have converged to create the conditions in which demagogues and tyrants flourish in modern democracies. Each has been documented and warned against for over 2,400 years, and each has been deliberately amplified by a concerted right-wing project of the last fifty. As Aristotle

observed: "Where the laws are not sovereign, then demagogues arise."[12] As Plato warned, the would-be tyrant is "drawn into a perfectly lawless life, which by his seducers is termed perfect liberty."[11] And as Hamilton cautioned centuries later, "of those men who have overturned the liberties of republics, the greatest number have begun their career by paying an obsequious court to the people; commencing demagogues, and ending tyrants."[13]

1. Erosion and rejection of the rule of law. The systematic undermining of legal norms, regulatory agencies, voting rights, judicial independence, and constitutional governance by conservative movements. This includes capturing the judiciary with right-wing activists, fabricating justifications for illegal wars, the January 6th insurrection, and a disproportionate ratio of criminal convictions among Republican officials (97 to 1 in presidential administrations over the last 50+ years).

2. Amplification of greed, selfishness, and opportunism as cultural norms. From James Buchanan's elevation of self-interest as the organizing principle of political society, through Milton Friedman's market fundamentalism, to the Randian objectivism that celebrates the profit motive as moral good, American culture has been trained to venerate precisely the antisocial traits that destroy democratic community. As of 2020, 71% of Americans were less confident in each other than twenty years ago, with selfishness, greed, and dishonesty the leading reasons.

3. Confusion about the nature of liberty, equality, and justice. The Right's definition of freedom as absence of government constraint — a freedom belonging primarily to those with capital — *is a counterfeit liberty*. As G.A. Cohen artfully argued, "poverty demonstrably implies liability to interference."[15] Authentic liberty, as argued in the concept of *integral liberty*, requires specific enabling conditions: without equivalent access to education, healthcare, justice, and economic opportunity, aspirations to liberty are desires without facility.[8]

4. Pervasive isolation, disconnection, and alienation. Hannah Arendt described "Verlassenheit" — organized loneliness — in which atomized individuals become susceptible to authoritarian manipulation and violent nationalism. Modern consumerism and technology have aggressively reproduced these conditions; the 2023 Surgeon General's advisory documented the highest levels of social isolation ever recorded in the U.S.[9] As Arendt warned, "organized loneliness is considerably more dangerous than the unorganized impotence of all those who are ruled by the tyrannical and arbitrary will of a single man."[14]

5. Cultural strife, discord, and division. As amplified through Right-wing media, conspiracy theories, hate speech, the leveraging of pseudo-Christian cultural conservatism (see Appendix C), economic populism and nationalism, revisionist history, and the systematic destruction of journalism's capacity to inform the public — beginning with the elimination of the Fairness Doctrine in 1987.

6. Economic stress and worsening inequality. Real wages have stagnated since about 1973, while overall productivity has doubled. The share of national income going to the top 1% also doubled from about 10% in 1980 to over 20% today. The number of billionaires has multiplied while the middle class has been hollowed out, and economic mobility has declined. We have now recreated a hereditary plutocracy — and it's overdue to recognize that no society can be both democratic and aristocratic.

7. Willfully persistent ignorance. The deliberate undermining of public education, defunding of research, proliferation of disinformation, promotion of science skepticism, and exploitation of the illusory truth effect — where repeated falsehoods are believed regardless of prior knowledge or expertise — have produced an epidemic of manufactured ignorance. As of 2024, 67% of Republicans still believed Joe Biden was not legitimately elected despite exhaustive debunking…absent the deliberate engineering of this farce, it seems inconceivable.

The expansive worsening of all seven conditions over the last few decades was not accidental. It was the result of the well-funded and coordinated effort that might be called "the great deception" — the marriage of free market fundamentalism, cultural and religious conservatism, economic populism, Christian nationalism, pro-white racism, and neoliberalism, all seemingly ignited into a flame of conservative activism by the Powell Memo of 1971, and carefully sustained over fifty years.[9][24]

C. Seven Institutional Pillars of the Fifty-Year Project

The Right-wing project has operated through seven institutional pillars, each of which this progressive agenda proposes to specifically counter:

1. Idea production and legitimation: The Heritage Foundation, Cato Institute, AEI, Hoover Institution, Manhattan Institute, Claremont Institute, Federalist Society, and others — all creating the intellectual environment in which certain ideas seem reasonable and others radical, shifting the Overton window over decades farther to the right.

2. Judicial capture: The Federalist Society's pipeline from law school to the bench, locking in gains across electoral cycles through a Supreme Court supermajority achieved by norm-breaking.

3. Media ecosystem: From talk radio to Fox News to podcasts and YouTube, creating an enclosed epistemological environment in lockstep conformance. At the same time, the neoliberal anti-science propaganda process uses the same funders and players to discredit scientific findings threatening to corporate profits — from tobacco to fossil fuels to pesticides (see Appendix A).

4. State-level capture: ALEC, the State Policy Network, the REDMAP redistricting project — model legislation, gerrymandering, and state preemption of progressive local policy.

5. Donor networks and dark money: Koch network, Leonard Leo's Marble Freedom Trust, and donor-advised funds and 501(c)(4) organizations designed to obscure the sources of political spending.

6. Grassroots and cultural mobilization: The Christian Right's church-based infrastructure, cooption of the Tea Party movement, gun organizations, homeschool networks — all providing year-round community, identity, and meaning in addition to political activation.

7. Corporate alignment and the revolving door: The Chamber of Commerce, the professionalized lobbying industry, and interlocking corporate directorates — achieving the original Powell Memo target of mobilizing corporate America as a unified political actor.

D. Wage-Productivity Divergence as the Central Economic Crime

From the end of World War II through the early 1970s, productivity gains and wage gains tracked each other closely. American workers shared in the wealth they created. After approximately 1973, they diverged dramatically: productivity roughly doubled, but real wages stagnated. The gains flowed almost entirely to capital owners — shareholders, executives, and the inheritor class. This was not a natural economic phenomenon, it was a political outcome, produced by deliberate policy choices: the destruction of union power (membership fell from roughly 35% in the 1950s to about 6% in the private sector today), tax policy that shifted the burden from capital to labor, financial deregulation, trade agreements without worker protections, the erosion of the minimum wage in real terms, the shift from defined-benefit pensions to 401(k) plans that transferred risk to workers, and the explosion of costs for healthcare, education, and housing for the average American.

The debt crisis is inseparable from this. When wages stagnate but costs rise, the gap is filled by debt — student loans, medical debt, credit card debt, mortgages. And debt functions as a disciplinary mechanism, with people too indebted to take risks, change jobs, organize, start businesses, or participate in civic life. This is the modern form of wage slavery and debt slavery, and it offers no exit without structural change.

E. Beyond a False Binary: The Mixed Economy and the American Progressive Tradition

The Right's most effective rhetorical weapon is a false choice: either unfettered capitalism ("freedom") or Soviet totalitarianism. This is as historically illiterate as it is economically incoherent, and is strategically designed to foreclose any discussion of how the economy could or should be organized. The truth is that socialism arose specifically to address the dehumanizing conditions of the industrial revolution — and that every thriving economy in the world today is a mixed economy combining socialist public provision with regulated markets.[18]

The historical record is clear. The 8-hour workday was first implemented by the socialist Robert Owen, who also abolished child labor in his mills and provided free healthcare and education to worker families. Women's suffrage was championed by socialists: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Clara Zetkin were all socialists. The civil rights movement was built on socialist infrastructure: W.E.B. Du Bois, Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and Malcolm X all operated from socialist principles. FDR's New Deal — which stabilized banking, created unions, built public works, and established Social Security — was the adoption of socialist policy within a capitalist framework.[18] As FDR declared in 1936: "The forces of organized money are unanimous in their hate for me — and I welcome their hatred." And the 'forces of organized money' are still unanimous in their hatred of what FDR represented — and of all the socialist contributions that saved capitalism from itself.[18]

Adam Smith himself explicitly argued that markets require "good government" to function, warned against merchants conspiring against the public interest, and argued for progressive taxation. His observation of "All for ourselves, and nothing for other people, seems, in every age of the world, to have been the vile maxim of the masters of mankind"[20] condemns precisely the plutocratic extraction that the American Right celebrates. It is not capitalism alone that has lifted the world out of poverty, but

capitalism's collaboration with Smith's "good government" — that is, governance that constrains the worst impulses of the profit motive and encourages diffusion of both wealth and political power.

The freedom argument. The Right defines freedom as absence of government constraint on economic activity — a freedom belonging primarily to those with capital. For the worker trapped in a bad job because leaving means losing health insurance, or for the person drowning in predatory debt, this "freedom" is meaningless. Real freedom requires a material foundation: healthcare not tied to employment, education not requiring a lifetime of debt, housing that is secure, income that covers basic needs. Again, as Cohen argued, "poverty demonstrably implies liability to interference."[15] Public provision of essential goods does not restrict freedom — it creates and supports it. Countries with the strongest safety nets have the highest rates of entrepreneurship, because people take risks when failure doesn't mean homelessness.

The cooperative argument. Mondragón has operated for nearly seventy years with over 80,000 worker-owners. Emilia-Romagna is one of Europe's most prosperous regions. The Rojava experiment and Zapatista communities demonstrate resilient cooperative economics under military threat. In the U.S., credit unions, rural electric cooperatives, and the Associated Press are cooperative enterprises used every day. Elinor Ostrom's research demonstrated that communities can sustainably manage shared resources through communication, trust, and polycentric governance — contradicting oft-touted "tragedy of the commons" assumptions.[21]

The public goods argument. National defense, clean air, public health, basic research, the justice system — these are public goods that markets cannot efficiently provide. Some things simply do not lend themselves to profit, and inelasticity of demand in other areas can undermine fruitful competition. An economy that privatizes everything underprovides public goods and overprovides private extraction.

The conventional political wisdom — accepted with such unanimity among Democratic strategists and consultants that it functions as doctrinal orthodoxy — is that the word "socialism" is a death sentence in American electoral politics, that the populations of the heartland and the Sun Belt have been so thoroughly conditioned by eight decades of Red Scare propaganda that any association with socialist ideas, however accurately described, will trigger an immunological rejection no amount of argument can overcome. This is cowardice dressed up as strategy. It is also, on the evidence, completely wrong. The most popular government programs in the United States — Social Security, Medicare, public education, the Veterans Administration, rural electrification, the interstate highway system, the U.S. Postal Service — are socialist programs, built on socialist principles, implemented by politicians who understood that public provision of essential goods as the practical foundation of a functioning society. The Americans who rely on these programs do not experience them as tyranny. *They experience them as the baseline conditions of a civilized society* — and they will routinely defend them against those same politicians who denounce socialism in the abstract while cashing the political dividends of socialist policy in practice. The gap between what Americans say they believe about socialism and what they actually demand from their government is not a wall of reflexive rejection. It is a door of opportunity — and the progressive movement's refusal to walk through it has been among its most self-defeating strategic failures.

The lie that socialism means Soviet gulags and Venezuelan hyperinflation has been permitted to stand unchallenged for so long that it has calcified into “common sense” — but common sense, as Gramsci understood, is not the natural wisdom of ordinary people. It is the residue of past ideological campaigns that have been repeated so often they no longer require argument; that *illusory truth effect* again. The appropriate response to a lie that has been repeated for eighty years is not to accept its terms and rebrand the truth under more palatable language — "progressive economics," "economic patriotism," "the caring economy" — as though the problem were merely lexical. The appropriate response is to do what James Talarico has done with Christianity: confront the distortion directly, name the lie as a lie, and reclaim the tradition from those who have hijacked it. Talarico did not abandon the language of faith because Christian nationalists had corrupted it. He stood on the floor of the Texas state legislature and told them, to their faces, that they were bearing false witness — and in doing so he demonstrated that the power of the distortion depends entirely on the willingness of honest people to let it go unchallenged. The same is true of the socialist tradition. Robert Owen, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, W.E.B. Du Bois, Martin Luther King Jr., Franklin Roosevelt — these are not foreign infiltrators. They are the architects of every expansion of freedom and dignity that the American experiment has produced. The Right has spent decades teaching Americans to fear the word while depending on its substance. It is long past time to teach them the truth instead.

This will not be simple, and it will not be accomplished in a single election cycle or a single messaging campaign. It requires the same sustained, disciplined, decades-long investment in public education that the Right made in public miseducation — through think tanks, media, churches, and every other institution that shapes how people understand the world they live in. It requires courageous politicians willing to risk the short-term electoral cost of honesty rather than accepting the long-term strategic cost of permanent rhetorical surrender. It requires, above all, a refusal to write off the populations of middle America as unreachable — a refusal grounded in the recognition — uncomfortable for coastal progressives — that the people who have been lied to most aggressively are often the people who benefit most from the programs those lies are designed to undermine, and that the condescension embedded in the assumption that they cannot learn the difference is itself a form of the elitism the progressive movement claims to reject. Epictetus wrote, nearly two thousand years ago, that people exist for one another — and that the obligation this imposes is binary: *teach them, then, or bear with them*. The progressive movement has been bearing with the consequences of its own silence for decades. It is time to start teaching instead.

F. Moral Foundations: From Egocentrism to Prosociality

A substantive basis for any enduring change in society is its current level of moral development and its ability to mature. Without a capacity for sufficient moral sophistication permeating our culture, we cannot sustain a new, higher-order level of civil society. A new set of rules and laws, no matter how progressive, will not succeed by themselves. This is why the same cycles recur throughout history: civilization cannot outpace the lowest-common-moral-denominator that holds a majority within its population.[17][23]

The moral condition underlying economic and political dysfunction and foreign policy egocentrism is the same: a self-absorbed orientation where the impacts of one's actions on others are outside our scope of moral concern. In an egocentric worldview, the deaths of hundreds of thousands are an acceptable tradeoff for economic stability; domestically, the same egocentrism manifests as opposition to taxes while benefiting from public goods, refusal to acknowledge the environmental destruction of the status quo, and the imposition of double standards on personal freedom. The same national egocentrism that produces exploitative foreign policy also produces domestic vulnerability to authoritarian manipulation — so both must be transcended together.

The shift required is from antisocial patterns — which prioritize self-interest to the exclusion of everyone else — to prosocial patterns, which prioritize the good of all while still placing personal wellbeing within that larger frame. This proceeds through expanding circles of identification: from self, to family, to tribe, to community, to humanity, to all life. The institutional designs in this progressive agenda are meant to support and accelerate this developmental trajectory across all areas of society.[30] Further, revolutionary integrity demands that the means embody the ends: if we imitate our oppressors' methods or operate at their level of moral depravity, we reproduce their oppression under new labels.[31]

G. A New Economic Framework

As pragmatic and well-developed option, this agenda adopts Kate Raworth's donut economics framework as its governing economic and ecological philosophy.[17] The donut defines a safe and just space for humanity — above a social foundation and below an ecological ceiling. GDP growth is not the goal. Human flourishing within ecological limits is the goal. Growth that raises the social floor without exceeding the ecological ceiling is beneficial; growth that overshoots the ceiling or fails to raise the floor is destructive, regardless of what it does to GDP.

As a secondary framing, a revised orientation to profit incentives is promoted as well (See Appendix D). This is inspired by targets that exceed the scope of this agenda, but which aim to ultimately embody more prosocial, collectively beneficial standards of business activity that reject self-serving individualistic materialism, worker and consumer exploitation, and commercialistic deception as the standard modes of operation for free enterprise.[32]

PART III: STRUCTURAL DEMOCRACY REFORMS

Here we counter gerrymandering, voter suppression, Electoral College distortion, Senate malapportionment, judicial capture, dark money, the unitary executive theory, congressional gridlock and chaos, corporate capture, and state-level preemption.

These reforms must come first because they are prerequisites. Better policy ideas are irrelevant if the structures through which power is exercised are rigged to prevent majoritarian outcomes. The Right understands this, which is why so much of its investment has gone to self-serving structural control — courts, redistricting, election administration, and the procedural obstructions in Congress — rather than winning public policy debates.

A. Voting Rights and Election Administration

The right to vote in the United States has never been freely given. It has been extracted — through constitutional amendment, through legislation, through litigation, through direct action, and through the blood of people who were beaten and killed for insisting that the franchise they were promised on paper be honored in practice. And every expansion has been met, within a generation, by a new architecture of restriction designed to accomplish through procedural complexity what can no longer be accomplished through explicit exclusion. Literacy tests gave way to poll taxes, which gave way to at-large districting and racial gerrymandering, which gave way to voter ID laws, polling place closures, registration purges, and the systematic dismantling of the federal oversight that had held these tactics in check for nearly half a century. The mechanisms change but the function does not. That function is to ensure that the electorate is composed of the people whose participation is convenient for those already in power, and that the people whose participation threatens that power find the act of voting sufficiently difficult, confusing, time-consuming, or intimidating that a meaningful fraction of them do not do it.

The hinge event of the modern era is *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013), in which the Supreme Court gutted Section 5 of the Voting Rights Act by invalidating the coverage formula that determined which jurisdictions — those with documented histories of racially discriminatory voting practices — were required to obtain federal preclearance before changing their election laws. Chief Justice Roberts's majority opinion declared that the coverage formula was based on "decades-old data and eradicated practices," a conclusion that subsequent events have rendered either naive or dishonest. Within hours of the decision, Texas announced the implementation of a voter ID law that had previously been blocked by preclearance. Within months, states across the former Confederacy and beyond had enacted new restrictions on voting that the preclearance regime had been specifically designed to prevent. The Brennan Center has documented that by 2024, at least thirty states had enacted more than seventy restrictive voting laws since the decision. The racial turnout gap — the disparity between white and nonwhite voter participation — has widened in jurisdictions that had been subject to preclearance, which is precisely the outcome the Voting Rights Act was enacted to prevent and precisely the outcome the Court's majority either failed to anticipate (or anticipated but did not care about).

Restore the preclearance regime. Not the old coverage formula, which the Court struck down, but a contemporary formula based on current evidence of discriminatory practices — recent violations, statistical disparities in registration and turnout by race, documented patterns of polling place closures or registration purges that disproportionately affect minority communities. The John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act contained such a formula. Pass it, or pass its equivalent, and fund the enforcement mechanism at levels sufficient to make preclearance a genuine check on discriminatory action rather than a procedural formality that understaffed agencies cannot administer in time to prevent the election it is supposed to protect.

Automatic voter registration at eighteen, opt-out rather than opt-in — because the current system, in which the burden of registration falls on the individual citizen, is a relic of an era in which registration served as a gatekeeping mechanism and has been maintained because it continues to function as one. Twenty-three states and the District of Columbia have adopted automatic voter registration in some form. The remaining states have not, and the distribution of those states is far from random: they are disproportionately the states in which the populations most likely to be unregistered — young people, low-income communities, communities of color, people who move frequently — are also the populations whose participation most threatens incumbent power. The federal government should establish automatic registration as a national floor for all federal elections, not a state-by-state option that allows the states most invested in suppression to opt out of the remedy.

Same-day registration as a federal minimum, so that no citizen is denied the right to vote because a registration deadline passed while they were working, moving, recovering from illness, or simply unaware that a bureaucratic prerequisite stood between them and the franchise. **Election Day as a federal holiday** — not because a single day off will solve the access problem, but because the refusal to grant one reveals the priority: the United States treats the act of choosing its government as less important than commemorating its past. Minimum two weeks of early voting, with standardized hours that include evenings and weekends, because the fiction that every voter can appear at a polling place on a single Tuesday between the hours of seven and seven presupposes a life of stable employment, reliable transportation, and childcare availability that describes the circumstances of a shrinking fraction of the electorate. **Federal minimum standards for polling place availability** — a maximum number of registered voters per polling place, with mandatory additional locations triggered when any precinct exceeds a defined wait-time threshold — because the strategic closure of polling places in minority communities is one of the most effective and least-discussed voter suppression tactics in operation. Nationwide polling places decreased from roughly two hundred thousand in 2018 to under ninety-five thousand by 2022. The closures were not distributed evenly. They never are.

Standardize and protect mail-in and absentee voting at the federal level, with prepaid postage, extended receipt deadlines that account for postal transit times, and ballot tracking systems that allow voters to confirm their ballots were received and counted. The post-2020 assault on mail-in voting — driven entirely by one party's strategic calculation that expanded access to mail ballots disadvantaged its candidates — has created a patchwork of state laws ranging from universal mail-in voting to systems that require notarized excuses for absentee ballots. This patchwork is itself a form of inequality: the ease with which a citizen can exercise the franchise should not depend on which side of a state line they

happen to live on. Require paper ballot audit trails for all voting systems used in federal elections, with mandatory post-election risk-limiting audits — not because electronic voting fraud is widespread, but because public confidence in election integrity requires a verification mechanism that does not depend on trusting the machines, and *because the Right's fraudulent claims about election integrity are most effectively countered not by arguing about trust but by providing proof*.

Felony re-enfranchisement upon completion of sentence — full stop. The United States is one of the only democracies on earth that strips voting rights from citizens convicted of felonies, and in many states the disenfranchisement persists long after the sentence has been served, sometimes permanently. An estimated four million Americans are currently ineligible to vote because of felony disenfranchisement laws — laws whose origins are explicitly racial, enacted during the post-Reconstruction period as part of the same apparatus of Black exclusion that included literacy tests, grandfather clauses, and white primaries. The racial dimension has not diminished: felony disenfranchisement disproportionately affects Black men, because the criminal justice system that produces felony convictions disproportionately targets, prosecutes, and sentences Black men — a disparity documented exhaustively elsewhere in this agenda. A citizen who has served their sentence has discharged their obligation to the state. The state's continued denial of their most fundamental civic right is not justice. It is punishment that extends beyond the sentence, and it serves no penological purpose other than the maintenance of a political arrangement in which the communities most affected by mass incarceration are also the communities with the least electoral power to change the policies that produce it.

A national free voter ID — automatically issued to every citizen at no cost, using existing federal databases and distributed through post offices, Social Security offices, and mobile enrollment units — converting the voter ID requirement from a suppression tool into a universal service. This is the progressive response to the Right's "election integrity" framing that does something the defensive posture has failed to do: it takes the argument away entirely. The Right's voter ID laws are suppressive because they impose a requirement that costs money, requires transportation to a government office, demands documentation that not everyone possesses, and falls disproportionately on the elderly, the poor, students, and communities of color. A free, automatically issued national voter ID eliminates every one of these barriers while providing the identification standard that a majority of the public supports. The civil liberties objection — that a national ID creates a surveillance infrastructure — must be addressed through the design: the voter ID confirms citizenship and identity for the purpose of voting and carries no other data, no tracking capability, and no requirement that it be carried or presented outside the electoral context. It is a voting credential, not a national registry, and its design should make that limitation architecturally enforceable rather than merely a matter of policy.

Protect election workers. The post-2020 campaign of threats and harassment against county election officials, poll workers, and ballot counters — driven by disinformation about election fraud and amplified by political leaders who knew or should have known the claims were false — has produced a crisis of recruitment and retention in election administration. Experienced election officials have resigned in significant numbers. Their replacements, in some jurisdictions, are partisan appointees whose stated objective is to "ensure election integrity" as defined by the political movement that

manufactured the integrity crisis in the first place. Federal criminal penalties for threats against election workers, whistleblower protections for election officials who report partisan interference, and minimum professional qualifications for election administration positions in all jurisdictions conducting federal elections — *these are not partisan proposals*. They are the minimum conditions for conducting elections that the public can trust, and they are necessary because one party has made the deliberate decision to undermine that trust as a political strategy.

B. Three Solution Paths to End Gerrymandering

The voting rights protections described above are necessary but insufficient if the districts in which votes are cast are themselves drawn to predetermine the outcome. Gerrymandering — the manipulation of district boundaries to entrench partisan advantage — is the mechanism by which legislators choose their voters rather than voters choosing their legislators, and it has been deployed in this redistricting cycle with an aggression and a shamelessness that should alarm anyone who claims to believe in democratic governance. The disparity is asymmetric, and pretending otherwise is the kind of false equivalence this document refuses to engage in. Republicans controlled the drawing of one hundred ninety-one congressional districts used in the 2024 elections — forty-four percent of the total — while Democrats fully controlled the drawing of only seventy-five.[42] The Brennan Center estimates that maps used in the 2024 election had on average a net sixteen fewer Democratic-leaning districts than maps that complied with the anti-gerrymandering standards in the stalled Freedom to Vote Act, and identified eleven Republican-drawn maps with extreme partisan bias compared to four drawn by Democrats.[43] The Republican Party's REDMAP project — the coordinated strategy launched in 2010 to win state legislatures for the explicit purpose of controlling redistricting — was not a secret. It was a publicized initiative with a website, a fundraising operation, and a stated objective of converting state legislative majorities into congressional map-drawing power. It succeeded. And every redistricting cycle since has compounded its effects, because the gerrymandered state legislative maps that REDMAP produced are themselves the instruments by which the next round of congressional maps is drawn — a self-reinforcing cycle in which the initial manipulation reproduces itself with increasing precision.

Democrats have gerrymandered — Illinois and Maryland are genuine examples — and this document does not pretend that partisan map-drawing is a monopoly of one party. But the scale, the coordination, the institutional infrastructure, and the willingness to push the boundaries of legality are categorically different. Only two states since 1970 have voluntarily redrawn their congressional maps between censuses for partisan advantage — both under Republican control.[44] President Trump himself has pressured Republican-controlled states to gerrymander their maps ahead of the 2026 midterms, converting redistricting from a state legislative function into an instrument of presidential power wielded to entrench a congressional majority against the electorate's potential judgment.[45] In North Carolina, after changes to the composition of the state supreme court, the court reversed its recent anti-gerrymandering precedents, and the Republican legislature redrew a map that flipped three Democratic districts to Republicans — enough to give control of the U.S. House to the GOP by a slim margin.[46] And all of this operates in the vacuum created by the Supreme Court's decision in *Rucho v. Common Cause* (2019), in which the majority declared partisan gerrymandering claims to be political questions

beyond the reach of federal courts — a decision that conceded the diagnosis while refusing the treatment, and that left the remedy to the very political actors who benefit from the disease.

Three solution paths are being proposed, each with distinct structural advantages and limitations. They are not interchangeable — the first two operate within the existing single-member-district framework, while the third eliminates that framework altogether — and a federal mandate should accommodate all three rather than imposing a single model on states with different political cultures, demographic distributions, and constitutional structures.

Option 1: Algorithmic Redistricting. Warren Smith's shortest-splitline algorithm — and the family of computational redistricting methods it represents — provides a mathematically determined, fully transparent, and completely nonpartisan method of drawing district boundaries. The algorithm takes the state's geographic boundaries and population data as inputs and produces districts of equal population through a recursive process of splitting the state along the shortest possible lines. Its principal advantage is the total elimination of human discretion: no commission member's judgment, no political negotiator's preference, no incumbent's self-interest enters the process at any point. The map is a mathematical output, reproducible by anyone with access to the same data and the same algorithm, and its legitimacy derives from the fact that no human being decided where the lines would fall. Its limitation is equally clear: the algorithm is indifferent to communities of interest — geographic, cultural, economic, or racial communities whose coherence as a political constituency is destroyed when they are bisected by a line drawn for geometric rather than representational reasons. It does not account for Voting Rights Act requirements that mandate majority-minority districts where racially polarized voting patterns would otherwise dilute minority representation. And its outputs, while nonpartisan in construction, are not necessarily neutral in effect — the geometry of population distribution means that even a mathematically "fair" map can produce partisan skews depending on how voters are spatially distributed. Algorithmic redistricting is the cleanest solution to the manipulation problem, but it purchases that cleanliness at the cost of representational nuance that some states may reasonably regard as essential.

Option 2: Independent Redistricting Commissions. Commission members selected through the stratified random sortition described in this agenda's governance principles — a two-stage process of threshold qualification followed by lottery — drawing from a pool that excludes current officeholders, lobbyists, and anyone who has held partisan office or party leadership within a defined period. This approach accommodates both the Voting Rights Act's requirements and meaningful community input, because the commission operates as a deliberative body that receives testimony, evaluates competing proposals, and exercises judgment within constraints defined by federal standards — compactness, contiguity, equal population, minority representation, and the prohibition of data on partisan registration or voting history from entering the drawing process. Its vulnerability is the one that all commission models share: the appointment mechanism. Commissions whose members are appointed by partisan officials reproduce partisan influence through the back door, as the experience of nominally "independent" commissions in several states has demonstrated. Sortition closes that door more effectively than any appointment mechanism controlled by the actors who benefit from gerrymandering, for the reasons detailed elsewhere in this document.

Option 3: Proportional Representation. Multi-member districts using proportional voting methods — party-list, single transferable vote, or mixed-member proportional systems — eliminate gerrymandering as a concept rather than merely constraining it, because in a proportional system the shape of the district is irrelevant to the proportional allocation of seats. A party that wins thirty percent of the vote in a multi-member district receives roughly thirty percent of the seats, regardless of where the district lines are drawn. This is the most comprehensive solution, and it carries the additional advantage of producing legislatures whose partisan composition more accurately reflects the actual distribution of voter preferences — a characteristic that single-member-district systems, even fairly drawn ones, structurally cannot guarantee. Its principal obstacle is legal: the 1967 federal statute mandating single-member districts for the House of Representatives would require repeal, and the political will for repeal is difficult to summon from a Congress whose members were all elected under the current system and whose re-election prospects are calibrated to it. Nevertheless, proportional representation is not some sort of exotic import — it is used in some form by the majority of the world's established democracies, and its adoption in the United States would align this country with the international norm rather than the international exception.

Recommended federal approach: Mandate the elimination of partisan gerrymandering by a date certain — tied to the next decennial redistricting cycle — and allow states to choose among federally approved methods that meet defined standards: mathematical transparency, independence from partisan control, compliance with the Voting Rights Act, and public auditability of the process and its outputs. States that fail to adopt an approved method by the deadline would have their congressional maps drawn by a federally administered algorithmic process as a default — not because the algorithm is the ideal solution, but because the alternative to a mandated default is the status quo, and the status quo is the problem.

C. Campaign Finance, Corporate Influence, and the Separation of Corporation and State

The United States does not have a campaign finance system. It has a legalized bribery system with disclosure requirements that are increasingly optional. The Supreme Court's 2010 decision in *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* — in which a five-to-four majority held that corporations and unions possess a First Amendment right to spend unlimited amounts on elections — did not create the problem of money in politics, it just amplified it significantly. Money has purchased political influence since the founding. What *Citizens United* did was remove the structural constraints that had kept the purchase somewhat bounded, somewhat transparent, and somewhat subject to democratic accountability, and replace them with a legal framework in which the wealthiest individuals and the largest corporations can deploy functionally unlimited resources to determine who holds power, with no effective ceiling on the amount and diminishing requirements to disclose the source.

The consequences are measured, and stark. Dark money expenditures — political spending by groups that do not disclose their donors — increased from less than five million dollars in 2006 to nearly two billion dollars in the 2024 federal elections alone.[47] Super PACs, which did not exist before *Citizens United* and the companion *SpeechNow.org v. FEC* ruling, spent more than four billion dollars on federal

elections between 2010 and 2024.[48] In the 2024 cycle, one hundred billionaire donors poured a record 2.6 billion dollars into elections, constituting nearly twenty percent of total spending — and a single individual, Elon Musk, contributed over 280 million dollars to outside-spending groups, roughly equivalent to the combined donations of three million small donors.[49] The Court's majority opinion in *Citizens United* was premised on the assurance that all of this newly permitted spending would be transparent. Unfortunately, that premise was either naive or cynical, and subsequent events have demonstrated that it was completely wrong: the mechanisms for avoiding disclosure have proliferated faster than the spending itself, and the Federal Election Commission — the body nominally responsible for enforcing campaign finance law — has been rendered dysfunctional by partisan deadlock among its commissioners, producing exactly the regulatory vacuum that the decision's critics predicted and that its beneficiaries require.

A constitutional amendment overturning *Citizens United* is the necessary foundation — establishing that the constitutional rights protected by the First and Fourteenth Amendments belong to natural persons, that corporations are chartered entities created by law with functional capacities defined by law, and that Congress and the states retain the authority to regulate the raising and spending of money in elections. This is a non-radical restoration of the legal framework that prevailed for more than a century before a slim Court majority decided that ExxonMobil's capacity to purchase political advertising is constitutionally indistinguishable from a citizen's right to stand on a street corner and speak. But the amendment process is long. It requires two-thirds of both chambers of Congress and ratification by three-quarters of state legislatures. The alternative — waiting for the Court to reverse itself — is a strategy that depends on the composition of a Court whose composition is itself determined by the money the amendment would constrain. So let’s begin with the amendment process. Build the state-level coalitions. Name the amendment. Give it a number.

In the interim — and the interim may be extended — pursue every statutory reform the current constitutional framework permits. Mandatory real-time disclosure of all political spending above one thousand dollars, with penalties for nondisclosure calibrated to the amount concealed rather than to a flat fine that functions as a minor cost of doing business. The Freedom to Vote Act contained such provisions, and it passed the House and had majority support in the Senate before dying to the filibuster. Pass it again, or pass its equivalent, once the filibuster is reformed. Public financing through small-dollar matching at a six-to-one ratio for contributions under two hundred dollars — a system that amplifies the political voice of ordinary citizens by making their small contributions worth six times their face value to candidates who opt into the system, creating a viable alternative to dependence on large donors. New York City's matching-funds system has operated on this model for decades and has demonstrably increased the diversity of the donor base and the competitiveness of elections. Scale it to the federal level.

Truth-in-political-advertising standards modeled on South Australian law and EU platform transparency obligations — requiring that political advertisements identify their sponsors, disclose their funding sources, and meet basic factual accuracy standards enforceable through the same regulatory mechanisms that govern commercial advertising. The objection that such standards violate the First Amendment is weaker than the objectors claim: commercial speech is already subject to truth-in-

advertising requirements, and the distinction between a political advertisement and a commercial one — the former may currently lie with impunity while the latter may not — is a distinction that serves the interests of the advertisers rather than the public they are addressing.

Lifetime lobbying ban for former members of Congress and senior executive branch officials — not the current revolving-door restrictions, which impose a one-to-two-year cooling-off period that functions as a brief sabbatical before the lucrative transition from public servant to hired influence-peddler. Is "the revolving door" just a metaphor? Hardly. It is a career path, and it is the primary mechanism by which corporate interests capture the regulatory and legislative process. The prospect of a seven-figure lobbying salary upon departure from office shapes the behavior of officials while they are still in office, because the industries they will eventually represent are the industries they are currently regulating or legislating. A lifetime ban eliminates this incentive. The objection that it would make it harder to recruit talented people into public service presupposes that the only people talented enough to serve in Congress are people who would refuse to serve if they could not afterward sell their access to the highest bidder.

The broader principle — the separation of corporation and state — must be stated explicitly, because it is the structural analog to the separation of church and state that this agenda defends elsewhere. Corporations are chartered entities. They exist because the state creates them, defines their legal capacities, and provides the infrastructure — courts, contract enforcement, property law, public roads, educated workforces, stable currencies — on which their operations depend. They are not persons. They do not have consciences, religious convictions, political beliefs, or the capacity for the moral reasoning that justifies the extension of constitutional rights to natural persons. They have interests, and those interests are legitimate within their proper domain — the production of goods and services, the employment of workers, the generation of economic activity. But when those interests are permitted to determine who holds political power, what laws are enacted, and how those laws are enforced, the result is more than democracy with corporate participation. *It is corporate governance with democratic pretense.* Establish by statute what the constitutional amendment will eventually establish permanently: that corporate charters confer functional capacities, not constitutional rights, and that those charters can be revoked — not merely fined, not merely regulated, but revoked — for serious violations of the public interest, including sustained patterns of regulatory evasion, environmental destruction, labor exploitation, or the corruption of democratic processes.

Direct constituent surveying systems — secure, authenticated digital platforms through which constituents can provide informed input on pending legislation — complement these reforms by creating a channel of political communication that bypasses the donor-intermediary system entirely. When a member of Congress receives ten thousand constituent responses on a pending bill alongside a million-dollar lobbying campaign urging the opposite position, the conflict of interest is at least visible. When the only input the member receives is from lobbyists and donors, the public interest has no advocate in the room.

D. Direct Democracy

The Founders of the American republic did not design representative government as a temporary workaround until the technology for direct democracy arrived. They designed it as a deliberate constraint on popular self-governance — and they were explicit about their reasons. Madison's Federalist No. 10 argued that representation was superior to direct democracy precisely because it would "refine and enlarge the public views by passing them through the medium of a chosen body of citizens" — language that does not disguise the assumption underneath it: that the public's views required refining, and that a propertied, educated class was the appropriate medium through which to refine them. Hamilton was blunter, expressing persistent skepticism about the capacity of the general population to govern wisely. Adams wrote that "democracy never lasts long" and "soon wastes, exhausts, and murders itself." Thus the Constitutional Convention produced an architecture of filtration — the Electoral College, the original appointment of senators by state legislatures, the restriction of the franchise to white male property owners, the three-fifths clause that converted enslaved people into fractional units of political representation for the states that enslaved them — designed to channel, constrain, and in many cases override the power of the people. The Founders were not fools. They were elitists operating within the assumptions of their era, building institutions that served the interests of their class while articulating principles — consent of the governed, popular sovereignty, the equality of all men — that their institutions contradicted and that subsequent generations would spend two and a half centuries trying to make real.

The progressive argument for direct democracy does not rest on restoring the Founders' intent. It rests on surpassing it — on taking the principles they articulated but did not honor and building institutions that actually embody them. The logistical constraints that made direct democracy impracticable in 1787 — a dispersed population, communication measured in weeks, widespread illiteracy, the absence of any infrastructure for collective deliberation at scale — no longer exist. The technology to consult the electorate on major legislation in real time is no longer speculative. It is operational in multiple democracies. The principled objections — that the public is too ignorant, too passionate, too susceptible to demagogy to govern itself — have been tested empirically in every country that has adopted direct democratic mechanisms, and the evidence does not sustain them. Swiss voters have managed binding referenda on complex policy questions for more than a hundred and seventy years without producing the catastrophes that elite theorists have predicted since Plato. Irish citizens selected by lottery have deliberated on constitutional questions that their parliament could not resolve and produced outcomes that the public ratified by decisive margins. The question isn’t whether direct democratic mechanisms are feasible but whether an entrenched political class that would be constrained by them will permit their adoption — a question that answers itself, which is why the adoption must be driven by popular demand rather than legislative initiative.

The Swiss model provides the most mature and best-documented framework. Switzerland's system of binding referenda — in which any federal law can be challenged by popular vote if fifty thousand signatures are collected within one hundred days, and in which citizens can propose constitutional amendments with one hundred thousand signatures — has operated continuously since 1848 and has produced a polity in which the electorate exercises direct legislative authority on matters ranging from immigration policy to infrastructure spending to foreign treaties. The system is not without flaws — turnout on individual referenda is often low, the initiative process can be captured by well-funded

interest groups, and the requirement of double majorities (popular vote plus a majority of cantons) for constitutional amendments can produce minoritarian outcomes. But these are design problems with design solutions, and the overall effect of the system on Swiss governance has been measured and thoroughly documented: it has resulted in higher levels of public trust in government, greater fiscal responsibility, and policy outcomes that more closely track public preferences than those produced by purely representative systems.[50]

Consider — and this agenda uses the word "consider" deliberately, because the specific design requires extensive deliberation and piloting before national adoption — a Swiss-model referendum power adapted to the American federal system. Signature thresholds set high enough to prevent frivolous use but low enough to be achievable by genuine grassroots mobilization, rather than only by organizations with professional signature-gathering capacity. A mandatory deliberative period between qualification and vote, during which a citizens' assembly convened by sortition reviews the measure, receives expert testimony, and publishes a public assessment of its likely effects — a feature absent from the Swiss system and from most American state-level initiative processes, and one designed to address the legitimate concern that direct democracy can produce impulsive or ill-informed outcomes. Constitutional safeguards ensuring that initiatives cannot be used to abridge fundamental rights or target minority populations — the same constraints that apply to legislative action under the Bill of Rights, applied with equal force to direct democratic action.

Citizen initiative processes at all levels — municipal, county, state, and federal — creating multiple points of entry for popular legislative action and reducing the dependence of the entire democratic system on a single, captured, increasingly dysfunctional congressional process. Regular electronic consultation with voters on major legislation — not binding plebiscites on every bill, but structured, authenticated processes through which representatives receive and are required to publicly acknowledge constituent input before voting. The technology for secure, verified digital consultation exists. The obstacle isn’t technical, it’s political: representatives who depend on donors rather than voters for their political survival have no incentive to create systems that make the divergence between donor preferences and constituent preferences visible.

Citizens' assemblies — the sortition-based deliberative bodies described in detail elsewhere in this agenda — constitute the institutional infrastructure for informed direct democracy. They are the mechanism that distinguishes democratic deliberation from opinion polling, and their integration into the initiative and referendum process addresses the strongest objection to direct democracy: that ordinary citizens lack the information, expertise, and deliberative context to make sound legislative judgments. The objection has always been self-serving when advanced by professional politicians — it is an argument that the people are not competent to govern themselves, made by people whose authority depends on the people believing it — and the evidence from Ireland, France, Canada, and other countries that have convened citizens' assemblies refutes it empirically. But the objection contains a legitimate kernel: uninformed snap judgments on complex policy questions can produce bad outcomes. The obvious remedy is to provide the electorate with the institutional support — expert testimony, facilitated deliberation, time, structured information, and hands-on practice — that makes an informed voice possible.

These mechanisms — referenda, initiatives, electronic consultation, citizens' assemblies — create alternative, parallel channels through which popular will is expressed, reducing the significance of any single winner-take-all contest and making the democratic system as a whole more resilient to the capture of any one institution. If Congress is captured by donors, citizens can legislate directly. If state legislatures are deadlocked into unresponsiveness, local initiative processes can bypass them. When the executive attempts overreach, a referendum can reverse it. No single mechanism is sufficient, but taken together, they constitute a democratic architecture in which the failure of one channel does not silence the public, because other channels are available.

E. Court Reform

The Supreme Court of the United States has become a partisan institution exercising legislative power without democratic accountability, and the refusal of the progressive movement to say this plainly — to name what has happened and describe it concisely — has been one of its most consequential rhetorical failures. What has happened is this: a decades-long campaign by the Federalist Society and its allied organizations to control the composition of the federal judiciary and influence its decisions has succeeded. The campaign was strategic, patient, and explicit in its objectives: identify ideologically reliable jurists early in their careers, cultivate them through clerkships and appointments, and place them on the federal bench in sufficient numbers to reverse the constitutional jurisprudence of the twentieth century. The result is a six-to-three conservative supermajority on the Supreme Court that has overturned *Roe v. Wade*, gutted the Voting Rights Act, immunized the president from criminal prosecution for official acts, declared partisan gerrymandering beyond the reach of federal courts, and embraced the unitary executive theory that this agenda addresses in the following section — each of these decisions advancing an ideological project that could not have been achieved through the democratic process because the American public *does not support it*.

Expand the Supreme Court to thirteen justices. The number nine is not constitutionally mandated. It is a statutory choice, last set in 1869, and Congress has changed the size of the Court seven times in the nation's history. Thirteen justices — matching the number of federal circuit courts — would dilute the outsized influence of any single appointment, help reduce incentives for the scorched-earth confirmation battles that have degraded the institution, and restore a measure of ideological balance to a Court whose current composition doesn't reflect the judgment of the American people but the timing of deaths, retirements, and a Senate majority's willingness to depart from its own tradition to prevent a sitting president from filling a vacancy.[53]

Eighteen-year term limits for all Supreme Court justices, with staggered terms producing one vacancy every two years — ensuring that every presidential term includes two appointments and that no single president's influence on the Court extends indefinitely. Life tenure was adopted in an era when life expectancy was roughly half what it is today, and its effect in the current era is to create a gerontocracy in which justices appointed in their forties or fifties serve for three decades or more, wielding power long after the presidents who appointed them and the senates that confirmed them have left office. Term limits do not require a constitutional amendment — they can be implemented by statute through a system in which justices transition to senior status after eighteen years, continuing to serve on lower

federal courts but vacating their seat on the Supreme Court. The constitutionality of this approach has been debated by legal scholars, and the weight of serious constitutional analysis supports it, but even if a constitutional amendment proves necessary, the case for term limits is strong enough to justify the effort.

A mandatory, binding ethics code for the Supreme Court — because the Court is currently the only branch of government that operates without one. The revelations of recent years — undisclosed luxury travel funded by parties with business before the Court, real estate transactions with litigants, spousal conflicts of interest that would disqualify any lower-court judge — have not produced institutional reform because the Court has asserted the authority to police itself and has declined to do so. A statutory ethics code with independent enforcement — administered by a panel that does not answer to the justices it oversees — is the minimum standard that every other court in the federal system already meets.

Merit-selection commissions using sortition for appellate and Supreme Court appointments — the same two-stage process described in this agenda's sortition framework: threshold professional qualifications defining the eligible pool, then random selection of the commission from that pool. The commission evaluates candidates, conducts public hearings, and submits a shortlist from which the president selects nominees. This does not eliminate the president's appointment power, which is constitutionally vested. It merely constrains it — channeling it through a process that is publicly transparent, professionally rigorous, and structurally resistant to the ideological capture that the Federalist Society's pipeline has achieved under the current system.

Democratic ratification of Supreme Court and appellate appointments through a high-threshold popular vote — a proposal that is constitutionally novel and would require amendment, but that addresses the fundamental democratic deficit of the current system: that the most powerful interpreters of the Constitution are selected through a process in which the public has no direct voice. A supermajority ratification requirement — sixty or sixty-five percent — would ensure that only nominees with broad public support are confirmed, which would structurally favor moderate jurists over ideological partisans, because ideological partisans cannot command supermajority support in a polarized electorate. This is a long-term proposal…so let’s name it and begin building the case.

Jurisdiction stripping where constitutionally permissible — the exercise of Congress's Article III power to define and limit the appellate jurisdiction of the federal courts. This is an enumerated power, and its judicious use — removing specific categories of cases from the Supreme Court's appellate jurisdiction when the Court has demonstrated that it will use that jurisdiction to advance ideological objectives rather than interpret law — is a legitimate democratic check on judicial overreach. It should be used sparingly, transparently, and with full public debate, because its abuse would be as dangerous as the judicial activism it is designed to constrain. But its availability should be acknowledged and its use should not be foreclosed by a reverence for judicial supremacy that the current Court has done nothing to earn.

Congressional reassertion of legislative authority. The Supreme Court has, over the past decade, systematically dismantled the frameworks through which Congress has historically exercised its constitutional powers. The overturning of Chevron deference in *Loper Bright Enterprises v.*

Raimondo (2024) eliminated the principle that courts should defer to reasonable agency interpretations of ambiguous statutes — a principle that had governed administrative law for forty years and that enabled Congress to legislate in broad terms while allowing expert agencies to implement the details. The gutting of the Voting Rights Act in *Shelby County v. Holder* (2013) eliminated the preclearance regime that had been the most effective civil rights enforcement mechanism in American history, on the theory that the racial discrimination it was designed to prevent no longer existed — a theory contradicted by the immediate wave of voter suppression laws enacted in the states freed from preclearance the moment the decision was handed down. The *Citizens United* decision converted corporate political spending into constitutionally protected speech. And the Court's embrace of the unitary executive theory has progressively weakened Congress's ability to create independent agencies insulated from presidential control.

The progressive response must be legislative confrontation, not resignation. Congress should re-pass the laws the Court has nullified — updated, strengthened, and designed to withstand the legal theories the current majority has deployed. Pass a new Voting Rights Act with a preclearance formula that satisfies the evidentiary standard *Shelby County*demanded — and the evidence is now overwhelming, given the documented voter suppression that has occurred since 2013. Pass new regulatory frameworks that do not rely on Chevron deference but instead provide the specificity the Court now requires — which means longer, more detailed statutes that leave less room for judicial second-guessing. Pass campaign finance legislation that tests the boundaries of *Citizens United* — mandatory disclosure, public financing, restrictions on coordination between campaigns and outside groups. If the Court strikes these down, the confrontation itself builds the political case for the structural court reform described above. The worst outcome is congressional passivity — the acquiescence to judicial supremacy that allows the Court to effectively legislate by prohibition while Congress declines to legislate at all.

The conversion therapy precedent and First Amendment boundaries. The Supreme Court's 8-1 decision in *Chiles v. Salazar* (March 2026) demands honest engagement rather than reflexive condemnation — because the liberal justices who joined the majority did so for reasons that progressives must understand if they are to respond effectively. Justice Kagan, joined by Justice Sotomayor, concurred that Colorado's law was a "textbook" viewpoint-based speech restriction — not because they endorse conversion therapy, but because Colorado's law prohibited therapy aimed at changing a minor's orientation while permitting therapy aimed at affirming it. That asymmetry — favoring one therapeutic viewpoint over another — is precisely what the First Amendment prohibits, regardless of which viewpoint is favored. Kagan's concurrence explicitly signaled that a viewpoint-neutral law — one that regulated the category of therapeutic practice without picking sides — "would raise a different and more difficult question" that the Court did not decide. This is not a defeat. It is a roadmap.

The deeper structural issue is whether the state's longstanding authority to regulate professional conduct extends to professional speech — whether a licensed therapist's words to a patient receive the same First Amendment protection as a citizen's words in the public square. Justice Jackson, alone in dissent, argued that professional speech regulation has never required strict scrutiny and that "the Constitution does not pose a barrier to reasonable regulation of harmful medical treatments just because substandard care comes via speech instead of scalpel." The other eight justices disagreed, at

least where the regulation is viewpoint-based. But Kagan's concurrence left the door open for viewpoint-neutral professional standards — and that is the pathway this agenda must pursue.

The revised approach: ban aversive physical conversion therapy practices outright, which the Court left open to regulation as conduct. For talk-based practices, pursue viewpoint-neutral regulatory pathways — require that all licensed mental health professionals adhere to evidence-based standards of care as a condition of licensure, and establish that practices unanimously condemned by every major professional body as harmful and ineffective fall outside the scope of evidence-based care. This framing regulates the *standard of professional competence*, not the *viewpoint of the therapist* — a distinction that Kagan's concurrence suggests may prove constitutionally decisive. Fund public education campaigns documenting the evidence of harm, and support state legislatures in drafting laws that follow the roadmap the Court's own liberal concurrence provided rather than repeating the structural error Colorado made. And let this case serve as a broader warning: laws designed to protect vulnerable populations must be drafted with constitutional precision, because sloppy legislation hands opponents the victories that sound policy would deny them.

The broader lesson of *Chiles v. Salazar* is more nuanced than the lesson of this section's other examples. Unlike the gutting of the Voting Rights Act, the overturning of Chevron deference, or the embrace of the unitary executive theory, this was not a case in which the conservative majority weaponized constitutional doctrine over liberal dissent to advance an ideological agenda. It was a case in which a poorly drafted law handed opponents a legitimate constitutional argument that even the Court's liberal justices could not reject. The lesson isn’t that the Court is always wrong, but that the progressive movement must be constitutionally precise in its legislative drafting — because when it is not, it gives a hostile Court easy victories, alienates potential judicial allies, and allows outcomes that sound policy and careful legal craftsmanship would have prevented. The deeper structural threat this section addresses remains real: the current conservative majority *will* use the First Amendment, the unitary executive theory, and every other available legal instrument to advance outcomes the democratic majority does not support, as it has done in *Shelby County*, *Citizens United*, *Dobbs*, *Loper Bright*, and the presidential immunity ruling. The progressive response isn’t to accept each ruling as the final word, but to adapt, legislate with constitutional rigor, and build the political conditions for the structural court reform that is ultimately necessary. The Court's legitimacy depends on public confidence, and public confidence depends on the perception that the Court is interpreting law rather than making it. The task is to make the case for reform clearly and honestly — which means distinguishing between rulings where the Court got it wrong and rulings where progressives handed it the tools to reach the right conclusion for the wrong movement's benefit.

F. Constraining Executive Overreach

The presidency of the United States has become an institution whose current occupant claims — and, with the acquiescence of a cooperative Supreme Court majority, increasingly exercises — powers that the Constitution does not grant, that the Founders explicitly rejected, and that no democratic theory can justify. The unitary executive theory, which holds that all executive power is vested personally in the president, and that every officer, agency, and institution within the executive branch is a subordinate

who serves at the president's pleasure and executes the president's will, is simply not a constitutional interpretation. *It is a constitutional revision* — one that, if accepted, would convert the presidency from the chief executor of laws passed by Congress into a sovereign authority constrained only by whatever limits a cooperative judiciary chooses to enforce, which in the current judicial environment means barely any at all.

In the first weeks of the current administration, seventeen inspectors general were fired simultaneously — the internal watchdogs whose statutory function is to investigate waste, fraud, and abuse within the agencies they oversee, and whose independence from political pressure is the precondition for their capacity to perform that function.[51] The stated legal basis was the president's removal power. The operational effect was to eliminate the oversight mechanism that might have reported the very abuses the removal was designed to enable. Independent regulatory commissions — the Federal Trade Commission, the Consumer Product Safety Commission, the National Labor Relations Board, the Federal Reserve — have had their members fired or threatened with firing for the stated reason that their policy views are inconsistent with the administration's priorities, in direct violation of the for-cause removal protections that Congress enacted precisely to insulate these agencies from partisan interference.[52] The Department of Justice, whose independence from presidential direction in matters of investigation and prosecution has been maintained as a norm — imperfectly but consequentially — by every administration since Watergate, has been explicitly subordinated to presidential control, with the administration's senior officials stating publicly that they do not recognize DOJ independence as a legitimate constraint.

Reject the unitary executive theory by statute — a comprehensive legislative framework declaring that Congress's power to create executive agencies, define their missions, and establish the terms under which their leaders serve is a constitutional authority that the president cannot override by executive order, and that the independent agency structure upheld in *Humphrey's Executor v. United States* (1935) reflects the constitutional design rather than departing from it. This statutory rejection will likely be challenged in court. It should be. The confrontation between congressional authority and presidential claim is one the democratic system needs to have explicitly, rather than allowing the theory to advance through a series of emergency stays and executive orders that establish precedent without producing a definitive judicial ruling.

Codify inspector general independence and durability. Inspectors general must be removable only for cause — defined as misconduct, neglect of duty, or incapacity — with the cause stated in writing and subject to judicial review. Require Senate confirmation for IG appointments and provide for interim appointment by the relevant agency's career senior staff rather than by the president when a vacancy occurs, so that the president cannot create a vacancy and then fill it with a loyalist whose independence is compromised by the terms of their appointment. Fund IG offices through mandatory appropriations rather than discretionary allocations that can be zeroed out by a hostile administration.

Protect DOJ independence through statute rather than norm. Codify the post-Watergate guidelines that restrict White House communication with the Department of Justice on pending investigations and prosecutions. Establish statutory penalties — including criminal penalties — for presidential direction of specific investigations or prosecutions, and create an independent mechanism for investigating and

prosecuting allegations of DOJ politicization that does not depend on DOJ itself. The special counsel mechanism, as currently constituted, is insufficient: the special counsel serves within the DOJ and can be fired by the attorney general, which means that the independence of the investigation depends on the integrity of a political appointee whose appointment was itself a presidential act. The mechanism must be structurally independent, rather than in name only.

Emergency powers reform requiring congressional reauthorization beyond thirty days. The National Emergencies Act of 1976 was designed to constrain presidential emergency authority by requiring that declared emergencies be periodically reviewed and terminated. It has failed. Presidents of both parties have declared emergencies that have persisted for years and in some cases decades, because the Act's termination mechanism — a joint resolution of Congress — requires the president's signature to take effect, which means that a president can veto the termination of his own emergency. Reform the Act to require affirmative congressional reauthorization — a vote to continue, not a vote to terminate — after thirty days, with automatic expiration if Congress does not act. Require that emergency declarations specify the statutory authority invoked, the factual basis for the declaration, and the specific actions authorized, so that emergency power cannot be used as a blank check for executive action unrelated to the emergency.

Statutory limits on domestic deployment of the National Guard and federal military forces. The Insurrection Act of 1807 — which authorizes the president to deploy military forces domestically to suppress insurrection or enforce federal law — has been invoked in living memory and has been publicly discussed as a tool for immigration enforcement, protest suppression, and the deployment of military personnel in functions that are properly the domain of civilian law enforcement. Reform the Insurrection Act to require a finding of actual insurrection — not civil disorder, protest, or the exercise of First Amendment rights — supported by evidence and subject to immediate judicial review. Prohibit the deployment of active-duty military forces for immigration enforcement, which is a law-enforcement function constitutionally and statutorily assigned to civilian agencies.

Permanently prohibit Schedule F reclassification of career civil service positions. Schedule F — the executive order first issued in 2020 and reimposed in 2025 — reclassifies tens of thousands of career civil servants in policy-related positions as at-will employees, stripping their merit-system protections and making them fireable for any reason, including refusal to carry out directives that are illegal, unethical, or contrary to their professional judgment. Obviously, the purpose isn’t efficiency. The purpose is to convert the career civil service — the institutional memory, technical expertise, and professional continuity of the federal government — into a patronage system staffed by political loyalists whose tenure depends on their willingness to do whatever the current president demands. How could this ever be construed as “reform of government?” It is the *destruction* of professional government, replacing it with a spoils system that the Pendleton Act of 1883 was enacted to prevent. So let’s codify the prohibition by statute, with protections that cannot be overridden by executive order, and strengthen the Merit Systems Protection Board's authority and independence to adjudicate whistleblower claims and wrongful termination actions.

Strengthen whistleblower protections — beyond the existing nominal protections that have proven inadequate to shield individuals who report government misconduct from retaliation, reassignment,

security-clearance revocation, and prosecution. Establish a federal whistleblower protection office independent of the executive branch, with the authority to receive complaints, investigate retaliation claims, and order remedies including reinstatement, back pay, and damages. Extend protections to national security and intelligence community whistleblowers, whose current protections are the weakest in the federal system despite their exposure to the most consequential forms of government misconduct. The willingness of individuals to report wrongdoing is the immune system of democratic governance. A government that punishes the people who tell the truth about what it is doing is a government that has decided to prioritize its own authority over any kind of accountability, and the predictable result is *an institution that does not know what it is doing wrong* — because everyone who sees it has learned that speaking out is more dangerous than silence.

G. Enforcement: Who Compels Compliance When the Executive Defies the Law?

Every structural reform proposed in this section — the statutory rejection of the unitary executive theory, the codification of inspector general independence, the protection of DOJ independence, the prohibition of Schedule F — assumes that once enacted, these laws will be obeyed. That assumption has been tested in the current administration and found wanting. Court orders have been defied or slow-walked. Statutory requirements have been ignored. Congressional subpoenas have been treated as suggestions. Inspectors general have been fired in violation of statutory protections, and the consequence has been... litigation that takes years to resolve while the damage is done. The progressive movement must confront a question it has historically avoided: what is the enforcement mechanism when the most powerful person in the constitutional system is the one breaking the law?

The existing mechanisms are inadequate, and the inadequacy is structural rather than incidental.

The Department of Justice cannot enforce the law against the executive branch that controls it. This is the foundational problem. The DOJ is an executive branch agency. The Attorney General serves at the pleasure of the president. Career prosecutors operate under the authority of political appointees who serve at the pleasure of the president. When the president directs illegal action, the institution responsible for enforcing federal law is the institution least capable of doing so — because the chain of command runs from the lawbreaker to the law enforcer. The post-Watergate norms that insulated DOJ from presidential direction in individual cases were always norms, not laws — and the current administration has demonstrated that norms without statutory force are norms without force, period.

Congressional contempt powers are functionally unenforceable against the executive. Congress can hold executive officials in contempt — but criminal contempt referrals are prosecuted by the DOJ, which will not prosecute its own principals. Civil contempt requires litigation that takes years. Inherent contempt — the historical power of Congress to arrest and detain contemnors through the Sergeant at Arms — has not been exercised since 1935 and would provoke a constitutional confrontation that the current judiciary would likely resolve in the executive's favor.

Federal courts can issue orders but cannot compel compliance. The judiciary's power depends ultimately on the executive branch's willingness to enforce its rulings. When the executive defies a court order, the court can hold the executive in contempt — and then what? The enforcement of contempt

orders against executive officials depends on... the U.S. Marshals Service, which is part of the DOJ, which reports to the Attorney General, who serves at the pleasure of the president. The circularity is complete.

This agenda proposes four structural reforms to break this circularity:

First: Statutory independence for the Department of Justice. The Agenda already proposes codifying DOJ independence through statute. But the proposal must go further than the post-Watergate guidelines that have proven insufficient. The structural model is the Federal Reserve: an institution within the executive branch whose leadership serves fixed terms, is removable only for cause, and whose operational independence is protected by statute rather than norm. Create a fixed ten-year term for the Attorney General, removable only for cause (defined as misconduct, neglect, or incapacity), with the cause stated in writing and subject to judicial review. Require Senate confirmation for all principal DOJ leadership positions. Prohibit the president from directing, ordering, or requesting any specific investigation, prosecution, or enforcement action — and make violation of that prohibition a federal crime, prosecutable by the independent mechanism described below. Fund DOJ through a mandatory appropriation baseline — analogous to the Federal Reserve's self-funding mechanism — so that a hostile administration cannot defund the department into operational incapacity. This will be challenged under the unitary executive theory. It should be. The confrontation is necessary and overdue.

Second: An independent Office of Public Integrity with prosecutorial authority. Create a permanently staffed, independently funded office — outside the DOJ, outside the executive branch — with statutory authority to investigate and prosecute criminal conduct by federal officials, including the president, the Attorney General, cabinet members, and senior White House staff. The office is led by a director appointed by a bipartisan judicial panel (the same mechanism used to appoint FISA court judges), serving a fixed term, removable only for cause by that same panel. The office's jurisdiction is limited to official misconduct — abuse of power, obstruction of justice, contempt of court, violations of the statutes protecting agency independence — so that it cannot be weaponized for ordinary policy disagreements. Fund it through mandatory appropriation. This is the structural successor to the expired independent counsel statute — redesigned to avoid the abuses of the Kenneth Starr era (unlimited scope, unlimited duration, no budgetary accountability) while addressing the abuses of the current era (a president who cannot be investigated by anyone he cannot fire).

Third: A Judicial Enforcement Service independent of the DOJ. The U.S. Marshals Service currently operates within the DOJ and is therefore subject to the same chain-of-command problem that prevents DOJ from enforcing the law against the executive. Create a separate Judicial Enforcement Service — under the authority of the federal judiciary, not the executive branch — with the limited but critical mandate of enforcing federal court orders, including contempt orders, against executive branch officials who refuse to comply. This service does not replace the Marshals Service's broader law enforcement functions. It exists solely to ensure that when a federal court orders an executive official to act or refrain from acting, there is an enforcement mechanism that does not depend on the cooperation of the official being ordered. The constitutional basis is Article III: the judicial power implies the power to enforce judicial orders, and that power is meaningless if its enforcement depends on the branch being compelled. The scope must be narrow — enforcement of specific court orders against named officials — to avoid creating a parallel law enforcement apparatus that would raise its own separation-of-powers

concerns. But the narrow function it serves is existential: without it, judicial review of executive action is advisory rather than mandatory, and the rule of law is a suggestion the executive may accept or decline at its convenience.

Fourth: Congressional enforcement reform. Revive and codify the inherent contempt power — the historical authority of each chamber of Congress to enforce its own subpoenas through arrest and detention by the Sergeant at Arms, without referral to the DOJ. This power was exercised routinely in the 19th century and has atrophied not because it was found unconstitutional but because Congress chose the more convenient — and less effective — route of criminal referral to the DOJ. In an era when the DOJ will not prosecute executive officials at the president's direction, the inherent contempt power is the only mechanism through which Congress can enforce its oversight authority without depending on the cooperation of the branch it is overseeing. Establish statutory procedures for the exercise of inherent contempt — due process protections, time limits, judicial review — so that the power is exercised with constitutional rigor rather than as a political weapon. And fund the Sergeant at Arms's office with the institutional capacity to execute this function — because a power that exists on paper but cannot be exercised in practice is a power that does not exist.

A note on the constitutional stakes: every one of these proposals will be challenged, and several will reach the Supreme Court. The unitary executive theory, as currently advanced by the administration and supported by at least some members of the Court's conservative majority, holds that all executive power is vested in the president and that any structural insulation of executive branch functions from presidential control is constitutionally impermissible. This agenda rejects that theory on the merits — as argued in section F — but also recognizes that the theory has adherents on the current bench. The court reform proposals in section E are therefore not merely desirable in their own right. They are prerequisites for the enforceability of the structural reforms proposed throughout Part III. A court that embraces the maximalist unitary executive theory will strike down DOJ independence, the Office of Public Integrity, and the Judicial Enforcement Service. A reformed court — expanded, term-limited, and selected through processes designed to resist ideological capture — may sustain them. The sequencing matters: court reform enables enforcement reform, enforcement reform enables structural reform, and structural reform enables everything else in this agenda. Without the enforcement mechanisms described here, every other proposal in this document is a law that depends on the goodwill of the people it was designed to constrain — and the current moment has demonstrated, with painful clarity, how much that goodwill is worth

H. Senate, Electoral College, and State Democracy

The Electoral College and the structure of the Senate are the two most powerful mechanisms by which minority rule is sustained in American democracy. Wyoming’s 580,000 residents have the same Senate representation as California’s 39 million. The Electoral College has twice in this century delivered the presidency to the candidate who lost the popular vote. Rather than abstract structural complaints, these are the architecture through which a shrinking demographic minority maintains veto power over the legislative and executive branches of government.

Consider a National Popular Vote Interstate Compact as the most achievable near-term path to presidential election reform. Add DC and Puerto Rico statehood — as a democratic imperative: these millions of American citizens are governed without proportional representation in the body that makes their laws. Restore the talking filibuster, eliminating the ability of a single senator to silently block legislation supported by a majority. Build a progressive ALEC equivalent — not for lobbying, but to model legislation, coordinate state-level strategies, and sustain investment in state legislative capacities through community engagement. Ban state preemption of local progressive policies, ending the practice by which conservative state legislatures override minimum wage increases, rent stabilization, police reform, and environmental protections adopted by cities and counties. Ranked-choice voting to reduce spoiler effects, encourage coalition-building, and give voters the freedom to support their actual preferences without strategic calculation. Institute elected civilian police oversight boards with subpoena power at every level of government.

I. Structural Reform of Congress

The dysfunction of the United States Congress deserves special attention, mainly because it isn't a mystery or accident. It is the product of specific structural decisions made by identifiable people for identifiable reasons, most of them having nothing to do with effective governance and everything to do with the consolidation of partisan power. Understanding the dysfunction requires naming the decisions and the people who made them, because the pretense that Congress is broken by impersonal forces — polarization, social media, the decline of civic virtue — obscures the mechanical reality that a small number of procedural arrangements, most of them informal and all of them changeable, have converted the legislative branch of the world's oldest continuous democracy into an institution that cannot perform its most basic function: *bringing legislation supported by a majority of its members to a vote*.

The single most consequential of these arrangements is the one misnamed the Hastert Rule — misnamed because Dennis Hastert, the convicted child abuser who served as Speaker from 1999 to 2007, merely formalized a practice that Newt Gingrich had already established during his speakership. The rule is simple: the Speaker will not bring a bill to the floor unless it has the support of a majority of the majority party. The effect is equally simple: legislation that would pass the House with bipartisan support — a majority of Democrats plus a minority of Republicans, or vice versa — **never receives a vote**. The Speaker's gatekeeping power, which was designed to manage floor time and prioritize the legislative calendar, has been converted into a veto exercised by the most ideologically extreme wing of whichever party holds the majority, because the "majority of the majority" threshold means that the median vote in the majority party — not the median vote in the House — determines the legislative agenda. A bill supported by sixty percent of the House dies in silence if it cannot command fifty-one percent of the majority caucus. The discharge petition — the only procedural mechanism by which rank-and-file members can force a floor vote without the Speaker's consent — requires two hundred eighteen signatures and carries the near-certain promise of leadership retaliation against any majority-party member who signs it. It has succeeded fewer than two dozen times in the last century. **So…abolish the Hastert Rule.** And do so not as a matter of informal courtesy or Speaker discretion, but as a formal change to House rules. Any bill with the demonstrated support of a majority of the full House — verified through a threshold of co-sponsors or a petition process with a lower signature requirement than the

current discharge petition — must receive a floor vote within a defined timeframe. The Speaker's role is to manage the legislative calendar, not to decide which majorities are permitted to govern.

But the Hastert Rule is only one mechanism in an architecture of dysfunction that Gingrich designed with a coherence that deserves to be understood as the strategic achievement it was, however destructive its consequences. When Gingrich became Speaker in 1995, he inherited a House in which bipartisan relationships were sustained by a social infrastructure that had operated for more than a century: members of both parties lived in Washington with their families, their children attended the same schools, their spouses socialized on weekends, and the personal relationships formed across party lines made it psychologically difficult — not impossible, but difficult — to treat a colleague as an enemy on the floor when you had been at his daughter's birthday party that Saturday. **Gingrich dismantled this infrastructure deliberately.** He changed the congressional workweek from five days to three — Tuesday through Thursday — and encouraged Republican members to leave their families in their home districts rather than relocate to Washington. The stated justification was constituent connection. The operational effect was to eliminate the cross-cutting social ties that had served as a constraint on partisan warfare. Former Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott described the consequence with admirable directness: when you live across the street from your political opponent, when you know his children, when you have been to dinner at his house, it becomes difficult to go to the floor and vilify him the next day. Gingrich understood this. He understood it, and he ended it, because bipartisan relationships were obstacles to the project of total partisan warfare that was his explicit strategy for building a permanent Republican majority. The Tuesday-through-Thursday schedule remains in effect thirty years later. Both parties have found it convenient. Neither has paid the political price for maintaining a commuter Congress whose members spend more time fundraising in their districts and traveling to and from airports than they spend in the institution they were elected to serve.

Even the language of this shift was itself engineered. In a now-infamous GOPAC memo, Gingrich instructed Republican candidates to describe Democrats using words including "betray," "bizarre," "decay," "destroy," "devour," "greed," "lie," "pathetic," "radical," "selfish," "shame," "sick," "steal," and "traitors." University of Maryland political scientist Lilliana Mason has identified this as a deliberate breach of the social norms that had previously constrained partisan rhetoric — not an escalation within the existing rules of engagement but a decision to abandon the rules altogether. The weaponization of the House Ethics Committee, the strategic use of C-SPAN to deliver partisan attacks to empty chambers, the government shutdowns of 1995 and 1996 — each of these was a specific tactical innovation in service of a strategic vision in which Congress was not a deliberative body that produced legislation through negotiation but a theater of war in which the only objective was the destruction of the opposing party's credibility and the consolidation of one's own power. Julian Zelizer's judgment in *Burning Down the House* is precise: Gingrich invented or perfected many of the things Americans dislike most about Congress.

The Senate has its own structural pathologies, chief among them the filibuster — the rule requiring sixty votes to advance most legislation, which has been transformed from a rarely invoked procedural protection into a routine instrument of minority obstruction that effectively requires a supermajority to govern. The filibuster is not in the Constitution. It is a Senate rule, changeable by a simple majority vote,

and its preservation serves the interests of whichever party holds fewer than fifty seats at any given moment — which is why neither party has eliminated it permanently despite decades of complaints from whichever party holds the majority. At minimum, restore the requirement that a filibuster be an actual filibuster — continuous physical presence on the floor, speaking, with a defined endpoint — rather than the costless procedural objection it has become, in which a single senator's office can block legislation without the senator so much as leaving his desk.

Beyond these headline dysfunctions lies a deeper structural collapse that receives less attention because it is less dramatic but no less consequential. Regular order in appropriations — the process by which Congress is supposed to pass twelve individual spending bills through committee markup, floor debate, amendment, and bicameral conference — has effectively ceased to function. The government now operates through continuing resolutions and omnibus spending bills assembled by leadership behind closed doors, presented to rank-and-file members with hours to read thousands of pages, and passed under the threat of government shutdown if anyone objects. This isn't governance anymore. It is hostage negotiation conducted on a recurring schedule, and it produces policy that reflects the priorities of leadership (and the lobbyists who have access to leadership) rather than the deliberative judgment of the committees whose members have subject-matter expertise. Conference committees — the bicameral bodies that once reconciled differences between House and Senate versions of legislation through structured negotiation — have been largely replaced by leadership-to-leadership deals that exclude the members who wrote and debated the bills in question. The Rules Committee, which is supposed to set the terms for floor debate, has been converted into an extension of the Speaker's office, routinely issuing closed rules that prohibit amendments and limit debate on major legislation to a few hours.

So…restore regular order. Pass individual appropriations bills through open committee markup and floor debate with amendment opportunities. Require conference committees for all major legislation. Reform the Rules Committee to include proportional minority representation and require open rules as the default for all legislation except in defined emergency circumstances. Restore the five-day workweek — as a structural condition for the kind of sustained engagement, negotiation, and relationship-building that democratic governance requires. Members of Congress should live in the city where they govern, as members did for most of the nation's history, and the social infrastructure that Gingrich dismantled should be rebuilt with the same deliberateness with which it was destroyed.

The motion to vacate the chair — the mechanism by which a single member can force a vote on removing the Speaker — has also been weaponized in recent years to give a handful of ideological extremists leverage over the entire legislative agenda. This is yet another instrument of minority rule within the majority party, and its recent deployment has produced exactly the chaos and paralysis it was designed to produce. So raise the threshold for the motion to vacate so that it requires a meaningful fraction of the full House rather than a single member, and require that the motion be debated and voted on within a defined timeframe rather than held as a perpetual threat.

Of course, none of these reforms will function as intended if the underlying incentive structure remains unchanged. Members of Congress currently face stronger incentives to obstruct than to legislate, to perform for cable news cameras than to negotiate in committee rooms, and to maintain ideological

purity for primary voters than to produce results for the general electorate. The structural reforms described here address the mechanisms through which those incentives operate — the Hastert Rule, the truncated workweek, the filibuster, the collapse of regular order, the weaponized motion to vacate — but they do not address the deeper drivers: gerrymandered districts that make general elections irrelevant and primaries the only contests that matter, the unlimited flow of dark money that rewards ideological extremism, and the media ecosystem that profits from conflict and punishes compromise. Those drivers are addressed elsewhere in this agenda. The point here is narrower but nevertheless essential: **the internal rules and practices of Congress itself have been deliberately engineered to produce dysfunction, and they can be deliberately re-engineered to produce governance.** The obstacle isn't complexity, it's the political will of the people who currently benefit from the dysfunction — which is to say, the leadership of both parties, who have discovered that a broken Congress is easier to control than a functional one.

I. Sortition as a Cross-Cutting Governance Principle

Every institution addressed in this agenda — from redistricting commissions to media accountability boards to technology oversight panels to the citizens' councils themselves — faces the same structural vulnerability: the people empowered to regulate, oversee, or adjudicate a domain are drawn from, appointed by, or answerable to the interests they are supposed to constrain. Redistricting commissions staffed by partisan appointees produce partisan maps. Media oversight populated by industry alumni oversees the industry that will employ them again when their terms end. Technology review boards whose members are selected by legislators who depend on technology-sector campaign contributions produce the kind of regulation that technology companies draft for themselves. Judicial merit-selection panels dominated by the bar associations and political networks that produced the existing judiciary reproduce the existing judiciary. The common defect is not corruption in the individual sense — though corruption is present — but structural capture: the systematic tendency of regulatory and oversight bodies to converge on the interests of the institutions they govern, because the selection mechanisms that populate those bodies draw from the same social, professional, and economic networks those institutions dominate.

Sortition — appointment by lottery from the eligible population — is the oldest democratic mechanism for breaking this convergence, and the one most thoroughly vindicated by contemporary evidence. The Athenians, who invented the practice, understood the logic with a clarity that should embarrass modern democracies that have forgotten it: elections are oligarchic because they select for wealth, name recognition, and rhetorical skill, all of which correlate with existing power; sortition is democratic because it gives every eligible citizen an equal probability of serving, which no election has ever done or can do. This isn't an antiquarian argument but a structural one, and the modern evidence confirms it. Ireland's Citizens' Assembly, composed of ninety-nine randomly selected citizens, deliberated on questions that the Irish parliament had been unable or unwilling to resolve for decades — including abortion and same-sex marriage — and produced recommendations that were subsequently approved by the public in referenda by decisive margins. The process worked precisely because the assembly members had no re-election incentive, no donor base to protect, no party leadership to appease, and no career in politics to advance or jeopardize. They were ordinary citizens given access to expert testimony,

facilitated deliberation, and time — and they produced better outcomes than the professional political class that had avoided these questions for a generation. France's Convention *Citoyenne pour le Climat*, composed of one hundred fifty randomly selected citizens, produced detailed climate policy recommendations that, while only partially implemented by the Macron government, demonstrated that randomly selected bodies could engage with technical complexity at a level that the common objection — that ordinary citizens lack the expertise to deliberate on policy — has been empirically refuted. The OECD has documented the accelerating adoption of deliberative mini-publics across its member states since 2010 and has identified them as among the most promising institutional innovations for restoring public trust in governance.

This agenda proposes sortition as a cross-cutting governance principle — not a single institution but a design methodology applied wherever independence from captured networks is essential to the body's function. The mechanism is consistent across applications: a two-stage process in which threshold qualifications define the eligible pool, and random selection from that pool determines membership. The qualifications are minimal and domain-specific — citizenship and residency for citizens' assemblies, demonstrated literacy in the relevant domain for technical oversight boards, absence of disqualifying conflicts of interest for judicial merit-selection panels — and their purpose is not to filter for expertise but to ensure that those selected are capable of engaging meaningfully with the deliberative process and the expert testimony it provides. The random selection from the qualified pool is the structural guarantee against capture: no interest group, no political party, no industry association can reliably stack a body whose membership is determined by lottery. Short terms — typically one to two years — and absolute prohibition on reappointment prevent the gradual socialization into incumbent networks that transforms independent regulators into cooperative partners of the regulated over time. Regular turnover maintains viewpoint diversity and prevents the formation of insider cultures that replicate the very capture the mechanism is designed to prevent.

The applications span the full range of governance functions this agenda addresses. Redistricting commissions selected by sortition from the eligible population of each state eliminate the single most consequential form of democratic self-dealing in American politics: legislators choosing their voters rather than voters choosing their legislators. Independent redistricting commissions exist in some states, but most are populated through appointment processes that reintroduce partisan influence through the back door; sortition closes that door. Judicial merit-selection panels — the bodies that screen and recommend candidates for judicial appointment — are currently dominated by bar associations and political networks whose members have professional relationships with the very candidates they evaluate; sortition-selected panels drawn from a pool of citizens with basic legal literacy would break this circularity without eliminating professional input, which would be provided through expert testimony rather than panel membership. Media accountability boards, proposed elsewhere in this agenda as a mechanism for overseeing compliance with public-interest obligations in the information commons, must be independent of both the government and the industry they oversee — a double-independence requirement that no appointment mechanism controlled by either can satisfy. Technology oversight boards face the same structural problem in a domain where the technical expertise required for informed oversight is concentrated almost exclusively in the industry being overseen, creating a revolving door that sortition can interrupt by ensuring that a majority of board

members have no professional ties to the technology sector and receive their technical education through the deliberative process itself rather than through prior employment. Carbon credit market oversight, financial regulation review panels, public university governing boards — in each case, the question is the same: how do you populate a body whose function requires independence from the interests it governs? And in each case, the answer is the same: you cannot appoint your way to independence, because appointment is itself a mechanism of influence. You can only randomize your way to it.

The design must be consistent with Elinor Ostrom's principles for commons governance — the empirically grounded framework for institutional design that Ostrom derived from decades of studying how communities successfully manage shared resources without either privatization or centralized state control. Ostrom's principles — clearly defined boundaries, proportional equivalence between costs and benefits, collective-choice arrangements that include affected parties, monitoring by those accountable to the users, graduated sanctions, accessible conflict-resolution mechanisms, and recognition by higher authorities of local governance arrangements — describe the conditions under which self-governing institutions succeed rather than degenerate into capture, free-riding, or authoritarian control. Sortition bodies designed along these lines are not floating abstractions imposed from above. They are embedded in the communities they serve, bounded by defined jurisdictions, subject to transparent monitoring by the public they represent, and empowered with genuine decision-making authority proportional to their deliberative mandate.

The binding-versus-advisory question must be addressed directly, because it determines whether sortition bodies are a genuine governance innovation or an elaborate mechanism for generating recommendations that elected officials can ignore. The Irish experience illustrates both possibilities: the Citizens' Assembly's recommendations on marriage equality and abortion were put to referendum and implemented, transforming Irish law; its recommendations on climate policy were received by the government with considerably less urgency and only partially acted upon. The pattern is predictable: elected officials embrace sortition outcomes that align with their preferences or that resolve politically toxic questions they prefer not to own, and shelve outcomes that threaten their interests or their donors' interests. The structural remedy is statutory mandate — not advisory authority but binding authority within defined domains, subject to the same constitutional constraints and judicial review that apply to any governmental decision. A redistricting commission whose maps are advisory is a commission whose maps will be overridden whenever they inconvenience the incumbent majority. A redistricting commission whose maps are binding and subject only to judicial review for constitutional compliance is a commission that actually redistricts. The same principle applies across domains: sortition bodies must have teeth, or they will be decorative.

PART IV: ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION

Here we are countering supply-side economics, deregulation, financialization, wage suppression, shareholder primacy, dynastic wealth, debt slavery, and the framing of public investment as distortion.

A. Labor, Wages, and Worker Ownership

The divergence between American worker productivity and American worker compensation is the defining economic fact of the past half-century, visible in every dataset that measures the two quantities side by side. From 1948 to 1973, productivity and hourly compensation rose in near-lockstep — workers produced more, and they were paid more, and the relationship between those two facts was understood as both economically rational and morally self-evident. After 1973, the lines diverged. Productivity continued to climb. Compensation flatlined. Between 1979 and the present, net productivity rose by approximately sixty percent while hourly compensation for nonsupervisory workers rose by less than sixteen percent in real terms. The difference — the vast and widening gulf between what American workers produce and what they are paid for producing it — did not vanish. It was captured. It flowed upward into corporate profits, executive compensation, shareholder returns, and the accumulation of wealth at the top of the income distribution on a scale not seen since the Gilded Age. This was not an act of nature. It was the product of specific policy choices: the deliberate weakening of organized labor, the erosion of the minimum wage in real terms, the deregulation of financial markets, the globalization of supply chains under trade agreements that protected capital mobility while offering no comparable protections for labor, and tax policy that systematically shifted the burden from capital to wages. Every one of these choices was contested at the time it was made. Every one was made anyway. The cumulative result is an economy in which a full-time worker earning the federal minimum wage cannot afford a two-bedroom apartment at fair market rent in any county in the United States — not a single one — and in which the median worker's share of national income has fallen to levels that would have been considered politically intolerable a generation ago. The middle class was once understood as the foundation of democratic stability; it is now a nostalgic abstraction.

Raise the federal minimum wage to twenty dollars per hour and index it permanently to median wage growth, so that the purchasing power of the lowest-paid workers is never again permitted to erode through legislative inaction while the cost of housing, healthcare, food, and education continues to climb. The current federal minimum of $7.25, unchanged since 2009, is not a wage floor. It is a policy of managed impoverishment — a number so disconnected from the actual cost of subsistence that its persistence can only be explained by the political power of the industries that benefit from paying it. Indexing to median wage growth — instead of inflation — ensures that the minimum wage tracks actual productive capacity. Inflation indices can be gamed through methodological adjustments and substitution effects; median wages cannot. If the economy grows, the lowest-paid workers participate in that growth. If it contracts, the adjustment follows. Most industrialized democracies have managed their wage floors this way for decades — the United States is the outlier, and the results of that outlier status are visible in every failing metric of working-class economic security.

But raising the wage floor, while necessary, addresses only the most visible symptom of a labor market in which the structural power of workers relative to employers has been systematically dismantled over four decades. The deeper intervention is the restoration — and expansion — of collective bargaining. Repeal the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947, which gutted the National Labor Relations Act by prohibiting sympathy strikes, enabling state-level right-to-work laws, requiring union loyalty oaths, and providing employers with a toolkit of legal delay tactics that have made union organizing campaigns into wars of attrition that most workers cannot sustain. Taft-Hartley did not merely constrain union power. It restructured the legal environment so that the act of organizing — of workers exercising their collective leverage against employers who possess every other form of structural advantage — became so procedurally burdensome and legally perilous that union membership declined from roughly a third of the private-sector workforce in the 1950s to approximately six percent today. This decline did not occur because workers lost interest in collective representation. Every survey of worker attitudes conducted in the past two decades shows that a substantial majority of nonunion workers would vote for union representation if they believed they could do so without employer retaliation. The decline occurred because the legal framework was redesigned to make employer retaliation effective and union organizing prohibitively difficult.

Implement card-check unionization — the Employee Free Choice Act model — which recognizes a union when a majority of workers in a bargaining unit sign authorization cards, eliminating the employer-controlled election process that currently serves as the primary venue for intimidation, delay, and the systematic firing of union organizers. The current NLRB election process is not a democratic exercise. It is a managed contest conducted on the employer's premises, on the employer's timeline, under conditions in which the employer has unrestricted access to workers through mandatory meetings while union organizers are excluded from the workplace. Captive-audience meetings — in which workers are required to attend anti-union presentations during work hours, on penalty of termination — remain legal. The firing of workers for union activity, while technically prohibited, is punished with remedies so weak (typically back pay minus interim earnings, imposed years after the violation) that employers routinely calculate the cost of breaking the law as lower than the cost of bargaining with an organized workforce. Card-check does not eliminate the right of workers to vote on unionization. It eliminates the employer's ability to manipulate the conditions under which that vote takes place.

Adopt sectoral bargaining — the system used throughout most of Western Europe and Scandinavia in which wages and working conditions are negotiated not enterprise by enterprise but across entire industries, establishing baseline standards that apply to all workers and all employers within a sector. The enterprise-level bargaining model that prevails in the United States creates a structural disincentive to unionize: a single employer that recognizes a union and raises wages faces a competitive disadvantage against non-union competitors in the same industry, which means that the employer's rational incentive is to resist unionization regardless of any abstract commitment to fair labor practices. Sectoral bargaining eliminates this dynamic by standardizing labor costs across the industry, removing the competitive penalty for treating workers decently and the competitive reward for exploiting them. It also extends the benefits of collective bargaining to workers who are not themselves union members — the overwhelmingly majority of the American workforce — by establishing floors that apply universally

rather than only to the diminishing fraction of workers with the institutional leverage to negotiate individually.

These reforms address the distribution of wages within the existing ownership structure. But the deeper structural question — the one that most labor policy discussions avoid because it challenges the foundational assumptions of American capitalism — is who owns the enterprise and who controls the decisions that determine how the value created by labor is allocated. The five-stage graduated transition to worker ownership is designed to answer that question through a process that is evolutionary process, building institutional capacity and practical experience at each stage before advancing to the next.

The first stage is profit-sharing — a requirement that enterprises above a specified size allocate a defined percentage of annual profits to employees, distributed proportionally. This is the least structurally disruptive intervention and the one most widely adopted in existing practice; its purpose in the sequence is to establish the principle that workers have a legitimate claim on the value they produce, and to create the financial literacy and institutional infrastructure for the stages that follow. The second stage is equity sharing — the mandatory issuance or allocation of ownership shares to workers over time, so that the workforce accumulates a genuine ownership stake in the enterprise , and one that cannot be revoked by executive decision. The third stage is board representation — the model already in practice throughout much of Northern Europe, in which workers elect representatives to corporate boards with full voting rights on strategic decisions, executive compensation, mergers, layoffs, and capital allocation. German codetermination law has required worker board representation in large firms since 1976; the German economy has not collapsed, and the evidence suggests that codetermination improves long-term firm performance by constraining the short-term extraction strategies that maximize shareholder returns at the expense of institutional stability. The fourth stage is right of first refusal for cooperative conversion — a requirement that when an enterprise is sold, closed, or transferred, the existing workforce has the legal right to purchase the enterprise and convert it to a cooperative structure before any external buyer is considered. This addresses one of the most destructive dynamics in American capitalism: the acquisition, asset-stripping, and closure of productive enterprises by private equity firms and absentee owners whose relationship to the workforce, the community, and the long-term viability of the enterprise is purely extractive. The fifth stage is cooperative structure as a condition of public support — enterprises that receive public subsidies, tax incentives, government contracts, or preferential regulatory treatment must adopt cooperative governance structures as a condition of that support, on the principle that public resources should not be used to subsidize private extraction.

The end-state vision isn’t to abolish markets, or to nationalize industry. It is a dual-sector economy organized around a “Universal Social Backbone” of nonprofit worker-owned cooperatives providing essential services — healthcare, housing, utilities, education, childcare, elder care, basic financial services — and a competitive sector of for-profit worker-owned cooperatives for everything else. The universal social backbone ensures that access to the necessities of a dignified life is not contingent on market position, employment status, or the accident of geography. The for-profit cooperative sector preserves competitive dynamism, innovation incentives, and consumer choice . What it eliminates is

extraction: wealth flows to the people who generate it, not to a shareholder class whose contribution to the productive process is the mere possession of capital.[8][10]

Mondragon has made the case through its success. A federation of more than eighty worker-owned cooperatives in the Basque region of Spain employing roughly eighty thousand people across manufacturing, retail, finance, and education — has operated on this model for nearly seven decades, surviving recessions, financial crises, and competitive pressures that destroyed conventional firms in the same industries and the same markets. Mondragon's internal wage ratio — the ratio between the highest-paid and lowest-paid worker — is capped at a multiple of six to one in most cooperatives, compared to the average S&P 500 CEO-to-worker ratio of approximately three hundred to one. The question is not whether cooperative enterprise can function at scale. The question is whether a political system captured by the beneficiaries of the existing ownership structure will permit the transition. The five-stage sequence is designed to build the institutional reality incrementally, creating facts on the ground that make the final stage not a radical departure but the logical completion of a process already well underway.

B. Taxation

The American tax system is not broken. It is functioning exactly as it was redesigned to function over the past five decades: to shift the burden of funding public goods from those most able to pay to those least able to resist. The top marginal income tax rate in the United States was 91 percent from 1954 through 1963 — the period that Americans of all political persuasions retrospectively identify as the era of greatest shared prosperity, strongest middle-class growth, and most robust economic expansion in the nation's history. The effective rate paid by the top 1 percent during this period was approximately 42 percent — substantially lower than the marginal rate, owing to deductions and shelters that have always existed, but still meaningfully higher than what the wealthiest Americans pay today. The current top marginal rate is 37 percent, and the effective federal income tax rate on the top 1 percent has fallen to roughly 26 percent. The effective rate on the top 0.1 percent — the billionaire class — is lower still, because the majority of their income arrives not as wages but as capital gains, which are taxed at preferential rates that no economic theory can justify on efficiency grounds and that no moral theory can justify on fairness grounds. Warren Buffett's observation that he pays a lower effective tax rate than his secretary is not an anecdote. It is a structural description of a tax code designed to privilege wealth over work.

Top marginal rates of at least 50 percent on income above $1 million. This is not a radical proposal. It is a return to approximately the rate that prevailed under Richard Nixon — hardly a progressive icon — and it remains well below the rates that obtained during the period of greatest economic growth and broadest shared prosperity in American history. The argument that high marginal rates suppress economic growth has been tested empirically and has failed: the periods of highest marginal taxation in American history coincide with the periods of strongest economic performance, and the periods of lowest marginal taxation — the post-Reagan era — coincide with the slowest growth in median wages, the greatest concentration of wealth, and the most severe financial instability. The relationship is not coincidental. High marginal rates constrain the accumulation of dynastic wealth, reduce the return on

rent-seeking relative to productive investment, and generate revenue that funds the public goods — infrastructure, education, research, healthcare — on which private-sector productivity depends. The causal arrow runs in both directions: taxes fund public investment, and public investment drives the growth that generates taxable income. The supply-side fiction that cutting taxes for the wealthy produces growth that trickles down to everyone else has had forty years to prove itself. It has produced instead the greatest concentration of wealth since the Gilded Age and a working class whose real wages have barely moved since the theory was first applied.

Tax capital gains as ordinary income. The preferential rate on capital gains — currently capped at 20 percent for the highest earners, compared to the 37 percent top rate on wages — is the single most consequential subsidy for wealth concentration in the tax code. It means that a hedge fund manager who earns $500 million in carried interest pays a lower marginal rate than a nurse who earns $80,000 in salary. The justification — that lower capital gains rates encourage investment — collapses under empirical scrutiny: the periods of highest capital gains taxation in American history were also periods of robust investment, because investment decisions are driven by expected returns on productive activity, not by the marginal tax rate on those returns. What the preferential rate does encourage is the reclassification of ordinary income as capital gains through financial engineering — carried interest, stock options, partnership structures, and the other mechanisms by which the wealthiest Americans convert what is functionally wage income into a category taxed at nearly half the rate. Eliminate the preferential rate. Tax all income the same, regardless of whether it was earned by labor or by the ownership of assets. And eliminate the stepped-up basis at death — the provision that allows unrealized capital gains to escape taxation entirely when assets are inherited, a loophole that functions as a permanent subsidy for dynastic wealth and that costs the Treasury tens of billions of dollars annually in revenue that was never collected and never will be.

A wealth tax of two percent annually on net worth above $50 million, rising to three percent above $1 billion. The concentration of wealth in the United States has reached levels that are incompatible with democratic governance — not as a rhetorical flourish but as a structural description. When three individuals possess more wealth than the bottom half of the American population combined, the political system cannot function as a democracy in any meaningful sense, because the capacity of concentrated wealth to influence elections, shape legislation, fund litigation, and capture regulatory agencies exceeds the capacity of democratic participation to counterbalance it. A wealth tax addresses what income taxes cannot: the accumulated stock of wealth that generates political power independent of any annual income flow. The administrative challenges are real but not insurmountable — multiple European countries have implemented wealth taxes, and the failures (France, Sweden) are attributable to specific design flaws (narrow bases, easy avoidance through emigration) that can be addressed through exit taxes, broad asset coverage, and international cooperation. The revenues are substantial: estimates of a two-percent wealth tax on fortunes above $50 million project annual revenues in the hundreds of billions — revenue sufficient to fund a significant portion of the public investment agenda described throughout this document.

A corporate minimum tax of 25 percent on book income — the profits corporations report to their shareholders, as opposed to the income they report to the IRS, which is systematically lower because

the tax code permits deductions, credits, and accounting strategies that reduce taxable income far below actual economic profit. In recent years, dozens of the most profitable corporations in America — including companies earning billions in annual profit — have paid zero federal income tax or received net refunds. This is not tax evasion. It is tax compliance — compliance with a code that has been systematically rewritten, provision by provision, to permit exactly this outcome. A minimum tax on book income closes the gap between what corporations tell their shareholders they earned and what they tell the government they owe.

A financial transaction tax of 0.1 percent on stock, bond, and derivative trades, with an exemption for retirement accounts so that ordinary savers are not affected. The purpose is twofold: to generate substantial revenue from the sector of the economy that produces the most income and contributes the least to productive economic activity, and to impose a friction cost on the high-frequency trading strategies that destabilize markets, extract rents from long-term investors, and serve no economic function other than the enrichment of the firms that execute them. Eleven European Union member states have implemented or committed to implementing financial transaction taxes. The United Kingdom has taxed stock trades at 0.5 percent since 1694 — the London Stock Exchange has survived.

An estate tax reaching 65 percent on estates above $1 billion, with robust anti-avoidance provisions including the elimination of dynasty trusts, the taxation of transfers to grantor-retained annuity trusts, and the closure of valuation discounts that allow wealthy families to transfer assets at artificially reduced values. The estate tax is the only mechanism in the American tax code that directly addresses dynastic wealth — the intergenerational transmission of economic power that, left unchecked, produces a hereditary aristocracy indistinguishable in its political effects from the one the founders explicitly rejected. The current estate tax — which applies only to estates above approximately $13 million and is avoided by the wealthiest families through trust structures designed for exactly that purpose — is a vestige of a principle that has been hollowed out to the point of symbolic irrelevance. Restore the principle. The founders did not fight a revolution against hereditary privilege to create a republic in which privilege is inherited tax-free.

Eliminate the carried interest loophole — the provision that allows private equity and hedge fund managers to classify their management fees as capital gains rather than ordinary income, reducing their tax rate by nearly half. This is not a complex policy question. It is a straightforward subsidy for one of the wealthiest professions in the country, preserved through decades of lobbying by the financial industry against bipartisan proposals to eliminate it. Every president since Obama has proposed closing the loophole. None has succeeded, because the political power of the beneficiaries exceeds the political will of the legislators who claim to oppose it. Close it.

C. Debt Relief

The American economy runs on debt — not as a temporary condition to be resolved but as a structural feature designed to extract wealth from those who have the least and transfer it to those who have the most. Student debt, medical debt, and predatory consumer lending are not unfortunate byproducts of an otherwise functional system. They are the system — mechanisms by which the costs of public goods that should be collectively funded (education, healthcare) are instead individualized, financialized, and

converted into revenue streams for creditors whose profit depends on the borrower's inability to escape.

Cancel federal student loan debt. The $1.84 trillion in outstanding student loan debt — carried by nearly 43 million Americans, with 20 percent in default and millions more in delinquency as of 2025 — is the consequence of a forty-year experiment in replacing public investment in higher education with individual borrowing. In 1980, a student at a public university could pay tuition with a summer job. By 2025, the average bachelor's degree recipient graduates with approximately $30,000 in debt, and graduate and professional students routinely carry six-figure balances that will shape every financial decision they make for decades — when to marry, whether to have children, whether to buy a home, whether to take the public-interest job that pays $45,000 or the corporate job that pays enough to service the debt. This is not a market functioning efficiently. It is a market functioning extractively — converting the aspiration for education into a debt instrument that disciplines the borrower's life choices long after the education is complete. Cancel the debt. Fund public higher education as a public good. And reform the bankruptcy code so that student loans are dischargeable like every other form of consumer debt — because the special protection that student loans currently enjoy in bankruptcy is not a neutral legal classification. It is a subsidy for the lending industry, enacted at the lending industry's request, and maintained because the borrowers it harms lack the political power to change it.

Abolish medical debt as a legal category. No person in a civilized society should be bankrupted by illness. And yet medical debt is the single most common factor cited in American personal bankruptcy filings, with studies consistently finding that over 60 percent of bankruptcies involve medical debt as a contributing cause. A 2026 study from Johns Hopkins found that Americans carrying medical debt have a 44 percent higher probability of experiencing housing instability — difficulty paying rent, eviction, or foreclosure — in the following year. The United States is the only wealthy country on earth where a cancer diagnosis is also a financial catastrophe — where the question "can I afford to be treated?" is a routine part of the patient experience. Medical debt should not be collectible through wage garnishment, should not appear on credit reports, should not be sellable to third-party debt buyers, and should not be enforceable through litigation. The underlying problem — a healthcare system that generates medical debt in the first place — is addressed in section F. But the immediate relief of abolishing medical debt as a legal instrument of collection is a standalone moral imperative that does not need to wait for systemic healthcare reform.

Usury caps at 15 percent on all consumer lending. The average credit card interest rate in the United States now exceeds 20 percent — a rate that, applied to the revolving balances carried by millions of American households, functions not as a price for credit but as a wealth-extraction mechanism that traps borrowers in permanent indebtedness. Payday lenders charge effective annual rates that routinely exceed 400 percent. The argument that usury caps reduce credit access has been tested in the states that have implemented them and has not been borne out — credit availability in capped states is comparable to uncapped states, because lenders adjust their business models rather than exiting the market. What usury caps do eliminate is the most predatory lending — the loans designed not to be repaid but to generate fees and interest in perpetuity. Fifteen percent is not an arbitrary number. It

approximates the historical boundary above which lending shifts from a service that enables economic activity to an extractive practice that impedes it.

Strengthen mortgage protections against the predatory practices that produced the 2008 financial crisis and that have reemerged in modified form through the unregulated private credit markets described in section D. Mandatory thirty-day pre-foreclosure mediation. Prohibition of balloon payments, negative amortization, and adjustable-rate structures designed to offer artificially low initial payments that reset to unaffordable levels. Right of first refusal for homeowners facing foreclosure to purchase their property at fair market value before it is sold to institutional investors. The 2008 crisis was not a natural disaster. It was the predictable consequence of a deregulated mortgage market in which the incentive structure rewarded origination volume rather than loan quality — and the people who paid the price were not the executives who designed the system but the families who lost their homes.

D. Financial Regulation and De-Financialization

The American economy has been financialized — a term that describes not merely the growth of the financial sector but its structural dominance over the productive economy. In 1970, the financial sector accounted for approximately 14 percent of domestic corporate profits. By 2024, that figure had exceeded 25 percent and in some years approached 30 percent. This is not because finance has become proportionally more productive. It is because finance has become proportionally more extractive — capturing a growing share of the value created by the real economy through mechanisms that add cost without adding value: trading commissions, management fees, interest payments, insurance premiums, and the Byzantine complexity of a financial system whose opacity is not a bug but a business model.

Reinstate Glass-Steagall — the Depression-era law that separated commercial banking (where ordinary people deposit their savings) from investment banking (where financial institutions make speculative bets with other people's money). Glass-Steagall's repeal in 1999 — signed by President Clinton, championed by both parties, and lobbied for relentlessly by the financial industry — was the single most consequential act of financial deregulation in American history. It permitted the creation of institutions that were simultaneously taking deposits insured by the federal government and making leveraged bets on mortgage-backed securities whose risk characteristics they did not understand and did not care to understand, because the profits from origination and trading were captured privately while the losses, when they materialized, were socialized through a taxpayer bailout that exceeded $700 billion in direct expenditures and trillions more in Federal Reserve guarantees. The argument for repeal was that the separation was outdated — that modern financial institutions needed the flexibility to compete globally. The result of that flexibility was the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression, the destruction of approximately $13 trillion in American household wealth, the loss of nearly nine million jobs, and the foreclosure of millions of homes — while the institutions that caused the crisis were rescued and their executives suffered no criminal consequences. Reinstate the wall. The lesson has been taught. It should not need to be taught again.

Break up too-big-to-fail institutions. If an institution is too big to fail, it is too big to exist — because its existence creates an implicit government guarantee that distorts market incentives, encourages reckless risk-taking, and socializes losses while privatizing gains. The Dodd-Frank Act's resolution authority was

designed to make it possible to wind down a failing financial institution without a taxpayer bailout. It has never been tested, and the financial institutions it was designed to constrain are larger today than they were before the crisis. The six largest American banks now hold assets exceeding $14 trillion — more than 50 percent of GDP. Break them up through antitrust enforcement, mandatory divestitures, and size caps that ensure no single institution's failure can threaten the stability of the financial system. The purpose of banking is to intermediate between savers and borrowers in service of productive economic activity. When the banking system itself becomes the primary source of systemic risk, the system has failed its purpose and must be restructured.

Promote credit unions and cooperative financial institutions, following Canada's model, where credit unions and cooperative banks serve a substantial share of the population and provide consumer financial services at lower cost and with fewer predatory practices than for-profit banks. Credit unions are nonprofit, member-owned institutions that return surplus to their members rather than extracting it for shareholders. They charge lower fees, offer lower interest rates on loans, pay higher interest on deposits, and are less likely to engage in the predatory practices — overdraft fee manipulation, hidden charges, aggressive cross-selling — that characterize the for-profit banking sector. Federal policy should actively promote credit union formation, expansion, and accessibility — including in the banking deserts where for-profit banks have withdrawn because the communities they served were not profitable enough to exploit.

Public banking and postal banking. Establish public banks at the state and municipal level — institutions owned by the government, funded by public deposits, and mandated to reinvest in the communities they serve rather than to maximize shareholder returns. The Bank of North Dakota, the only state-owned bank in the United States, has operated continuously since 1919, has never required a bailout, and consistently generates returns that fund state programs — a track record that should have produced fifty imitators and has instead produced a political environment in which the financial industry's lobbying apparatus has prevented any state from replicating the model. Postal banking — offering basic financial services through the United States Postal Service — would provide checking accounts, savings accounts, small-dollar loans, and payment services to the approximately 5.6 million American households that are unbanked and the additional 18.7 million that are underbanked, populations that currently rely on payday lenders, check-cashing services, and other predatory financial providers whose fees constitute a poverty tax on people who cannot afford it. The Postal Service already has the physical infrastructure — 31,000 locations, more than any bank — and the institutional trust. What it lacks is the legislative authorization, which the financial industry has spent decades ensuring it does not receive.

Regulate interlocking directorates, private equity, and private credit. The Clayton Antitrust Act of 1914 prohibits interlocking directorates — the practice of the same individual serving on the boards of competing companies. The prohibition is virtually unenforced. A 2025 analysis found that interlocking directorates among the largest American corporations remain pervasive, creating networks of shared governance that facilitate the kind of coordinated behavior — parallel pricing, suppressed wages, reduced competition — that antitrust law was designed to prevent. Enforce the law. Private equity — the industry that acquires companies using borrowed money, loads them with debt, extracts fees and

dividends, and discards the hollowed-out remains — requires regulation commensurate with the damage it inflicts: mandatory disclosure of fund performance and fee structures, restrictions on dividend recapitalizations (the practice of borrowing against a portfolio company's assets to pay the private equity firm), and personal liability for fund managers whose leveraged acquisitions result in bankruptcy and job loss. Private credit — the rapidly growing market in which unregulated lenders provide the loans that regulated banks are prohibited from making — is the next systemic risk, and it is growing precisely because the regulatory framework has not kept pace with the migration of risk from regulated to unregulated institutions. Regulate it before it detonates.

Restrict stock buybacks. Until 1982, stock buybacks were treated as market manipulation under SEC rules. The Reagan administration's SEC reversed that classification, and since then American corporations have spent trillions of dollars buying back their own shares — not to invest in research, not to raise wages, not to build productive capacity, but to inflate their stock price and thereby increase the value of the stock-based compensation packages held by their executives. In 2023 alone, S&P 500 companies spent over $800 billion on buybacks. This is capital that could have funded wage increases, equipment upgrades, research and development, or any other productive purpose — but the incentive structure of executive compensation makes buybacks more personally lucrative for the people who authorize them than any alternative use of the funds. Restore the pre-1982 treatment: buybacks are market manipulation. If a company has excess capital, it can invest it in its workforce, its products, or its community. It should not be permitted to use it to bid up the price of its own stock for the benefit of the executives who authorized the expenditure.

E. Housing, Zoning, and Transit

The housing crisis in the United States is not a crisis of demand. People have always needed places to live. It is a crisis of supply, of speculation, and of a regulatory architecture that treats housing as an investment vehicle first and a human necessity second. The median home price in the United States has exceeded $400,000 — a figure that places homeownership beyond the reach of the majority of American households, particularly younger households whose wages have not kept pace with asset price inflation. Rents have risen faster than incomes in virtually every metropolitan area for more than a decade. And the gap between housing units needed and housing units available — estimated at between 3.8 and 7 million units depending on the methodology — is not closing, because the incentive structure of the housing market rewards scarcity over abundance. Landlords benefit from low vacancy rates. Homeowners benefit from rising prices. Developers benefit from building luxury units with higher profit margins. And the people who need affordable housing — the essential workers, the service employees, the teachers and nurses and firefighters who make every community function — are priced out of the communities they serve.

Build 3 to 5 million new public housing units over ten years — a construction program at the scale of the postwar housing boom, funded by federal investment and designed to provide permanently affordable housing that is not subject to the speculative dynamics of the private market. Public housing in the United States has been systematically defunded, stigmatized, and physically degraded over decades — not because public housing is inherently inferior but because the deliberate decision to

underfund it produced the conditions that were then cited as evidence of its failure. Well-designed, well-maintained, mixed-income public housing exists throughout Europe, Singapore, and Vienna — where approximately 60 percent of residents live in publicly subsidized housing and the city is consistently ranked among the most livable in the world. The model works when the investment is made. The American failure is a failure of political will, not of institutional design.

Rent stabilization — not rent control in the crude form that even sympathetic economists criticize, but the kind of predictable, moderate annual increase caps that prevent the sudden, speculative rent spikes that displace established residents from their communities. Rent stabilization does not freeze rents. It limits the rate of increase to a percentage tied to inflation or to a cost-of-living index, ensuring that landlords can cover rising costs while tenants are not subjected to the 20, 30, or 50 percent annual increases that are now routine in high-demand markets and that function not as price signals but as displacement mechanisms — forcing out lower-income residents to make way for higher-income tenants willing to pay more for the same unit. Pair rent stabilization with robust tenant protections: just-cause eviction requirements, right to counsel in eviction proceedings, and mandatory relocation assistance when units are withdrawn from the rental market.

Mixed-use zoning reform. The single-family zoning that dominates American land use — the regulation that prohibits anything other than detached single-family homes on the majority of residentially zoned land in most American cities — is much more than a neutral planning tool. It is an exclusionary mechanism with documented racist origins (explicitly designed, in many jurisdictions, to exclude Black families from white neighborhoods after explicit racial zoning was struck down in 1917) and ongoing exclusionary effects: it inflates land costs by artificially constraining supply, it mandates car dependence by separating residential from commercial and institutional uses, it prevents the construction of the duplexes, triplexes, accessory dwelling units, and small apartment buildings that constitute the "missing middle" of the American housing stock, and it enforces economic segregation by ensuring that the communities with the best schools, the safest streets, and the cleanest air are accessible only to those who can afford a single-family home at market price. Reform zoning nationally to permit multi-family housing in all residential zones, to allow mixed-use development by right, and to eliminate minimum lot sizes, parking minimums, and setback requirements that function as density caps in disguise. Instead of being an imposition on local control, this is the removal of a federal subsidy for exclusion — because the single-family-only zoning that progressive cities are beginning to reform is sustained in most jurisdictions by federal mortgage policies, tax deductions, and infrastructure investments that privilege the single-family model.

Mass transit investment — local, regional, and national. The United States is the only major industrialized nation without a functioning intercity passenger rail system, and most American cities have public transit systems that are underfunded, unreliable, and designed as services of last resort rather than as the primary mobility infrastructure of a modern urban economy. Federal investment in public transit at the scale necessary to make it a viable alternative to automobile dependence — frequent, reliable, affordable, and accessible — in every metropolitan area above 100,000 population. Regional rail connecting metropolitan areas within multi-city corridors. National high-speed rail on the routes where demand, distance, and density make it competitive with air travel: the Northeast Corridor,

the Texas Triangle, the California Central Valley, the Cascadia corridor, the Front Range, and the Southeast. The infrastructure exists in every peer country. The engineering is far from speculative. What is speculative is whether the American political system can overcome the lobbying power of the automobile and petroleum industries long enough to build it.

And the transit that is built should be fare-free — not as a utopian aspiration but as a practical fiscal calculation whose arithmetic has been demonstrated repeatedly. In the United States, fare revenue covers on average only about 10 to 15 percent of transit operating costs; the remaining 85 to 90 percent is already publicly subsidized. Meanwhile, the cost of collecting those fares is substantial — fare enforcement personnel, fare evasion prosecution and court costs, collection infrastructure, credit card processing fees, and the billion-dollar technology systems required to manage payment. New York's MTA spent nearly a billion dollars implementing its new fare collection technology and spends over $30 million annually to operate it — while losing an estimated $900 million a year to fare evasion and spending additional millions on enforcement and prosecution that criminalize poverty without meaningfully closing the revenue gap. When Massachusetts communities eliminated fares, the results were unambiguous: the Southeastern Regional Transit Authority saw a 55 percent increase in ridership, the Merrimack Valley system saw ridership quadruple, and on-time performance improved because drivers no longer had to police fare payment at every stop. Kansas City saw a 31 percent ridership increase under its zero-fare program along with measurable reductions in carbon emissions and increases in employment. An Allegheny County study — the most rigorous experimental evaluation to date — found that fare-free transit reduced car trips, increased earned income among the previously unemployed, and generated social welfare returns that exceeded the fiscal cost of the policy. The logic is straightforward: when the cost of collecting a fare approaches or exceeds the revenue the fare generates, and when eliminating the fare produces ridership increases that reduce per-passenger operating costs, improve public health and environmental outcomes, reduce automobile congestion, and eliminate an entire apparatus of enforcement, prosecution, and incarceration for what amounts to a poverty offense — the fare is not funding transit. It is an obstacle to transit doing what transit is supposed to do. The modest fare revenue that elimination displaces can be replaced through dedicated funding streams that align the cost of transit with the populations and activities that benefit from it — the financial transaction tax proposed in section B, employer-based transit contributions from businesses whose workforce depends on public transportation to arrive, or congestion pricing on the automobile traffic that fare-free transit is designed to reduce, so that the drivers who impose the most costly externalities on urban infrastructure subsidize the system that alleviates them.

Community land trusts — nonprofit organizations that own land permanently and lease it to homeowners, ensuring that housing built on trust land remains affordable in perpetuity rather than appreciating into the speculative market. The community land trust model separates the ownership of land from the ownership of the structure built on it: the homeowner owns the house and builds equity in it, but the land remains in trust, and resale prices are limited by formula so that the affordability is preserved for the next buyer. Far from being a novel experiment, The Champlain Housing Trust in Burlington, Vermont has operated since 1984 and currently stewards over 2,800 units of permanently affordable housing. The model works. It has been tested. It scales. And it solves the fundamental problem that market-rate affordability programs cannot: the tendency of any housing subsidy that

operates within the speculative market to be capitalized into land prices, enriching landowners rather than reducing costs for residents.

Homebuyer protections: assessed-value caps, fixed-fee transactions, owner-occupant priority, and penalty taxes on speculation. Cap property tax assessments on primary residences so that longtime homeowners are not taxed out of their homes by rising market valuations they did not cause and cannot capture without selling. Replace the percentage-based real estate commission structure — which charges the same six percent whether the agent works for fifty hours or five — with fixed-fee transaction models that reduce the cost of buying and selling a home by thousands of dollars. Establish owner-occupant priority in residential real estate transactions: when a home is offered for sale, owner-occupants who intend to live in the property receive priority over investors, corporate buyers, and institutional purchasers. And impose penalty taxes on speculative transactions — short-term flips, bulk purchases by institutional investors, foreign purchases of residential property held vacant — so that the tax code discourages the treatment of housing as a speculative asset and encourages its use as what it is: a place where people live.

F. Healthcare

The United States spent $5.3 trillion on healthcare in 2024 — $15,474 per person, nearly double the average of comparably wealthy countries — and got worse outcomes for it. Americans die younger than residents of every comparable high-income nation. The country has the highest rates of avoidable deaths, the highest infant mortality, the highest rates of unmanaged diabetes, and among the worst maternal outcomes in the developed world. More than one in four Americans report skipping medical consultations, tests, treatments, or follow-up care because of cost, and 21 percent report skipping medication — figures that include people who have insurance but still cannot afford to use it. Administrative costs alone consume over $1,000 per person per year, approximately five times the average of peer countries — not because American healthcare is more complex, but because a fragmented system of competing for-profit insurers, each with its own billing codes, coverage rules, denial procedures, and appeals processes, generates administrative overhead as a structural feature rather than a correctable inefficiency. The system spends roughly as much on administration as it does on long-term care. Sweden spends twenty-two times more on long-term care than on administration. This comparison is as unflattering as it is deliberate; the predictable result of organizing healthcare around the extraction of profit from illness rather than the prevention and treatment of illness.

Universal public healthcare, with mental health and substance use treatment fully integrated into primary care rather than siloed into separate systems with separate funding streams, separate providers, and separate stigma. The artificial separation of mental and physical health — a relic of insurance industry cost-shifting, not of medical science — produces worse outcomes in both domains, because untreated depression worsens cardiovascular disease, untreated anxiety drives emergency room utilization, untreated trauma drives addiction, and untreated addiction drives everything else. Integration means a single point of entry, a single standard of coverage, and a single understanding that the brain is part of the body and that treating one without the other is not medicine but accounting.

A parallel private insurance tier, modeled on the Swiss system established under the 1996 Federal Health Insurance Law (LAMal): mandatory participation, nonprofit operation for basic coverage, community-rated premiums that cannot vary based on health status or medical history, a standardized benefit floor set by federal regulation, government premium subsidies for households that cannot afford the cost, and insurers that compete on service quality and efficiency rather than on their ability to select healthy enrollees and deny claims to sick ones. The Swiss model isn't without flaws — its premiums have risen sharply, its out-of-pocket costs are among the highest in Europe, and its reliance on individual premiums rather than income-based contributions makes it more regressive than tax-funded systems. But it demonstrates that universal coverage through regulated private nonprofit insurers is achievable, that community rating eliminates the predatory risk-selection that defines the American insurance market, and that a parallel private tier can coexist with a public system without cannibalizing it — provided the regulatory architecture prevents insurers from operating as profit-extraction vehicles wearing the costume of healthcare delivery. The critical design constraint is that the private tier supplements the public system — offering faster access, greater provider choice, enhanced amenities — rather than substituting for it. The public system must be good enough that no one needs the private tier for essential care, and the private tier must be regulated tightly enough that it cannot siphon resources, providers, or political support away from the public system that serves everyone.

Long-term care as a public benefit, funded through the same universal system rather than treated as a catastrophic personal expense that bankrupts families or forces them to impoverish themselves to qualify for Medicaid. The current structure — in which long-term care is excluded from Medicare, largely excluded from private insurance, and available through Medicaid only after the patient has exhausted virtually all personal assets — is a policy choice, not a fiscal inevitability, and it is a choice that falls disproportionately on women, who provide the majority of unpaid family caregiving and who live longer and therefore require more long-term care themselves.

Prohibition of direct-to-consumer advertising of prescription pharmaceuticals and medical devices. The United States and New Zealand are the only two countries in the developed world that permit pharmaceutical companies to advertise directly to patients — a practice that drives demand for expensive brand-name drugs over generics, distorts clinical decision-making by creating patient expectations based on marketing rather than evidence, and transfers billions of dollars annually from the healthcare system to advertising budgets. The pharmaceutical industry spent over $6 billion per year on direct-to-consumer advertising in recent years — money that does not develop new drugs, does not improve existing treatments, and does not make anyone healthier. It exists to create demand for the most profitable products, regardless of whether those products are the most effective, and it has no place in a healthcare system designed to serve patients rather than shareholders.

G. The Care Economy and Earned Social Benefits

The care economy is the invisible infrastructure on which every other form of economic activity depends. No one works, innovates, or participates in civic life without someone caring for their children, their aging parents, or their own physical and mental health. And yet the work of care —

disproportionately performed by women and pervasively underpaid — is systematically devalued by an economic framework that recognizes only market transactions as productive.

Universal childcare and elder care, funded as public goods. Paid family leave as a federal standard. Professional wages for care workers commensurate with the social value of their labor. These are economic infrastructure investments, not entitlements — and countries that have made them consistently outperform the United States in workforce participation, childhood outcomes, and elder wellbeing.

A Social Contribution Recognition System would extend this logic further: a framework in which credits are earned through prosocial labor — caregiving, community service, civic participation, mentorship, ecological stewardship — and then convert to retirement benefits, funded by progressive taxation. Retroactive credits for post-1990s generations would begin to address the structural theft of economic security from younger cohorts who entered adulthood under conditions of stagnant wages, exploding costs, and vanishing pensions. Originally proposed in the context of *integral liberty* and a Level 7 political economy, such a earned social benefit system embodies the principle that contribution to the common welfare takes many forms, and that a society which recognizes only profit-generating activity as "work" has impoverished its own understanding of value.[8][10]

H. Social Security, Poverty, and the Jobs Guarantee

Social Security is the most successful anti-poverty program in American history, and it is being starved by a funding structure that exempts the wealthiest Americans from contributing their proportional share. Remove the Social Security income cap so that every dollar of earned income is subject to the payroll tax — a change that would, by itself, extend the program's solvency for decades. Apply the payroll tax to capital gains, because the distinction between income from labor and income from ownership is a policy choice that subsidizes wealth at the expense of work.

Establish a guaranteed minimum income floor through a negative income tax — ensuring that no person falls below the threshold of basic material dignity regardless of employment status, disability, or circumstance. Offer an emergency housing guarantee for anyone facing homelessness. Offer a federal jobs guarantee as employer of last resort, providing meaningful public-service employment at a living wage to anyone willing to work — in infrastructure, conservation, eldercare, education support, and community development. The jobs guarantee simultaneously addresses unemployment, underfunds public goods, and establishes a wage floor that private employers must meet or exceed.

I. Precautionary Principle, Agriculture, Automation, and AI

The United States operates under a regulatory philosophy that permits new chemicals, technologies, and industrial practices until harm is proven — often decades after damage has been done, and only after the industries responsible have accumulated sufficient political power to resist accountability. Europe's precautionary principle reverses this burden: proponents of a new substance or practice must demonstrate safety before widespread deployment. Adopt this principle as the governing standard for American regulatory policy. The track record of the alternative — from leaded gasoline to asbestos to

PFAS to opioids — is a catalog of preventable catastrophe. Currently, there is likely no more urgent application of the precautionary principle that Artificial Intelligence.

Redirect agricultural subsidies from commodity monoculture — which degrades soil, poisons waterways, and concentrates land ownership — toward ecological outcomes: soil health, biodiversity, water quality, carbon sequestration, and regional food security. Support small and mid-scale producers, organic transition, and cooperative agricultural models. Industrial agriculture is a major driver of multiple ecological ceiling breaches identified in the donut economics framework, and its transformation is inseparable from the broader ecological agenda described in Part VIII.

AI and automation displacement requires a managed transition, not the frictionless "creative destruction" that free market ideology celebrates and working people experience as devastation. Mandatory two-year advance notice for large-scale automation or AI deployments. An automation tax on companies that replace human labor with machines or AI, with revenue directed to worker transition programs, retraining, and the National Service Corps. Shorter work weeks, distributing available labor more broadly as productivity gains from automation are realized. This is consistent with every prior wave of technological progress: the gains have always, eventually, been translated into reduced working hours. The question is whether this time the translation will be deliberate or forced.

J. Reframing the Profit Motive

As supported by this agenda's community level engagement and oversight, along with top-down economic, labor, banking, and ownership reforms, profit is transformed to incentivize more prosocial practices and desired outcomes for free enterprise. Profit becomes a reward for demonstrated creativity, knowledge, and expertise, the strengthening of civil society, self-sacrifice for the betterment of others, exceptional innovation, long-term ecological viability and sustainability, and other contributions to higher-order democratic economy and self-governance. For the full spectrum of transformation, see Appendix D.

PART V: CIVIC RENEWAL, COMMUNITY, AND PARTICIPATION

Building the social and cultural foundation for democratic society — and addressing the crisis of meaning that authoritarian movements exploit.

The cultural power of the American Right does not derive from the superiority of its ideas. Its economic prescriptions have produced stagnant wages, gutted communities, and levels of inequality that its own voters experience as betrayal. Its foreign policy legacy includes catastrophic wars launched on false premises. Its deregulatory agenda has poisoned water, destabilized financial systems, and accelerated ecological crisis. By any empirical measure of the outcomes its policies have produced, the Right should be politically discredited. It is not. And the reason it is not has less to do with policy than with something the Left has consistently failed to understand or take seriously: the Right meets basic human needs — for belonging, for purpose, for dignity, for a coherent narrative about who you are and why your life matters — that the contemporary Left has largely abandoned to the market, to algorithmic media, and to an individualism so thoroughgoing that it has dissolved the social structures within which those needs were once met.

Hannah Arendt described this dynamic with precision that has only gained force over the intervening decades. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, she documented how atomized individuals — stripped of social bonds, isolated from meaningful community, bereft of the institutional affiliations that once provided identity and purpose — become susceptible to authoritarian movements that offer, above all else, the experience of belonging to something larger than themselves.[14] The content of the ideology is almost secondary. What matters is that it provides a structure of meaning: an enemy to oppose, a community to join, a narrative that transforms personal grievance into collective mission. Arendt was writing about the conditions that produced European fascism, but the structural parallel to twenty-first-century America isn't merely a rhetorical analogy. *It is a description of the same social mechanics operating under different historical circumstances.* A highly transient society where unions, fraternal organizations, churches, local civic associations, extended family structures, and stable employment relationships have all steadily declined has produced an American population more isolated, by every available measure of social connection, than any generation in the nation's history. Rates of loneliness, social disconnection, and what social scientists have taken to calling "deaths of despair" — suicide, drug overdose, alcoholic liver disease — have climbed with a consistency that constitutes not a trend but an indictment of the social order that produces them.

Into this vacuum, modern consumerism and technology have inserted what Guy Debord described as the *spectacle* — a self-reinforcing system of representation in which the image of life replaces the experience of it, and in which the accumulation of commodities and the performance of identity become substitutes for the relationships, purposeful labor, and civic participation that once constituted a meaningful existence.[9] The spectacle doesn't operate through coercion, but saturation. The average American adult spends more than seven hours per day consuming screen media — a figure that has increased every year for two decades and that represents, in aggregate, the largest single allocation of waking life after sleep and work. The content of that consumption is engineered, at the level of platform architecture and algorithmic optimization, to maximize engagement through emotional activation like

outrage, anxiety, envy, and tribal identification. Informing, connecting, or empowering the user are not the business model. Social media platforms that promised to bring people together have produced populations that are simultaneously more connected to information and more disconnected from one another than at any point in human history. The result is a population marinating in a representation of reality that presumes individualism and material acquisition are the only guarantors of prosperity and well-being — a representation so pervasive, so thoroughly integrated into the texture of daily experience, that the average American citizen has lost the frame of reference. There is now a genuine inability to recall what healthy community, authentic belonging, and unmediated human connection look and feel like. The frame of reference has been lost. And when the frame of reference for genuine social life is lost, the counterfeits being offered — from consumer brands that sell identity, to political movements that sell belonging, to online communities that sell the simulation of intimacy without its risks or obligations — become indistinguishable from the real thing, because there is no longer a lived experience of the real thing against which to measure them.

The Right has capitalized on this with a sophistication that the Left has been reluctant to acknowledge, in part because acknowledging it would require confronting uncomfortable truths about the inadequacy of progressive responses to cultural disintegration. The evangelical megachurch offers community, childcare, social services, mutual aid, and a narrative of cosmic significance — all under one roof, all embedded in a social network that provides practical support as well as existential meaning. The MAGA movement offers a collective identity, a shared enemy, a sense of historical mission, and the intoxicating experience of mattering — of being seen, valued, and feared by the powerful — to people whose economic and social experience has been one of steadily diminishing relevance. Right-wing media ecosystems provide companionship. The talk radio host who speaks to you for three hours a day, the cable news anchor whose outrage mirrors and validates your own, the online community where your grievances are heard and elevated to the status of political resistance — these are relationships, not information channels. These are not trivial offerings. They are responses — distorted, manipulative, frequently cruel in their consequences, but structurally responsive — to genuine human needs that the Left has addressed primarily through policy proposals and institutional programs that, however sound on their merits, do not meet people where they actually live.

The progressive response cannot be limited to better policy, though better policy is necessary. It cannot be limited to better messaging, though the Left's chronic inability to communicate in language that resonates beyond the university-educated professional class is a problem worth taking seriously. The progressive response must include the deliberate construction of institutions and spaces that meet the same needs the Right is meeting — belonging, purpose, identity, community, dignity — but without the authoritarianism, the scapegoating, and the surrender of critical thought that the Right demands as the price of admission. This means investing in the physical and social infrastructure of community life: public spaces designed for gathering, community centers and libraries funded as permanent civic institutions, cooperative enterprises that embed workers in relationships of mutual obligation, civic assemblies and participatory budgeting processes that give people genuine decision-making power over the conditions of their shared life, and cultural programming — public media, the arts, adult education, community athletics, local journalism — that creates occasions for people to encounter one another as neighbors and fellow citizens rather than as demographic categories or ideological adversaries. The

Right understood, decades before the Left was willing to, that people do not join movements because they have read the policy platform. They join because the movement answers a question that keeps them awake at night — *Who am I? Where do I belong? Does my life matter?*— and the progressive movement will not become a mass movement until it is prepared to answer those questions with something more compelling than a white paper.

A. Citizens' Assemblies as Community Infrastructure

The deliberative institutions proposed throughout this agenda — citizens' assemblies, participatory budgeting, direct democratic consultation, sortition-based oversight — require a social substrate that does not currently exist in most American communities. Deliberation does not happen in a vacuum. It happens among people who know each other, who have some minimal foundation of trust, who have practiced the skill of disagreeing without dehumanizing, and who show up because the experience of showing up is worth the effort. The American civic landscape has been stripped of nearly every institution that once provided this substrate — the union hall, the Grange, the civic club, the neighborhood association, the church-as-community-center rather than church-as-political-vehicle — and what remains is a population that encounters its neighbors primarily as obstacles in traffic and antagonists on social media. Building a deliberative democracy on this foundation is building on sand. The foundation must be rebuilt first, or simultaneously, which means that the institutional design of citizens' assemblies must integrate community-building, cultural life, and social connection into their structure rather than treating deliberation as a stand-alone civic function that people will attend out of duty.

Citizens' assemblies as proposed in this agenda operate as a modular, nested system using stratified random sortition — neighborhood assemblies feeding into municipal assemblies feeding into regional and national bodies, with membership rotating on short cycles and demographic stratification ensuring that the bodies reflect the communities they serve. But the critical design principle is that these assemblies serve simultaneously as policy forums and community spaces. They incorporate music, art, food, celebration, and cultural programming alongside civic deliberation — not as decoration but as structural elements that make participation attractive, emotionally rewarding, and socially connective. They replace the demagogue's rally with the community rally: gatherings that are entertaining, social, and satisfying in the way that any good gathering of neighbors is satisfying, while building genuine deliberative capacity and shared norms of evidence-based reasoning. The Right understood decades ago that people do not join movements because they have read the policy platform; they join because the movement meets needs for belonging, identity, and purpose that nothing else in their lives is meeting. The progressive institutional equivalent must meet those same needs — or it will remain a policy platform that no one shows up for.

Citizens' assemblies are the formal, sortition-based layer of this infrastructure. But they are not the only layer, and they will not function without the informal community institutions that feed into them and sustain the civic culture on which they depend. This agenda proposes, across its various sections, a constellation of community-level institutions that must be understood as an integrated ecosystem rather than a disconnected list of programs.

Worker cooperatives and cooperative enterprise incubators — described in the labor and ownership section — are not only economic institutions. They are schools of democratic practice. A worker who participates in the governance of their own enterprise — who votes on business decisions, serves on a board, negotiates with fellow worker-owners over wages and working conditions — is a worker who has practiced democratic self-governance in the domain where it is most immediate and most consequential to their daily life. The skills transfer. The habits transfer. The expectation that one's voice matters and that collective decisions should be made transparently and accountably — this transfers from the workplace to the citizens' assembly to the ballot box, and its absence in the American workplace is one of the reasons its absence in American civic life has been so easy to engineer.

Community land trusts — described in the housing section — anchor residents to place in a way that speculative real estate markets structurally prevent. A community in which families are not perpetually displaced by rising rents and flipped properties is a community in which people stay long enough to know their neighbors, invest in local institutions, and develop the place-based identity that makes civic participation feel meaningful rather than abstract. The erosion of residential stability is not incidental to the erosion of civic life. It is one of its primary mechanisms.

Mutual aid networks, community tool libraries, community-supported agriculture programs, Buy Nothing groups, time banks, and the other forms of non-market reciprocity that have proliferated in communities where formal institutions have failed — these are the connective tissue of a civic culture. They are small, informal, and individually modest in their impact. Taken together, they constitute a parallel economy of generosity and mutual obligation that operates on precisely the principles this agenda proposes at institutional scale: contribution according to capacity, access according to need, and the recognition that my neighbor's well-being is less a charitable abstraction than a material condition equal to my own.

Community Coregroups — small, locally organized groups of eight to fifteen people that meet regularly and progress through defined phases of relationship-building, educational exploration, and coordinated civic engagement, as developed within the Level 7 framework — are the most deliberately designed of these community-level institutions, and they address the specific gap that none of the others fully close.[56],[59] Worker cooperatives build democratic practice in the workplace. Community land trusts build residential stability. Mutual aid networks build reciprocity. Citizens' assemblies build deliberative capacity. But none of these, individually, builds the sustained interpersonal relationships, the mutual accountability, the integration of personal development with political education, and the sense of being known and valued by a specific group of people who share your commitments — which is what the evangelical megachurch provides for the Right's base and what the progressive movement has never built an equivalent for. Coregroups are that equivalent. They are the institutional form in which political education does not produce mere ideology but relationship, in which relationship does not produce mere sentimentality but collective agency, and in which civic engagement is sustained across years and decades because the people engaged in it are accountable to each other and not merely to an abstraction called "the movement." They require no legislation, no funding, and no institutional permission to begin. They require the decision to start and the discipline to continue.

Public libraries, community centers, public parks, public transit hubs, and the physical infrastructure of shared space — described in various sections of this agenda — are the material preconditions for all of this. People cannot gather if there is nowhere to gather. Communities cannot form around shared spaces if the shared spaces have been defunded, privatized, or designed for consumption rather than connection. The systematic defunding of public space in the United States over the past four decades hasn't been a fiscal decision. It was a political one, and its political function is the same as every other form of atomization described in this document: isolated individuals do not organize, do not deliberate, do not build collective power, and do not threaten the concentrations of wealth and political authority that benefit from their isolation. Every dollar invested in public community infrastructure is a dollar invested in the physical preconditions of democratic self-governance — and every dollar cut from that infrastructure is a dollar spent on ensuring that democratic self-governance remains a theoretical aspiration rather than a lived practice.

The integrated design is the point. Citizens' assemblies without community infrastructure are deliberative exercises attended by the civic-minded few. Community infrastructure without citizens' assemblies is social programming without political power. Worker cooperatives without civic engagement are economic islands in a political sea controlled by the interests they were designed to counter. Coregroups without a broader institutional ecosystem are support groups that feel good but change nothing. Each element requires the others. The Right built its institutional ecosystem — churches, media networks, think tanks, political clubs, donor networks, state legislative pipelines — as an integrated system in which each component reinforced and fed the others over decades. The progressive equivalent must be built with the same systemic intentionality, the same understanding that no single institution is sufficient, and the same patience to sustain the project across the generational timeframe that structural transformation requires.

B. National Service

The United States has not had a shared civic experience that crosses class, race, geographic, and ideological lines since the draft ended in 1973. The all-volunteer military that replaced it is drawn disproportionately from rural communities, the working class, and military families — a self-selecting population that constitutes less than one percent of the country and that the other ninety-nine percent honors in speeches, forgets between wars, or does not know personally. The result is a society in which the foundational democratic experience — the experience of working alongside people who do not look like you, did not grow up where you grew up, do not share your assumptions about the world, and whose cooperation you nevertheless require to accomplish something that matters — has been eliminated from the life of the average American citizen. This is a fundamental structural loss, and its consequences are visible in every dimension of the social fragmentation this agenda describes: the inability to see across partisan lines, the reduction of political opponents to caricatures, the collapse of the civic trust on which democratic institutions depend, and the ease with which demagogues convert unfamiliarity into fear and fear into political power. People who have never shared a barracks, a work site, a meal, or a mission with someone from the other side of the country's class and racial geography are people for whom "the other side" is an abstraction — and abstractions are easy to hate.

Universal national service at eighteen — two years, mandatory enrollment, no exemptions for wealth — with a choice among four branches: military service for those who choose it; a civilian infrastructure corps that builds and repairs the physical systems on which the country depends — roads, bridges, rail, broadband, renewable energy installations, public housing, water systems, the built environment that decades of deferred maintenance have degraded to the point of crisis; a community health corps that staffs the clinics, the mental health services, the elder care facilities, the addiction treatment centers, and the public health infrastructure that is chronically understaffed because the work is essential but the pay is not competitive with the private sector; and an education corps that places young people in classrooms, after-school programs, tutoring networks, adult literacy programs, and the community institutions — libraries, museums, civic organizations — that form the educational infrastructure beyond the school building. Each branch serves at a living wage — genuine living wage, not the poverty stipend that AmeriCorps currently offers, which functions as a subsidy for the idealism of people whose families can afford to support them through a year of functionally unpaid labor while excluding everyone else. Full GI Bill-equivalent benefits upon completion: tuition coverage, housing assistance, healthcare, and the credential of service that opens doors in employment and civic life. The benefits are not a reward. They are a down payment — the country's investment in the people who invested two years of their lives in it, structured so that national service becomes a genuine pathway to economic stability rather than a gap year for the privileged.

The enrollment is universal but the branches accommodate the full range of human capacity, interest, and circumstance. The young person who wants to serve in the military can serve in the military. The young person who objects to military service on grounds of conscience can build solar installations in Appalachia, staff a rural health clinic in the Mississippi Delta, or tutor children in schools that cannot recruit enough teachers because the salaries are forty thousand dollars a year in cities where rent is two thousand a month. The point isn’t uniformity of experience, but the universality of civic obligation: the shared understanding, embodied in two years of lived practice, that citizenship is not a status one inherits but a commitment one makes, and that the commitment involves showing up, doing work that needs doing, and doing it alongside people one did not choose and might not otherwise ever meet.

Open enrollment to displaced workers of all ages — not as an afterthought but as a critical design feature that addresses the labor displacement this agenda anticipates…from AI automation, energy transition, and the broader economic restructuring its proposals entail. A fifty-two-year-old coal miner whose job has been eliminated by the transition to renewable energy and who has no realistic prospect of retraining for a new career as a clinical psychologist is not well served by a retraining voucher and a referral to a community college website. That person is well served by a program that provides a living wage, a defined mission, a community of fellow workers, meaningful work rebuilding the physical infrastructure of the region that extractive industry degraded, and a benefit package upon completion that provides the economic security the lost job once offered. National service for displaced workers is not charity. It is the mechanism by which the costs of structural economic transition are borne collectively rather than imposed individually on the people least responsible for the conditions that made the transition necessary.

The civic function is as important as the economic one, and over the long term it may be more important. Two years of national service produces something that no other institution in American life currently produces: the lived experience of shared enterprise across every line that American politics currently exploits to divide. The eighteen-year-old from a wealthy suburb in Connecticut and the eighteen-year-old from a reservation in South Dakota and the eighteen-year-old from a Black neighborhood in Birmingham and the eighteen-year-old from a farming community in Iowa — these four people, in the current American system, will rarely meet. They will live in different economies, consume different media, attend different schools, hold different assumptions about what America is and who it is for, and vote for different candidates based on different understandings of reality that have never been tested against each other's experience. National service puts them on the same work crew. It does not guarantee that they will become friends, or that their political views will converge, or that the experience will be transformative in every case. What it guarantees is contact — sustained, cooperative, task-oriented contact in which the abstract other becomes a specific person with a name, a story, a set of skills, and a life that is legible to you because you have shared a piece of it. This is the precondition for democratic solidarity, and no amount of messaging, no number of social media campaigns, no volume of political rhetoric about unity can substitute for it. You cannot build solidarity among people who have never met. You can only build it among people who have worked together, and national service is the institution that makes that work happen.

The program connects directly to the community infrastructure described in the preceding section. National service members staff the citizens' assemblies, build and maintain the community centers, install the renewable energy systems, construct the public housing, expand the broadband networks, and provide the labor for the physical and social infrastructure that every other proposal in this agenda depends on. They are not cheap labor — they are paid a living wage with full benefits — but they are available labor, deployed where the need is greatest rather than where the profit is highest, and their deployment is governed by public priorities rather than market signals. The infrastructure corps builds the housing this agenda proposes. The health corps staffs the universal healthcare system this agenda proposes. The education corps supports the educational reforms this agenda proposes. National service isn’t intended to be a standalone program. It creates the workforce through which the agenda's physical and institutional commitments are fulfilled — and the civic experience through which the next generation of citizens develops the capacity, the relationships, and the sense of shared obligation that democratic self-governance requires to function.

C. Moral Development, Mental Health, and Prosocial Culture

The most consequential failure of the American educational and civic system is not that it produces citizens who lack information — Americans have more access to more information than any population in human history — but that it produces citizens who lack the developmental infrastructure to do anything with that information other than consume it, react to it, and sort themselves into tribal allegiances on the basis of it. Moral development — the cultivation of empathy, civic responsibility, and ethical reasoning as practiced capacities, developed through experience and structured reflection — has been systematically excluded from public education, from civic discourse, and from the institutional design of virtually every structure through which Americans encounter one another as members of a

shared society. This exclusion is the predictable consequence of an educational philosophy that treats human beings as future economic units whose value is measured in productivity, and of a political culture that treats moral language with suspicion — as the province of religion (which claims a monopoly it has not earned), of sentimentality (which is dismissed as weakness), or of ideological imposition (which is feared as authoritarianism). The result is a population equipped with technical skills and factual knowledge but systematically underdeveloped in precisely the capacities that democratic self-governance requires: the ability to take the perspective of another person whose experience differs from one's own, the ability to reason about competing goods rather than simply assert preferences, the ability to hold moral complexity without collapsing into tribalism or nihilism, and the willingness to accept obligation to strangers — which is the foundational psychological act on which every functioning society depends.

Moral development is not moral instruction. It is not the transmission of a fixed set of values from authority to subject — the model that religious institutions have historically claimed and that secular critics rightly resist. It is a developmental process, documented across decades of research in developmental psychology — from Piaget's stages of cognitive development through Kohlberg's and Gilligan's work on moral reasoning through the more recent empirical literature on prosocial behavior, compassion cultivation, and perspective-taking — in which the capacity for ethical reasoning and empathic identification expands through practice, exposure, and structured reflection. The developmental trajectory moves through expanding circles of identification: from self-interest to family loyalty to community membership to national identity to identification with all human beings and, ultimately, to a recognition of obligation toward all sentient life.[30] However, this expansion does not occur automatically, nor does it occur through mere exhortation or modeling alone. It grows through the cultivation of specific cognitive and emotional capacities in conditions that support their development — and it can be arrested, reversed, or deliberately stunted by antagonistic conditions. The authoritarian movements described elsewhere in this agenda are, among other things, machines for arresting moral development at the tribal stage — binding identity to an in-group, defining worth through opposition to an out-group, and providing the psychological satisfactions of belonging and purpose at the cost of the broader identification that democratic citizenship requires.

The tools for cultivating these capacities are plentiful, empirically validated, and already in use in institutional settings that take moral development seriously as a public good.[36] Cognitive behavioral techniques — the identification of distorted thinking patterns, the development of metacognitive awareness, the practice of reappraising situations before reacting to them — have been shown in hundreds of clinical trials to reduce anxiety, depression, and reactive aggression while improving decision-making quality and interpersonal functioning. Mindfulness-based practices — which train sustained attention, emotional regulation, and the capacity to observe one's own mental states without being controlled by them — have demonstrated effects on stress reduction, empathic accuracy, and the capacity to tolerate ambiguity and discomfort without resorting to defensive rigidity. Dialectical behavior techniques — originally developed for populations with severe emotional dysregulation — provide structured methods for holding contradictory truths simultaneously, validating emotional experience while maintaining behavioral standards, and navigating interpersonal conflict without either capitulating or escalating. These are not esoteric therapeutic modalities accessible only to the privileged.

They are teachable skills, and the evidence base for their effectiveness when incorporated into educational curricula — from middle school through secondary and post-secondary education — is substantial and growing. Programs in social-emotional learning that incorporate these evidence-based approaches have demonstrated measurable effects on academic performance, disciplinary outcomes, substance use, interpersonal violence, and long-term mental health — effects that persist years after the program ends and that are most pronounced in the populations most underserved by existing institutional supports.

Incorporate these skills into public school curricula from middle school onward — not as elective enrichment, not as a response to crisis, not as a program bolted onto the existing academic structure and dependent on the enthusiasm of individual teachers, but as a core curricular component funded, staffed, and assessed with the same seriousness applied to mathematics and literacy. The objection that schools should not be in the business of shaping character is historically illiterate — American public education was explicitly designed to form citizens, and the founders who built the system understood, with a clarity that the contemporary aversion to moral language has obscured, that democratic self-governance is impossible without a population capable of reasoned deliberation, mutual obligation, and the subordination of immediate self-interest to long-term collective welfare. The question has never been whether schools shape moral development. Schools shape moral development whether they intend to or not — through disciplinary practices, through the values embedded in curriculum selection, through the social dynamics they permit or constrain, through the implicit messages communicated by institutional structure itself. The question is whether that shaping will be deliberate, evidence-based, and oriented toward the capacities democratic citizenship requires, or whether it will continue to be accidental, haphazard, and oriented by default toward the production of compliant workers and anxious consumers.

But institutional curricula, however well designed, address only the developmental environment of the young. The broader challenge — and the one this document must name even though it cannot fully prescribe — is the cultivation of transformative practice across the lifespan, as a personal and cultural commitment that extends beyond formal education into the texture of adult life. Every wisdom tradition in human history — contemplative, philosophical, spiritual, Indigenous — has recognized that the expansion of compassion, the deepening of self-knowledge, and the development of moral courage are not achievements completed in adolescence but ongoing practices requiring sustained attention and supportive community. The specific forms this practice takes — meditation, contemplative prayer, philosophical dialogue, therapeutic self-examination, artistic creation, service to others, immersion in the natural world — are less important than the recognition that the inner life of the citizen should not be a private matter irrelevant to public outcomes. It is instead the substrate on which every public outcome depends. A population incapable of self-reflection will not sustain self-governance. A population incapable of empathy will not sustain solidarity. A population incapable of tolerating discomfort will not sustain the sacrifices that structural transformation requires. The progressive movement has historically been reluctant to engage with this dimension of political life, ceding the language of personal transformation either to religious movements that too often harness it for conformity, or to self-help industries that commodify it into consumer products stripped of social obligation. This cession has been a strategic error of the first order. Reclaiming the language and

practice of personal development — grounding it in evidence instead of dogma, embedding it in community instead of consumption, orienting it toward expanded compassion instead of individual optimization — isn't peripheral to the progressive project. It is a precondition for its success.

Investment in the arts and humanities as public goods is inseparable from this project, because the arts and humanities are the primary vehicles through which a society cultivates the moral imagination — the capacity to inhabit perspectives other than one's own, to feel the weight of experiences one has not had, to recognize in the suffering or joy of a stranger the common structure of human experience that makes solidarity possible. Literature, theater, film, music, visual art, philosophy, history — these are not luxuries to be funded when budgets permit and cut when they do not. They are the infrastructure of empathy, and their systematic defunding — in public education, in public media, in the cultural institutions that once served as shared civic spaces — has produced exactly the empathic deficit that makes authoritarian politics possible. A society that can no longer imagine the interior life of the person across the political divide is a society that has lost the capacity for democratic negotiation, because negotiation requires the recognition that the other party has legitimate interests, genuine experiences, and a perspective that contains at least partial truths — a recognition that is itself an act of moral imagination, cultivated through practice, not assumed as a default condition of human nature.

All of this — the developmental curricula, the transformative practice, the investment in arts and moral imagination — must be pursued with what can only be called revolutionary integrity: the insistence that the means must always embody the ends, that the process of building a more just and compassionate society cannot be conducted through methods that are themselves unjust or cruel, and that the internal culture of progressive movements must reflect the world those movements claim to be building.[31] Rather than just a platitude, this is a structural discipline, and its absence has undermined progressive movements repeatedly — movements that demand equality while reproducing internal hierarchies, that demand compassion while treating dissenters with contempt, that demand democratic participation while concentrating decision-making in self-appointed leadership. The Right's movements are not held to this standard, and they do not hold themselves to it. The progressive movement must hold itself to it anyway, because the failure to do so is a concession that the values animating the movement are aspirational rhetoric rather than lived commitments. And aspirational rhetoric, as this document has argued throughout, is precisely what the progressive movement can least afford.

D. Social Work as Democratic Infrastructure

The social worker is, for tens of millions of Americans, the last institutional connection between a person in crisis and a society that claims to care about them. When a child is abused, it is a social worker who investigates, intervenes, and determines whether that child is safe. When an elderly person is neglected in a care facility, it is a social worker who advocates for their dignity and their rights. When a family collapses under the weight of addiction, eviction, medical debt, or domestic violence, it is a social worker who walks into the wreckage and tries to assemble a plan that prevents catastrophe — working with whatever resources the system has not yet defunded. When a homeless veteran, a discharged psychiatric patient, or an undocumented mother with no English arrives at a hospital or a shelter or a courtroom, it is a social worker who stands between that person and the full indifference of an

institutional apparatus that was not designed with them in mind. Social workers are the connective tissue of the safety net — the professionals who translate policy into practice at the point of human contact, who make the decisions that determine whether a child is removed from a home, whether a patient is discharged into homelessness, whether a family receives services or falls through the cracks that services were supposed to close.

And they are struggling — because the system in which they operate is working against them. The United States faces a projected deficit of nearly 200,000 social work practitioners by 2030, driven by a workforce crisis that has been entirely predictable and objectively self-inflicted.[75] Turnover rates exceed 30 percent annually in child welfare — meaning that in many agencies, the workforce replaces itself roughly every three years. Nearly half of social workers report experiencing burnout at some point in their careers. In crisis and emergency settings, burnout rates exceed 75 percent. Seventy-five percent of social workers report that caseload size directly affects their mental health. The recommended caseload for child and family social workers is 12 to 15 cases; actual caseloads routinely reach 23, 28, or higher.[76] Social workers routinely report carrying caseloads so far beyond safe limits that they cannot perform even the most basic functions of their role — cannot return phone calls, cannot schedule required visits, cannot read the files of the families they are responsible for protecting. The result is not just worker suffering, though it is certainly that, but burnout also adversely affects client outcomes in 30 to 40 percent of cases. Why? Because high turnover in child welfare produces placement disruptions, delays in achieving permanency, and repeated attachment losses for children already traumatized by the conditions that brought them into the system. The system designed to protect the most vulnerable people in the country can itself become a source of harm to those people — because the workers it depends on are overworked to the point of incapacity, underpaid to the point of exodus, and unsupported to the point of moral injury.

Countries with structured social services programs and government oversight — throughout Northern Europe and parts of Asia — report systematically lower burnout rates, not because their social workers are made of different material but because their institutional architecture treats social work as essential public infrastructure rather than as a cost center to be minimized. The United States often treats its social workers the way it treats its public schools, transit systems, and environmental regulators: starving them of resources, overloading them with mandates, blaming them when the predictable failures occur, and then citing those failures as evidence that public services don't work.

This agenda proposes a comprehensive reform of the social work infrastructure in the United States, organized around four principles: evidence-based practice standards, institutional empowerment, structural accountability, and workforce sustainability.

Evidence-based practice standards. The social work profession suffers from a fragmentation of methods that is partly intellectual, partly jurisdictional, and partly the consequence of chronic resource scarcity that makes consistent training impossible. ***Establish federal evidence-based practice guidelines for the core domains of social work*** — child welfare investigation and intervention, elder abuse and neglect response, mental health crisis intervention, substance use treatment coordination, hospital discharge planning, housing instability and homelessness services, and domestic violence response — developed through a collaborative process involving practitioners, researchers, and the populations served. These

guidelines are not intended to be rigid protocols that eliminate professional judgment; they are structured frameworks that ensure every social worker in every jurisdiction has access to the same evidence base, the same decision-making tools, and the same standard of care — so that the quality of intervention a family receives does not depend on which county they live in, which agency handles their case, or whether their assigned worker received adequate training before being handed a caseload that would overwhelm an experienced practitioner.

Fund the research infrastructure to produce and update these standards continuously. Social work research is chronically underfunded relative to the profession's scope and consequence — the federal investment in evidence-based social work practice is a fraction of what is spent on evidence-based medicine, despite the fact that social work decisions affect life outcomes with comparable permanence. Create a National Institute for Social Work Research, or embed a social work research division within an existing NIH or SAMHSA structure, with dedicated funding for longitudinal studies of intervention effectiveness, randomized evaluations of practice innovations, and the systematic collection of outcome data that the field currently lacks. The medical profession's transformation from anecdote-driven practice to evidence-based medicine took decades of sustained institutional investment. Social work deserves — and the populations it serves require — the same investment.

Institutional empowerment. Social workers cannot function as the last line of support for vulnerable populations if they have no institutional authority to compel the cooperation of the systems those populations depend on. A child welfare worker who identifies a child in danger but cannot compel a school district to share records, cannot access a parent's mental health treatment history without months of bureaucratic delay, and cannot require a landlord to address the housing conditions that are endangering the child's health is not adequately empowered to protect that child — they are only empowered to document the failure and move to the next case. Reform the statutory and regulatory framework to give social workers in designated roles — child protective services, adult protective services, hospital social work, and crisis intervention — the legal authority to access records across institutional boundaries, to convene multi-agency responses without requiring each agency's independent authorization, and to compel timely action from housing, education, healthcare, and law enforcement agencies whose cooperation is necessary for the intervention to succeed. Model this on the authority that law enforcement already possesses in parallel contexts — because the decision not to extend comparable authority to social workers is itself a policy statement about whose safety matters and whose does not.

Integrate social workers into the community infrastructure this agenda proposes. The citizens' assemblies, community hubs, and Coregroups described throughout Part V should include embedded social work professionals — not as external referral sources that community members must navigate independently, but as permanent, accessible, trusted presences within the community institutions where people already gather. This is the model that works in the countries with the best social outcomes: social workers as community fixtures, known by name, present year-round, engaged in prevention and relationship-building rather than deployed solely in crisis response after the damage has occurred.[77] The community infrastructure this agenda envisions is incomplete without a professional

social work presence — and the social work profession is structurally hobbled without the community infrastructure this agenda proposes to build.[78]

Structural accountability. Empowerment without accountability is a license for harm — and social work, like every profession that exercises authority over vulnerable people, has produced documented cases of negligence, bias, cultural incompetence, and abuse of power that demand structural remedy. Establish independent oversight mechanisms for social work practice in high-stakes domains — child welfare, involuntary commitment, elder guardianship — with civilian review boards modeled on the police oversight structures proposed elsewhere in this agenda. Require cultural competency not as a credential earned through a weekend workshop but as a demonstrated capacity assessed through ongoing supervision, client feedback, and outcome data disaggregated by race, ethnicity, language, and socioeconomic status. The documented racial disproportionality in the child welfare system — in which Black and Indigenous children are removed from their families at rates far exceeding their share of the population, and in which the subjective judgments of caseworkers about parental fitness are systematically influenced by racial bias — is not a problem that cultural competency training alone can solve. It requires structural intervention: blind review processes where feasible, mandatory second opinions for removal decisions, data-driven auditing of disparate outcomes, and consequences for agencies whose patterns of intervention demonstrate bias that cannot be explained by case-specific factors.

Workforce sustainability. No reform of practice standards, no expansion of authority, and no accountability mechanism will function if the workforce itself is in perpetual crisis. The social work workforce crisis is a compensation crisis, a caseload crisis, and a support crisis — and addressing it requires intervention on all three fronts simultaneously.

Compensation: social workers are among the most credentialed and least compensated professionals in the public sector. A licensed clinical social worker with a master's degree and years of supervised practice earns a median salary that places them below many occupations requiring less education, less training, and less emotional exposure. Federal and state funding formulas must be reformed to mandate compensation floors for social workers performing public-interest functions — floors that reflect the credential requirements, the emotional demands, and the social consequence of the work, not the historic willingness of a female-dominated profession to accept less because the work is coded as "caring" and therefore presumed to be its own reward.

Caseloads: establish federally mandated maximum caseload standards for social workers in publicly funded child welfare, adult protective services, and crisis intervention roles — standards with enforcement mechanisms that make them actual limits rather than aspirational guidelines routinely violated. The research is clear: caseloads above 15 in child welfare and above 20-25 in adult services produce measurable declines in service quality, increases in worker burnout, and worse outcomes for the populations served. These numbers represent the empirical boundary beyond which the work becomes physically impossible to perform at a standard consistent with the safety of the people it is intended to protect. Mandate them, fund the staffing necessary to meet them, and hold agencies accountable when they fail.

Support: invest in reflective supervision — the structured, relationship-based supervisory practice that the evidence identifies as the single most important organizational factor in reducing burnout and improving practice quality. Supervision in social work isn't just administrative oversight; it is the professional space in which a worker processes the emotional content of their work, receives clinical guidance on complex cases, and develops the professional judgment that no training program can fully provide in advance. When supervision is inadequate — when it is reduced to compliance monitoring, conducted by supervisors with their own unmanageable caseloads, or eliminated entirely due to staffing shortages — the worker is left to manage alone the most emotionally demanding work any public institution asks anyone to do. The predictable result is the burnout, the turnover, and the client harm that the system then treats as evidence of individual failure rather than institutional design.

Professional development in evidence-based self-awareness and decision-making tools. The social work profession asks its practitioners to make consequential judgments under conditions of emotional intensity, ambiguity, and time pressure — to assess whether a child is safe, whether a patient can be discharged, whether a family is stabilizing or deteriorating — and then provides them with little structured training in the cognitive and emotional disciplines that make sound judgment under those conditions possible. This is a training shortcoming with measurable consequences: reactive, stress-driven decision-making contributes to the racial disproportionality, premature case closures, and defensive risk-aversion that the accountability mechanisms described above are designed to catch — but which prevention would render unnecessary. So let's equip every social worker, from initial licensure through continuing education, with a toolkit of evidence-based practices for self-awareness, emotional regulation, and client engagement.

Mindfulness-based stress reduction — whose effects on burnout, empathic accuracy, and decision-making quality are documented in hundreds of clinical trials and specifically validated in social work populations[80] — should be a core component of professional training, not an optional wellness supplement. Dialectical behavior skills — distress tolerance, emotional regulation, interpersonal effectiveness, and the capacity to hold contradictory truths without collapsing into either rigidity or paralysis — are as relevant to the practitioner navigating a volatile home visit as they are to the client navigating a crisis. Motivational interviewing — the evidence-based method for engaging ambivalent clients through reflective listening, affirmation, and the elicitation of the client's own motivation for change rather than the imposition of the practitioner's agenda — should be a universal competency rather than a specialized technique available only to substance use counselors. And frameworks like Marilee Adams's Choice Map — which provides a structured, visual method for recognizing when one has shifted from a learner mindset (curious, solution-focused, collaborative) to a judger mindset (reactive, blame-focused, win-lose) and for consciously switching back — offer practitioners and the populations they serve a shared language for the cognitive habits that determine whether an interaction produces insight or escalation.[79] These tools should not be luxuries for practitioners who have the time and institutional support to pursue professional enrichment. They are the professional equivalent of the evidence-based practice standards described above — disciplines that improve outcomes, reduce burnout, and make this work sustainable over a career rather than endurable for three years before the worker leaves the profession. Fund them. Require them. And extend them, through the social workers who practice them, to the communities they serve — because the same cognitive and emotional skills

that make a social worker more effective make a parent more patient, a person in crisis more capable of self-advocacy, and a community more resilient against the conditions that generate the crises social workers are sent to manage after the fact.

The social work profession is, in its values and its aspirations, the professional embodiment of everything this agenda stands for: the belief that every person has worth, that structural conditions rather than personal failings produce most human suffering, that intervention should be guided by evidence rather than ideology, and that the measure of a society is how it treats its most vulnerable members. The gap between those aspirations and the conditions under which social workers actually practice is a measure of how seriously the United States takes its own stated values. This agenda proposes to close that gap — not through grandiose rhetoric, but through the institutional investment, structural reform, and sustained political commitment that the profession and the populations it serves have been denied for decades.

PART VI: THE INFORMATION COMMONS

Here we counter the Right-wing media ecosystem, defunding of public education, the attack on universities, historical revisionism, the epistemological crisis, and the weaponization of disinformation. The information environment is a public good that must be democratically governed.

The fifth of the Seven Threads — willfully persistent ignorance — was not produced haphazardly. It was carefully manufactured through the deliberate undermining of public education, defunding of research, destruction of the Fairness Doctrine, proliferation of disinformation, and exploitation of the illusory truth effect, where repeated falsehoods are believed regardless of prior knowledge.[9][24] The neoliberal anti-science propaganda process also uses shared funders, think tanks, PR firms, fake scientific authorities, and media outlets to discredit scientific findings threatening to corporate profits — from tobacco to fossil fuels to pesticides (see Appendix A). Our information environment is the substrate on which democratic self-governance depends. When that substrate is corrupted, every other reform becomes harder to achieve and easier to reverse. The aim here, therefore, is to counter the Right's great deception with organic truth (See Appendix B).

A. Media Reform and Information Integrity

The information environment in which American democracy operates has been corrupted to a degree that would have been recognized as a national emergency in any previous era — and the corruption has proceeded along two tracks simultaneously, each reinforcing the other, producing a population that is simultaneously the most informed and the most misinformed in human history. The first track is the collapse of the institutional journalism that once provided a shared factual substrate for democratic deliberation. The second is the construction of an alternative information architecture — built by private platforms whose revenue model depends on engagement, and engagement is maximized by outrage, fear, tribal identification, and addiction — that has replaced the shared factual substrate with algorithmically curated reality tunnels in which every user receives a personalized feed optimized not for truth but for attention. The result is a polarized electorate, to be sure, but also one that no longer shares a common set of facts from which to disagree, which means that democratic deliberation — the process of reasoning together from shared premises toward negotiated conclusions — has lost its precondition. You cannot deliberate with someone who inhabits a different factual universe, and the American information architecture is now engineered, at the level of platform design, to produce and maintain separate factual universes at industrial scale.

Restore and modernize the Fairness Doctrine for broadcast media — the regulation that from 1949 to 1987 required broadcast licensees to present controversial issues of public importance in a manner that was honest, equitable, and balanced. Its elimination under Reagan, at the urging of broadcasters who understood precisely what its removal would permit, was the regulatory precondition for the emergence of partisan talk radio, Fox News, and the entire right-wing media ecosystem that followed. The doctrine's restoration must be modernized to account for the media landscape that has emerged since 1987 — extending its obligations to dominant digital platforms that function as de facto public squares, reaching audiences that dwarf the broadcast networks the original doctrine governed. The objection that applying fairness obligations to digital platforms violates the First Amendment conflates the speech rights of persons with the editorial architecture of corporations whose "speech" consists of algorithmic amplification decisions made by code optimized for engagement metrics. A platform that algorithmically promotes conspiracy theories because conspiracy theories generate clicks is a machine that produces measurable public harm, and regulating that machine's outputs is no more a violation of

free speech than regulating the emissions of a factory is a violation of the factory owner's right to manufacture goods.

Rebuild public media from the wreckage the current administration has made of it. The Corporation for Public Broadcasting — the congressionally created nonprofit that for fifty-eight years channeled federal funding to more than 1,500 local radio and television stations nationwide — was defunded by congressional Republicans at President Trump's urging in the summer of 2025, stripped of more than 1.1 billion dollars in previously approved funding, and formally dissolved by its board of directors in January 2026 rather than remain, in its president's words, "defunded and vulnerable to additional attacks."[60] The destruction was deliberate, politically motivated, and executed on a party-line vote after the president publicly threatened that "any Republican that votes to allow this monstrosity to continue broadcasting will not have my support or Endorsement." The consequences are already measured: PBS has cut fifteen percent of its workforce; an estimated seventy to eighty NPR member stations face closure; New Jersey's only public television station has announced it will cease operations; stations across the country have eliminated reporting teams, canceled local programs, and reduced emergency broadcast capabilities — the very capabilities that rural and tribal communities depend on for severe weather alerts and public safety information. The stations hardest hit are those in rural and low-income communities that commercial media has never found profitable enough to serve, which is to say precisely the communities that most need the noncommercial, locally rooted journalism that public media provided and that nothing else will replace.

This agenda doesn't propose a restoration of the old system but the construction of a new one — better funded, more structurally independent, and insulated from the political vulnerability that allowed a single administration to destroy half a century of public media infrastructure in a single legislative session. Establish a public media trust, funded by a digital advertising tax levied on the platforms whose business model destroyed the advertising revenue that once sustained local journalism and whose algorithmic architecture actively degrades the information environment that public media exists to support. The trust must be structured with the institutional independence of a federal reserve for information — governed by a sortition-selected board to prevent both government editorial control and industry capture, with a statutory mandate and a funding mechanism that cannot be zeroed out by executive order or rescission bill. Fund NPR, PBS, and their successor institutions and local affiliates through this trust at levels that reflect what public media actually is: not a luxury, not a "monstrosity," not a target for ideological retribution, *but essential democratic infrastructure* — as fundamental to self-governance as courts, elections, and the postal service, and deserving of the same institutional permanence.

Antitrust action against media conglomerates — because the consolidation of media ownership into a small number of corporations that control newspapers, television stations, radio stations, and digital platforms across hundreds of markets is itself a form of information monopoly that reduces the diversity of editorial perspectives available to the public, eliminates the competitive pressure that once incentivized investigative journalism, and concentrates the power to shape public opinion in the hands of a few executives and shareholders whose interests are not the public interest. The Telecommunications Act of 1996 relaxed the ownership limits that had previously prevented any single entity from dominating a media market. The result was predictable: a wave of consolidation that produced companies like Sinclair Broadcast Group, which owns or operates nearly two hundred television stations across the country and requires its local anchors to read centrally scripted editorials as if they were locally originated content — a practice that converts the appearance of local journalism into a delivery mechanism for nationally coordinated messaging while the communities those stations nominally serve lose the independent editorial voice that justified their broadcast licenses.

Platform regulation must address the structural architecture of the platforms themselves, not merely the content that flows through them. Common-carrier obligations — requiring dominant platforms to provide nondiscriminatory access to their networks, the same obligation that applies to telephone companies and other utilities whose infrastructure is essential to public communication. Algorithmic transparency — requiring platforms to disclose, in terms accessible to both regulators and the public, how their recommendation algorithms select, rank, and amplify content, so that the mechanisms by which information reaches users are subject to public scrutiny rather than treated as proprietary trade secrets. Comprehensive federal data privacy legislation — establishing that personal data belongs to the person who generates it, that its collection requires informed and specific consent, that its sale requires explicit authorization, and that violations carry penalties proportional to the revenues of the companies that profit from the violation rather than flat fines that function as licensing fees for continued extraction. And interoperability mandates — requiring dominant platforms to allow users to communicate across platforms and to export their data and social connections to competing services, breaking the network-effect lock-in that currently makes it functionally impossible for users to leave a platform whose practices they object to without losing the social connections that brought them there.

Public Media Rating System. An independent, publicly funded media evaluation system — combining the accessibility of a letter grade with the analytical rigor of a peer-reviewed methodology — that provides regularly updated ratings of bias, factuality, sourcing quality, and funding transparency for all major media outlets and prominent online information sources. This isn't a new idea. Organizations like the Ad Fontes Media Bias Chart, NewsGuard, and the Media Bias/Fact Check project already perform versions of this function, but they operate as private enterprises with limited reach and no institutional authority. A publicly funded rating system, governed by a sortition-selected board to ensure independence from both government and industry capture, would do what these private efforts cannot: require that ratings appear on broadcast and streaming news programs as a standard disclosure, be integrated into social media content feeds alongside algorithmically recommended content, and be maintained with the institutional permanence and methodological transparency that public trust requires. All AI-generated content — text, image, audio, video — must be clearly and conspicuously labeled as such, with the generating system identified, so that the provenance of information is transparent to the person consuming it. NewsGuard's finding that partisan-backed outlets designed to look like impartial local news sources have now surpassed the number of actual local daily newspapers in the United States is a measure of how completely the information environment has been colonized by manufactured credibility — and how urgently a reliable, publicly accountable credibility assessment is needed. This is transparency, not censorship. It does not prohibit anyone from publishing anything. It ensures that the public has access to independent, methodologically rigorous assessments of who is telling them the truth, who is shading it, and who is fabricating it entirely.

Media literacy in schools. The ability to evaluate sources for veracity, credibility, bias, funding, and methodological soundness must be taught as a core curricular skill beginning in middle school and reinforced through high school — with the same institutional seriousness currently afforded to mathematics and reading comprehension, because in an information environment engineered to deceive, the capacity to distinguish reliable information from sophisticated disinformation is as fundamental to functional citizenship as the capacity to read. Finland's national curriculum has integrated media literacy education since the 1970s, and Finnish citizens consistently rank among the most resistant to disinformation in international assessments — a correlation that is not accidental and that demonstrates the effectiveness of the intervention at population scale. The current ratio of extreme right-wing to left-wing disinformation outlets in the United States is approximately eight to one — a structural imbalance in the production of fabricated and misleading content that cannot be

addressed by content moderation alone, because content moderation is reactive, platform-specific, and perpetually outpaced by the volume of content it is attempting to moderate. What can address it is a population trained to recognize manipulation — trained to ask who funds this outlet, what methodology produced this claim, what sources are cited and are they verifiable, what is the track record of this publication for accuracy, and what emotional response is this content designed to provoke and why. Media literacy does not tell people what to think. It teaches them how to evaluate what they are being told, which is the single most cost-effective investment in democratic resilience available.

Public digital infrastructure. A publicly funded, open-source social platform operating as a public utility — designed from the ground up on principles that are structurally incompatible with the engagement-maximizing architecture of private platforms. The design distinction is architectural, not cosmetic. Private platforms are engineered to maximize time-on-platform because time-on-platform generates advertising revenue. The content that maximizes time-on-platform is content that provokes strong emotional reactions — outrage, fear, moral indignation, tribal solidarity, contempt for the outgroup — because strong emotional reactions produce engagement, and engagement produces data, and data produces targeted advertising revenue. Is this a conspiracy? No, it is simply a business model, and its incentive structure is precisely aligned against every objective of informed democratic deliberation. A public social platform, funded through the same public interest trust that funds local journalism, would operate on a fundamentally different incentive structure: no advertising revenue, no engagement optimization, no algorithmic amplification of emotionally provocative content. Public interest algorithm requirements would mandate that a defined percentage of content surfaced to users be drawn from verified, high-quality sources — public media, established journalistic organizations that meet defined accuracy and sourcing standards, and the public media rating system's top-rated outlets — so that the platform's architecture structurally advantages reliable information rather than structurally disadvantaging it, as the current commercial platforms do.

A final principle must govern every element of this section, and it must be stated with the force the document reserves for its most important commitments: any progressive instinct toward content moderation as the primary mechanism for addressing disinformation is strategically dangerous, and progressives who advocate for expanded censorship powers are building a weapon that will be used against them. Every content moderation infrastructure, every speech-restriction authority, every regulatory power to determine what is and is not permissible expression will eventually — not theoretically, not hypothetically, but eventually and inevitably — be controlled by the political Right, because the Right wins elections and holds power, and when it does, it will use every tool of content control that progressives built to suppress the speech of progressives. The Trump administration's attempts to weaponize federal agencies against media organizations, universities, and individual critics are not an aberration. They are a preview of what will happen with any censorship infrastructure that exists when an authoritarian executive takes office. The structurally sound approach — the approach that is robust to changes in political power — goes beyond content moderation to systemic reform: break the monopolies so that no single platform can dominate the information environment. Fund the alternatives so that citizens have a genuine choice between engagement-optimized commercial platforms and public-interest platforms designed for informed deliberation. Require transparency so that the mechanisms of information manipulation are visible to the public. Invest in media literacy so that the population is equipped to evaluate what it encounters. Provide accessible, independent, publicly accountable ratings so that credibility is not a matter of guesswork. And then let speech answer speech — which is the First Amendment's own prescription, and one that works when the structural preconditions for informed speech are in place, which they currently are not, which is what every other proposal in this section is designed to remedy.[9]

B. Education

The American public education system is the institution through which a democratic society reproduces itself — through which it transmits not only knowledge and skills but the civic capacities, the shared historical understanding, and the habits of critical inquiry on which self-governance depends. As John Dewey famously wrote in *The Middle Works m 1899-1924* (1916): "Democracy has to be born anew every generation, and education is its midwife." It is also the institution that the American Right has targeted with the most sustained, most coordinated, and most strategically coherent campaign of defunding, delegitimization, and institutional capture of any public system in the country — more sustained than the assault on voting rights, more coordinated than the campaign against organized labor, and more consequential in its long-term effects than either, because a population that has been denied the tools to think critically about its own governance is a population that will not recognize when its other rights are being taken away. The elimination of the Department of Education — pursued openly by the current administration and supported by the institutional architecture of Project 2025 — is the capstone of a forty-year project to convert American education from a public good that serves democratic society into a private commodity that serves the market, and to ensure that the populations most in need of educational investment are the populations least likely to receive it.

Restore and strengthen the Department of Education — not to its prior state, which was inadequate, but to the institutional capacity the crisis demands. Title I enforcement must be funded at levels sufficient to actually eliminate per-pupil spending disparities between wealthy and poor districts, rather than narrowing them marginally while leaving the fundamental inequity intact. The United States is one of the only industrialized nations on earth in which educational funding is tied primarily to local property tax revenue, which means that the quality of a child's education is determined by the property values of the neighborhood in which they happen to live — a system that reproduces economic inequality with mechanical precision across generations and that would be recognized as structurally discriminatory if it were designed for any purpose other than the one it serves, which is to ensure that the children of wealthy families receive a qualitatively different education from the children of poor families while maintaining the fiction that both are products of the same "public" system. Full Title I funding means full equalization — every child in every district funded at a level that reflects the actual cost of educating them, including the additional costs associated with poverty, disability, English-language acquisition, and the other factors that make some students more expensive to educate than others and that the current funding structure uses as pretexts for spending less rather than more.

Oppose the school voucher movement as the institutional mechanism for defunding public education — because that is what it is, regardless of the language of "choice" and "competition" in which it is packaged. The voucher model operates through a straightforward fiscal logic: redirect public education funding to private institutions — disproportionately religious schools — through tuition vouchers, tax-credit scholarships, and education savings accounts that drain the revenue base on which public schools depend. The predictable result, documented in every jurisdiction where voucher programs have been implemented at scale, is not improved educational outcomes for voucher recipients but reduced funding for the public schools that continue to serve the vast majority of students — and that are constitutionally required to serve every student, including those with disabilities, those learning English, and those whose behavioral or medical needs make them more expensive to educate and less attractive to private schools operating on a selective-admission model. The voucher movement isn’t education reform. It is a privatization strategy that uses the language of parental choice to accomplish the transfer of public resources to private institutions that are not subject

to the same accountability, accessibility, or nondiscrimination requirements as the public system they are designed to replace.

Protect curriculum independence from political interference. The campaign to dictate what can and cannot be taught in public schools — book bans, prohibitions on discussing race or gender identity, mandatory Bible instruction, the replacement of trained school counselors with religious chaplains — is not an education policy. *It is a cultural control project* whose purpose is to ensure that the next generation is denied the analytical tools necessary to evaluate the political claims being made on its behalf. Establish federal standards protecting academic freedom in public K-12 education, prohibiting state legislatures from mandating or banning specific curricular content on ideological grounds, and ensuring that curriculum decisions are made by educators with subject-matter expertise rather than by politicians whose qualifications are electoral rather than pedagogical. This does not mean that communities have no voice in what their schools teach — it means that the voice must be exercised through school boards and curriculum review processes that include educators, parents, and subject-matter experts, not through state legislation that imposes ideological litmus tests on classroom content from the capitol.

Connect education to democratic citizenship. The civic education deficit in the United States is less of an accident than a product of decades of deliberate defunding and deprioritization. Only nine states and the District of Columbia require a full year of civics education. Many states have no civics requirement at all. The result is a population that can name the judges on a reality television show but cannot name the three branches of government — a population that is functionally illiterate about the institutions that govern its life and therefore unable to evaluate the claims made by those who seek to dismantle those institutions. This is the connection between education policy and every other section of this agenda: a population that does not understand how its government works cannot defend that government against those who seek to capture it. Mandate comprehensive civic education — including media literacy, constitutional law, the history of democratic movements, and the mechanics of participation — in every public school receiving federal funding. And fund it. The citizens' assemblies, the national service program, and the community infrastructure described in Part V are the adult continuation of a civic education that must begin in childhood. Without that foundation, no amount of institutional reform will produce a citizenry capable of sustaining the democracy those institutions are designed to protect.

Regulation of charter schools and for-profit educational institutions must be restored and expanded. The charter school movement was originally proposed as a laboratory for educational innovation within the public system — small, flexible schools that would experiment with pedagogical approaches, share their findings with traditional public schools, and improve the system from within. What it became, in practice, was a mechanism for diverting public education funding into private hands, often with less transparency, less accountability, and worse outcomes than the public schools the charters were supposed to improve. Charter schools that continue operating must meet the same accountability standards, the same civil rights requirements, the same special education mandates, and the same financial transparency obligations as public schools — because they are funded with public money, and public money carries public obligations. Oppose voucher programs, which are not educational reform but educational privatization — the transfer of taxpayer dollars from accountable public institutions to private and religious schools that are not required to meet the same standards, serve the same populations, or report the same outcomes, and whose primary political function is to erode the constituency for public education by giving middle-class families an exit from the system whose improvement they might otherwise demand.

Universal pre-K for all three- and four-year-olds — publicly funded, universally available, and staffed by professionally trained and professionally compensated early childhood educators. The evidence on early childhood education is among the most robust in the social sciences: children who attend high-quality pre-K programs demonstrate measurably better outcomes in school readiness, reading and math proficiency, social-emotional development, and long-term educational attainment, with the largest effects concentrated among children from low-income families — which is to say, the children who benefit most from the intervention are the children least likely to have access to it under the current system, in which pre-K is available to families who can afford private tuition or who are fortunate enough to live in one of the jurisdictions that fund it publicly. Universal pre-K is not childcare policy, although it serves a childcare function. It is educational infrastructure — the foundation on which every subsequent year of schooling builds, and without which the achievement gaps that this agenda's other educational proposals are designed to close begin forming before a child sets foot in a kindergarten classroom.

Smaller class sizes and professional wages for teachers — two proposals that are routinely treated as aspirational luxuries and that are in fact the most direct levers available for improving educational outcomes. The research on class size is clear: smaller classes produce measurably better outcomes, particularly in the early grades and particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, because smaller classes allow teachers to provide individualized attention, identify struggling students earlier, and build the relationships with students and families that are the precondition for effective teaching. The research on teacher compensation is equally clear: the United States faces a teacher shortage that is not a shortage of people willing to teach but a shortage of people willing to teach at the salaries offered — salaries that, adjusted for education level and hours worked, are significantly lower than those of comparably educated professionals in other fields. The average starting salary for a public school teacher in the United States is roughly forty-one thousand dollars. A graduate of a prestigious business school placed in a corporate management position starts at roughly ninety thousand dollars or more. One requires additional certification, continuing education, supervised clinical practice, and a willingness to perform the most consequential work a society asks anyone to do — shaping the minds and capacities of the next generation of citizens. The other requires the ability to optimize quarterly revenue for shareholders. Is this disparity a reflection of market forces operating on equivalent goods? Or is it a reflection of political choices about what a society values? The United States has made the answer legible in the paychecks: it values the management of capital more than the development of children. Pay teachers professional wages — salaries competitive with other professions requiring equivalent education and expertise — and the teacher shortage will resolve itself, because the shortage was never about a lack of vocation. It was about the indignity of being asked to do essential work for wages that require a second job or a working spouse to sustain a middle-class life.

Higher education reform. Free public college and university for every student admitted to a public institution — funded federally, administered through existing state university systems, and available without means testing, because means testing creates bureaucratic barriers that disproportionately exclude the students the program is designed to serve while subjecting working families to the humiliation of proving they are poor enough to deserve an education. The cost is substantial and the cost is justified: an educated population is the precondition for every other objective this agenda pursues — the informed electorate that democratic self-governance requires, the skilled workforce that a knowledge economy demands, the scientifically literate public that climate policy depends on, and the critically thinking citizens who are the only durable defense against the disinformation architecture described in the preceding section. Cancel existing federal student loan debt — not as a one-time act of generosity but as a structural correction for a system that loaded a generation of Americans with a

collective two trillion dollars in debt for the crime of pursuing the education that the economy demanded and that the job market's wages could not repay. For-profit colleges — institutions whose revenue model depends on maximizing enrollment, minimizing instructional cost, and extracting the maximum possible federal financial aid from students who disproportionately fail to graduate and disproportionately default on the loans they took out to attend — must convert to nonprofit status as a condition of receiving any federal funds, because the profit motive in higher education produces the same incentive structure it produces everywhere else this agenda examines: the optimization of revenue extraction at the expense of the population being served.

A specific percentage of admissions at all federally funded institutions — public universities and any private institution that accepts federal financial aid, which is nearly all of them — must be reserved as full-ride merit-based scholarships, awarded on demonstrated academic performance and potential without regard to family income, legacy status, athletic recruitment, or donor relationships. The purpose is structural: to ensure that access to the nation's most selective and most resource-rich educational institutions reflects performance rather than family wealth, and to break the self-perpetuating cycle in which the children of alumni, the children of donors, and the children of families that can afford private college preparatory education fill the seats at institutions that were chartered to serve the public, funded in significant part by the public, and that owe the public a student body that looks like the country rather than like its wealthiest zip codes.

Accurate and complete history curricula — including the history of slavery and its ongoing structural consequences, Indigenous dispossession and the treaty obligations the federal government has broken, the labor movement and the rights it secured that every American worker now takes for granted, the civil rights movement and the forces that opposed it, the internment of Japanese Americans, the history of immigration restriction and its racial motivations, and the structural racism embedded in housing policy, criminal justice, and economic institutions that persists in measurable form in the present. This is not "critical race theory," a term the Right has weaponized into a catchall epithet for any historical education that acknowledges the existence of racial injustice. It is history — documented, sourced, and as empirically verifiable as any other body of historical knowledge — and the campaign to exclude it from public school curricula is a campaign to produce citizens who do not understand the country they are governing, which is a precondition for governing it badly. Protect academic freedom by statute — at the K-12 level and in higher education — against the legislative campaigns currently underway in multiple states to prohibit the teaching of specific historical facts, restrict classroom discussion of race, gender, and sexuality, and subject teachers and professors to political litmus tests disguised as curricular standards. The legislator who bans a book from a school library is not protecting children. That legislator is ensuring that those children grow up unable to recognize the conditions the book described when they encounter them in their own lives.

Comprehensive, evidence-based sex education beginning at age-appropriate levels and continuing through high school — covering human biology, contraception, consent, healthy relationships, sexual orientation, and gender identity, and grounded in the medical and psychological evidence rather than in the religious doctrines or political anxieties of whichever constituency holds the local school board majority. Abstinence-only sex education — the approach mandated by federal policy for decades and still prevalent in many states — has been studied exhaustively and has been shown to produce no reduction in sexual activity, no delay in the initiation of sexual activity, and no reduction in rates of sexually transmitted infections or unintended pregnancy. What it produces is ignorance — specifically, the kind of ignorance that results in young people making decisions about their bodies and their relationships without the information that would allow those decisions to be informed. Every dollar spent on abstinence-only education is a dollar spent on a program that has been empirically

demonstrated not to work, sustained by political pressure from constituencies whose objection is not to the evidence but to the subject matter itself.

Evidence-based mental health skills — cognitive behavioral therapy techniques, mindfulness practices, dialectical behavior therapy toolkits — integrated into standard curricula from middle school onward. This shouldn't be considered therapy delivered by teachers. It is instead the teaching of essential skills — the skill of recognizing and managing emotional responses before they escalate into crisis, the skill of identifying cognitive distortions that produce anxiety and depression, the skill of tolerating distress without self-destructive behavior, the skill of maintaining interpersonal relationships through conflict rather than abandoning them. These are the same skills that clinical psychology has validated over decades of research as the most effective interventions for the mental health crisis that is currently producing the suicide rates, the addiction rates, the loneliness epidemic, and the pervasive anxiety documented throughout this agenda — and they are skills that can be taught before the crisis arrives, as preventive infrastructure rather than emergency response. This is consistent with the civic infrastructure described in Part V and the moral development framework described elsewhere in this document: a population equipped with the psychological tools to manage its own emotional life is a population less vulnerable to the demagogues, the algorithmically optimized outrage machines, and the culture of competitive victimhood that this agenda identifies as obstacles to democratic solidarity. The classroom is where the infrastructure begins — not because schools can solve the mental health crisis alone, but because schools are the only institution through which every young person in the country passes, and the skills that would make them resilient to the forces tearing democratic society apart can be taught there if anyone decides to teach them.

C. Science and Research

The United States built the most productive scientific research enterprise in human history — and then, over the course of four decades, allowed it to be systematically dismantled by a coalition of ideological hostility, corporate self-interest, and bipartisan neglect whose cumulative effect has been to surrender the country's competitive position in precisely the domains on which its future depends. The cancellation of the Superconducting Super Collider in 1993 — a ten-billion-dollar particle physics facility under construction in Texas that would have been the most powerful accelerator on earth — was the moment the retreat became visible. Congress killed the project to save money. The Europeans built CERN's Large Hadron Collider instead, discovered the Higgs boson in 2012, and the United States has not led in high-energy physics since. That decision was not an aberration. It was the beginning of a pattern in which the federal government's commitment to fundamental scientific research — research whose commercial applications are unknown, whose timelines are measured in decades, and whose value to society is therefore invisible to the quarterly earnings logic that governs both corporate R&D and the congressional appropriations process — has been steadily eroded, producing a country that remains capable of extraordinary applied innovation in the private sector while losing its capacity to generate the foundational knowledge on which all applied innovation ultimately depends.

The current administration has accelerated this erosion to a pace that would have been unrecognizable even five years ago. In 2025, the Trump administration terminated or froze more than seven thousand eight hundred grants from the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation — the two largest public supporters of scientific research in the United States — totaling billions of dollars in committed research funding, much of it targeting projects on topics the administration disfavors: infectious disease, vaccine development, climate science, misinformation research, and any investigation touching on race, gender, or health equity.[61] More than twenty-five thousand employees

departed federal science agencies, many of them early-career researchers whose expertise will not be easily replaced. The administration proposed slashing the NIH budget by nearly forty percent, the NSF by fifty-seven percent, and the DOE Office of Science by fourteen percent in fiscal year 2026 — cuts that, had Congress not intervened on a bipartisan basis to reject the worst of them, would have reduced non-defense research funding to 1991 levels and set the American scientific enterprise back a generation. The proposed cuts to basic research alone — thirty-four percent — represented an unprecedented peacetime disinvestment in the foundational science that has produced, over the preceding eighty years, the antibiotics, the semiconductors, the GPS satellites, the internet, the mRNA vaccines, and the renewable energy technologies on which both the American economy and American national security depend. The Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas has estimated that the rate of return on nondefense R&D spending ranges from one hundred forty to two hundred ten percent — which means that every dollar cut from the research budget costs the economy between $1.40 and $2.10 in future productivity, a return that no private investment consistently matches and that no rational fiscal policy would forfeit.

Congress, to its credit, rejected the worst of the proposed devastation — maintaining NIH funding with a modest increase and limiting NSF cuts to roughly three percent in the final appropriations. But "Congress prevented the catastrophe" falls woefully short of a science policy. It is instead the description of a system in which the survival of the nation's research enterprise depends each year on whether a handful of appropriators from both parties are willing to defy the executive, which is a structural vulnerability that no serious country should tolerate, especially for an enterprise on which its future competitiveness, public health, national security, and capacity to respond to existential threats like climate change all depend.

Restore and dramatically expand federal research funding. Double the budgets of the NSF, the NIH, the DOE Office of Science, and NASA's Science Mission Directorate over a defined timeline — not as a one-time stimulus but as a sustained, structural commitment to restoring American scientific leadership and maintaining it across administrations. Establish specific set-asides for fundamental research without immediate commercial application — research driven by curiosity, by the pursuit of knowledge whose value cannot be predicted in advance, and by the recognition that the most consequential scientific breakthroughs of the last century — quantum mechanics, the structure of DNA, the theory of general relativity, the discovery of cosmic background radiation — were produced by researchers who were not trying to build a product but trying to understand the universe, and whose understanding subsequently transformed every domain of human life in ways their funders could not have anticipated and would not have funded if commercial return had been the criterion. The private sector will fund applied research because applied research produces profits. Only the public sector will fund fundamental research, because fundamental research produces knowledge — and knowledge, unlike a product, cannot be captured by the entity that funded it, which means that its benefits are diffused across the entire society, which means that the market will systematically underinvest in it, which is the textbook definition of a public good requiring public funding.

Restore scientific agency independence — codified by statute, not maintained by norm — so that agency directors serve defined terms, are removable only for cause, and are insulated from the kind of political interference that the current administration has demonstrated is possible when independence is a matter of convention rather than law. The NIH director, the NSF director, the heads of NOAA, the EPA's science offices, and the leadership of every federal agency whose function includes the production or evaluation of scientific evidence must be protected from removal for political reasons — because the moment a scientist's job security depends on producing findings that please the administration, the findings cease to be science and become propaganda, which is precisely the condition the current administration has sought to create. Nearly five hundred NIH staff members signed the Bethesda

Declaration in 2025, a letter of dissent to the agency's director protesting politically motivated interference in research. NSF employees filed a whistleblower complaint alleging "politically motivated and legally questionable" actions including the termination of hundreds of staff. These are not the actions of a disgruntled bureaucracy. They are the actions of scientists who understood that what was being done to their institutions constituted a threat to the integrity of the scientific enterprise itself — and who risked their careers to say so.

Lift the ban on gun violence research — a ban imposed in practice by the Dickey Amendment of 1996, which prohibited the CDC from using funds to "advocate or promote gun control" and which was interpreted, by design, as a prohibition on any federally funded research into the causes and prevention of gun violence. The result was a two-decade void in the epidemiological data on a public health crisis that kills roughly forty-five thousand Americans per year — a void that was not accidental but manufactured by the firearms industry and its congressional allies for the explicit purpose of ensuring that the policy debate over gun violence would proceed without evidence. The modest funding restored in recent years is inadequate. Fund gun violence research at levels proportional to the scale of the crisis — which is to say, at levels comparable to federal investment in research on other leading causes of death — and protect that funding from the political interference that suppressed it for a generation.

Re-establish the Office of Technology Assessment — the nonpartisan congressional agency that from 1972 to 1995 provided Congress with independent, expert analysis of scientific and technological issues, and that was defunded by Newt Gingrich's Congress in one of the first acts of the Republican Revolution, for the transparent reason that an office producing independent scientific analysis was inconvenient for a congressional majority whose policy agenda required ignoring independent scientific analysis. The elimination of the OTA left Congress — a body whose members are overwhelmingly lawyers, businesspeople, and career politicians with no scientific training — without an in-house capacity to evaluate the scientific and technological dimensions of the legislation it passes. The result is a legislature that depends for its scientific understanding on the testimony of lobbyists, the briefings of interest groups, and the summaries provided by congressional staff members who are themselves generalists operating without institutional scientific support. Re-establish the OTA, staff it with career scientists and engineers protected by the same merit-system provisions this agenda demands for all federal scientific positions, and fund it at levels that allow it to produce the rigorous, independent, publicly available analysis that Congress needs to legislate responsibly on matters from artificial intelligence to climate policy to pandemic preparedness to the regulation of emerging technologies whose implications the legislators voting on them do not understand.

The neoliberal anti-science propaganda process — documented in this agenda's Appendix A — has operated for decades through a consistent and replicable mechanism: industries whose profits are threatened by scientific findings fund think tanks, public relations firms, and compliant scientists to manufacture doubt about those findings, then use that manufactured doubt to delay regulatory action, then use the delay to continue extracting profit while the harm compounds.[9] Tobacco did it with lung cancer. Fossil fuel companies did it with climate change. Chemical manufacturers did it with pesticide toxicity. Pharmaceutical companies did it with opioid addiction data. The mechanism is the same in every case: the same network of funders, the same ecosystem of think tanks and scientists spouting alternative viewpoints, the same public relations strategies, and the same rhetorical formula — "the science isn't settled," "we need more research," "the costs of regulation outweigh the benefits" — applied with interchangeable precision to whatever scientific consensus happens to threaten the current quarter's earnings. Restoring scientific agency independence, expanding research funding, and re-establishing the OTA are necessary but insufficient responses to this propaganda architecture. The deeper response is to ensure that the institutions producing scientific knowledge are funded publicly,

governed independently, and structured so that their findings cannot be suppressed, distorted, or delayed by the industries those findings implicate — which requires not only the institutional reforms described here but the campaign finance reforms, the media reforms, and the corporate accountability mechanisms described elsewhere in this agenda. Science cannot defend itself against the political power of the industries it investigates. Only democratic institutions with the structural independence to act on scientific findings regardless of their commercial implications can do that — and building those institutions is what this entire agenda is for.

D. Digital Rights, Data Ownership, and Intellectual Property

A defining economic transaction of the twenty-first century is one that most of its participants don't recognize as a transaction at all. Every search query, every location ping, every purchase, every social media interaction, every medical record, every biometric scan, every pattern of browsing behavior, every recorded conversation with a voice assistant — each of these generates data that is collected, aggregated, analyzed, packaged, and sold by corporations whose entire business model depends on the fact that the people generating the data do not understand its value, do not know who holds it, cannot control how it is used, and have never meaningfully consented to its collection. Is this a "market failure?" Hardly. It is a market functioning exactly as designed — a market in which the product is the behavioral prediction derived from intimate surveillance of billions of people, the customers are the advertisers and political operatives who purchase those predictions, and the people being surveilled are neither the customers nor the sellers but the raw material from which the product is extracted. Shoshana Zuboff named this architecture "surveillance capitalism," and the name is precise: it is capitalism whose commodity is human experience itself, rendered into data, refined into prediction, and sold to the highest bidder without the knowledge or consent of the human beings whose experience was the feedstock.

Every person's data belongs to them. This is the foundational principle, and it must be established by federal statute with the force and specificity that the current patchwork of state laws, industry self-regulation, and unread terms-of-service agreements does not and cannot provide. Comprehensive federal data protection legislation modeled on the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation — not as a copy of the GDPR, which has its own flaws and enforcement gaps, but as an American framework built on the same structural principles and adapted to the American legal and commercial landscape. ***Data minimization:*** companies may collect only the data necessary for the specific service the user has requested, and the burden of justifying collection falls on the collector, not the collected. ***Purpose limitation:*** data collected for one purpose may not be repurposed for another without explicit, informed, specific consent — not the buried-in-paragraph-forty-seven consent of a terms-of-service agreement that no human being has ever read, but the kind of consent that requires the company to explain, in language accessible to a non-specialist, what data is being collected, what it will be used for, who will have access to it, and what happens to it when the user's relationship with the service ends. ***Right of access:*** every person has the right to see, in complete and comprehensible form, all data any company holds about them. ***Right to erasure:*** every person has the right to demand that their data be deleted — fully, permanently, and verifiably — from any system that holds it. ***Right to portability:*** every person has the right to take their data with them when they leave a platform, in a format that allows them to use it elsewhere, so that the network-effect lock-in that currently makes departure from a dominant platform functionally equivalent to social exile is broken by ensuring that the data a person generated belongs to the person, not the platform.

Penalties for violations must be scaled to global revenue — up to four percent, matching the GDPR's ceiling — because flat fines are not penalties for corporations whose quarterly revenues exceed the GDP of most countries. A fifty-million-dollar fine imposed on a company earning fifty billion dollars a year is a five-minute rounding error in the quarterly earnings call. This is a licensing fee for continued violation, budgeted alongside marketing expenses and treated with the same moral weight. Penalties scaled to revenue change the calculus: four percent of global revenue is a number that appears in the CEO's performance review, that affects the stock price, and that creates the institutional incentive to invest in compliance rather than accept the fine as a cost of doing business. Enforcement must be vested in an independent agency — not the Federal Trade Commission in its current weakened state, but a dedicated data protection authority with the statutory independence, the technical expertise, the staffing, and the budget to investigate violations, compel disclosure, and litigate against companies that treat their users' data as a corporate asset rather than a personal right. The EU's experience demonstrates both the promise and the limitation of this approach: the GDPR established the right framework, but enforcement has been uneven because the agencies tasked with enforcement are underfunded and the companies they regulate have more lawyers than the regulators have staff. The American version must be designed with enforcement capacity built in from the outset, not bolted on as an afterthought.

AI training data rights represent the frontier of this fight, and the frontier is moving faster than the law. The large language models, image generators, and predictive systems that constitute the current wave of artificial intelligence were trained on datasets that include the copyrighted work of millions of writers, artists, musicians, photographers, and programmers — work that was scraped from the internet without consent, without compensation, and without disclosure. The companies that built these models assert that the use of this material constitutes fair use or that the training process transforms the material sufficiently to extinguish the original creator's claim. These assertions are self-serving, legally contested, and structurally identical to the argument that any other form of industrial appropriation makes: the taking was necessary for progress, and progress benefits everyone, and therefore the people whose work was taken should be grateful rather than compensated. **So require consent for the use of personal data in AI training** — consent that is specific, informed, and revocable, not implicit in the act of posting a photograph online or publishing an article on a website. Require compensation for the use of copyrighted material in training datasets, structured as a licensing regime that ensures creators are paid for the commercial exploitation of their work rather than discovering after the fact that their life's output was ingested by a model that now competes with them in the marketplace. Require transparency about training data — full public disclosure of the sources, the volumes, the selection criteria, and the terms under which material was acquired — so that the public and the courts can evaluate the claims these companies make about the legality and ethics of their data practices.

Personal criminal liability — not corporate fines, not consent decrees, not deferred prosecution agreements, but criminal liability for the individual executives who authorize systematic data theft or intellectual property appropriation. The corporate form has been used for a century to insulate the people who make decisions from the consequences of those decisions, producing a system in which a company can steal the creative output of millions of people, generate billions of dollars in revenue from that theft, and settle the resulting litigation with a payment that amounts to a fraction of the profit — while the executives who authorized the taking face no personal consequence whatsoever. Criminal liability changes this equation. When the person who signs the order knows that the order could result in their prosecution — not the company's prosecution, not a fine paid from corporate funds, not a settlement negotiated by corporate lawyers, but their own prosecution and their own potential imprisonment — the orders that get signed are different. Mandatory disgorgement of profits derived from stolen data or intellectual property — not damages calculated by courts years after the fact, but

automatic forfeiture of every dollar of revenue attributable to the misappropriated material, calculated from the date of first use and continuing until the violation is remedied. Disgorgement eliminates the possibility that theft is profitable even after the penalty — which, under the current system, it almost always is.

Intellectual property reform — because the system designed to incentivize creation has been captured by the corporations that profit from monopolizing it, and the distance between the system's stated purpose and its actual function has become so vast that the two bear no recognizable relationship to each other. Copyright in the United States now extends to seventy years after the death of the author — a term that was extended in 1998 by the Sonny Bono Copyright Term Extension Act, a law whose primary beneficiary was the Walt Disney Company, whose lobbying campaign to prevent Mickey Mouse from entering the public domain was so transparent that the legislation was widely known as the "Mickey Mouse Protection Act." The original Copyright Act of 1790 provided a term of fourteen years, renewable once — a framework designed to give creators a meaningful period of exclusive benefit from their work and then return that work to the public domain, where it could be built upon, adapted, and made available to the culture that produced it. The current seventy-years-after-death term serves no creative incentive whatsoever — no writer, no musician, no artist is motivated to create by the prospect that their great-grandchildren's estate will continue to collect royalties decades after their death. What the extended term serves is corporate rent-seeking: it ensures that works whose creators are long dead remain the exclusive property of the corporations that acquired the rights, generating revenue streams that flow to shareholders rather than to the culture from which the works emerged and to which they belong.

Move toward shorter copyright terms — the original fourteen-year framework, or a modernized equivalent that provides creators with a meaningful period of exclusivity while ensuring that works enter the public domain within a timeframe that serves cultural and democratic purposes rather than corporate balance sheets. **Strengthen fair use protections** — so that commentary, criticism, parody, education, and transformative use are protected robustly against the chilling effect of litigation threats from rights-holders whose legal budgets dwarf those of the individuals and institutions engaged in legitimate fair use. **Limit patent abuse** — particularly the practice of acquiring broad, vaguely worded patents not for the purpose of producing anything but for the purpose of threatening litigation against anyone who does, a practice known as patent trolling that extracts billions of dollars annually from productive enterprises and that serves no function other than the enrichment of the entities engaged in it. Reform the patent system so that patents are granted only for genuinely novel inventions with demonstrated specificity, enforce use-it-or-lose-it provisions that prevent the warehousing of patents as litigation weapons, and shorten patent terms in domains where the pace of innovation has rendered the current twenty-year term an eternity — granting effective monopolies over technologies that were already obsolete before the patent expired.

Intellectual property law exists — or should exist — to serve two purposes: incentivizing creation by ensuring that creators benefit from their work, and enriching the public domain by ensuring that creative works eventually become available to the culture that produced them. The current system has inverted these purposes. It now functions primarily to protect corporate monopolies on ideas, to extend the revenue streams of rights-holding entities long past any connection to creative incentive, and to weaponize the legal system against the very creators, innovators, and cultural participants the system was designed to serve. The reforms proposed here are not hostile to intellectual property. They are a restoration of intellectual property's original purpose — a purpose that the corporations currently profiting from the system's distortion have every incentive to obscure and that this agenda has every obligation to name.

E. Democratic Control of Technology

Some of the most consequential decisions affecting the daily lives of American citizens are increasingly made not by elected officials, or courts, or any institution subject to democratic accountability, but by *algorithms* — proprietary mathematical systems owned by private corporations, designed by engineers whose names the public will never know, operating according to logic that the public is not permitted to inspect, and producing outcomes that the public has no mechanism to challenge, appeal, or reverse. An algorithm determines whether a job application is seen by a human recruiter or filtered out before any person reads it. An algorithm determines whether a loan is approved or denied, at what interest rate, and on what terms — and the applicant who is denied will never know whether the denial was based on creditworthiness, zip code, racial proxy, or a statistical correlation between their browsing history and the default rates of people the algorithm has classified as similar. An algorithm determines the price a consumer pays for an airline ticket, an insurance premium, a hotel room, a ride-share fare — and the price may differ from the price offered to another consumer for the same product at the same time based on variables the consumer cannot see and the company will not disclose. An algorithm determines which defendants are released on bail and which are detained, which neighborhoods receive intensified policing and which do not, which parolees are classified as high-risk and which are classified as low — and the training data on which these determinations rest encodes every racial disparity, every enforcement bias, and every structural inequality in the criminal justice system that produced it, reproducing those patterns with the authority of mathematical precision while the word "algorithm" provides a veneer of objectivity that the underlying data does not support.

These are not private decisions. They are governance decisions — decisions that allocate opportunity, determine access to essential services, shape the information environment, set prices in markets where consumers have no negotiating power, and distribute the benefits and burdens of economic and civic life across the population. When a decision of this kind is made by a government agency, it is subject to administrative law, to judicial review, to legislative oversight, to freedom-of-information requests, and to the constitutional constraints that limit governmental power over individuals. When the same decision is made by an algorithm owned by a private corporation, it is subject to nothing — no transparency requirement, no appeals process, no external audit, no democratic accountability of any kind. The corporation that owns the algorithm treats it as a trade secret. The individual affected by the algorithm's output has no right to know what inputs were used, what weights were applied, what variables were considered, or why the decision went the way it did. This is governance without consent, law without legislation, judgment without appeal — and it is expanding into every domain of American life at a pace that the political system has made no serious effort to match with regulatory capacity.

Technological infrastructure that functions as public utility — that serves as the medium through which citizens access information, communicate with one another, seek employment, obtain credit, interact with government services, and participate in the economic and civic life of the nation — must be subject to democratic governance. This isn’t a novel principle. It is the same principle that subjected railroads to common-carrier obligations in the nineteenth century, that regulated telephone networks as public utilities in the twentieth, and that established the Federal Communications Commission to govern the broadcast spectrum on the grounds that the airwaves belonged to the public even when the transmitters belonged to private corporations. The digital infrastructure of the twenty-first century is at least as consequential as the railroad, the telephone, and the broadcast spectrum — and it is governed with less democratic accountability than any of them. The argument that digital platforms and algorithmic systems are "private" and therefore beyond the reach of public governance is the same argument that railroad barons made in the 1880s, that telephone monopolists made in the 1930s, and

that broadcast networks made in the 1960s. It was wrong then. It is wrong now. And the consequences of accepting it are more severe, because the scope of algorithmic governance is broader, more intimate, and more consequential than any previous form of private power over public life.

Public interest technology authority. A new federal agency — not housed within existing regulatory structures whose institutional cultures and procedural timelines were designed for a slower technological era, but purpose-built for the speed and technical complexity of the domain it governs. Staffed by technologists, not lawyers — engineers, computer scientists, data scientists, and security researchers who understand the systems they are overseeing at the level of architecture and code, not merely at the level of policy abstraction. Appointed through rotating sortition-based selection from a qualified pool, consistent with the governance principles described elsewhere in this agenda — ensuring that the body's composition is not captured by the industry it regulates through the revolving-door dynamics that have rendered every existing technology-adjacent regulatory body functionally compliant with the interests of the companies it nominally oversees. The authority must have the power to issue binding interim directives on expedited timelines — days or weeks, not the months or years that conventional rulemaking requires — because algorithmic systems deployed at scale cause harm at internet speed, and a regulatory process that operates at bureaucratic speed is a regulatory process that arrives after the damage is done and the company has moved on to the next product. Interim directives would be subject to after-the-fact judicial review, ensuring constitutional accountability while preserving the capacity to act before an algorithmic deployment that affects millions of people has operated unchecked for years while the administrative process grinds through notice-and-comment periods designed for an era in which regulatory targets were factories, not software updates pushed to a billion devices overnight.

The design principle is speed and technical competence deployed within democratic constraints — not the deregulatory fiction that markets will self-correct, which they will not, and not the bureaucratic default of agencies that produce hundred-page reports and consent decrees that the regulated companies treat as suggestions. The technology authority must be capable of receiving a complaint, evaluating the technical architecture of the system in question, determining whether the system violates established standards, and issuing an order requiring modification or suspension — all within a timeframe that is relevant to the pace of technological deployment. The Federal Trade Commission's current approach to technology regulation — which consists primarily of after-the-fact enforcement actions brought years after the violation, resulting in settlements that impose no structural remedy and carry fines that the regulated companies do not notice — is not regulation. It is a performance of regulation, and the technology industry has correctly concluded that the performance carries no cost.

Mandatory open protocols and interoperability to prevent platform lock-in — the condition in which a user's data, social connections, communication history, and digital identity are trapped within a single platform's proprietary ecosystem, making departure from the platform functionally equivalent to abandoning years of accumulated digital life. Interoperability requirements would mandate that dominant platforms allow communication across platform boundaries — as email does, as the telephone network does, as every previous communication infrastructure subject to common-carrier obligations has done — so that a user on one platform can communicate with a user on another without either being required to join the other's service. Open protocols would ensure that the standards governing digital communication are publicly documented, independently maintained, and available for any developer to implement — preventing the dominant platforms from using proprietary protocols to create walled gardens that exclude competitors not through superior service but through architectural lock-in. The antitrust implications are direct: a platform that controls both the communication infrastructure and the social graph of its users possesses monopoly power that cannot be challenged by

competitive entry, because no competitor can offer an equivalent service without access to the social connections the incumbent has enclosed. Interoperability breaks the enclosure and restores the competitive conditions under which platform quality, privacy practices, and user experience determine market outcomes rather than the sheer gravity of accumulated network effects.

Publicly funded open-source alternatives for critical digital infrastructure — because the argument that essential public functions should not depend on the proprietary systems of private corporations whose interests may diverge from the public interest is the same argument this agenda makes about healthcare, about education, about energy, and about every other domain in which the market's optimization function does not align with the public good. A publicly funded social platform, described in the media reform section, is one instance of this principle. But the principle extends further: open-source operating systems for government computing, open-source tools for election administration, open-source platforms for civic deliberation and participatory governance, open-source AI models available to publicly funded researchers and public institutions — each of these reduces dependence on private vendors whose contractual terms, pricing decisions, and product roadmaps are governed by shareholder returns rather than public need. The cost of developing and maintaining open-source public infrastructure is real and must be funded at levels sufficient to produce systems that are reliable, secure, and competitive with their proprietary equivalents. But the cost of *not* developing public alternatives — of allowing every digital system through which citizens interact with their government, their schools, their healthcare providers, and each other to be owned, operated, and ultimately controlled by private corporations — is a dependency that this agenda's analysis of corporate power should make unacceptable.

Algorithmic accountability boards with audit and modification authority — sortition-selected bodies, staffed with independent technical experts and ordinary citizens, empowered to examine the algorithms governing high-stakes decisions in employment, lending, criminal justice, insurance, housing, and public services; to require the companies operating these algorithms to disclose their architecture, training data, and decision logic to the board under confidentiality protections sufficient to address legitimate trade-secret concerns; and to order modifications to algorithms found to produce discriminatory outcomes, violate privacy standards, or operate in ways that are materially inconsistent with the representations the companies have made to the public. The boards operate as the algorithmic equivalent of the financial auditors, food safety inspectors, and environmental compliance officers that every other industry with the capacity to cause widespread harm is required to submit to — an external check on systems whose operators have every incentive to declare them fair, accurate, and unbiased, and whose declarations cannot be verified without independent access to the systems themselves.

The precautionary principle, articulated in Part IV of this agenda and applied throughout its proposals, governs every element of this section. The burden of demonstrating that a technological deployment is safe — that it does not discriminate, does not violate privacy, does not produce outcomes that are materially harmful to the populations affected by it — falls on the proponent of the deployment, not on the public that bears the consequences if the demonstration is never made.[8] The current default is the opposite: technology companies deploy algorithmic systems at scale, affecting millions of people, with no obligation to demonstrate safety before deployment and no mechanism for accountability after harm is discovered except litigation that takes years, costs millions, and produces settlements that amount to the cost of doing business. This is the same default that allowed pharmaceutical companies to market drugs without adequate safety trials, chemical manufacturers to discharge toxins without environmental review, and automobile manufacturers to sell vehicles without crash-testing standards — defaults that were eventually reversed, in every case, only after sufficient harm had accumulated to overcome the industry's political resistance to regulation. The technology industry is no different; it is earlier in the

same cycle. The precautionary principle breaks the cycle at the front end, before the harm accumulates, by establishing the principle that no corporation has the right to experiment on the public without the public's informed consent and the regulator's prior review. The technology exists to conduct these assessments. The technical expertise exists to staff the bodies that would conduct them. The only thing that does not exist is the political will to impose on the technology industry the same obligations that every other industry with the capacity to cause widespread harm has been required to meet — and that political will is what this agenda, and the movement behind it, is designed to create.

PART VII: RIGHTS AND EQUALITY

Here we counter the carceral state, immigration enforcement as racial control, the surveillance state, the rise of Christian nationalist theocracy, gender inequality, plutocratic impunity, and the rollback of reproductive rights.

The economic structure described in the preceding sections does not sustain itself by economic logic alone. Concentrated wealth requires divided labor — in the sense of specialized production, but also in a deeper sense that the people whose collective action could threaten the concentration must be kept from recognizing their shared interest in doing so. Racial hierarchy, gender subordination, the carceral state, immigration enforcement as racial control, the surveillance apparatus, and the resurgence of Christian nationalist theocracy don't just happen to coexist alongside economic inequality. Again, they are the mechanisms by which economic inequality reproduces itself — the load-bearing walls of an architecture designed to ensure that the woman in the meatpacking plant and the man driving for a gig platform and the family facing eviction and the immigrant cleaning office buildings at midnight never stand in the same room and say the same sentence: *the people who own everything are the reason none of us have enough*. Every division catalogued in this section — every rollback of reproductive rights, every discriminatory enforcement pattern, every expansion of the surveillance state, every legislative gesture toward theocratic governance — serves that function, whether or not the individuals advancing it consciously intend it.

The eighth right in our Bill of Rights and Responsibilities — Equal Dignity — requires affirmative institutional design; it is not self-executing. But neither is it sufficient as a political strategy to catalog specific injuries each group suffers and prosecute each case in isolation from the others. The progressive movement has spent the better part of three decades doing exactly that, and the results are now a matter of record, resulting in a coalition so fractured along identity lines that its constituent parts spend more political energy policing one another's language, establishing hierarchies of victimhood, and litigating the relative severity of their respective grievances than they spend building the cross-cutting economic solidarity *that is the only force capable of changing the structures that produce every one of those grievances in the first place*. Once again, this is not a comfortable observation for progressives to hear, and it will be misread — perhaps deliberately, by some — as an argument that racism, sexism, homophobia, and the other forms of oppression addressed in this section are not real, not serious, or not worth fighting. They are all three…of course they are. But the argument here is different and much more demanding: **that the *political mode* in which these struggles have been conducted — the conversion of every policy disagreement into a question of personal identity, the reflexive equation of criticism with bigotry, the elevation of group loyalty over persuasion, and the treatment of coalition partners as enemies whenever they prioritize a different injury from one's own — has been a catastrophic strategic gift to the very forces it claims to oppose.** The Right did not invent the culture war. But it has won every major battle of the last thirty years in significant part because the Left has cooperated by fighting on the terrain the Right has chosen — identity rather than economics, symbolic recognition rather than material redistribution*, and the language of personal offense rather than the language of structural power*.

What has emerged is a politics of competitive victimhood so thoroughly internalized that it functions less as a strategy for liberation than as a form of identity — a way of being in the world that requires a permanent enemy, a permanent grievance, and a permanent refusal to subordinate one's particular injury to any collective project that does not place that injury at the absolute center of its concerns. Consider the person who will not join a coalition for a living wage because the coalition's statement did

not lead with their specific demographic's experience of wage theft…does this advance justice? As they perform righteous indignation, that performance costs everyone — including themselves — the political power that would be required to achieve the material change that would actually improve their life. This dynamic isn't confined to one side of the political spectrum; the white working-class voter who refuses solidarity with Black workers because racial resentment has been offered as a substitute for economic agency is engaged in the same error from the opposite direction. But this agenda is addressed to progressives, and it is progressives who must discipline themselves to recognize that the economic structure — the concentration of wealth, the erosion of labor power, the capture of democratic institutions by capital — is the root system from which every form of oppression addressed in this section grows. Cut the root, and the branches die. Prune the branches while the root flourishes, and they grow back faster than any movement can cut them again.

So…this isn't an argument to undermine reproductive rights, LGBTQ+ discrimination, racial injustice, disability exclusion, or any other specific form of oppression. Every section that follows makes the case for specific, concrete, enforceable protections in these and more. Instead, this is an argument about *priority of framing and strategy*: that every one of these fights is stronger, more persuasive, and more likely to produce durable change **when it is rooted in the economic analysis that connects it to every other fight,** instead of conducted as an isolated identity-group campaign whose primary audience is people who already agree. The progressive movement does not lack passion. What it lacks is the discipline to subordinate "but what about me and what I care about" to the harder, less emotionally satisfying, and ultimately more powerful question: *what about all of us, and what do we need to do together that none of us can do alone.*

A. Reproductive Rights

Federal statutory protection for abortion access — codifying and extending the right recognized in *Roe* — is the starting point, and it is only the starting point. Repeal the Hyde Amendment, which has functioned since 1977 not as a neutral conscience provision but as an economic weapon aimed precisely at the women least able to absorb its consequences: low-income women, disproportionately women of color, whose access to reproductive healthcare is mediated through Medicaid and therefore subject to a political veto that women with private insurance never face. The Hyde Amendment does not prevent abortion. It prevents poor women from obtaining abortions safely and legally, which is a different thing entirely, and the pretense that these are the same thing has been maintained for nearly five decades by legislators who understand the difference perfectly well. Guarantee contraception access by federal law, including over-the-counter hormonal contraception, because the evidence on this point is unambiguous and has been for decades.

The evidence-based framing requires progressive advocates to say something they have been strangely reluctant to say, loudly and often: **the policies that actually reduce abortion are progressive policies.** The data are not contested. When comprehensive reproductive healthcare organizations like Planned Parenthood begin operating in an area, abortion rates decline — by as much as fifty percent after the first year — because access to contraception, education, and preventive care reduces unintended pregnancies. Those who claim to want fewer abortions and who simultaneously seek to defund the organizations that produce fewer abortions are not engaged in a moral project. They are engaged in a control project, and the refusal of the progressive movement to say so in plain language — repeatedly, without apology, and in terms that any voter can understand — is one of the most consequential unforced communications failures of the last half-century. State the evidence. Name the contradiction.

Do not allow the framing to remain on the terrain of moral intuition when the empirical terrain is so favorable.

Further, restrictions on reproductive autonomy enforce economic dependence and function as labor market discipline — compelling women to remain in exploitative employment or relationships because the alternative is unaffordable. This is the connection between this section and the economic analysis that governs this entire document: bodily autonomy is not a separate issue from economic justice. It is the same issue, experienced in the body rather than the paycheck, and the political separation of the two — the treatment of reproductive rights as a "social issue" distinct from "economic issues" — is itself a product of the strategic fragmentation described above, a fragmentation that serves the interests of everyone except the women affected.

B. LGBTQ+ Rights

Federal nondiscrimination protections covering sexual orientation and gender identity in employment, housing, public accommodations, credit, and federal programs are essential. The Supreme Court's 8-1 decision in *Chiles v. Salazar* (March 2026) demands honest engagement rather than reflexive condemnation — because the liberal justices who joined the majority did so for reasons that progressives must understand if they are to respond effectively. Justice Kagan, joined by Justice Sotomayor, concurred that Colorado's law was a "textbook" viewpoint-based speech restriction — not because they endorse conversion therapy, but because Colorado's law prohibited therapy aimed at changing a minor's orientation while permitting therapy aimed at affirming it. That asymmetry — favoring one therapeutic viewpoint over another — is precisely what the First Amendment prohibits, regardless of which viewpoint is favored. Kagan's concurrence explicitly signaled that a viewpoint-neutral law — one that regulated the category of therapeutic practice without picking sides — "would raise a different and more difficult question" that the Court did not decide. This is not a defeat. It is a roadmap.

The deeper structural issue is whether the state's longstanding authority to regulate professional conduct extends to professional speech — whether a licensed therapist's words to a patient receive the same First Amendment protection as a citizen's words in the public square. Justice Jackson, alone in dissent, argued that professional speech regulation has never required strict scrutiny and that "the Constitution does not pose a barrier to reasonable regulation of harmful medical treatments just because substandard care comes via speech instead of scalpel." The other eight justices disagreed, at least where the regulation is viewpoint-based. But Kagan's concurrence left the door open for viewpoint-neutral professional standards — and that is the pathway this agenda must pursue.

The revised approach: ban aversive physical conversion therapy practices outright, which the Court left open to regulation as conduct. For talk-based practices, pursue viewpoint-neutral regulatory pathways — require that all licensed mental health professionals adhere to evidence-based standards of care as a condition of licensure, and establish that practices unanimously condemned by every major professional body as harmful and ineffective fall outside the scope of evidence-based care. This framing regulates the *standard of professional competence*, not the *viewpoint of the therapist* — a distinction that Kagan's concurrence suggests may prove constitutionally decisive. Fund public education campaigns documenting the evidence of harm, and support state legislatures in drafting laws that follow the roadmap the Court's own liberal concurrence provided rather than repeating the structural error Colorado made. And let this case serve as a broader warning: laws designed to protect vulnerable populations must be drafted with constitutional precision, because sloppy legislation hands opponents the victories that sound policy would deny them.

On gender-affirming care for adults: accessible through the private healthcare tier, funded by private insurance, governed by the same patient-provider relationship protections that apply to every other medical decision. The principle is straightforward. Adults consult their physicians, make informed decisions about their own bodies, and the state has no legitimate role in overriding that decision absent the same standards of medical malpractice and informed consent that govern every other domain of medicine. The political campaign to prohibit adult gender-affirming care doesn't make a *medical* argument. It is a *cultural-control* argument dressed in medical language, and it should be engaged on those terms.

For minors, the question requires the same discipline this agenda applies to every novel intervention at expanded scale: honest engagement with the evidence as it stands, not as any political faction wishes it stood. The existing evidence base supports gender-affirming interventions for carefully diagnosed adolescents under established clinical protocols — protocols developed by the Endocrine Society, reviewed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, and practiced under medical supervision with longitudinal outcome data that, while still accumulating, does not support the catastrophist narrative that opponents have constructed. At the same time, the rapid expansion of both demand and provision warrants what this agenda expects of every novel intervention: structured pilot programs with longitudinal study, transparent outcome reporting, and the willingness to follow the evidence wherever it leads — including toward modifications of practice if the evidence warrants them. This is the same standard applied to carbon capture, cooperative enterprise models, UBI pilot programs, and every other proposal whose promise is strong but whose implementation at scale has not yet been fully validated. Reject both unrestricted access driven by political demand and political prohibition driven by cultural panic. Follow the medicine. The point is not to find a comfortable middle ground between competing political pressures. The point is to protect the children, which requires evidence rather than ideology and caution rather than certainty from any direction.

C. Criminal Justice and Policing

The War on Drugs has been, from its inception, a war on communities — disproportionately Black and Latino communities — waged under the pretense of public safety while producing outcomes indistinguishable from deliberate social destruction: mass incarceration, family dissolution, the systematic creation of a permanent underclass stripped of voting rights, employment prospects, and housing eligibility. End it. Decriminalize personal possession. Legalize and regulate cannabis federally, with mandatory expungement of prior convictions and reinvestment of tax revenues into the communities that bore the heaviest costs of prohibition. Eliminate cash bail, which functions as pretrial imprisonment for poverty. End mandatory minimums, which transfer sentencing discretion from judges who hear cases to legislators who never will. Abolish life without parole for nonviolent offenses — a sentence that presumes no human being is capable of transformation, which is a moral claim no serious society should be willing to make.

But ending the drug war addresses only the demand side of mass incarceration. The supply side — the institutional infrastructure that requires a steady flow of human beings to justify its own existence — must be dismantled as well. The private prison industry and the private immigration detention system have created a perverse economic incentive in which corporate profitability depends on the continued imprisonment of as many people as possible. Why do corporations lobby for harsher sentencing, for mandatory minimums, for the criminalization of immigration status? Is it because these policies really serve public safety? Or is it because they fill beds and swell profits? A justice system in which incarceration is a revenue stream for shareholders isn't a justice system. Its's a market. End private

prisons. End private immigration detention. Return the administration of punishment — if punishment there must be — to public institutions accountable to the public, not to quarterly earnings calls.

The militarization of local police forces is the physical expression of the same logic. The 1033 program has transferred billions of dollars in military hardware to law enforcement agencies that were never designed, trained, or authorized to function as occupying armies. Armored vehicles deployed in neighborhoods where the principal threats are domestic disputes and traffic violations. Military-grade weapons in the hands of officers whose training in de-escalation is measured in hours, not semesters. The equipment shapes the posture, the posture shapes the culture, and the culture produces the outcomes: communities policed as hostile territory, encounters escalated into confrontation, and a doctrine of force that treats civilian casualties as an acceptable operational cost. End the 1033 program. Implement binding federal use-of-force standards. Eliminate qualified immunity, which has become a judicial doctrine of near-total impunity for officers whose conduct would be criminal if performed by anyone without a badge. Establish elected civilian oversight boards with genuine power — subpoena authority, disciplinary jurisdiction, and budgetary review. The advisory bodies that currently exist in most cities often serve more to absorb public anger than alter institutional behavior. And invest in the approaches that actually reduce harm without producing new victims: mental health crisis response teams staffed by clinicians rather than armed officers, violence interruption programs that engage communities before conflict escalates, restorative justice processes that require offenders to face the people they have harmed rather than vanish into a cell where no such reckoning ever occurs.

D. White-Collar Crime and Plutocratic Accountability

The current system imposes years of imprisonment for minor drug offenses while barely prosecuting corporate conduct of vastly greater harm. The Sackler family engineered an opioid epidemic that has killed more Americans than the Vietnam War. Big Tobacco suppressed evidence of carcinogenicity for decades. Big Oil funded climate disinformation while its own scientists confirmed the catastrophic trajectory. Big Agriculture has saturated the food supply and the water table with chemicals whose long-term effects on human health were known and concealed. Across industries, executives have engaged in conduct resulting in millions of deaths with consequences that amount to negotiated settlements and early retirements. Is this asymmetry an oversight? It seems much more likely this is the architecture of a system built to ensure that the perpetrators of the greatest harms are the least likely to face meaningful accountability.

Dramatically increase funding for white-collar crime prosecution. Impose mandatory sentences for corporate fraud, environmental crimes, and public health crimes resulting in death or serious injury — comparable to sentences for violent crime, because the harm is comparable and often greater. Establish individual criminal liability for executives who knowingly authorize or permit mass harm. This must be a prosecutorial norm, not a theoretical possibility invoked in press conferences while street-level offenders are subject to maximum enforcement. Full asset forfeiture for individuals convicted of corporate crimes resulting in death, injury, or large-scale financial harm — not token fines calibrated to represent a minor cost of doing business, but expropriation of wealth accumulated through criminal conduct. Corporate charter revocation — the "corporate death penalty" — for companies convicted of repeated, egregious criminal conduct. A corporation that kills with impunity has forfeited its social license to exist. If the severity of punishment is to mean anything at all, it must be proportional to the scale of harm, regardless of the perpetrator's social class or the number of lobbyists retained to argue otherwise.

The same architecture of selective enforcement is visible — with particular clarity — in the treatment of fraud targeting the elderly. Americans over sixty lost $4.9 billion to fraud in 2024 alone, a forty-three percent increase over the prior year, and those figures represent only what is reported, which investigators consistently describe as a fraction of the actual losses. The schemes are sophisticated and almost invariably cross state lines — call center operations, romance scams, tech support fraud, grandparent impersonation rings run by organized criminal networks spanning multiple countries. This interstate and transnational character is precisely what renders the victims invisible to the justice system. Local police departments lack jurisdiction, resources, and in most cases any institutional incentive to investigate crimes whose perpetrators are in another state or another country. The standard response a victim receives from local law enforcement is a referral to the FBI. But the FBI, as of May 2025, was ordered to devote approximately one-third of its agents' time to immigration enforcement, with white-collar crime cases explicitly deprioritized. In the twenty-five largest field offices, forty-five percent of agents were reassigned to immigration enforcement full time. Federal white-collar prosecutions fell to fewer than four thousand in fiscal year 2025 — less than half the caseload of three decades earlier — and this decline is not attributable to a single administration but reflects a bipartisan erosion of enforcement capacity stretching back to at least 2011. Federal structures nominally dedicated to elder fraud do exist — the DOJ's Elder Justice Initiative, a Transnational Elder Fraud Strike Force, regional task forces established in 2016, and a National Elder Fraud Coordination Center opened in Pittsburgh in April 2025 — but they are chronically under-resourced relative to the scale of the crisis and are now competing for investigative capacity with an agency whose workforce has been systematically redirected toward other priorities. The result is a jurisdictional no-man's-land in which a fraud operation can steal a retiree's life savings from two thousand miles away, and no level of law enforcement — local, state, or federal — treats the case as its responsibility. This is less a gap in the system than the system functioning exactly as it has been allowed to function: a justice apparatus that can mobilize thousands of agents to enforce immigration law but cannot staff a functional response to the organized financial destruction of its most vulnerable citizens. It will continue until dedicated, permanently funded, and independently staffed federal elder fraud enforcement is established as a law enforcement priority in its own right — not an afterthought appended to agencies whose attention is permanently elsewhere.

E. Immigration

Abolish ICE and reform CPB. The immigration enforcement apparatus of the United States has become an instrument of cruelty so systematic, so institutionally entrenched, and so disproportionate to the problem it purports to address that reform is insufficient. Immigration and Customs Enforcement — ICE — was created in 2003 in the panicked institutional reorganization that followed September 11th, an agency born of a moment in which the conflation of immigration with terrorism was treated as self-evident. It was a political choice, too often exploited rather than reexamined. In the two decades since, ICE has evolved into a domestic paramilitary force whose operational culture — predawn raids on family homes, arrests at courthouses and hospitals, the separation of parents from American-citizen children, the detention of asylum seekers in conditions that have been documented by the agency's own inspector general as dangerous and degrading — bears no resemblance to the administrative immigration function it nominally serves. Abolish it. Not as a slogan, but as a structural reorganization: separate the functions ICE currently bundles into a single agency with a single culture and distribute them to institutions with different mandates, different oversight structures, and different institutional incentives. Interior enforcement limited to cases involving serious criminal conduct, conducted through civil processes subject to genuine due process protections — warrants, hearings, legal representation, judicial review — rather than the administrative detention regime that currently allows individuals to be

held for months or years without the procedural protections that the Constitution guarantees to every person on American soil, not merely every citizen.

Customs and Border Protection requires a different but equally fundamental intervention. CBP is the largest federal law enforcement agency in the country — nearly 65,000 employees, including approximately 20,000 Border Patrol agents — and it has operated for decades with a culture of impunity that no other law enforcement agency of comparable size would be permitted to sustain. Independent reviews have found that eighty percent of complaints filed against Border Patrol personnel involved physical abuse or excessive force. The ACLU has documented that CBP's own oversight body, the Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties, reported just three Fourth Amendment violations in a year in which the ACLU identified over a hundred in a single sector alone. No Border Patrol agent has ever been convicted of criminal wrongdoing while on duty, despite well over a hundred deaths resulting from encounters with CBP personnel over the past decade — including agents shooting across the international border into Mexico with complete impunity. The agency's deployment as a domestic political enforcement tool — masked agents conducting immigration sweeps in American cities far from any border, operating without body cameras, under a president who rescinded the federal mandate requiring them — culminated in January 2026 in Minneapolis, where CBP agents shot and killed Alex Pretti, a thirty-seven-year-old ICU nurse at the Minneapolis Veterans Affairs Medical Center, a federal employee who cared for American veterans, while he was filming agents and attempting to assist a woman who had been pushed to the ground. Ten shots were fired in five seconds while Pretti lay on the ground *after he had been disarmed*. The Department of Homeland Security's secretary called Pretti's actions an "act of terrorism." Multiple verified videos and the agency's own report to Congress contradicted that characterization. The agent who killed Pretti remained on the job. This agency has been permitted to develop the operational culture of an occupying force, deployed without meaningful oversight, accountability, or use-of-force standards against the very communities and citizens it is nominally chartered to protect. So reform CBP through binding use-of-force standards with independent civilian oversight, mandatory body cameras without exception, an end to the practice of deploying masked agents in American cities, and a mandate that treats border communities as populations to be served rather than territories to be occupied.

At the same time, shift border security strategy from its current dependence on mass human deployment — thousands of agents patrolling vast stretches of remote terrain in a model that is simultaneously expensive, inefficient, and conducive to the abuses documented above — toward *integrated electronic surveillance*: ground sensors, radar and lidar systems, camera towers with AI-assisted monitoring, drone overwatch, and satellite imagery that can detect movement across the border in real time and direct rapid-response units to specific incursion points. These systems exist, they are already deployed in limited sectors, and every independent assessment of border security — including those commissioned by Republican administrations — has concluded that technology-based surveillance provides superior situational awareness at a fraction of the per-mile cost of human patrols, while eliminating the conditions under which isolated agents operating without witnesses in remote terrain commit the abuses that have defined the agency's record. A reformed CBP would be smaller, better trained, better paid, better supervised, and equipped with the technological infrastructure that renders the current model of mass patrol both unnecessary and indefensible —because border is important, but the current approach is the least effective and most abusive way to achieve it.

Fund the immigration courts — not incrementally, not through the annual appropriations process that has permitted the backlog to metastasize for decades while both parties have found the dysfunction politically useful, but through a massive, structural investment in judges, courtrooms, support staff, and legal aid sufficient to ensure that every person in immigration proceedings can see a judge within weeks,

not years. The current backlog — which exceeds three million cases as of the most recent reporting — is a denial of due process so comprehensive that it functions as punishment in its own right. Individuals wait years for hearings while their lives remain suspended — unable to work legally in many cases, unable to travel, unable to plan, unable to do anything other than exist in a legal limbo that serves no governmental interest other than the performative cruelty of demonstrating that the system can make people suffer without ever formally adjudicating their case. A government that insists it is a nation of laws while operating an adjudicative system in which the average wait time for a hearing exceeds four years has forfeited the moral authority to invoke the rule of law as a justification for enforcement.

Establish a clear, non-punitive, and rapid pathway to citizenship for undocumented residents who are already living, working, paying taxes, raising families, and contributing to communities across the country — the estimated eleven million people whose presence is treated as a crisis by politicians who rely on their labor and whose donors profit from their exploitability. The economic argument for regularization is overwhelming and has been for decades: undocumented workers pay billions annually in Social Security and Medicare taxes from which they will never draw benefits, they start businesses at rates comparable to or exceeding native-born citizens, and the communities in which they concentrate are not drained by their presence but sustained by it. The moral argument is simpler: a society that has tacitly accepted the presence of millions of people for decades — employing them, taxing them, educating their children in public schools, relying on them to harvest its food, build its houses, care for its elderly, and clean its buildings — and then treats their presence as a criminal violation to be remedied by deportation has not achieved the rule of law. It has achieved a system of selective enforcement designed to maintain a permanent underclass of workers too frightened to demand the wages, conditions, and protections to which any human being performing that labor is entitled.

Comprehensive visa reform — because the legal immigration system is itself a primary driver of unauthorized immigration, a fact that the enforcement-only approach deliberately ignores. The visa categories, quotas, and processing timelines that govern legal immigration to the United States were designed for a different era, bear no relationship to the actual labor needs of the American economy, and create waiting periods that stretch to decades for applicants from high-demand countries. A system that tells a skilled worker from India or the Philippines that the legal path to residency will take twenty years is a system designed to fail, and its failure produces precisely the unauthorized immigration that enforcement advocates then cite as evidence for more enforcement — an example of "forced causality" that can only be remedied through fundamental redesign. Reform the visa system to reflect actual labor market needs, eliminate per-country caps that discriminate on the basis of national origin, create functional temporary and seasonal worker programs with genuine labor protections, and establish processing timelines measured in months, not decades.

End family separation — not merely as a matter of reversing the specific policy implemented in 2018, which was only the most visible and deliberately cruel iteration of a practice that has occurred under multiple administrations, but as a binding legal prohibition with statutory force. No child should be taken from a parent as a consequence of an administrative immigration violation — a principle so basic that its violation provoked international condemnation from human rights organizations, pediatric medical associations, and the faith communities whose moral authority the architects of the policy claimed to represent. End the detention of asylum seekers, who are exercising a legal right recognized under both domestic and international law and whose imprisonment serves no purpose other than deterrence — the deliberate infliction of suffering on people who have committed no crime in order to discourage others from exercising the same legal right. Close for-profit detention facilities, which operate under the same perverse incentive structure as private prisons: corporations whose revenue depends on the number of human beings confined within their walls, lobbying for policies that maximize

confinement, cutting costs on medical care and nutrition and sanitation to protect margins, and operating with a level of oversight so inadequate that deaths in custody, sexual abuse, and denial of medical treatment have been documented repeatedly by government inspectors, journalists, and advocacy organizations without producing the institutional consequences that would follow if the victims were anyone other than noncitizens whom the political system has decided do not matter. Codify DACA — the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program — and expand it, because the seven hundred thousand young people who have built their lives in this country under its protections deserve permanent legal status, not the indefinite precarity of an executive action that can be rescinded by any subsequent president on any given Tuesday.

The Right's anti-immigration agenda is, beneath its economic language and its invocations of sovereignty and the rule of law, *fundamentally a racial project*. This really isn't a claim that requires inference or interpretation. It is visible in the explicit language of its architects — from the white-nationalist origins of organizations like the Federation for American Immigration Reform, founded by John Tanton, whose private correspondence revealed a preoccupation with maintaining a white demographic majority, to the "great replacement" rhetoric that has migrated from fringe message boards to the speeches of sitting members of Congress and cable news programs watched by millions. The economic arguments deployed to justify restriction — that immigrants depress wages, consume public resources, and compete with native-born workers for scarce opportunities — have been studied exhaustively and found to be, at best, dramatically overstated. The comprehensive 2017 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine study — the most rigorous and wide-ranging analysis of immigration's economic effects ever conducted in the United States — found that immigration has an overall positive impact on long-run economic growth, that second-generation immigrants are among the strongest fiscal and economic contributors in the country, and that the long-term wage effects on native-born workers are very small and concentrated in narrow labor-market segments.[33] The fiscal costs that restriction advocates cite are overwhelmingly concentrated at the state and local level, are largely attributable to the cost of educating immigrant children — children who go on to become net fiscal contributors as adults — and are offset at the federal level by the taxes immigrant workers pay, including the Social Security and Medicare contributions from which undocumented workers are permanently excluded. The economic case against immigration is not really an honest disagreement about empirical evidence. Instead, it is a veneer of "respectable vocabulary" over a project whose actual motivations are demographic and racial. The progressive response must name this directly, not dignify the economic framing by treating it as good-faith argument.

And much of the migration the Right demonizes is driven by conditions that American foreign policy helped create — a fact that the enforcement debate treats as irrelevant but that any honest analysis must confront. Decades of U.S. intervention in Central America — from the CIA-orchestrated coup in Guatemala in 1954 through the support of military dictatorships and death squads in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras during the 1980s through the destabilizing effects of the War on Drugs and the deportation of gang members who organized in American cities and exported their structures to countries with no institutional capacity to absorb them — have produced the conditions of violence, corruption, and economic collapse from which people flee. The caravans that dominate cable news coverage are not spontaneous migrations of people who woke up one morning and decided to walk a thousand miles. They are the downstream consequences of policy choices made in Washington over half a century, choices whose architects never anticipated — or never cared — that the human consequences would eventually arrive at the southern border and demand to be addressed. A foreign policy that destabilizes nations on the one hand, and an immigration policy that criminalizes the people who flee the resulting instability on the other, isn't a contradiction. It's a carefully constructed system —

and dismantling it requires addressing both ends simultaneously, because enforcement that ignores the conditions producing the migration it purports to control is not enforcement. This is theater.

F. Gender Equality, Economic Parity, and the Crisis of Male Purpose

The principle animating equal pay legislation in its current form — that discrimination can be addressed by prohibiting it — has proven insufficient for the same reason that most prohibitions without enforcement mechanisms prove insufficient: the incentive to violate the rule remains intact as long as the cost of compliance exceeds the cost of getting caught, and the cost of getting caught has been kept artificially low for decades. Women in the United States still earn roughly eighty-two cents for every dollar earned by men performing comparable work, a figure that has moved with glacial slowness since the Equal Pay Act of 1963 — more than six decades of nominal legal protection producing a gap that, at current rates of closure, will not reach parity until sometime after the middle of this century. For Black and Latina women the disparity is substantially worse, and the compounding effects over a career — reduced retirement savings, lower Social Security benefits, diminished capacity to accumulate wealth or weather financial emergencies — constitute a structural economic penalty imposed on the basis of sex and race that no amount of individual negotiation skill can overcome.

Federal equal pay legislation must therefore be rebuilt around the mechanisms that actually alter institutional behavior: mandatory pay transparency, so that the information asymmetry that enables discriminatory compensation is eliminated at the source; regular third-party auditing of compensation structures across organizations above a minimum size threshold, with results made publicly accessible; and penalties for demonstrated discrimination that are calibrated not to the budgets of compliance departments but to the revenues of the enterprises that benefit from paying women less. Fines that amount to rounding errors in a quarterly earnings report are not penalties — they are licensing fees for continued discrimination. The goal is not to punish employers who are already acting in good faith but to make the cost of discriminatory compensation structures economically irrational for those who are not.

But equal compensation for women who are already in the workforce addresses only one dimension of a problem that is structural at every level. The absence of women from leadership positions in government, business, and civic institutions isn’t the result of a pipeline problem — it is the predictable consequence of institutional cultures designed by and for men, selection processes that reproduce existing hierarchies, and the persistent allocation of caregiving responsibilities to women in ways that interrupt careers, constrain geographic mobility, and penalize ambition at precisely the moments when advancement decisions are made. Federally funded programs to recruit, mentor, and advance women into leadership positions across sectors are structural interventions — this is the only demonstrated method of breaking a self-perpetuating exclusion that cannot correct itself organically. The evidence from countries that have implemented such programs — from board-composition mandates in Scandinavia to public-sector leadership pipelines in Canada and New Zealand — consistently demonstrates that institutional gender balance does not occur organically within systems that were built without it. It must be engineered, funded, and sustained over time.

And none of it is sustainable without addressing the material conditions that force women to choose between economic participation and caregiving — a choice that men, as a structural matter, are rarely required to make. Paid family leave and universal childcare are not social programs in the traditional sense. They are economic infrastructure, as fundamental to full workforce participation as roads are to commerce or broadband is to the information economy. Every serious empirical analysis of the relationship between public childcare investment and women's labor force participation arrives at the

same conclusion: countries that treat childcare as a public good consistently outperform the United States in women's workforce participation, earnings trajectory, and long-term economic security. The United States remains one of the only industrialized nations on earth with no guaranteed paid family leave — a distinction that is less a reflection of economic constraints than of political choices about whose labor is valued and whose is rendered invisible. Until caregiving is recognized as the economic infrastructure it demonstrably is, and funded accordingly, equal pay legislation will continue to address the symptoms of gender-based economic inequality while leaving its deepest structural cause untouched.

Here is where this section must become uncomfortable for progressives, because the gender crisis in the United States is not a crisis experienced only by women, and the progressive movement's failure to recognize this — and, frankly, its active resistance to recognizing it — has produced consequences that are visible in every suicide statistic, every college enrollment report, and every rally where young men cheer for authoritarians who offer them the one thing the Left has refused to offer: the acknowledgment that their pain is real.

Men in the United States are four times more likely than women to die by suicide. They are three times more likely to be homeless. They are twelve times more likely to be incarcerated. They are two to three times more likely to die from alcohol-related causes. The suicide rate among young men aged eighteen to twenty-seven increased nearly twenty percent between 2014 and 2024, with eighty-five percent of that increase concentrated among Black and Hispanic men — the same populations this agenda identifies as disproportionately harmed by every other structural failure it describes.[40] Nearly one in four men under thirty now reports having no close friends, a five-fold increase since 1990. Women now earn almost two college degrees for every one earned by men. These are signs of a population that is not doing well. And the progressive response to this data, for far too long, has been either silence, dismissal, or the argument — sometimes explicit, more often atmospheric — that compassion for men is a zero-sum game, that acknowledging male suffering necessarily diminishes the reality of female suffering, and that any attention directed toward the struggles of boys and men constitutes a distraction from the "real" work of gender justice. This response has been morally indefensible and strategically catastrophic.

And in the vacuum the Left created, the Right filled with amplified toxicity. The pipeline is visible and well-documented: a young man falls behind in school, loses social connection, spends increasing hours online, and encounters an ecosystem engineered to capture him — from the relatively anodyne self-improvement content that serves as an entry point, through the pseudo-intellectual authority of figures like Jordan Peterson who offer genuine psychological insight wrapped in reactionary gender ideology, to the openly misogynistic influencer culture of Andrew Tate and his imitators, to the political recruitment operations of Turning Point USA and the broader MAGA apparatus that converts alienated young men into foot soldiers for an authoritarian movement. Is this a mysterious process? Absolutely not. It is a transparent radicalization pipeline, and it operates with impunity because the young men have nowhere else to go. No institution on the Left is meeting them where they are, speaking to their actual experience, or offering them a version of masculine purpose that is neither the toxic dominance hierarchy of the Right nor the implicit message they receive from progressive culture: that masculinity itself is the problem, that their struggles are less real than everyone else's, and that the appropriate posture for a young man who wants to be a good person is *offering permanent apology for the sins of men he has never met*.

The progressive alternative is once again not to minimize the reality of patriarchal structures or to pretend that gender-based oppression is imaginary. It is instead to insist on a principle that the Right

cannot offer because its entire operating model depends on denying it: that gender, like every other dimension of human identity, is more complex, more fluid, and more various than any rigid binary allows. This complexity isn't just a crisis to be managed, it's a reality that must be accommodated by conscious and aware institutions capable of serving a full range of human experience. The growing identification of young people as gender-fluid or nonbinary is the visible evidence that the old categories were always insufficient, and the political energy spent policing those categories — from either direction — is energy diverted from the economic structures that determine whether any person, of any gender, can live with dignity.

What young men need is what everyone addressed in this agenda needs: economic viability, social connection, purposeful work, and institutions that treat them as members of a community rather than as demographic categories to be either privileged or punished. The specific interventions need not be speculative. Massively expand mentorship programs — particularly programs like Big Brothers Big Sisters — offer data on outcomes is unambiguous: young people with mentors are eighty-one percent more likely to participate in sports, seventy-eight percent more likely to volunteer in their communities, and twice as likely to hold leadership positions. But there are currently three times as many women applying to be Big Sisters as there are men applying to be Big Brothers — a gap that is itself a symptom of the same dynamic this section describes: a culture in which men mentoring boys has been tainted by suspicion rather than honored as civic obligation.[41] So recruit male mentors with the same institutional seriousness that this agenda brings to every other structural intervention. Fund vocational and apprenticeship pathways that do not require a four-year degree — not as a consolation prize for men who cannot succeed in academia but as a legitimate and respected alternative that produces the economic viability on which everything else depends. Connect these pathways to the public service corps proposed elsewhere in this agenda, so that young men who are adrift can find purpose in building the physical and social infrastructure their communities need — the housing, the renewable energy installations, the broadband networks, the restored public spaces — rather than finding it in online radicalization communities whose only product is rage.

And progressives must confront, directly and without evasion, the role that progressive culture itself has played in driving young men toward the Right. The feminism that identifies patriarchal structures, names their mechanisms, and fights to dismantle them is essential to every goal this agenda pursues. The feminism that treats individual men as inherently culpable for those structures, that equates masculinity with toxicity rather than recognizing toxicity as a *corruption* of masculinity, and that responds to male suffering with the observation that men have historically inflicted more suffering than they have received. Let's not pretend this flavor of feminism functions as a liberation movement. It is really functioning as a sorting mechanism that tells half the population they are on the wrong team by birth, and the predictable result is that a significant number of them go looking for a team that will have them. The Right will always have them. The question is whether the Left will offer an alternative before the Right's version of masculine purpose — dominance, resentment, and the identification of women and minorities as the enemy — becomes the only version these young men have ever known.

The foundational commitment stated at the beginning of this section applies here with full force: the economic structure is the root problem. Men without economic viability — without stable employment, without the capacity to support a family, without the social standing that productive work confers — are men without the material foundation on which every other dimension of a meaningful life depends. The crisis of young men isn't really a crisis of culture, messaging, or insufficiently affirming language. It's actually is a crisis resulting from an economic order that has eliminated the pathways through which previous generations of men found purpose, and a political culture that has decided — on both sides, for different reasons — that this elimination is either acceptable or someone else's problem. But it's

everyone's problem. A society that produces large numbers of young men without opportunity, connection, or purpose is a society manufacturing instability, and the instability does not confine itself to the men experiencing it. It radiates outward — into families, into communities, into politics, and into the quality of life of every person, of every gender, who shares a society with men who have been given nothing to live for except grievance.

G. Structural Fairness

As America's demographic composition shifts, the central question becomes whether selection processes will be redesigned honestly or defended dishonestly. Every institution that makes selections — universities, employers, licensing boards, government agencies, courts — operates through criteria that appear neutral but encode the accumulated advantages and disadvantages of the society that produced the applicants. A standardized test that correlates more strongly with parental income than with the aptitude it purports to measure is not a neutral instrument. A hiring process that relies on referrals from existing employees is not a neutral instrument. A criminal background check applied to employment in fields unrelated to the offense is not a neutral instrument. Each of these mechanisms, taken individually, can be defended as reasonable. Taken together, they constitute an architecture of selection that reproduces existing hierarchies with mechanical reliability while providing the participants at every stage with the assurance that they are simply choosing the best candidate.

The aspiration is institutional design that operates as closely as possible to a Rawlsian veil of ignorance — not the naive "color-blindness" that ignores existing inequities and thereby ratifies them, but the active redesign of institutions and processes to neutralize pre-existing advantages and disadvantages at their source. This means addressing upstream causes — educational access, economic opportunity, health, housing — so that the pool arriving at any selection point reflects human potential, not inherited privilege. And it means minimizing the influence of bias in the selection process itself, not through the pretense that bias can be willed away by well-intentioned selectors but through structural mechanisms that reduce the opportunity for bias to operate.

Consider what this looks like in practice. Several major orchestras, beginning with the Boston Symphony in the 1950s and expanding widely through the 1970s and 1980s, adopted blind audition procedures — candidates performed behind a screen, and in some cases walked to the stage on carpet to conceal the sound of their footwear. The intervention was mechanical, simple, and did not require anyone to examine their own prejudices or undergo training in unconscious bias. It simply removed the information that enabled bias to function. The result, documented in a landmark study by Goldin and Rouse, was that blind auditions increased the probability that a woman would advance from preliminary rounds by approximately fifty percent and increased the probability of being hired by several-fold. The orchestras had not been engaged in conscious discrimination. The selectors believed they were evaluating musicianship. What the screen revealed was that their evaluation of musicianship had been contaminated by visual information that had nothing to do with the quality of the performance — and that this contamination had been operating for decades, invisibly, while every participant in the system was confident that merit alone determined the outcome.

This is the model. Not preference for one group over another, not quotas that substitute demographic arithmetic for qualitative judgment, but the disciplined identification of the specific mechanisms through which bias enters selection — and the redesign of those mechanisms so that bias has fewer channels through which to operate. Structured interviews with standardized scoring criteria rather than conversational interviews that reward cultural familiarity with the interviewer. Work-sample tests rather than credential screens that measure access to elite institutions more than capacity to perform the work. Admissions processes that weight demonstrated persistence under adverse conditions — a metric that measures the applicant, not the applicant's parents. Grant-review processes in which proposals are evaluated without identifying information about the applicant's institution, publication record, or prior funding history — mechanisms already piloted at several federal agencies with results that consistently diversify the pool of funded researchers without reducing the quality of funded research. Each of these

interventions targets a specific channel through which inherited advantage masquerades as earned merit, and each can be evaluated empirically for whether it achieves its intended effect.

The goal is not equality of outcome — no institutional design can or should guarantee identical results for every individual. The goal is a selection architecture honest enough to distinguish between differences in capacity and differences in opportunity, and rigorous enough to ensure that the latter does not determine the former. A society that permits inherited advantage to dictate life outcomes while insisting that those outcomes reflect individual merit has not achieved fairness. It has achieved a more sophisticated vocabulary for defending its absence.

H. Civil Liberties, Surveillance, and Church-State Separation

The surveillance apparatus constructed after September 11, 2001, was justified as a temporary emergency measure. It has become permanent, and its scope has expanded far beyond anything its architects publicly acknowledged. The Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act and Section 702 of the FISA Amendments Act were designed to target foreign intelligence threats; they have been used to collect the communications of American citizens on a scale that would have been unimaginable — and constitutionally intolerable — a generation ago. The NSA's own internal audits have documented thousands of compliance violations. The FISA court, which was supposed to provide judicial oversight, has functioned for most of its existence as a rubber stamp — approving more than ninety-nine percent of surveillance requests in proceedings where only the government is represented and the targets are never notified. Reform FISA. Reform Section 702. Require individualized probable-cause warrants for the collection of any American citizen's communications, location data, or digital activity — the same standard the Fourth Amendment has always required for physical searches, applied without exception to the digital domain where Americans now conduct the overwhelming majority of their private lives.

The technologies of surveillance have advanced far beyond the legal frameworks that nominally govern them. Facial recognition systems are deployed by law enforcement agencies across the country with no federal regulation, no uniform accuracy standards, and well-documented racial bias in misidentification rates — bias that falls disproportionately on Black and Latino individuals, which is to say on precisely the communities already subjected to the most aggressive policing. Predictive policing algorithms trained on historically biased arrest data do not predict crime; they predict where police have previously been sent, which is a measure of enforcement patterns, not criminal behavior, and which guarantees that the communities most heavily policed in the past will be most heavily policed in the future regardless of actual crime rates. Regulate facial recognition technology at the federal level, with mandatory accuracy thresholds, independent auditing, and an outright ban on real-time mass surveillance in public spaces. Require judicial warrants for all location tracking, geofence requests, and cell-site simulation. Subpoenas, administrative requests, and the informal cooperation agreements that currently allow law enforcement to buy location data from commercial brokers are insufficient — constitutional process demands a warrant. Protect end-to-end encryption against the persistent demands of law enforcement and intelligence agencies for backdoor access, demands that rest on the fiction that a vulnerability engineered for government use will never be discovered or exploited by anyone else. And strengthen whistleblower protections — not the nominal protections that currently exist, which have proven wholly inadequate to shield individuals like Edward Snowden, Chelsea Manning, Reality Winner, and Daniel Hale from prosecution and retaliation, but protections with genuine legal force, independent adjudication, and remedies that make it possible for a person of ordinary courage to report government misconduct without sacrificing their freedom.

The separation of church and state is the other civil liberties crisis of this moment — less discussed than surveillance, arguably more dangerous in its long-term implications, and advancing with an institutional discipline that should alarm anyone who understands what is at stake. The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment is not an abstract constitutional nicety. It is the mechanism by which a religiously diverse republic prevents any single sect from using the coercive power of the state to impose its doctrines on everyone else. It protects religious liberty — all religious liberty, for every faith and for those who profess none — by ensuring that the government remains neutral ground. And it is under coordinated assault.

Christian nationalism — the political movement that asserts the United States was founded as a Christian nation and should be governed according to Christian principles — has moved from the margins of American politics to the center of institutional power at every level of government. The threat isn't personal faith — which is every politician's right — but organized political movements working to embed religious dogma into law, policy, and public institutions in ways incompatible with our constitutional governance. The most aggressive and theologically coherent expression of this movement is dominionism — the doctrine, rooted in the theology of R.J. Rushdoony and advanced through networks like the New Apostolic Reformation, that Christians are called to exercise dominion over all institutions of society, including government, and that biblical law should form the foundation of civil law. Dominionist influence is visible in the legislative campaigns to ban abortion without exception on the grounds that personhood begins at conception — a theological claim presented as a biological one. It is visible in the systematic placement of sympathetic judges at every level of the federal judiciary, culminating in a Supreme Court majority that has demonstrated a willingness to dismantle decades of Establishment Clause precedent. It is visible in state legislatures that have mandated the display of the Ten Commandments in public school classrooms, authorized chaplains as substitutes for trained school counselors, redirected public education funding to religious schools through voucher programs, and introduced legislation requiring the teaching of the Bible as a historical document in public school curricula — legislation whose sponsors make no serious effort to disguise its sectarian purpose. It is visible in the rhetoric of elected officials who openly describe the United States as a Christian nation and their political agenda as divinely ordained — language that is not metaphorical but programmatic.

Enforce the Establishment Clause as a binding constitutional prohibition, with standing for affected citizens to challenge violations and with consequences for officials who treat their oath to uphold the Constitution as subordinate to their religious convictions. Oppose public funding of religious schools through voucher programs, tax-credit scholarships, and the other mechanisms that have been engineered to circumvent direct-funding prohibitions while achieving the same result: the transfer of public education dollars to institutions that discriminate in admissions, employment, and curriculum on the basis of religious doctrine. Oppose religious exemptions that permit discrimination against LGBTQ individuals, against women seeking reproductive healthcare, against employees whose private conduct offends their employer's religious sensibilities — exemptions that convert the Free Exercise Clause from a shield protecting individual conscience into a sword imposing one group's moral framework on others through the medium of commercial and civic life. Revoke the tax-exempt status of religious organizations that engage in partisan political activity — a prohibition that has existed in the tax code since 1954 and has been enforced with a selectivity that amounts to non-enforcement, leaving churches free to function as political organizing centers, voter mobilization operations, and platforms for candidate endorsement while retaining the public subsidy of tax exemption. If a religious organization wishes to operate as a political entity, it is free to do so — but not at taxpayer expense, and not while claiming the constitutional protections designed for institutions that remain outside the political arena.

All of this must be understood as pro-pluralism, not anti-religion. The separation of church and state does not diminish religious freedom — it is the only mechanism that has ever reliably protected it. Every theocracy in human history has persecuted not only the nonreligious but also the adherents of minority faiths and the dissenting members of the dominant faith itself. The Christians most endangered by Christian nationalism are those whose theology does not align with the version being encoded into law — and there are a great many of them, given that the dominant strain of Christian nationalism in American politics represents a narrow, historically recent, and theologically contested interpretation of a tradition spanning two millennia and encompassing thousands of denominations. The wall between church and state protects the believer and the nonbeliever alike. Dismantling it does not produce a more Christian nation. It produces a nation in which one faction's Christianity is enforced by police power, and every other expression of conscience — religious or otherwise — exists at its sufferance.

However, the constitutional argument against Christian nationalism, while necessary and dispositive, is incomplete without the theological one — because the movement's power rests not on its legal arguments, which are weak, but on its claim to speak for Christianity itself. **That claim is false**, and it must be challenged on its own terms, by Christians and non-Christians alike who understand that allowing a political faction to monopolize the moral authority of a two-thousand-year-old tradition is dangerous not only to democratic governance but to the tradition itself.

The scriptural case for Christian nationalism is, on honest examination, remarkably thin. A systematic review of New Testament scripture — the body of text that defines Christian ethics as distinct from the Mosaic law of the Hebrew Bible — reveals that on virtually every tenet of the Christian nationalist platform, the countervailing scriptural evidence substantially outweighs the supporting evidence.[74] On the question of whether rulers and governments should be explicitly Christian: the passages most frequently cited in support (Romans 13:1-7, Acts 17:26-27) are vastly outnumbered by passages in which Jesus explicitly rejects the fusion of political and spiritual authority — "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36), "Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's" (Matthew 22:15-22) — and in which the apostles instruct early Christians to obey civil authority as a practical matter while maintaining that their citizenship is elsewhere (Philippians 3:18-21, 1 Peter 2:13-14). On the question of whether white native-born citizens deserve priority over immigrants: there is not a single New Testament passage that supports ethnic or national priority, while the evidence for radical inclusion is overwhelming — from the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37) to Paul's declaration that in Christ "there is neither Jew nor Gentile" (Galatians 3:28) to the vision of Revelation in which every nation, tribe, and tongue stands before the throne (Revelation 7:9-10). On the question of whether Christian values should be imposed through secular law and public institutions: Paul himself wrote that Christians should not judge those outside the church — "What business is it of mine to judge those outside?" (1 Corinthians 5:12-13) — a principle that directly contradicts the legislative project of encoding one denomination's doctrinal commitments into civil law binding on everyone.

The Founding Fathers understood this. Many of them — Jefferson, Franklin, Paine, and arguably Washington and Madison — were Deists influenced by the Enlightenment, not orthodox Christians. They did not employ the word "God" even once in the United States Constitution. They enshrined the separation of church and state not despite their familiarity with Christianity but because of it — because they had witnessed, in the Europe they left behind, what happened when one faction's theology was enforced by state power. The religious language that Christian nationalists point to as evidence of America's founding Christian identity — "In God We Trust," "under God" in the Pledge of Allegiance — was not part of the founding at all. These phrases were added in the 1860s and 1950s respectively, the latter as Cold War propaganda designed to distinguish the United States from "godless Communism." They are artifacts of political messaging, not of constitutional design.

What James Talarico has demonstrated on the floor of the Texas state legislature — standing before colleagues who invoke Christianity to justify cruelty and telling them, with scriptural specificity, that they are bearing false witness — is the model this agenda endorses. The progressive movement cannot cede religious language to the Right any more than it can cede economic language. The Jesus of the Gospels healed without asking for insurance coverage, fed multitudes without means-testing, and reserved his harshest condemnation not for the poor, the foreign, or the sexually nonconforming but for the religious authorities who used their institutional power to burden others while enriching themselves. The claim that Jesus would endorse an agenda of immigrant persecution, public service demolition, healthcare denial, and the concentration of wealth among those who already possess more than they can spend is not a theological position. *It is an appropriation of the Christian tradition* — and one that millions of Christians across every denomination recognize as such. The progressive movement should amplify those voices, not because doing so is politically useful — though it is — but because it is honest, and because the Christians who reject Christian nationalism deserve allies who take their theology as seriously as they do.

I. Indigenous Sovereignty

The relationship between the United States government and Indigenous nations is the longest-running and most comprehensively documented record of broken promises in American history. More than three hundred and seventy treaties were ratified between the federal government and tribal nations — and virtually every one of them was subsequently violated, reinterpreted, or unilaterally abrogated when the terms became inconvenient for the interests of white settlement, resource extraction, or territorial expansion. The legal framework that emerged from this history — a patchwork of treaty law, congressional plenary power doctrine, Supreme Court decisions that simultaneously affirmed tribal sovereignty and subjected it to federal override, and bureaucratic administration through the Bureau of Indian Affairs — has produced a governance structure in which Indigenous nations possess nominal sovereignty while remaining functionally dependent on a federal government that has proven, across centuries, to be an unreliable and frequently hostile trustee. The consequences are not historical, they are present-tense: Native Americans experience the highest poverty rates, the lowest life expectancy, the highest rates of suicide among young people, and the most severe gaps in infrastructure — clean water, electricity, broadband, paved roads — of any demographic group in the United States. These outcomes are not the residue of a distant injustice. They are the ongoing product of a system that has never been restructured to fulfill the obligations it assumed.

Honor and strengthen tribal sovereignty as a binding legal and fiscal commitment. Fully fund treaty obligations, which the federal government is legally required to meet and has chronically underfunded for as long as the obligations have existed. The Indian Health Service operates at approximately sixty percent of the funding level necessary to provide care comparable to what the federal government provides to other populations it is obligated to serve — including federal prisoners, whose per-capita healthcare expenditure exceeds that of Native Americans living on reservations. Federal education funding for tribal schools and Bureau of Indian Education facilities has lagged behind comparable public school funding for decades, producing facilities in which students attend classes in buildings that would be condemned if they were located in any non-tribal jurisdiction. These are not discretionary spending decisions. They are the federal government defaulting on legally binding commitments and relying on the political marginalization of the affected population to avoid accountability for the default.

Support tribal self-determination in governance, resource management, education, and healthcare. Concretely, this means transferring decision-making authority and resources to tribal governments. A

federal bureaucracy that has spent more than a century demonstrating its inability to prioritize Indigenous interests has forfeited the presumption of competence. The paternalism embedded in the Bureau of Indian Affairs model — in which a federal agency makes decisions about land use, resource development, education, and welfare on behalf of sovereign nations — isn't just offensive in principle. It produces worse outcomes than tribal self-governance, as demonstrated by the experience of tribes that have assumed administrative control of their own programs under the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act. Tribes that manage their own healthcare, education, and resource programs consistently outperform federally administered programs serving comparable populations — not because federal employees are incompetent but because no distant bureaucracy can match the contextual knowledge, cultural competence, and accountability of a government answerable to the people it serves.

Require meaningful consultation — not the pro forma notification process that currently passes for consultation — on all federal actions affecting tribal lands, water, resources, and sacred sites. The Dakota Access Pipeline controversy was not an aberration. It was a representative example of how the existing consultation framework functions in practice: tribal objections are received, documented, and overridden when they conflict with the economic interests of politically connected developers. Meaningful consultation means consultation that occurs before decisions are made rather than after they are effectively finalized, that provides tribal governments with sufficient time and technical resources to evaluate proposals, and that grants genuine decision-making authority — including the authority to refuse — over actions that affect treaty-protected lands and resources.

Address the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls, which has persisted for decades at epidemic levels while receiving a fraction of the law enforcement attention, media coverage, and political urgency directed at comparable crises affecting other populations. The jurisdictional tangle that characterizes law enforcement in Indian Country — overlapping and often conflicting federal, state, and tribal authority — creates gaps in investigation and prosecution that are not accidental but structural, and that have been documented, studied, and reported on for years without producing the legislative or institutional response the scale of the crisis demands. Fully fund tribal law enforcement agencies. Expand tribal criminal jurisdiction. Establish dedicated federal investigative units with specific mandates and reporting requirements for cases involving missing and murdered Indigenous people. The data systems alone — the absence of comprehensive, interoperable databases tracking these cases across jurisdictions — constitute a failure so basic that its persistence can only be explained by the political invisibility of the victims.

Return federal lands to tribal management. The default interpretation of 'where appropriate' should be broad, given that the federal government's acquisition of those lands was, in most cases, accomplished through fraud, coercion, treaty violation, or military force. This does not require romanticizing tribal land management or assuming that every transfer will produce optimal ecological outcomes. It requires acknowledging that Indigenous peoples managed the ecosystems of this continent for millennia before European contact, that the ecological record of federal land management over the past century and a half includes catastrophic fire suppression policies, industrial-scale resource extraction, and the systematic degradation of watersheds and habitats, and that tribal management approaches — which integrate ecological stewardship with cultural practice in ways that Western resource management is only beginning to understand — deserve the presumption of competence that has been extended, without comparable evidence, to every federal agency that has administered these lands since they were taken.

J. Disability Rights

The Americans with Disabilities Act, signed into law in 1990, represented a transformative commitment: that disabled Americans would no longer be excluded from public life by physical barriers, discriminatory practices, and institutional indifference. More than three decades later, the gap between that commitment and the lived experience of disabled people in the United States is a measure of how effectively a society can pass landmark legislation and then decline to fund or enforce it. Sidewalks without curb cuts in cities that have had thirty-five years to install them. Public transit systems that meet the letter of accessibility requirements while remaining functionally unusable for wheelchair users who cannot rely on elevators that are perpetually out of service. Government websites that fail basic screen-reader compatibility. Polling places with steps. Courthouses without accessible restrooms. Housing stock in which the percentage of units meeting even minimal accessibility standards remains in the single digits in most metropolitan areas. Each of these failures is individually remediable and collectively damning — evidence not of an intractable engineering problem but of a political judgment that the exclusion of disabled people from public life is an acceptable cost of not spending the money.

Full ADA funding and enforcement. The Department of Justice Civil Rights Division and the EEOC must be funded to investigate and prosecute violations, not to maintain the years-long backlogs that currently function as de facto tolerance of noncompliance. It means establishing proactive enforcement mechanisms — regular audits of public facilities, government digital platforms, and federally funded construction. The current complaint-driven model places the burden of enforcement on the people least resourced to bear it. A disabled person who cannot enter a building should not be required to file a federal complaint, wait months or years for investigation, and risk retaliation in order to obtain access that the law guaranteed them decades ago. The enforcement architecture must be redesigned so that compliance is the default condition and noncompliance carries consequences immediate enough to alter institutional behavior.

Accessibility in all public infrastructure, technology, and housing must be treated as a baseline design requirement. Retrofitting after the fact costs more — financially and humanly — and delivers less. Universal design principles, which produce environments usable by the widest possible range of people without specialized adaptation, are not aspirational abstractions. They are established engineering and architectural methodologies that, when incorporated from the outset of a design process, add marginal cost while producing dramatically more inclusive outcomes. The persistent treatment of accessibility as a specialized add-on — a ramp bolted to the side of a building whose architects never considered wheelchair access, a screen-reader patch applied to a website whose developers never tested it with assistive technology — reflects an institutional culture in which disabled users are an afterthought, and the physical and digital environments they must navigate are monuments to that afterthought. Federal procurement standards, building codes, and technology mandates should require universal design as a condition of approval, not as an accommodation requested after the design is finalized and the cost of remediation has multiplied.

End the subminimum wage for disabled workers. Section 14(c) of the Fair Labor Standards Act — enacted in 1938 and still in effect — permits employers holding special certificates to pay disabled workers less than the federal minimum wage, in some cases pennies per hour, on the theory that their productivity is commensurately lower. The provision has been used overwhelmingly by sheltered workshops — segregated work environments that isolate disabled workers from the mainstream labor force, offer little or no path to competitive employment, and operate under a paternalistic model that treats disabled adults as objects of charitable management instead of workers entitled to fair compensation for their labor. Multiple states have already eliminated the subminimum wage with no

measurable negative effect on employment rates for disabled workers — because the premise that disabled people cannot perform productive work at minimum wage was never an empirical finding. It was a prejudice encoded into statute and sustained by the economic interests of the institutions that benefit from paying their workforce almost nothing. Abolish Section 14(c). Expand community-based services and independent living supports — the infrastructure that enables disabled people to live, work, and participate in their communities instead of being warehoused in institutional settings designed around the convenience of service systems, not the autonomy of the people those systems are supposed to serve.

And disability perspectives must be integrated into all policy design from the outset — as a standard element of the institutional design process, present when decisions are made rather than consulted after the architecture is built and the assumptions are set. Disabled people and disability expertise must be at the table when questions are being framed, options evaluated, and tradeoffs weighed — not appended as a review step after the architecture is set. The history of disability policy in the United States is a history of well-intentioned programs designed by nondisabled people on the basis of assumptions about what disabled people need — assumptions that, when tested against the actual preferences and experiences of disabled people, have proven wrong often enough to constitute a pattern. The independent living movement, the neurodiversity movement, the psychiatric survivors' movement — each emerged in direct response to policies designed for disabled people without disabled people, and each has had to fight for decades to be recognized as a legitimate source of expertise about the lives its members actually live. The corrective is structural: disability representation in policy design bodies, regulatory agencies, legislative staffs, and executive offices — a permanent institutional presence with the authority to shape outcomes.

PART VIII: CLIMATE, ECOLOGY, AND THE LIVING WORLD

Here we counter fossil fuel industry capture, climate denial, deregulation, and the assumption of infinite growth on a finite planet. It is guided by the donut economics framework of human flourishing within ecological limits.

The donut economics framework[10] demands that the economy operate below ecological ceilings and planetary boundaries across all dimensions — not just carbon. Climate change is the most urgent dimension of a broader ecological crisis, but it is not the only one. Biodiversity collapse, soil degradation, ocean acidification, freshwater depletion, microplastic contamination, and chemical pollution each threaten the natural systems on which all life depends. The environmental agenda is therefore a fundamental reorientation of the economy's relationship with the living world, not a narrow "transition to clean energy."

A. Ending Fossil Fuel Profiteering

The fossil fuel industry must fund the transition. ExxonMobil's own scientists (beginning with senior scientist James Black's 1977 report to company executives) accurately projected global warming from fossil fuel combustion with what a 2023 peer-reviewed study in *Science* (Supran, Rahmstorf, and Oreskes) described as "shocking skill and accuracy," producing climate models that proved correct 63 to 83 percent of the time and that in some cases outperformed NASA's own projections to Congress. The industry's response to its own research was not disclosure, not precaution, and not transition — it was a multidecade disinformation campaign modeled explicitly on the tobacco industry's playbook, using the same consultants, the same think tanks, the same manufactured-doubt strategy, and the same congressional lobbying apparatus to ensure that the public remained confused about what the companies' own laboratories had confirmed (see Appendix A). Exxon labeled its 1982 climate briefing "proprietary information for authorized company use only," then spent more than $30 million funding think tanks that promoted climate denial while its own models were being vindicated by observed temperature data in real time. The five largest Western oil majors — ExxonMobil, Shell, Chevron, BP, and TotalEnergies — reported combined profits of nearly $200 billion in 2022 alone, followed by another $100 billion in 2023, during which they paid out a record $113.8 billion to shareholders in dividends and buybacks while investing roughly 4 percent of capital expenditure on clean energy. The global oil and gas industry earned over $2.7 trillion in income in 2023. These are not companies that need public assistance. These are companies that owe a debt measured in atmospheric carbon, flooded coastlines, wildfire seasons that no longer end, and in the respiratory disease burden of communities — which are disproportionately Black, Latino, Indigenous, and low-income — that live downwind and downstream of their refineries and export terminals.

A comprehensive carbon tax will reflect the true social cost of emissions — which the EPA estimated in 2023 at $190 per metric ton of CO_2 at a 2 percent discount rate, nearly four times the prior federal estimate of $51, and a figure that many climate economists argue still undervalues long-term damages because it relies on models that cannot fully capture tipping-point risks, cascading ecological failures, or the compounding costs of delayed action. Revenue from the carbon tax must be directed to two purposes simultaneously: investment in the public transition infrastructure described below, and direct household dividends that protect working families from the price increases that fossil fuel companies will inevitably pass through to consumers. The dividend structure is not optional — it is the mechanism that prevents the carbon tax from functioning as a regressive consumption tax, and it is the political precondition for the tax's durability. Without it, the industry will do exactly what it has always done:

frame the cost of accountability as a cost imposed on ordinary people by out-of-touch regulators, and the tax will be repealed within a single election cycle.

Elimination of all fossil fuel subsidies — federal, state, and municipal. A 2025 Oil Change International report found that the federal government alone hands the fossil fuel industry an estimated $34.8 billion annually through tax breaks, below-market royalty rates on public lands, direct spending, and regulatory loopholes — a figure the report describes as conservative because it excludes state and local subsidies, international public finance, military expenditures to protect fossil fuel supply chains, and the health and environmental costs of fossil fuel pollution that the public absorbs while the industry externalizes. The Trump administration's One Big Beautiful Bill Act added approximately $4 billion per year in new fossil fuel subsidies on top of this baseline, funded in part by cuts to SNAP, Medicaid, and clean energy programs — a transfer of public resources from the people who need them most to the industry least in need of public support. As much as 60 percent of U.S. oil and gas production is estimated to be subsidy-dependent — meaning it would be unprofitable without taxpayer support. The free market that the fossil fuel industry claims to champion does not exist; what exists is a century-old system of public subsidy that makes fossil fuels appear cheaper than they are, suppresses the price competitiveness of renewables, and forces the public to pay twice: once at the pump and again through the health, climate, and infrastructure costs that the industry refuses to internalize. Every dollar of fossil fuel subsidy is a dollar of market distortion that delays the transition.

Mandatory contributions to a public transition fund, calculated on the basis of historical cumulative emissions and historical profits. The principle is straightforward: the companies that created the crisis — with full knowledge of what they were creating — must bear a proportional share of the cost of resolving it. This less punitive than it is the application of the same liability framework that governs every other industry that knowingly produces harm. Tobacco companies fund cessation programs. Chemical manufacturers fund Superfund cleanup. Fossil fuel companies must fund the energy transition, the infrastructure retrofits, the community resilience investments, and the just transition programs for displaced workers and fossil fuel-dependent communities described elsewhere in this agenda. The alternative — requiring the public to finance the full cost of a transition necessitated by private profit — is a subsidy of a different kind, and it is indefensible.

Ban new fossil fuel leasing on federal lands and waters and phase out existing leases consistent with 1.5°C targets.

Public Fossil Fuel Transition Authority. The managed decline of fossil fuel production cannot be left to market forces, voluntary corporate commitments, or the discretionary judgment of administrations that change every four to eight years — because every one of these mechanisms has already been tried, and every one has failed. Global emissions continued to rise through the Paris Agreement, through net-zero corporate pledges, through two decades of international climate conferences. The industry's own behavior confirms the diagnosis: ExxonMobil and Chevron spent over $110 billion on fossil fuel acquisitions in 2023 alone — not the investment pattern of companies planning to wind down production, but of companies betting that the political system will never force them to stop. A dedicated public authority must be established with the sole institutional mandate of managing the decline of fossil fuel production on a binding statutory timeline. The enabling legislation must contain explicit, quantified reduction targets — not aspirational goals, not emissions-intensity benchmarks that allow absolute production to increase, but absolute production decline schedules written into the statute itself. These targets must be insulated from administrative revision: changeable only by congressional supermajority, with automatic escalation provisions — modeled on the backstop mechanisms in the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments for nonattainment areas — that accelerate the timeline if interim

targets are missed rather than extending it. The authority's discretion is limited to implementation: which facilities close first, how workers and communities transition, how infrastructure is repurposed, how the economic base of fossil fuel-dependent regions is rebuilt. The question of whether decline occurs, or at what pace, is not within the authority's jurisdiction — it is settled by statute, in the same way that the UK Climate Change Act of 2008 settled binding carbon budgets by Act of Parliament rather than leaving them to ministerial discretion.

The authority must be capture-proofed from inception, because the history of energy regulation in the United States is a history of regulatory capture. The Minerals Management Service — the agency responsible for overseeing offshore drilling — collected royalties from the same companies it regulated, developed a culture of institutional dependence on industry cooperation, and failed catastrophically when the Deepwater Horizon rig exploded in 2010, killing eleven workers and producing the largest marine oil spill in history. The Transition Authority's design must make this outcome structurally impossible instead of just unlikely. Lifetime prohibition on fossil fuel industry employment for authority leadership and senior staff — not a two-year cooling-off period, not a five-year revolving-door restriction, but a permanent bar, because the incentive to regulate leniently in exchange for a future seven-figure industry position must be eliminated entirely rather than merely deferred. Independent inspector general with statutory removal protections and direct reporting to Congress. Mandatory public proceedings for all major decisions, with standing citizen-suit provisions allowing affected communities and environmental organizations to enforce compliance with statutory targets in federal court. And the authority must be funded through dedicated carbon tax revenue rather than industry fees — because an agency that depends on the financial health of the industry it is winding down has an institutional incentive to slow the wind-down, which is precisely the dynamic that corrupted the Minerals Management Service and that has compromised financial regulation at every point where regulators depend on the entities they oversee for funding, personnel, and institutional relevance.

One structural constraint must be acknowledged: under prevailing constitutional interpretation, one Congress cannot bind a future Congress to a supermajority requirement for statutory revision — this is known as the entrenchment problem. The UK Climate Change Act operates through political constraint rather than constitutional prohibition, and the same logic applies here. The binding force of the statutory timeline depends on the political cost of repeal — which is why the standing citizen-suit provisions, the automatic escalation triggers, the public proceedings requirement, and the dedicated funding stream matter as much as the targets themselves. Each is a structural mechanism that raises the cost of reversal, creates constituencies with legal standing to resist backsliding, and ensures that any future Congress seeking to weaken the timeline must do so openly, against organized opposition, and in defiance of an institutional apparatus designed to make delay visible and accountable. The goal is to make voting for climate destruction on the record, with no procedural cover and no ambiguity about what the vote means.

B. Green Industrial Mobilization

Green New Deal framework: massive public investment in renewable energy, grid modernization, building electrification, and public transit, tied to job creation and industrial policy. Just transition investment for fossil fuel-dependent communities is a central element of the transition plan — because the failure to provide genuine alternatives for displaced workers and communities is both morally indefensible and politically fatal. Public and cooperative ownership of energy infrastructure, consistent with the broader transition from shareholder extraction to democratic ownership described in Part IV.

C. The Broader Ecological Crisis

The environmental agenda has to extend far beyond carbon. Biodiversity is collapsing at rates not seen since the last mass extinction. Topsoil is being depleted faster than it can regenerate. Oceans are acidifying, warming, and filling with plastic. Freshwater aquifers are being drawn down beyond replenishment. Synthetic chemicals whose long-term effects are unknown permeate the environment and human bodies. Each of these represents a dimension of ecological limits that the economy must be tailored to address.[17]

Environmental justice mandate: cumulative impact assessment ensuring pollution is not concentrated in vulnerable communities — because the same economic hierarchy that concentrates wealth at the top concentrates environmental harm at the bottom. Aggressive EPA enforcement of existing authority. The precautionary principle applies: the burden of proof must be on those who would introduce new chemicals, technologies, or practices to demonstrate safety, not on the public to prove harm after the fact.

PART IX: FOREIGN POLICY, DEFENSE, AND GLOBAL JUSTICE

Here we counter neoconservative interventionism, the military-industrial complex, covert regime change, uncritical support for authoritarian allies, and the extraction of the Global South.

The United States has conducted its foreign policy for the better part of a century on a set of assumptions that the evidence no longer supports — if it ever did. The first assumption is that American military dominance produces American security. It does not. The permanent war footing that has persisted since 2001 has produced two catastrophic ground wars, the destabilization of an entire region, the deaths of hundreds of thousands of civilians, the creation of the refugee flows that the Right then weaponizes as an immigration crisis, the erosion of civil liberties at home under the justification of wartime necessity, and a military budget that consumes more than the next ten nations combined while failing to prevent the most consequential security threat of the twenty-first century — which is not terrorism but the information warfare, democratic subversion, and authoritarian consolidation being conducted by Russia, China, and Iran without firing a shot. The second assumption is that trade liberalization produces democratic liberalization — that economic engagement with authoritarian regimes will, through some combination of rising middle-class expectations and exposure to Western norms, nudge those regimes toward democracy. **This assumption has been tested comprehensively and it has failed.** The third assumption is that the United States can promote democracy abroad while practicing something other than democracy at home — that a country whose own democratic institutions are under sustained internal assault, whose elections are gerrymandered, whose legislature is captured by corporate donors, and whose executive is claiming powers that the Constitution does not grant can credibly lecture other nations on democratic governance. It cannot. The moral authority on which effective democracy promotion depends has been squandered, and until it is rebuilt through the domestic reforms this agenda describes, American foreign policy will operate from a position of rhetorical bankruptcy that no amount of diplomatic skill can overcome.

It has become increasingly evident that the moral condition underlying both domestic dysfunction and foreign policy egocentrism is the same: a self-absorbed orientation in which the consequences of one's actions on others are beyond the scope of moral concern.[23] The same national egocentrism that produces exploitative foreign policy also produces domestic vulnerability to authoritarian manipulation — and both must be transcended together. A progressive foreign policy must be rooted in the same principles that govern domestic policy: democratic accountability, the rule of law, human dignity, and the recognition that genuine security comes from justice rather than domination.

The Failure of "Change Through Trade"

Before addressing specific policy reforms, the evidence on what does and does not promote democratic development abroad must be confronted, because the conventional wisdom that has guided American foreign policy for decades — that economic engagement with authoritarian regimes produces democratic reform — is not supported by the evidence and has produced consequences that should disqualify it permanently from serious policy consideration.

The most comprehensive test of the "change through trade" thesis was China's accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001. The theory was stated explicitly at the time by its proponents. President Clinton argued that WTO membership would "unleash forces that no totalitarian operation rooted in last century's industrial society can control." George H.W. Bush had articulated the same premise: "No nation on Earth has discovered a way to import the world's goods and services while stopping foreign ideas at the border." The prediction was that economic integration would produce a rising middle class whose demand for political participation would force the Chinese Communist Party to liberalize. Twenty-five years later, the results are unambiguous: China achieved the economic growth its WTO proponents predicted — surpassing per capita GDP targets ahead of schedule — and used that growth not to liberalize but to consolidate authoritarian control more effectively than at any point since Mao. Under Xi Jinping, China has eliminated presidential term limits, constructed the most sophisticated surveillance state in human history, imprisoned more than a million Uyghur Muslims in internment camps, crushed democratic governance in Hong Kong, and weaponized its economic power to punish any nation, corporation, or individual that criticizes its human rights record. Trade did not change China. It funded China's deepening capacity to resist change — and to export its authoritarian model to countries that now have a well-resourced alternative to Western democratic conditionality.[62]

The Russian case is equally damning, and perhaps more directly consequential for American security. After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, the West — led by the United States and advised by American economists — prescribed "shock therapy:" rapid price liberalization, privatization of state enterprises, and integration into the global market economy, on the theory that a market economy would produce democratic institutions as a natural consequence. The results were catastrophic by every measurable indicator. Russia's GDP contracted by nearly fifty percent between 1991 and 1997. Hyperinflation exceeded two thousand percent in 1992, wiping out the savings of ordinary Russians overnight. The privatization process — conducted through a voucher system that was manipulated by well-positioned insiders and a "loans-for-shares" scheme that transferred the nation's most valuable industrial assets to a handful of oligarchs at a fraction of their value — did not produce a competitive market economy but a kleptocracy in which a small circle of politically connected individuals seized control of Russia's resource wealth while the population experienced rising poverty, declining life expectancy, collapsing public services, and the disintegration of the social order.[63] Crime rates and inequality soared. Male life expectancy declined by nearly five years during the 1990s. Russia took thirteen years to return to its 1989 communist-era income levels — compared to six years for Poland and seven for Romania, countries that implemented reforms with greater institutional care and less ideological rigidity. The democratic experiment that shock therapy was supposed to enable was discredited in the minds of the Russian population not because democracy was tried and failed but because what was called democracy — the chaotic, impoverished, humiliating decade of the 1990s — became permanently associated with Western economic prescriptions that produced mass suffering. Into this vacuum stepped Vladimir Putin, who offered order, stability, and the restoration of national dignity at the price of democratic governance — a price the Russian public, having experienced what a very imperfect "democracy" meant in practice, was willing to pay. The man who now wages information warfare against Western

democracies is the direct product of the West's own failed theory of democratic promotion through economic liberalization. The United States did not merely fail to democratize Russia. It created the conditions that produced the authoritarian regime now dedicated to undermining American democracy.[64]

The pattern extends beyond these two cases. Saudi Arabia has been a major U.S. trading partner and arms customer for decades; it remains an absolute monarchy with one of the worst human rights records on earth. Other Gulf states have achieved extraordinary per capita wealth through resource extraction and trade; none is a democracy. Vietnam integrated into the global economy and joined the WTO in 2007; it remains a one-party state. The evidence is clear enough to state as a conclusion rather than a hypothesis: **trade does not promote democracy.** Increases in prosperity can stabilize dictatorships as effectively as they can empower democratic movements — more effectively, in fact, because authoritarian governments that control resource revenues can use those revenues to buy loyalty, fund security services, and insulate themselves from the popular pressures that democratic theory assumes prosperity will generate.[65]

The Colonial Inheritance and the Boundary Problem

A progressive foreign policy must also confront, with a directness that most American policy discourse has systematically avoided, the degree to which the instability, conflict, and governance failures that characterize much of the developing world aren’t indigenous pathologies but the predictable consequences of European colonial engineering — engineering in which the United States has been complicit and from which it has profited.

Nearly forty percent of all international boundaries on earth were drawn by Britain and France. The Berlin Conference of 1884-85 divided the African continent among European colonial powers with no regard for existing ethnic, cultural, linguistic, or political entities — drawing lines on maps in European conference rooms that cut through the middle of established communities, placed historically hostile populations within the same colonial administrative unit, and separated peoples who had governed themselves as coherent polities for centuries. The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916 performed the same operation in the Middle East, carving the remnants of the Ottoman Empire into British and French spheres of influence whose boundaries bore no relationship to the populations living within them. The Durand Line of 1893 bisected the Pashtun population between Afghanistan and what would become Pakistan. The partition of India in 1947 created borders that displaced fifteen million people and killed between one and two million, and produced the Kashmir conflict that has brought two nuclear powers to the brink of war repeatedly for seventy-five years. Each of these boundaries was drawn to serve the administrative convenience of the colonial power, not the governance needs of the colonized population — and each has produced conflicts that persist to this day because the fundamental problem has never been resolved: the people living within these borders did not draw them, do not recognize them as legitimate expressions of their political identity, and in many cases are governed by states whose territorial claims are experienced as foreign impositions rather than organic expressions of collective self-determination.[66]

The consequences are more than historical artifacts, they are the structural preconditions for ongoing instability. The Rwandan genocide of 1994 was made possible in part by the Belgian colonial administration's decision to harden and politicize the distinction between Hutu and Tutsi — identities that had been fluid and contextual in precolonial Rwanda — by issuing identity cards that fixed ethnic classification and distributing political power along ethnic lines. The ongoing conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which have killed more people than any war since World War II, are inseparable from

the colonial borders that placed dozens of distinct ethnic groups within a single administrative unit whose central government has never been capable of governing its territory. The sectarian conflicts in Iraq and Syria play out across boundaries that the Sykes-Picot Agreement drew through the middle of Kurdish, Sunni, and Shia populations. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict — the most politically charged and diplomatically intractable conflict in American foreign policy — was created in significant part by the decision of the British Mandate and subsequently the United Nations to partition Palestine in a manner that displaced an existing population to create a state for a different population, producing a grievance whose resolution has eluded every diplomatic framework attempted in the eight decades since.

The United States also has compounded these colonial inheritances through its own interventions. The CIA-orchestrated coup in Iran in 1953, which overthrew the democratically elected government of Mohammad Mosaddegh and reinstalled the Shah, produced twenty-six years of authoritarian rule whose brutality and corruption inspired conditions for the Islamic Revolution of 1979 — which in turn produced the theocratic regime that has been a primary adversary of American interests in the region for nearly half a century. The pattern around the globe has been consistent: American intervention installs or supports a regime that serves American strategic or economic interests; the regime's illegitimacy and repression generate popular opposition; the opposition, having been denied democratic channels of expression by the very regime the United States supports, radicalizes; and the radicalized opposition, when it eventually prevails, is hostile to the United States precisely because of the American role in sustaining the regime it overthrew. Iran in 1979. The mujahideen in Afghanistan — funded by the United States to fight the Soviets, subsequently producing the Taliban and providing the organizational base for al-Qaeda. The reversion to autocracy after the Arab Spring in Egypt, Libya, Yemen, and Bahrain, in countries where decades of American-supported or American-tolerated authoritarian rule had prevented the development of the civil society institutions that democratic transitions require. This has been a predictable cycle, and continues to be predicted — by the populations subjected to it, by area specialists who understand the cultures in question, and by anyone willing to examine the historical record with minimal honesty. But the U.S. did not listen.

The deeper problem is one of cultural arrogance so profound that it constitutes a form of policy blindness. Western democracy promotion has consistently assumed that democratic institutions can be transplanted into societies whose cultural, religious, economic, and social structures are fundamentally different from those in which those institutions evolved — and that the failure of the transplant is a defect of the recipient culture rather than a defect of the transplant. The Islamic Revolution in Iran was not a failure of the Iranian people to appreciate democracy. It was the predictable collapse of a modernization program imposed by an authoritarian monarch whose legitimacy was derived entirely from foreign support, and whose reforms — however genuinely beneficial some of them were — were experienced by much of the population as an assault on their identity conducted at the behest of a foreign power. Of course, the revolution itself was not a monolithic uprising of religious fundamentalism. It was a broad coalition — leftists, liberals, nationalists, secularists, students, labor unions, and religious factions — united by opposition to the Shah and by the expectation that his removal would produce a more democratic and pluralistic government. But what determined the outcome was not the religiosity of Iranian culture, per se, but the organizational asymmetry among the revolutionary factions: Khomeini's network of mosques, seminaries, and clerical institutions constituted the only organizational infrastructure that the Shah's secret police had been unable to fully penetrate and dismantle, which gave the religious faction a mobilization capacity that no other group could match. Khomeini exploited this advantage — and compounded it with deliberate deception, making explicit promises of political liberalization, democratic governance, and respect for minority rights that he reversed systematically once power was consolidated. The secular and liberal factions that had

participated in the revolution in good faith were subsequently suppressed, imprisoned, or killed by the regime they had helped install. The lesson here should not be that religious societies can't sustain democratic governance — Turkey, Indonesia, and Senegal have all demonstrated otherwise, however imperfectly. The lesson should be that when an authoritarian client state collapses, the faction that prevails is the one with the strongest organizational infrastructure and the most ruthless leadership — and that by destroying every other form of civil society organization while leaving the clerical network intact, the Shah's regime (and its American sponsors) inadvertently determined which faction that would be.

Similarly, the reversion to tribal and sectarian governance across post-independence Africa was not a failure of Africans to understand democracy. It was the predictable consequence of colonial boundaries that created states with no organic basis in the political identities of the populations they contained, governed by institutions designed for European administrative convenience rather than African self-governance, and stripped of the indigenous governance structures that colonial administrations systematically dismantled. The return to autocracy after the Arab Spring was not a failure of Arab political culture. It was the predictable result of democratic transitions attempted in societies where decades of Western-supported authoritarian rule had destroyed the independent civil society, free press, judicial independence, and culture of political pluralism that democratic governance requires as preconditions — preconditions that the Western powers supporting the transitions had themselves helped to eliminate.

The Resource Curse and U.S. Complicity

American foreign policy has an additional structural entanglement with authoritarian governance we need to name: the resource curse, and the subsequent American dependence on natural resources in countries where that curse operates. The research is extensive and the findings are consistent: countries with abundant natural resources — particularly oil and gas — are more likely to be governed by authoritarian regimes, experience higher levels of corruption, suffer from slower economic growth outside the resource sector, and resist democratic transitions, because resource revenues allow governments to fund security services, buy political loyalty, and sustain themselves without the tax revenues that create accountability to citizens.[67] Massive oil wealth inherently strengthens authoritarian rule because political leaders who control resource revenues have so much more to lose from democratic transitions, and more resources with which to prevent them. The governments of Saudi Arabia, the Gulf states, Russia, Venezuela, and the petro-states of Central Asia and West Africa have been sustained by resource revenues that insulate them from popular pressure and eliminate the fiscal accountability that has historically been a primary driver of democratic development — that link between taxation and representation that produced democratic governance in Europe and North America.

The United States has not been a passive observer of this dynamic but a participant, and indeed an architect. The 1974 agreement between the Nixon administration and Saudi Arabia, in which the Saudis committed to pricing all oil exports in U.S. dollars and recycling petrodollar surpluses into U.S. Treasury securities in exchange for American military protection and arms sales, established the structural foundation for both the dollar's global reserve currency status and the United States' entanglement with authoritarian petro-states. The petrodollar system did not merely create American dependence on Saudi oil. It created a mutual dependency in which the stability of the global financial system, the demand for U.S. government debt, and the privileged position of the dollar in international trade **all became contingent on the continuation of a relationship with an absolute monarchy** — a relationship in which

the United States could not credibly pressure the Saudis on human rights, democratic governance, or the export of Wahhabi extremism without threatening the underlying financial architecture on which American fiscal supremacy depended. The same logic extended to the Gulf states and, in different configurations, to every oil-producing authoritarian regime whose dollar-denominated exports sustained the U.S. system. The petrodollar arrangement compounded the resource curse by adding an external guarantor — the most powerful military on earth — to the internal dynamics that already insulated petro-state rulers from any democratic accountability. Oil wealth alone allows an authoritarian government to buy domestic loyalty and fund security services. Oil wealth denominated in dollars and backstopped by American military commitments allows that government to do so with the explicit protection of the global hegemon, which has a structural financial interest in the regime's survival regardless of that regime's conduct toward its citizens.

American dependence on foreign oil — reduced but not eliminated by the domestic shale revolution — has produced decades of strategic relationships with authoritarian petro-states whose governance the United States has not merely tolerated but actively sustained. Because the alternative — democratic governance in oil-producing countries, which might nationalize resources, restrict production, reprice exports in alternative currencies, or align with American adversaries — has been treated as a greater threat to American interests than the authoritarianism itself. The double standard is the one this agenda identifies in its principled conditionality section: authoritarian allies receive unconditional support while authoritarian adversaries face sanctions, and the distinction between the two categories is determined not by the severity of the authoritarianism but by its alignment with American strategic and economic interests. This double standard is morally incoherent and strategically corrosive — and it is sustained by both a fossil fuel dependence and a financial architecture that this agenda's energy transition and fiscal reform proposals are designed to end, which means that the foreign policy reforms described here, the energy reforms described elsewhere in this document, and the fiscal architecture that reduces dependence on foreign debt purchases are structurally interdependent: **you cannot have a morally coherent foreign policy while your energy supply depends on the goodwill of authoritarian regimes and your currency's global status depends on their willingness to price their exports in your dollars.**

Evidence-Based Support for Democracy That Actually Works

So if trade does not promote democracy, and regime change results in authoritarian backlash, and colonial boundary engineering creates ungovernable states, and resource dependence sustains the very authoritarianism it purports to oppose — *then what does work?* The evidence, drawn from decades of comparative political science, points to a set of approaches that are less dramatic than regime change, less gratifying than trade deals, less immediately profitable than arms sales, but more effective than any of these.

First, support for indigenous civil society institutions — not American-designed institutions transplanted into foreign soil, but the organizations, networks, and associations that emerge organically within a society and provide the social infrastructure on which democratic governance depends. Independent media. Labor unions. Women's organizations. Professional associations. Religious institutions that operate independently of state control. Legal aid organizations. Human rights monitoring groups. These are the institutions that create the culture of pluralism, accountability, and civic participation without which democratic elections are performances rather than governance mechanisms. The research confirms that democracy assistance channeled through civil society organizations produces measurably better democratic outcomes than general economic aid, because it strengthens the institutional capacity that makes democratic governance functional rather than merely

formal.[68] USAID's civil society programs — when they were adequately funded and permitted to operate without political interference — strengthened legal environments for civil society in more than twenty countries, supported more than five hundred local civil society organizations globally, and advanced internet freedom and independent media in dozens of countries. These are modest achievements compared to the ambitions of regime change, but they are actual achievements — durable, measurable, and consistent with the principle that only a nation's own people can truly bring about sustainable democracy within its borders.

Second, educational investment — particularly in civic education, media literacy, and the development of an educated population capable of the critical thinking that democratic self-governance requires. The correlation between educational attainment and democratic durability is among the strongest in comparative politics. Countries with higher levels of education are more likely to transition to democracy, more likely to sustain democratic governance once established, and more resistant to democratic backsliding. This is not because education makes people ideologically liberal — it does not — but because education develops the cognitive capacities that democratic deliberation requires: the ability to evaluate competing claims, to distinguish evidence from assertion, to recognize manipulation, and to hold government accountable through informed civic participation.

Third, support for independent judiciaries and rule-of-law institutions — the mechanisms through which democratic governance is constrained from degenerating into majoritarian tyranny or executive overreach. The judiciary is the institution most consistently targeted by aspiring authoritarians — in Hungary, Poland, Turkey, Israel, and indeed the United States — because an independent judiciary is the structural obstacle to the consolidation of power that authoritarianism requires. Supporting judicial independence in transitioning democracies through training, institutional design assistance, and the integration of judicial independence protections into constitutional frameworks, is one of the most cost-effective investments in democratic durability available.

Fourth, the regional democratic neighborhood effect. Countries surrounded by democracies are significantly more likely to democratize and to sustain democratic governance, because democratic neighbors create demonstration effects, provide models of institutional design, exert peer pressure through regional organizations, and reduce the strategic incentives for authoritarianism by creating security environments in which democratic governance is not a strategic vulnerability. This has implications for American foreign policy: supporting democratic governance in regions where democratic momentum already exists — rather than attempting to impose it in regions where no democratic infrastructure exists — produces better outcomes per dollar invested.

Fifth, **supporting the development of institutions that provide lived experience of democratic governance at the local and community level**, even in countries where national-level democracy does not exist. Participatory budgeting, community land trusts, cooperative enterprise, local citizens' assemblies, community-managed natural resources — each of these creates democratic practice at the scale where it is most immediately meaningful to participants, builds the social capital and institutional competence that national-level democratic governance will eventually require, and demonstrates to populations that have no experience of functional democracy what democratic governance actually looks like. This is the approach most consistent with Ostrom's commons governance principles and with the parallel power framework this agenda proposes domestically — and it has the advantage of being resistant to capture by national-level authoritarian governments…because it operates at a scale those governments find difficult to monitor and control.

Neoliberal Drift as a Global Threat

The principled conditionality framework described below must also account for a threat that is not reducible to classical authoritarianism: the global drift toward neoliberal governance — the systematic replacement of democratic accountability with market logic, of public services with private provision, and of citizens with consumers — that this agenda identifies domestically and which operates with equal force internationally. The IMF and World Bank's structural adjustment programs — which for decades conditioned financial assistance to developing countries on the adoption of austerity, privatization, deregulation, and trade liberalization — are themselves a form of neoliberal export, and their record of undermining democratic governance in the countries subjected to them is extensively documented.[72] When the IMF conditions a loan on the privatization of a country's water supply, the reduction of its public healthcare spending, or the elimination of its food subsidies, it is imposing economic policy choices that the country's elected government did not make and that its population did not consent to — and the resulting hardship is experienced by that population not as the consequence of neutral economic forces but as the imposition of a foreign agenda enforced through financial coercion. The resentment this produces has been a recruiting tool for authoritarian populists across the developing world, who offer nationalist resistance to "Western economic imperialism" as a substitute for democratic governance — a substitute that is often accepted, because, once again, the version of "democracy" the population has experienced came packaged with economic policies that made their lives measurably worse.

Principled conditionality must therefore apply in both directions: conditioning American support not only on democratic governance and human rights but on the rejection of neoliberal economic prescriptions that undermine both. When the United States pressures a developing country to privatize its essential services, deregulate its financial sector, or adopt austerity measures that gut public investment in education, healthcare, and infrastructure, it is not promoting the conditions for democratic governance. It is undermining them — because the institutional capacity, the social cohesion, and the economic security that democratic governance requires cannot be built on a foundation of austerity, privatization, and the systematic withdrawal of the state from the domains where its citizens need it most.

A. Military Reform

Significantly reduce the military budget — this isn't an arbitrary austerity measure but a strategic reallocation of national resources from the instruments of coercion to the instruments of influence. The United States spends more on its military than the next ten nations combined, and this spending has not produced proportional security. It has produced a permanent war footing that distorts national priorities, diverts resources from the domestic investments this agenda proposes, sustains a military-industrial-congressional complex whose power shapes foreign policy in the direction of conflict rather than diplomacy, and maintains a global military footprint — approximately 750 overseas bases in roughly eighty countries — that generates the resentment, the strategic entanglement, and the blowback that constitute the primary threats to American security in the twenty-first century.

In addition, the wars in Ukraine and Iran have rendered the cost structure of America's military posture not merely bloated but strategically obsolete. A $20,000 Shahed drone — assembled by a single engineer in a ten-hour shift from commercially available components — is being intercepted by a $4 million Patriot missile. That is a two-hundred-to-one cost ratio favoring the attacker. In the first week of the Iran conflict alone, the United States and its partners expended an estimated $1.7 billion in interceptors against drone and missile salvos that cost Iran a fraction of that figure. Lockheed Martin produces roughly six hundred Patriot interceptors per year; at the rate of expenditure observed in the opening days of that conflict, Gulf state stockpiles could be depleted in days. Meanwhile, Ukraine has demonstrated that $500 first-person-view drones can destroy million-dollar tanks, that $2,500 interceptor drones can down $50,000 Shaheds, and that a country producing 1.7 million drones in a single year can impose unsustainable attrition on a larger adversary. The lesson here isn't that drones are the future and missiles are the past — the lesson is that the United States has spent decades building the most expensive military in human history around platforms, procurement cycles, and force structures designed for a kind of warfare that its own adversaries have learned to circumvent at a cost ratio that makes American defense spending a strategic liability rather than an asset. A defense budget that allocates hundreds of billions to aircraft carriers, fifth-generation fighter jets, and missile systems that cost orders of magnitude more than the threats they are designed to counter is a budget optimized for the revenue of defense contractors rather than one optimized for security. We aren't promoting an antimilitarist agenda…at all. This is the most pro-security position available: redirect resources from legacy platforms and force structures that current conflicts have exposed as economically unsustainable, toward the asymmetric capabilities, cyber defense, intelligence, diplomacy, and domestic resilience that actually determine whether a nation is secure in the twenty-first century.

Begin phased closure of the majority of overseas U.S. military bases, retaining only those that serve genuinely defensive alliance commitments and that are maintained with the informed consent of the host nation's population — not merely the consent of its government, which may be authoritarian or which may consent because the base provides economic benefits to the governing class while imposing costs on the surrounding community. **End the permanent war footing that has persisted since September 2001.** Repeal and replace the 2001 and 2002 Authorizations for Use of Military Force, which have been stretched far beyond their original scope to authorize military operations in countries and against organizations that did not exist when the authorizations were passed — a legal fiction that has allowed four successive administrations to conduct military operations without the congressional authorization the Constitution requires. **Restore Congress's war power** — the constitutional authority to declare war, which has been reduced from a substantive check on executive military action to a ceremonial ratification of decisions already made by the president, and which must be restored to its

constitutional function if the democratic accountability this agenda demands of every other institution is to apply to the most consequential decision a government makes.

B. Diplomacy, Soft Power, and Multipolar Engagement

Restore and expand the instruments of American influence that actually produce durable outcomes — development, education, cultural exchange, and diplomacy — which have been systematically starved of funding while the military budget has consumed the overwhelming majority of national security spending. Restore Voice of America's editorial independence, which has been compromised by political appointees who converted a journalistic institution into a propaganda outlet. Rebuild USAID — not merely restore it to its pre-2025 state, in which it was already underfunded and politically constrained, but expand it into the primary instrument of American engagement with the developing world, with a mandate, a budget, and an institutional independence commensurate with its strategic importance. The current administration didn't just gut USAID, it destroyed it. On July 1, 2025, the United States Agency for International Development — the institution that had served for sixty-four years as the primary instrument of American development engagement with the world, that had managed thousands of programs in roughly one hundred thirty countries, and that a *Lancet* study published on its final day of operation estimated had saved close to ninety-two million lives over the preceding two decades — officially ceased to exist.[71] The dismantling was swift, chaotic, and deliberate. Within weeks of the inauguration, a stop-work order froze programs worldwide. By February, more than ten thousand employees had been placed on leave. By March, eighty-three percent of programs had been terminated — some five thousand two hundred contracts canceled. By July, the agency was closed and its remnants absorbed into a State Department that lacks the institutional infrastructure, the technical expertise, and the field capacity to manage the complex global programs USAID had spent decades building.

The consequences of shuttering USAID are already measured: HIV clinics closed in South Africa, medical programs terminated in Afghanistan, food assistance ended for 2.4 million people in Yemen, malaria deaths spiking in Cameroon, and a *Lancet* projection that global aid cuts could produce between 9.4 and 14 million preventable deaths by 2030. Even Republican senators acknowledged that the destruction had been, in Mitch McConnell's words, 'unnecessarily chaotic' and had created opportunities for China to fill the gap the United States had left — which is precisely what is happening, as Chinese development assistance and infrastructure investment expand into the regions where American presence has evaporated. Rebuilding what was destroyed will take, by the estimate of Andrew Natsios, USAID administrator under George W. Bush, at least five to seven years — and that estimate assumes a future administration with the political will to rebuild, which is not guaranteed. The destruction of USAID wasn't a policy debate. It is the elimination of the single most effective instrument of American soft power, conducted by an administration that does not believe in soft power and that has demonstrated, through this act, that it prefers a world in which American influence is exercised exclusively through military force and economic coercion — instruments that this section has already demonstrated do not produce the outcomes their proponents claim.

Rebuild and reform the Peace Corps — well beyond its Participatory Analysis for Community Action framework. The legitimate criticism of the Peace Corps model is that it has too often functioned as a mirror image of the structural adjustment mentality it should be an alternative to: an American arrives in a community with a predetermined improvement project, executes it over a defined period with skills and resources the community may or may not possess, and departs — leaving behind a product that the community did not design themselves, may not have prioritized, and often lacks the institutional capacity to maintain. The result feels good for the volunteer and looks good in the program's annual

report, but it can alienate the communities it purports to serve by reinforcing the same dynamic of external dependency and paternalistic intervention that characterizes the worst of American development policy. The reformed model must invert this relationship. Volunteers should be embedded within existing local organizations rather than deployed as independent agents of American expertise. Project selection must be driven by community priorities, identified primarily through community-led processes, and not by Washington program design. The two-year deployment should be extended where possible, because the first year of a cross-cultural placement is spent learning — learning the language, the social dynamics, the institutional landscape, the history of previous interventions that succeeded or failed and why — and a volunteer who departs after two years is leaving just as they have become genuinely useful. Most critically, the measure of success must shift from project completion to institutional capacity and metrics similar to those used in the proposed U.S. pilot program framework: did the volunteer's presence strengthen a local organization's ability to do what it was already trying to do, or did it create a dependency that collapses when the volunteer goes home?

Establish new civilian exchange programs that are genuinely reciprocal — that place Americans in developing countries and bring citizens of developing countries to the United States, not as observers of American excellence but as participants in a mutual encounter from which both sides learn. The most effective democracy promotion isn't conducted through lectures, conditionality, or trade agreements. It is conducted through relationships that form when people work alongside each other long enough to see each other as colleagues rather than as representatives of their respective national narratives. But the relationships must be structurally equal, or they reproduce the very power asymmetry they are supposed to transcend. An exchange program in which Americans arrive as experts and foreign participants arrive as students is not mutual engagement. It is pedagogy in disguise, and the populations on the receiving end can tell the difference — which is why they have learned to perform gratitude while the Americans are present and resume their own priorities the moment the Americans leave.

Explicitly embrace the transition from unilateral American dominance to multipolar consensus-building. The era in which the United States could dictate the terms of international order is ending — not because of a failure of American will but because other nations have developed the economic, military, and diplomatic capacity to assert their own interests, and because the American model of governance has lost the credibility it once commanded. The progressive response to this transition is less nostalgia for unipolarity than the recognition that multipolar consensus-building — genuine partnership with allies, respect for international law, acceptance that other nations will have proportional influence in global governance — is both the realistic assessment of the current strategic environment and the democratic principle of diffused power applied to international relations. Re-engage with the international institutions from which the United States has withdrawn or which it has undermined: the Paris Agreement, the World Health Organization, the International Criminal Court, arms control frameworks. These institutions are imperfect. They are also the only mechanisms that exist for coordinating collective action on threats — climate change, pandemic disease, nuclear proliferation, financial instability — that no nation can address alone.

C. Principled Conditionality

All U.S. economic and military support must be conditioned on demonstrated movement toward liberal democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and the rejection of neoliberal economic prescriptions that undermine democratic governance. Applied consistently — not selectively, or according to the strategic convenience of the moment, or with exceptions for allies whose authoritarianism is useful — and with the narrow, *publicly justified* exceptions described below.

Consistency is the operative word, because the single most corrosive feature of American democracy promotion has been its…consistent inconsistency. The double standard under which authoritarian allies — Saudi Arabia, Egypt under Sisi, the Gulf states — receive unconditional military and economic support while authoritarian adversaries — Russia, Iran, North Korea — face sanctions and diplomatic isolation is a moral contradiction that the populations of every country in the world can see, and it destroys the credibility of every American claim to care about democracy, human rights, or the rule of law. When the United States sells arms to Israel and Saudi Arabia while sanctioning Iran, the message received by the populations of these countries — and by every observer worldwide — is that American foreign policy is about interests, not values, and that the values talk is packaging for the interests. This message is accurate under the current framework. It must become inaccurate under the progressive framework proposed here.

When allies regress — as Hungary under Orbán, as India under Modi, as Israel under Netanyahu,[1] as the Philippines under Duterte, as Brazil under Bolsonaro — *withdraw support publicly, with clear criteria for restoration stated in plain language*. If behavior escalates into systematic oppression, apartheid governance, or authoritarian consolidation, escalate to sanctions, diplomatic isolation, and public condemnation. All economic relationships with longstanding authoritarian regimes — Russia, Saudi Arabia, Iran, China — must be explicitly contingent on measurable movement toward democracy and civil liberties. This must be an unwavering, publicly stated commitment, maintained across administrations and resistant to the pressure of strategic convenience.

Narrow exceptions — for existential shared threats including nuclear proliferation, pandemic response, and climate agreements requiring broad coalition — are sometimes unavoidable. When engagement with imperfect partners is necessary, the conditionality remains the default posture, the exceptions are time-limited and subject to congressional review (reasserting Congress's *regulation of foreign commerce* under Article I), and the nature of the exception is stated publicly — in plain language, not diplomatic euphemism. A progressive foreign policy does not pretend that the world is simple or that moral clarity eliminates strategic complexity. It insists that the complexity be acknowledged honestly rather than used as a justification for abandoning principles whenever their application is inconvenient.

D. End Covert Regime Change

Permanently cease all covert manipulation of foreign governments through CIA political operations, assassinations, and coups. The history of American covert intervention is a history of consequences so catastrophic and predictable, so consistently counterproductive to the objectives the interventions were designed to achieve, that their continuation constitutes either willful ignorance or institutional inertia of a kind that should be intolerable in a democratic society.

[1] Explicitly: The erosion of judicial independence, expansion of settlements, and the destruction of civilian life and infrastructure in Gaza on a scale that constitutes collective punishment if not genocide.

Iran, 1953: the CIA overthrows Mosaddegh, installs the Shah, and produces the Islamic Revolution. Guatemala, 1954: the CIA overthrows Árbenz, installs a military dictatorship, and produces four decades of civil war and genocide. Chile, 1973: the CIA facilitates the coup against Allende, installs Pinochet, and produces seventeen years of dictatorship, torture, and disappearance. The pattern does not vary. The short-term strategic objective is achieved — the inconvenient government is removed — and the long-term consequences are worse than the problem the intervention was designed to solve, because the intervention often destroys the indigenous political institutions that democratic governance requires, empowers the most ruthless domestic actors, generates popular hostility toward the United States that persists for generations, and provides authoritarian governments worldwide with a ready-made justification for suppressing domestic democratic movements as American-funded subversion.

All future interventions must be transparent, legally authorized by Congress, and democratically accountable. No American president should have the unilateral authority to overthrow a foreign government in secret — or kidnap its leaders — an authority that no constitutional text grants, no democratic principle supports, and that has produced, in every documented case, outcomes that have made the United States less secure and the world less democratic.

E. Global Economic Justice

Reform the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to end the structural adjustment orthodoxy that has imposed austerity on developing nations for decades — an orthodoxy whose theoretical foundations have been empirically discredited and whose practical consequences have included the destruction of public services, the privatization of essential resources, the immiseration of entire populations, and the generation of political instability that authoritarian movements exploit. The IMF's own internal evaluations have acknowledged that structural adjustment programs have frequently failed to produce the economic growth they promised and have imposed disproportionate costs on the poorest populations of the countries subjected to them.[XX] Reform these institutions so that their lending conditions support rather than undermine democratic governance, public investment in education and healthcare, environmental protection, and the development of the indigenous institutional capacity that economic self-determination requires.

Debt cancellation for the poorest nations — many of which are servicing debts incurred by authoritarian governments that the populations never chose, for projects that the populations never benefited from, at interest rates that the populations had no power to negotiate. The debt burden of the world's poorest countries is a mechanism through which the wealth extracted during colonialism continues to flow from the Global South to the Global North — and the insistence on repayment, enforced through structural adjustment conditions that gut the public services on which the poorest citizens depend, is a form of economic coercion that is incompatible with every principle this agenda espouses.

Fair trade frameworks protecting labor and environmental standards — so that trade liberalization does not function as a race to the bottom in which the countries that offer the lowest wages, the weakest environmental protections, and the most exploitable labor forces attract the most investment, while countries that maintain democratic labor standards and environmental regulations are punished through capital flight. **Climate finance:** the wealthy nations that caused the climate crisis — whose industrialization over the past two centuries produced the atmospheric carbon that is now destabilizing the climate — must fund adaptation in the poorer nations that are bearing the consequences of emissions they did not produce. This is justifiable restitution, and the refusal to frame it as such is itself a form of the moral egocentrism this section identifies as the root of American foreign policy dysfunction.

End investor-state dispute settlement mechanisms that allow corporations to sue sovereign governments for public interest regulation — a provision embedded in trade agreements at the insistence of corporate interests, this subordinates democratic governance to corporate profit by creating a legal framework in which a country that raises its minimum wage, strengthens its environmental protections, or regulates its financial sector can be sued by a foreign corporation for the profits the regulation allegedly cost it. ISDS mechanisms are the purest expression of the neoliberal inversion of democratic priorities — the principle that corporate profit takes precedence over democratic self-governance — and their elimination from all trade agreements to which the United States is a party should be a non-negotiable condition of progressive foreign policy.

American prosperity was built in part on the exploitation of the Global South through colonialism, extractive trade, structural adjustment, and the resource dependencies described above. Much of the migration that the Right demonizes was driven by conditions that American foreign policy, American economic prescriptions, and American military interventions helped create. A progressive foreign policy must acknowledge this history and work to reverse its effects — not out of guilt, which can produce either chest-beating or paralysis instead of action, but out of the recognition that genuine security in an interconnected world requires justice, and that the United States cannot be secure while the populations it has helped impoverish remain desperate enough to risk everything to reach its borders.

E. International Coordination

Many of the economic proposals in this agenda — wealth taxation, financial transaction taxes, corporate minimum rates, regulation of capital flows — are vulnerable to evasion through capital mobility in the absence of international coordination. A wealth tax that drives assets to offshore jurisdictions accomplishes little. Financial regulation that applies only within American borders invites regulatory arbitrage. This is a genuine constraint, and pretending otherwise is the kind of wishful thinking this agenda has criticized in others.

The proposed response is twofold. First, pursue multilateral tax and financial agreements aggressively — building on frameworks like the OECD global minimum tax to close the gaps through which capital escapes democratic accountability. The OECD's agreement on a fifteen percent global minimum corporate tax rate was a significant step, but it is insufficient: fifteen percent approaches the effective rate paid by most small businesses in the United States, and the agreement's enforcement mechanisms are weak enough to invite the creative compliance that has characterized every previous attempt at international tax coordination. Push for higher rates, stronger enforcement, and the inclusion of wealth taxation — not merely corporate income taxation — in the multilateral framework.

Second, use America's remaining economic leverage to make unilateral enforcement credible: restrict access to U.S. financial markets for entities and jurisdictions that facilitate evasion, and impose secondary sanctions on tax havens — including the tax havens that exist within or under the protection of American allies, such as the Cayman Islands, the British Virgin Islands, Luxembourg, Ireland, and the state of Delaware. The hypocrisy of demanding international tax cooperation while tolerating domestic and allied tax havens is another instance of the double standard that this agenda identifies as the structural defect of American foreign policy. International coordination is the preferred path; unilateral enforcement capacity is the necessary backstop. Neither is sufficient without the other.

PART X: BUILDING PROGRESSIVE POWER

The meta-strategy: how to build the institutional capacity to win. The conservative "great deception" project took fifty years. Reversing it requires matching its comprehensiveness, discipline, and long-term commitment.

The Seven Institutional Pillars described in Part II represent the Right's infrastructure of power.[9][17] Each must be matched by a progressive counterpart. The progressive movement has historically been fragmented, reactive, and under-resourced — winning individual battles while losing the structural war. This section proposes the institutional architecture necessary to reverse that dynamic.

The asymmetry is not primarily one of money, though money matters. It is an asymmetry of *design*. The Right built a system. The Left built a collection of causes. The Right's institutional pillars — from the Heritage Foundation to the Federalist Society to Fox News to ALEC to the Koch donor network — do not merely coexist. They *interoperate*: Heritage produces the policy paper, Fox popularizes it, ALEC drafts the model legislation, the State Policy Network distributes it to fifty state capitals, the Federalist Society ensures the judiciary will uphold it, and the Koch network funds every node in the chain. The progressive equivalent of this system does not exist. What exists instead is a landscape of well-intentioned organizations, each addressing a legitimate concern, each competing for the same limited donor pool, each guarding its institutional turf, and none of them coordinated into the kind of mutually reinforcing architecture that converts intellectual production into political power into law into judicial precedent into cultural common sense. Building that architecture is the project described in this section, and it is the project without which every other section of this agenda remains aspiration rather than governance.

A. Think Tanks and Idea Infrastructure

The Heritage Foundation was established in 1973 with a specific operational theory that distinguished it from the think tanks that preceded it: ideas must be produced in forms that legislators can use *immediately* — not academic monographs that sit on shelves, but concise policy briefs timed to the legislative calendar, drafted in language that a congressional staffer can convert into bill text over a weekend. The Cato Institute, the American Enterprise Institute, the Hoover Institution, the Manhattan Institute, the Claremont Institute — each occupies a slightly different ideological niche, each produces scholarship of varying quality, and together they constitute an ecosystem in which virtually any policy position the Right wishes to advance can be supported by a document bearing an institutional imprimatur that the media treats as credible, that legislators cite as authority, and that the judiciary references in its opinions. This is Pillar 1 of the infrastructure described in Part II, and its importance cannot be overstated: it is the mechanism through which policy preferences that would be recognized as radical if stated plainly are transformed into "serious" proposals through the alchemy of institutional prestige. The Heritage Foundation's *Mandate for Leadership* — the nine-hundred-page policy blueprint published before each Republican presidency — is the most visible product of this system, but it is not the most consequential. The most consequential products are the thousands of state-level policy briefs, amicus curiae filings, op-eds, congressional testimonies, and media appearances that together create the intellectual ecosystem in which legislation is drafted and debated. By the time a bill reaches the floor, the ideas it contains have been normalized through years of repetition across multiple institutional platforms. *The Overton window has already been moved,* and the vote is a formality.

In comparison, the progressive think tank landscape isn't empty. The Center for American Progress, the Economic Policy Institute, the Roosevelt Institute, Demos, the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, the

Brennan Center for Justice — these organizations produce work of high quality, and some of it has been influential. But their collective operation suffers from three structural deficiencies that the Right's infrastructure does not. First, they are massively outspent. The Heritage Foundation alone operates on a budget exceeding $100 million annually; the combined budgets of the major progressive policy organizations do not match the combined budgets of the Right's top five. Second, they are concentrated at the federal level. The State Policy Network — the Right's fifty-state infrastructure of state-level think tanks, each producing policy analysis tailored to its state's legislative environment — has no progressive equivalent of comparable scale. Progressive state-level policy organizations exist, but they are chronically underfunded, unevenly distributed, and rarely coordinated with each other or with national organizations in ways that produce the kind of fifty-state strategic coherence that the State Policy Network achieves. Third, and most consequentially, progressive idea production is disconnected from progressive power-building. The Right's think tanks do not merely produce ideas. They produce ideas *in coordination with* the media ecosystem that will disseminate them, the donor network that will fund the campaigns of legislators who will enact them, the legal infrastructure that will defend them in court, and the grassroots organizations that will mobilize public support for them. Progressive idea production, by contrast, often terminates at the publication of the report. The report is excellent. The report is cited in academic literature. The report has no discernible effect on legislation, because no institutional machinery exists to convert it from analysis into political action.

Fund progressive think tanks at the scale of Heritage and Cato — not as a matter of matching dollar for dollar, which may not be achievable in the near term given the structural advantages that concentrated wealth provides to the Right's donor class (see Part XII for discussion of alternatives), but as a matter of strategic priority that commands the first and most sustained investment of whatever resources the progressive movement can marshal. Also invest in state-level policy organizations to match the State Policy Network's fifty-state infrastructure, because the Right understood decades ago what progressives have been slow to learn: state legislatures are where policy is made for the majority of Americans, where the pipeline of future national leaders is built, and where the gerrymandering, voter suppression, and preemption laws that constrain progressive governance at every level originate. The Right did not win at the state level by accident. It won because it invested in the intellectual and organizational infrastructure to contest those races, draft that legislation, and defend those laws in court — a coordinated, multi-decade project that the progressive movement has only recently begun to take seriously.

Create a progressive legal infrastructure equivalent to the Federalist Society: a pipeline from law school through clerkships to the bench, producing a generation of jurists whose constitutional philosophy reflects the principles articulated in this agenda — *integral liberty*, the enabling conditions for genuine freedom, the inseparability of economic rights from political rights, the understanding that concentrated private power is as great a threat to liberty as concentrated state power. The American Constitution Society exists, was founded in 2001 explicitly as the progressive answer to the Federalist Society, and has built a network of more than two hundred student chapters and lawyer chapters across the country. But it operates at a fraction of the Federalist Society's budget, commands a fraction of its institutional influence, and has not achieved — *has not been funded to achieve* — the kind of systematic judicial pipeline that the Federalist Society built: the identification of ideologically committed law students, the cultivation of those students through mentorship and clerkship placement, the advancement of those clerks into the federal judiciary, and the resulting transformation of constitutional jurisprudence over a generation. The Federalist Society didn't capture the judiciary through brilliant legal reasoning. It captured the judiciary through *institutional investment sustained over forty years*, and the progressive movement will not reverse that capture through anything less. The American

Constitution Society needs transformative investment — not incremental growth, but the kind of order-of-magnitude scaling that treats the federal judiciary as what it is: the branch of government with the most durable influence on American life and the one most thoroughly captured by the Right's fifty-year project.[26]

The Right understood that ideas precede policy — that the Overton window must be moved before legislation becomes possible. Milton Friedman said it plainly: the role of the think tank is to develop policy alternatives and keep them alive until the politically impossible becomes the politically inevitable. The progressive movement must make the same investment in idea production, legitimation, and dissemination — and it must do so with the additional discipline of ensuring that the ideas it produces are connected, through explicit institutional linkages, to the media infrastructure that will communicate them, the organizing infrastructure that will mobilize support for them, and the electoral infrastructure that will produce the legislators willing to enact them. An idea without a delivery system is an academic exercise, and the Right has never made that mistake. The progressive movement has made it repeatedly, and the results are visible in every policy victory that polled at sixty percent and never received a floor vote.

B. Media Infrastructure

The Right's media ecosystem — Pillar 3 of the infrastructure described in Part II — did not emerge organically either. It was built through deliberate investment over decades, beginning with the strategic exploitation of the FCC's elimination of the Fairness Doctrine in 1987, accelerating through the launch of Fox News in 1996, and expanding into an enclosed epistemological environment that now encompasses talk radio, cable news, podcasts, YouTube channels, social media influencer networks, and a growing constellation of partisan-backed outlets designed to resemble impartial local news sources. As documented in Part VI, NewsGuard has identified over 1,200 of these fabricated "local news" sites — a number that now exceeds the count of actual local daily newspapers remaining in the United States. That ecosystem's power doesn't derive from the quality of its journalism, which ranges from selectively accurate to deliberately fabricated, but from its *comprehensiveness*: a person who consumes Right-wing media can live entirely within its information environment, encountering no narrative that contradicts the one being constructed, and experiencing every external source of information as confirmation of the ecosystem's central claim — that the mainstream media is biased, hostile, and not to be trusted. This isn't a side effect of the ecosystem, *it is its purpose.*

The progressive response to this media landscape has been, with limited exceptions, to lament its existence, to fact-check its claims in venues that the people consuming those claims never visit, and to wait for mainstream media institutions to perform the accountability function that their business models and institutional cultures have rendered them structurally incapable of performing. This approach is an absence of strategy dressed in the language of institutional norms, and it has produced exactly the results that the absence of strategy reliably produces: the Right sets the terms of every major political debate, the progressive position is perpetually reactive, and the default framing of American political discourse — the water in which the average citizen swims without noticing it — is conservative. Not at all because conservative ideas are more persuasive on their merits — they clearly aren't — but because conservative ideas are communicated through an infrastructure designed to make them *feel* self-evident and reasonable, while progressive ideas are communicated through institutions that either don't exist, are chronically underfunded, or are staffed by people who communicate in the register of a university seminar instead of the kitchen table.

Build progressive media with its own affirmative narrative — local, regional, digital, and platform-native. This is not a call for a "left-wing Fox News," which would replicate the epistemological closure, misinformation, and audience manipulation that this agenda identifies as a threat to democratic governance regardless of which party benefits from it. It is instead a call for media infrastructure that does three things the progressive movement currently does not do at adequate scale. First, *local journalism* — the form of media most directly relevant to the communities in which people actually live, most resistant to the algorithmic manipulation that distorts national discourse, and most thoroughly destroyed by the collapse of the advertising model that sustained it. Since 2005, roughly 2,900 newspapers have closed in the United States, and the communities they served have not been replaced by digital alternatives but by information deserts in which residents have no reliable source of reporting on the school board, the county commission, the police department, the zoning board, or any of the other local institutions whose decisions shape their daily lives more directly than anything that happens in Washington. Into this vacuum the Right has inserted its fabricated local news sites, mentioned above, which produce content that looks like local journalism but functions as partisan messaging, and which are often the only "news" source available in communities where the actual newspaper has shut down. A progressive media strategy that focuses exclusively on national platforms while ceding the local information landscape to partisan fabrication is a strategy designed to lose, because the communities in which people form their political identities, their sense of what is happening in the world, and their trust or distrust in democratic institutions are local communities — and the media that serves those communities, or fails to serve them, is local media. So fund it. Not as philanthropy or a side project of other national organizations, but as *core infrastructure*, with the same seriousness and scale that the Right's donor networks have brought to their media investments.

Second, *narrative development*: stop ceding framing to the Right. The progressive movement has allowed the Right to name the terms of virtually every major political debate of the last forty years — "tax relief" instead of "revenue", "entitlement reform" instead of "benefit cuts", "right to work" instead of "right to freeload," "school choice" instead of "public education defunding," "deregulation" instead of "corporate impunity," "free markets" instead of "rigged markets" — and has then spent its political energy arguing within the Right's frame rather than establishing its own. George Lakoff identified this dynamic decades ago; it has not been corrected because the progressive movement has treated messaging as a communications problem rather than an infrastructure problem. Did the Right develop superior framing through spontaneous rhetorical genius? Of course not. It developed superior framing through institutional investment: Frank Luntz's focus groups, the Heritage Foundation's message-testing operations, the coordinated discipline through which a phrase chosen in a conference room in Washington appears simultaneously in the mouths of every Republican member of Congress, every Fox News anchor, and every talk radio host in the country. Progressive framing remains, by comparison, an artisanal enterprise — individual communicators and organizations developing their own language independently, with no coordinating mechanism and no system for ensuring that a frame that works is adopted broadly enough to penetrate the public consciousness. **So invest in the cognitive science of political framing** — the work of Lakoff, Drew Westen, Anat Shenker-Osorio, and others — and develop disciplined messaging infrastructure that sets its own terms rather than reacting to Right-wing provocations. This isn't about spin; it's the recognition that language shapes perception, that perception shapes politics, and that the side that defines the terms of "reality' is the side that governs it.

Third, invest in media training and build a deep bench of effective communicators — at the national level, where the progressive movement has a handful of genuinely compelling public voices, and at every level where political communication matters: state legislatures, city councils, school boards, union halls, community assemblies, and the digital platforms where the median American now encounters

political information. The Right's communicator bench is deep, the product of systematic investment in identifying, training, and promoting individuals who can translate complex ideological positions into language that resonates with audiences whose attention must be earned rather than assumed. The progressive movement's chronic inability to communicate in language that reaches beyond the university-educated professional class — the tendency to lead with policy complexity rather than moral clarity, to hedge rather than assert, to explain rather than connect — isn't just a personal failing of individual progressive politicians. It's an institutional failure in the absence of the training infrastructure, the feedback mechanisms, and the career pathways that produce effective communicators at scale. Martin Luther King Jr. was a transformative communicator not only because he was uniquely gifted — which he was — but because the Black church tradition from which he emerged was itself a training institution, a system that produced generation after generation of public speakers who could move audiences because they had practiced doing so every Sunday for decades. The progressive movement needs its own version of that system — institutional spaces in which communication is practiced, critiqued, refined, and rewarded as the core competency it is, rather than treated as a secondary skill that talented individuals either possess or don't.

The public media trust and media rating system described in Part VI of this agenda are the structural complement to the investments described here. The trust provides the institutional permanence that political funding cycles deny; the rating system provides the informational transparency that algorithmic media obscures. But these are defensive measures — protecting the information environment from further degradation. The media infrastructure described in this section is the offensive counterpart, building the capacity to tell the progressive story in language that reaches people where they are, through channels they trust, at a scale that matches the challenge. The progressive response must be just as deliberate as the Right's media construction, but decidedly more rapid — because the Right had the luxury of building its media ecosystem over three decades in an environment of journalistic norms that no longer exist, and the progressive movement doesn't have three decades. The information environment is degrading faster than institutions are being built to sustain it, and the window for building a progressive media infrastructure capable of contesting the narrative — rather than objecting to it from the sidelines — is closing rapidly.

C. Organizing Infrastructure

The Right's grassroots and cultural mobilization — Pillar 6 — provides year-round community, identity, and meaning, as opposed to activation during election cycles alone. The evangelical megachurch, the gun club, the homeschool cooperative, the local chapter of Turning Point USA — these aren't primarily political organizations. They are *social* organizations that produce political outcomes as a byproduct of the belonging they provide. A person who attends the same church every Sunday, whose children play with the children of other congregants, whose social life is embedded in the community the church creates, doesn't need to be mobilized when an election arrives. They are already mobilized — already connected to a network that shares information, coordinates action, and reinforces a worldview in which voting for the candidates endorsed by the community's leadership feels more like a natural extension of membership than a political act. The progressive equivalent of this infrastructure does not exist. What exists instead is the campaign apparatus — a machine that activates every two or four years, contacts voters through canvassing and phone banking and digital advertising, asks for their votes, and then disappears until the next cycle, leaving no institutional residue, no ongoing relationships, no reason for a voter to feel that the progressive movement is a community to which they belong as opposed to an organization *that wants something from them during election season and ignores them the rest of the time*.

Year-round community organizing — *not just election-cycle mobilization* — is the corrective, and the distinction between organizing and mobilization is more than semantic. Mobilization is the deployment of existing support: identifying people who already agree with you and getting them to the polls. Organizing is the creation of new support: building relationships, developing shared analysis, cultivating leadership, and expanding the base of people who see themselves as participants in a collective project rather than consumers of a political product. The progressive movement has become very good at mobilization — sophisticated voter files, targeted digital advertising, data-driven canvassing operations — and less skilled at organizing. The result is a movement that can turn out its existing supporters efficiently but cannot expand its base, cannot sustain engagement between elections, and cannot compete with the Right's year-round community infrastructure for the loyalty of people whose political identities are not yet fixed. The Community Coregroups described in Part V, the citizens' assemblies described throughout this agenda, the mutual aid networks and cooperative enterprises and community land trusts described across multiple sections — these are all, simultaneously, elements of the organizing infrastructure this section describes. They are institutions that create the relational substrate on which political mobilization can be built, but that exist for reasons beyond any single election.

Invest in down-ballot races: school boards, county commissions, state legislatures, DA races, water boards, municipal judgeships, public utility commissions — the full architecture of local and state governance that directly affects the lives of the people the progressive movement claims to represent and that the Right has contested with disciplined seriousness for decades while progressives have treated them as afterthoughts. The REDMAP project — the Republican State Leadership Committee's coordinated campaign to capture state legislatures in advance of the 2010 redistricting cycle — is the most consequential example of what happens when one side takes state-level power seriously and the other doesn't. With an investment of approximately $30 million, REDMAP flipped enough state legislative chambers to control the drawing of congressional districts for 40 percent of the U.S. House, locking in structural advantages that persisted for a decade and that, in several states, have survived even the most aggressive efforts at reform. The lesson isn't that progressives should replicate REDMAP's gerrymandering — this agenda calls instead for the abolition of partisan redistricting entirely, through the sortition-based independent commissions described in Part III. The lesson is that state-level power is where the structural conditions of democracy are determined, and a movement that fails to contest it has conceded the architecture of governance to its opponents before the first federal vote is cast.

Progressive candidate recruitment must target underrepresented communities and working-class candidates — as a structural correction to the class composition of American legislatures that makes the progressive agenda permanently difficult to enact. The median net worth of a member of Congress is over $1 million. The cost of running a competitive House race exceeds $2 million in most districts; a competitive Senate race can exceed $50 million. The result is a legislature populated overwhelmingly by people whose lived experience of the economy — of healthcare costs, of housing insecurity, of wage stagnation, of debt — is not the lived experience of the constituents they represent, and whose donor relationships create incentive structures that pull against the interests of working-class voters on nearly every issue this agenda addresses. So recruit candidates who have worked as nurses, teachers, electricians, small business owners, military veterans, social workers, and community organizers — people whose credibility comes from shared experience rather than from the fundraising networks that currently serve as the primary gateway to political candidacy. Fund them through the small-dollar fundraising infrastructure and public financing mechanisms described in Part III. Protect them from the DCCC's documented practice of blacklisting firms and consultants who work with progressive primary challengers — a practice that weaponizes the party's institutional resources against the candidates most likely to advance the agenda the party claims to support.[34]

Voter registration and civic engagement as permanent activities — embedded in the community institutions this agenda proposes, sustained by the organizing infrastructure this section describes, and understood as the continuous work of democratic maintenance rather than the episodic work of campaign season. The citizens' assemblies, national service corps, and civic infrastructure described in Part V are a progressive answer to this challenge: institutions that make civic participation a normal feature of community life rather than an obligation imposed every November. The Right's year-round mobilization succeeds in part because it is experienced as community life. The progressive equivalent must achieve the same integration — participation that is attractive because it is social, purposeful, and rewarding, not merely dutiful.

D. Coalition Strategy

The progressive coalition in its current form is an unstable alliance of demographic groups, issue advocates, and institutional interests whose shared commitment to the Democratic Party is often less a product of affirmative identification than of the absence of an alternative. It's not really a coalition. It's more of a hostage situation — a collection of constituencies that have been told, with varying degrees of accuracy, that the Republican Party poses an existential threat to their interests, and that the Democratic Party is the only available vehicle for preventing that threat from materializing. The argument is often correct on the first count and deeply inadequate on the second, and the result is a coalition held together by fear rather than by the kind of shared affirmative project that sustains political movements across decades. Sure, fear is an effective mobilizer, but it is a shoddy organizer. It produces turnout in moments of crisis and disappears the moment the crisis is perceived to have passed — which is why the Democratic Party's electoral performance swings wildly between mobilized panic and demobilized complacency, and why the progressive movement has never built the kind of durable governing majority that the New Deal coalition sustained for forty years.

Economic populism is the unifying context — the frame within which the coalition's diversity becomes a source of strength rather than fragmentation. The argument made in Part II and reinforced throughout this agenda is that the central conflict in American society is economic: the enduring conflict between those who benefit from the concentration of wealth and power and those who are harmed by it. As emphasized earlier, every other division that dominates political discourse — race, gender, sexuality, religion, partisan identity, cultural affiliation — is either a manifestation of that economic conflict or an attempt at distracting us from it. This analysis does not minimize the reality of racism, sexism, or other forms of oppression. It insists that these forms of oppression *persist* in significant part because they are economically useful to those who benefit from the concentration of wealth — that racial division, gender subordination, and cultural warfare are tools for preventing the cross-cutting class solidarity that is the only force capable of threatening concentrated economic power. The coalition strategy flows from this analysis: build the solidarity that the powerful have spent centuries preventing.[11][12]

Multiracial working-class solidarity is the explicit goal — the coalition that the powerful have spent centuries trying to prevent, from the colonial-era invention of "whiteness" to divide indentured European and enslaved African laborers, through the Southern Strategy, to the current culture-war apparatus. The history is detailed in Part II. The strategic implication is direct: every progressive policy position that divides the working class along racial or cultural lines, however justified its proponents believe it to be, is doing the Right's work for it. And every progressive policy position that unites the working class around shared material interests — healthcare, wages, housing, education, economic security — is building the coalition that the Right's entire political project is designed to prevent. This isn't intended as an argument against addressing racial injustice, it's an argument about a strategic

framing within which racial injustice is most effectively addressed. And the evidence, from the original Rainbow Coalition to the Fight for $15 to the broad-based popular support for progressive economic policies that consistently poll above sixty percent across partisan lines, consistently indicates that economic framing builds broader and more durable coalitions than identity-specific framing. This is the discipline described in Part VII: subordinating "but what about me" to the harder, more powerful question of "what about all of us."

Rural engagement is one of the most consequential strategic failures in the progressive coalition's recent history, and correcting it is a prerequisite for any governing majority. The progressive agenda on healthcare, broadband, agriculture, schools, drug treatment, infrastructure, and economic development is directly relevant to rural communities that have been abandoned by both parties — abandoned by Republicans who harvest their votes through cultural grievance while delivering tax cuts for corporations and deregulation that accelerates the consolidation of agriculture, the closure of rural hospitals, and the extraction of natural resources without community benefit; and abandoned by Democrats who have written off rural America as culturally irredeemable and strategically dispensable. The Right's cultural grip on rural America is based on *the absence of a credible progressive alternative*, not on material delivery. Rural hospital closures have accelerated under Republican governance. Rural broadband remains a broken promise. The opioid epidemic devastated rural communities while the pharmaceutical industry that caused it faced consequences so mild as to constitute permission. Farm consolidation has destroyed the family farm as an economic unit while agricultural subsidies flow overwhelmingly to the largest operations. On every material dimension, the Right has failed rural America. It retains rural loyalty because it shows up — because the evangelical church, the gun range, the talk radio station, and the local Republican committee are present in rural communities as social institutions while the Democratic Party is absent except when it needs votes in a statewide or national election…and sometimes not even then.

When progressives show up with a genuine economic agenda and treat rural communities as partners rather than as cultural adversaries, the coalition expands. This is has been demonstrated repeatedly in specific races: Sherrod Brown in Ohio before his 2024 defeat, John Fetterman in Pennsylvania, the Montana Democrats who held the governorship for sixteen years until 2020, the Kansas referendum that rejected an anti-abortion constitutional amendment by eighteen points in a state that voted for Trump by fifteen. The pattern is consistent: progressive economic messages resonate in rural America when they are delivered by people who show up, who listen, who speak in the language of shared material interest rather than cultural condescension, and who demonstrate through *sustained presence* that they consider rural communities worth the investment of time and institutional resources. The organizing infrastructure described in this section must extend to every county in every state — **including the ones that Democrats have decided are lost causes,** because a party that writes off a third of the country's geography has decided that it does not want a governing majority badly enough to earn one.

The coalition must also extend to the constituencies that the progressive movement has been slowest to reach: non-college-educated workers of all races, young men whose alienation is documented extensively in Part VII, Latino voters whose economic conservatism and cultural traditionalism coexist with progressive economic interests that neither party is currently serving, and the forty-five percent of American adults who identify as political independents — the largest bloc in the electorate and the one least invested in partisan identity. These are not groups who can be targeted with tailored messaging and then ignored until the next election. They are the people whose material interests this agenda serves best, and the organizing infrastructure must be designed to bring them into the movement as participants, not just as voters — through the community institutions, the workplace democracy, the

civic assemblies, and the economic reforms that make the progressive project something people experience *in their daily lives* rather than something they hear about on television every four years.

E. The State-Level Battlefield

The Right's most consequential and least countered strategic achievement of the last fifty years isn't the capture of the federal judiciary, the construction of a media ecosystem, or the election of Donald Trump. It is the systematic conquest of state-level governance — a campaign so methodical, so generationally sustained, and so lightly opposed that it now constitutes the structural foundation on which every other conservative victory depends. ALEC — the American Legislative Exchange Council — currently operates in all fifty states, producing model legislation that state legislators with no independent policy staff can introduce verbatim. The State Policy Network coordinates fifty-two affiliated think tanks that produce state-specific research, op-eds, and policy recommendations tailored to each state's political landscape. The Republican State Leadership Committee's REDMAP project, with an initial investment of roughly $30 million, captured enough state legislative chambers in 2010 to control redistricting for nearly half the U.S. House — an investment whose return, measured in structural partisan advantage, exceeded that of any single federal campaign expenditure in American history. The result: as of 2026, Republicans control both chambers in twenty-eight state legislatures and hold trifectas — governor and both chambers — in twenty-three states. This is the product of a strategy that the progressive movement has acknowledged in theory and failed to counter in practice.

The progressive counter-strategy must match this operational specificity or concede the terrain. What follows is an operational framework intended to transcend mere aspiration.

Build the progressive equivalent of ALEC and the State Policy Network — at comparable scale and funding. The State Innovation Exchange exists and does important work, but it operates at a fraction of ALEC's resources and with a fraction of ALEC's fifty-state footprint. Fund it — or an equivalent organization — to produce model legislation for every major policy area in this agenda: ranked-choice voting, independent redistricting commissions, public banking, minimum wage and paid leave, rent stabilization, police accountability, zoning reform, Medicaid expansion, cannabis legalization with expungement, renewable energy mandates, and the citizens' assembly pilots proposed in Part V. Ensure that every progressive state legislator in every state has access to drafted legislation, fiscal impact analysis, constitutional review, and communications support on every priority issue. ALEC provides this to conservative legislators as a turnkey service. The progressive equivalent must do the same.

Identify and contest the twenty most flippable state legislative chambers. This requires a sustained, multi-cycle investment in candidate recruitment, training, and support — not the election-year parachute operations that currently constitute progressive state-level strategy. For each target chamber, develop a specific theory of victory: which districts are winnable, what candidate profiles are credible in those districts, what local issues provide the entry point, and what organizing infrastructure already exists or must be built. The Right's REDMAP succeeded because it identified specific targets, allocated resources to those targets, and sustained the effort across multiple cycles. A progressive REDMAP equivalent — organized around democratic reform rather than gerrymandering — is overdue.

Contest school board, county commission, DA, and municipal elections systematically. These are the offices that most directly affect the lived experience of communities — who gets prosecuted and who doesn't, what gets taught and what's banned, where development is permitted and where it's blocked, how police are overseen — and they are the offices the progressive movement has most consistently ignored while the Right has contested them with disciplined seriousness. The Moms for Liberty school

board campaigns, whatever one thinks of their substance, demonstrated that a coordinated national strategy can win local elections by connecting local candidates to national resources, messaging, and training. The progressive equivalent must be equally coordinated — connecting local candidates to the national infrastructure this section describes, providing them with campaign support, policy expertise, and the fundraising capacity that local races require but that local candidates cannot generate independently.

Counter state preemption with affirmative state-level legislation. In states where progressive legislative majorities exist or are achievable, use that power to pass the reforms this agenda proposes at the federal level: ranked-choice voting, independent redistricting, public financing of elections, minimum wage increases, paid family leave, Medicaid expansion, cannabis legalization, police reform, zoning liberalization, and renewable energy mandates. Each state-level success builds the evidentiary base for federal adoption, demonstrates that the policies work in practice, and creates constituencies that will defend them against future rollback. This is the pilot principle applied to the federalist structure: use the states as laboratories for the policies that federal power will eventually scale.

In states where progressive legislative majorities are not achievable in the near term, the strategy shifts to ballot initiatives and constitutional amendments. Many of the most consequential progressive victories of the last decade — Medicaid expansion in red states, minimum wage increases, cannabis legalization, gerrymandering reform in Michigan and other states, abortion protections post-Dobbs — have been won through direct democracy mechanisms that bypass hostile legislatures entirely. In the twenty-six states that permit citizen-initiated ballot measures, this is the most viable pathway for structural reform. Invest in the signature-gathering infrastructure, the legal review, and the campaign apparatus that ballot initiatives require — and connect them to the permanent organizing infrastructure described in this section so that the relationships built during initiative campaigns survive beyond election day.

Defend against conservative state-level offensive operations. The current administration's coordination with Republican state legislatures — pressuring states to redraw congressional maps, weaponizing federal grants to incentivize state-level compliance with federal priorities, using executive orders to preempt state-level protections — requires a coordinated legal defense. Fund a progressive litigation infrastructure at the state level: a network of public interest law firms, state ACLU chapters, and pro bono legal resources capable of challenging unconstitutional state actions as rapidly as they are attempted. The Right has Alliance Defending Freedom, the Liberty Counsel, the Becket Fund, and the Institute for Justice litigating in every jurisdiction simultaneously. The progressive legal infrastructure is less coordinated and less well-funded — and in a period when the judiciary is hostile to progressive claims, that deficit is compounded by the need to bring more cases, develop more legal theories, and sustain more multi-year litigation campaigns than would be necessary before a more balanced bench.

None of this is glamorous. State legislative campaigns do not generate national headlines or viral fundraising emails. School board races do not attract celebrity endorsements. The work of building a fifty-state progressive infrastructure is slow, expensive, and largely invisible to the national media ecosystem through which the progressive movement currently communicates. That is exactly why the Right has succeeded at it and the Left has not. The Right understood that structural power is built from the bottom up, that the architecture of governance is determined at the state level, and that a movement that controls state legislatures controls redistricting, election administration, judicial selection in many states, and the policy environment in which people actually live. A progressive movement that continues to pour disproportionate resources into federal races while conceding the state-level battlefield will continue to win presidential elections and lose the country.

F. Abandoning Neoliberal Drift

The progressive movement cannot build power while the Democratic Party's institutional leadership continues to operate within the framework it claims to oppose. The neoliberal drift within the party did not begin with Bill Clinton, though his presidency represents its most consequential acceleration. It began with Jimmy Carter — whose administration deregulated the airline, trucking, and rail industries, appointed Paul Volcker to the Federal Reserve with a mandate to crush inflation through monetary austerity that devastated organized labor, and initiated the philosophical surrender to market fundamentalism that Ronald Reagan would subsequently claim as his own. Carter's deregulatory turn was presented as consumer-friendly reform, and in some cases it reduced prices in the short term. But it also destroyed union density in the industries affected, eliminated the regulatory frameworks that had sustained middle-class wages in transportation, and established the premise that would govern Democratic economic policy for the next four decades: *that the market, left to its own devices, produces outcomes superior to democratic governance* — a premise indistinguishable from the Right's central claim and one that a party committed to economic justice has no business adopting.

The Clinton administration transformed this philosophical surrender into a rigorous governing doctrine. NAFTA without labor protections exported manufacturing jobs while offering nothing to the workers displaced. Financial deregulation — culminating in the repeal of Glass-Steagall and the Commodity Futures Modernization Act that deregulated the derivatives market — dismantled the regulatory architecture that had prevented a major financial crisis for six decades, producing the catastrophe of 2008 within a decade of its passage. Welfare-to-work "reform" that effectively abandoned single moms and their children was sold as empowerment but functioned as the withdrawal of the social contract from the people who needed it most. Mass incarceration through the 1994 crime bill — which incentivized state prison construction, funded 100,000 new police officers, and expanded the federal death penalty — fell disproportionately on Black communities whose votes the party simultaneously courted. Each of these was a Democratic initiative, passed by a Democratic president, defended in the language of pragmatism and modernization — and each adopted the Right's economic premises while maintaining rhetorical distance from conservative cultural positions.

The Obama administration continued the pattern — bailing out Wall Street while millions lost their homes, accepting ACA legislation without a public option, expanding drone warfare, prosecuting government whistleblowers, and declining to pursue structural reform of the financial sector even with a congressional supermajority. Longstanding congressional Democratic leaders have sustained the same neoliberal drift through decades of corporate fundraising relationships, revolving-door tolerance, and reflexive defense of "market-based solutions" to problems markets created. This is *the central reason the progressive movement lacks a credible institutional vehicle*. **A Democratic Party that deregulates industry under one president, deregulates finance under another, expands the surveillance state under a third, and embraces corporate donors as a permanent constituency cannot simultaneously serve as the instrument of economic transformation described in this agenda.**

The drift did not happen because Democratic leaders lacked progressive convictions in their youth, or because the party was infiltrated by ideological opponents. It happened because the institutional incentive structures within the party — the fundraising apparatus, the consultant class, the career pathways, the donor relationships, and the media environment in which Democratic politicians operate — systematically reward neoliberal positioning and punish progressive ambition. The mechanism is straightforward and has been documented extensively: a Democratic candidate who adopts progressive economic positions — higher taxes on the wealthy, breaking up concentrated corporate power, restricting the financial sector, strengthening labor — faces immediate and concrete consequences.

Corporate PAC money dries up. The donor class that funds both primary and general election campaigns signals displeasure. The consultant class, whose members cycle between campaign advisory roles and corporate lobbying positions with a fluidity that would be comical if its consequences weren't so destructive, advises "moderation" — which in practice means adopting positions acceptable to the donors who pay the consultants' invoices. The candidate who takes the advice wins the fundraising race. The candidate who doesn't is outspent, under-resourced, and described in media coverage as "idealistic but unelectable" — a characterization that becomes self-fulfilling because electability in American politics is largely a function of the resources available to demonstrate it. The survivors of this selection process — the officials who hold office, chair committees, and control the party's institutional machinery — are disproportionately the ones who learned early that the path to power runs through corporate compatibility, not economic transformation. So this isn't corruption in the crude sense of bribery (though crude corruption exists as well). It is structural capture: a system that produces outcomes favorable to concentrated wealth not because anyone planned it but because the incentive architecture makes any other outcome require extraordinary personal sacrifice and political risk.

The intellectual architecture of this capture has its own institutional history, and naming it matters because it remains operational within the party. The Democratic Leadership Council, founded in 1985 in explicit reaction to Walter Mondale's defeat, provided the ideological framework: the argument that the Democratic Party had moved "too far left," that economic populism was electorally toxic, and that the path to power lay in embracing market mechanisms, courting business constituencies, and positioning the party as a responsible steward of corporate capitalism rather than a challenger to it.[69] Bill Clinton was the DLC's product, and his presidency was its proof of concept — proving that a Democrat could win the White House by running on welfare reform, crime bills, financial deregulation, and trade agreements that prioritized capital mobility over labor protection. That Clinton's economic legacy included the repeal of Glass-Steagall, the Commodity Futures Modernization Act that deregulated the derivatives market, and the welfare reform that threw millions of the poorest Americans off public assistance — each of which produced catastrophic consequences within a decade — has not discredited the DLC's thesis within the party's institutional leadership, because the thesis was never primarily about policy outcomes. It was about *electoral viability*, and Clinton won twice. The DLC formally dissolved in 2011, but its institutional successor — Third Way — continues to operate on the same premise, publishing analyses that frame progressive economic positions as politically dangerous and advising Democratic candidates and officeholders to pursue the "vital center" that, by remarkable coincidence, aligns with the policy preferences of the financial services industry that provides a substantial portion of Third Way's funding.[70] The revolving door between Third Way, the corporate consulting firms that staff Democratic campaigns, and the lobbying industry that employs former Democratic officials is not a feature of the landscape. *It is the landscape* — the connective tissue of an institutional culture that has internalized neoliberal premises so thoroughly that it mistakes them for pragmatism.

The underlying thesis is also wrong on its own terms. The claim that progressive economic positions are electorally toxic is contradicted by every available dataset. Progressive positions on healthcare, wages, taxation, Social Security, and corporate accountability consistently poll at sixty to seventy percent support across partisan lines — a fact documented in this agenda's Introduction and reinforced by every subsequent election cycle in which progressive ballot measures pass in states whose representatives voted against the same policies in Congress. Florida voters approved a $15 minimum wage in the same election they chose Trump. Missouri and Nebraska voters expanded Medicaid through ballot initiatives over the explicit opposition of their Republican governors and legislatures. Kansas voters rejected an anti-abortion constitutional amendment by eighteen points. Are these progressive strongholds? No, they are states in which the electorate, when given a direct vote on the substance of progressive

economic policy stripped of partisan branding, endorses it decisively. The “too far left” narrative survives because it serves the institutional interests of the people who repeat it: the donors who prefer moderate candidates, the consultants who are paid to produce moderate candidates, and the officeholders whose corporate relationships depend on remaining moderate candidates. The narrative is a business model, not an empirical finding, and the progressive movement’s failure to say so — clearly, repeatedly, and with the evidence in hand — has allowed the business model to masquerade as strategic wisdom for thirty years.

The consultant class deserves specific attention because it functions as the transmission mechanism through which neoliberal capture reproduces itself across election cycles. Democratic campaign consulting is a multi-billion-dollar industry dominated by a small number of firms whose principals have been advising Democratic candidates for decades — through wins and losses, through shifting demographics and evolving media landscapes, through every failure documented in this agenda’s Introduction — without ever being held accountable for the strategic choices that produced those failures. The same firms that advised the 2016 Clinton campaign, which lost to the most unfit candidate in modern history, advised subsequent campaigns using substantially similar strategic frameworks. The same consultants who counseled Democrats to avoid economic populism in districts where economic populism was the only message that could have competed with the Right’s cultural appeal continued to counsel avoidance after the strategy failed, because the consultant’s revenue model isn’t contingent on winning. It is instead contingent on being hired, and being hired is contingent on relationships with party leadership, which is contingent on not threatening the donor relationships on which party leadership depends. The circularity is complete. A consultant who advised a candidate to run on breaking up Wall Street would not be invited back — not because the advice was bad, but because the advice threatened the revenue streams of the people who decide which consultants get invited. The DCCC’s documented blacklisting of firms that work with progressive primary challengers[34] is the enforcement mechanism of this closed system: a message to every political professional in the Democratic ecosystem that working for progressive insurgents will end your career, and working for corporate-friendly incumbents will sustain it. The result is a professional class that self-selects for neoliberal compatibility and that reproduces neoliberal strategy as the party’s default setting regardless of its electoral performance, because the people empowered to evaluate that performance are the same people whose livelihoods depend on the strategy remaining unchanged.

The structural democracy reforms in Part III — particularly public financing and the separation of corporation and state — are prerequisites for breaking this cycle at the systemic level. But the strategic question within the party must be answered directly: this agenda calls for recapturing the Democratic Party, not abandoning it. The two-party system is a structural reality of American politics, produced by single-member-district plurality elections (Duverger’s law), sustained by ballot access barriers that the two parties have collaboratively erected, and reinforced by a media environment that treats third-party candidates as curiosities or spoilers rather than as legitimate competitors. Third-party strategies have occasionally shifted discourse — the Socialist Party under Eugene Debs pushed the Democratic Party leftward on labor in the early twentieth century, Ross Perot forced deficit politics onto the agenda in 1992, the Green Party has raised environmental issues that the Democrats subsequently adopted — but they have rarely produced governance, and they have sometimes produced the opposite: enabling the election of candidates whose positions were further from the third party’s than the major-party candidate they displaced. Ralph Nader’s 97,488 votes in Florida in 2000, in an election decided by 537, is the case study that third-party advocates have spent a quarter century trying to explain away, and the explanations have never been persuasive enough to override the arithmetic.

The path forward is sustained primary challenges against neoliberal incumbents, institutional reform of party governance, cultivation of donor-independence through small-dollar fundraising and public financing, and the building of a progressive bench deep enough to contest power at every level. Each of these requires elaboration, because each has been attempted in fragmentary form and each has encountered specific obstacles that must be named if they are to be overcome.

Sustained primary challenges are the most immediate mechanism for shifting the party's composition. The model exists and has produced results: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's defeat of Joe Crowley in 2018 — a ten-term incumbent who was the fourth-ranking Democrat in the House and the presumptive next Speaker — demonstrated that neoliberal incumbents are vulnerable when challenged by candidates with genuine community roots, a compelling economic message, and the willingness to do the organizing work that institutional Democrats have outsourced to consultants. Jamaal Bowman, Cori Bush, Summer Lee, and others have demonstrated the replicability of the model, even as some have subsequently lost re-election in contests where establishment-aligned outside spending overwhelmed their small-dollar fundraising advantages. The lesson of these defeats isn't that primary challenges are futile. It's that primary challenges must be *sustained and systematic* rather than episodic and personality-driven. The Right's fifty-year project didn't depend on any single candidate or any single election. It built a pipeline — from student organizations through think tanks through state legislatures through Congress — that produced an inexhaustible supply of ideologically committed candidates at every level. The progressive movement needs the same kind of pipeline: candidate identification programs that begin at the school board and city council level, training institutions that prepare working-class candidates for the specific rigors of campaigning, fundraising infrastructure that can sustain primary challenges against incumbents who will always have corporate money advantages, and the institutional discipline to contest not just the high-profile races that attract national media attention but the hundreds of state legislative and down-ballot races where the party's ideological composition is actually determined.

Institutional reform of party governance addresses the structural rules that currently ensure neoliberal dominance even when progressive candidates win. The DNC's superdelegate system, though partially reformed after the 2016 debacle, remains a mechanism through which party insiders can influence the presidential nominating process independently of primary voters. The DCCC and DSCC — the party's congressional campaign committees — function as incumbent protection programs whose institutional incentives run directly contrary to the progressive project of replacing neoliberal officeholders with genuinely progressive ones. Their endorsement and funding decisions favor incumbents and "recruited" candidates selected by party leadership, and their blacklist of firms working with primary challengers is an explicit policy of punishing the democratic process within the party for producing results that party leadership does not want. *Reform these institutions*. Open the endorsement process. End the blacklist. Subject the committees' strategic decisions to democratic accountability within the party — through elected regional representatives, transparent budgeting, and the same kind of participatory governance that this agenda proposes for public institutions. A party that advocates for democratic governance and practices oligarchic governance internally has a credibility problem that no messaging strategy can resolve.

Donor independence is the precondition for every other reform, because a party that depends on corporate money for its electoral survival cannot credibly pursue policies that threaten corporate interests — and the pretense that it can has been the central lie of the Democratic establishment for a generation. The small-dollar fundraising revolution demonstrated by Bernie Sanders in 2016 and 2020, by Ocasio-Cortez, and by a growing cohort of progressive candidates has proven that it is possible to fund competitive campaigns without corporate PAC money — that millions of Americans will contribute

twenty-seven dollars at a time to candidates who speak to their interests, provided those candidates actually speak to their interests rather than delivering the focus-grouped equivocations that corporate-funded campaigns produce. But small-dollar fundraising as currently practiced is personality-dependent: it works for charismatic candidates with national profiles and fails for the hundreds of state legislative and local candidates who lack the visibility to generate viral fundraising moments. The infrastructure gap is institutional, not individual. What is needed is a permanent, nationally coordinated small-dollar fundraising apparatus that functions as the progressive equivalent of the Koch donor network — pooling small contributions from millions of donors, directing them strategically to progressive candidates at every level of government, and providing the financial independence that allows those candidates to campaign, govern, and vote without the corporate compatibility test that the current system imposes. ActBlue provides the technological platform. What does not yet exist is the strategic layer — the institutional capacity to identify, evaluate, and fund progressive candidates across hundreds of races with the same coordinated discipline that the Right's donor networks bring to their investments. Building that layer is not optional. It is the difference between a movement that produces occasional progressive breakthroughs in favorable districts and a movement that contests power at the scale required to govern.

The progressive bench is the longest-term investment and the one most consistently neglected. The Right's bench is deep because it was built deliberately over decades: the Federalist Society identified promising law students in the 1980s who became federal judges in the 2010s. The Leadership Institute, founded in 1979, has trained more than 200,000 conservative activists, candidates, and operatives. ALEC provides model legislation that a newly elected state legislator with no policy staff can introduce on day one. Turning Point USA recruits on college campuses. The pipeline is continuous, institutional, and generationally designed. The progressive equivalent is scattered: a handful of training programs — Arena, Run for Something, the New Leaders Council, Emerge America for women candidates — that do important work individually but do not constitute the kind of integrated pipeline that produces viable governance. The progressive movement needs to think in generational terms: identifying promising young leaders in community organizations, labor unions, cooperative enterprises, and the national service corps proposed in Part V; providing them with the political education, policy expertise, campaign training, and institutional support to contest elections from school board to Congress; and sustaining that support across the decades-long arc of a political career rather than discovering candidates the year before an election and expecting them to learn on the fly what the Right's candidates were taught at twenty-two.

The tension between transformation from within and independent power-building is real, and this agenda does not pretend otherwise. A movement that invests all its energy in capturing the Democratic Party risks being captured by it — absorbed into the institutional culture it intended to transform, its leaders socialized into the norms of the body they joined, its radical energy domesticated by the committee assignments and leadership ladders and fundraising obligations that constitute life inside the institution. The history of progressive movements absorbed by the Democratic Party — from the labor movement's subordination to Cold War liberalism, to the antiwar movement's dissipation into Carter-era malaise, to the Occupy energy that dissipated without institutional expression — is a catalog of this risk. But a movement that refuses to engage with the Democratic Party at all — that builds parallel institutions, organizes communities, develops policy, and waits for the existing system to collapse under its own contradictions — has consigned itself to permanent marginality in a political system where governing power flows through the two parties and nowhere else. The correct strategy is both: sustained engagement with the Democratic Party through primary challenges, institutional reform, and the cultivation of a progressive governing majority, *and* the simultaneous construction of independent

institutional power — the worker cooperatives, community land trusts, citizens' assemblies, mutual aid networks, media infrastructure, and Community Coregroups described throughout this agenda — that exists independently of the party, applies pressure on it from outside, provides the social infrastructure that makes political mobilization possible, and ensures that the movement retains institutional capacity during the periods when it does not hold party or governmental power. The parallel institutions described in Part XI are not a consolation prize for progressives who can't win elections. They're the independent power base without which winning elections produces nothing durable — because a progressive majority that governs without independent institutional support will face the same structural pressures toward neoliberal accommodation that captured every previous progressive majority, and it will have no countervailing force to resist them.

The party in its current form is an obstacle to this agenda. But the institution itself — its ballot access, its infrastructure, its name recognition, its legal standing in every jurisdiction — is currently the only viable vehicle through which a progressive governing majority can be assembled in the near term. The ranked-choice voting reforms proposed in Part III would, over time, reduce the structural lock that the two-party system imposes and create genuine space for multi-party competition. But that reform requires legislative action, and legislative action requires a progressive majority within the existing system, which returns the argument to its starting point: the Democratic Party must be transformed because it is the only available instrument of transformation, and the transformation must begin before the instrument is ready for it. Rather than a paradox, this is the condition of every serious political movement that has ever operated within a system it intended to change. The abolitionists worked through a political system built by slaveholders. The suffragists worked through a political system that excluded them. The labor movement built power within an economy designed to exploit it. In each case, the movement used the existing system as a lever while simultaneously building the independent institutional power that made the lever effective. The progressive movement of the twenty-first century faces the same structural challenge, and the answer is the same: use the party as a vehicle while building the independent power that ensures the vehicle goes where you need it to go rather than where its current drivers prefer to take it. The task is to transform it from within while building the independent institutional power described throughout Part X — because neither strategy alone is sufficient, and the history of progressive movements that chose one at the expense of the other is a history of movements that either won elections without changing the system or changed the conversation without winning elections. This agenda demands both.

G. What if the Party Resists Reform?

This has to be discussed, because it is the most serious hurdle this agenda faces: What if the Democratic Party cannot be reformed? What if the institutional capture is too deep, the donor relationships too entrenched, and the leadership too invested in the neoliberal consensus to permit the transformation this agenda demands?

This non-hypothetical has a substantial track record. Bernie Sanders mounted two presidential campaigns on a platform that aligned closely with the economic populism described throughout this agenda — and was defeated both times *by the party's institutional machinery*, not by the electorate's rejection of his ideas. Elizabeth Warren's structural reform proposals were marginalized by the same donor class whose power she sought to constrain. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and the progressive caucus have achieved visibility but not structural control — their legislative influence remains circumscribed by a party leadership that treats them as a manageable flank rather than a governing vanguard. Ralph Nader's campaigns were met not with engagement but with coordinated hostility, and the party

subsequently rewrote its procedural rules to prevent similar challenges. In each case, the pattern is the same: progressive energy is absorbed, channeled into fundraising appeals and rhetorical gestures, and ultimately neutralized by an institutional structure that depends on the very corporate relationships progressives seek to sever.

Chris Hedges has unsparingly articulated this same critique. In *Death of the Liberal Class*, he argues that the Democratic Party, along with the media, universities, labor unions, and religious institutions, has been so thoroughly captured by corporate power that it no longer functions as a vehicle for reform at all. The party, in Hedges' analysis, is not merely failing to fight for working people — it has become an active instrument of their dispossession, lending democratic legitimacy to policies that serve corporate interests while offering nothing but empty rhetoric in return. He charges that the liberal class, including the Democratic Party, has been systematically purged of those willing to challenge corporate power — and that what remains lacks the moral courage to do so. For Hedges, the appropriate response is not reform but revolt — building power entirely outside the party's institutional structure through acts of sustained civil disobedience and mass movements that bypass the electoral system altogether.

The critique is not wrong in its diagnosis, but it is wrong in its prescription. Why? Mainly because we are out of time; the historical moment no longer permits the luxury of building from scratch.

Consider what is converging simultaneously. The Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation — the ocean current system that stabilizes the climate of the Northern Hemisphere — is weakening toward a potential tipping point that multiple research teams have identified as plausible within this century, with some projections placing the window of irreversibility within the next two decades. The AMOC functions as a planetary heat distribution system, carrying warm water from the tropics northward and driving the currents that regulate weather patterns across Europe, the Americas, and beyond. Its weakening has already been linked to a persistent cold anomaly south of Greenland that has resisted a century of ocean warming. A significant slowdown — let alone a collapse — would trigger cascading consequences: catastrophic temperature drops across Northern Europe, rapid sea-level rise along the North American eastern seaboard, disruption of monsoon patterns that billions depend on for food production, and a sharp reduction in the ocean's capacity to absorb atmospheric carbon. A March 2026 study from Utrecht University identified abrupt shifts in the Gulf Stream's path as a potential precursor signal, one that may precede collapse by only decades — or less, given that human-driven warming is accelerating the process faster than models simulate.

Multiple planetary boundaries — biodiversity loss, nitrogen and phosphorus cycles, land-system change, novel entities, freshwater use — have already been exceeded, and the remaining boundaries are under increasing pressure. These, too, are not minor problems. The U.S. economy faces the compounding effects of protectionist tariffs, unsustainable federal debt, and monetary policy constraints that point toward stagflation — a condition for which neither party's conventional toolkit has an adequate response. The U.S.-Israeli war with Iran, now in its second month, has killed thousands, closed the Strait of Hormuz — the world's most critical oil chokepoint — and triggered the largest oil supply disruption in history, with Brent crude up more than fifty percent since hostilities began. Both Israel and the United States possess nuclear weapons; Iran has been pursuing nuclear capability for years. The war in Ukraine likewise continues with no trajectory toward resolution, and carries its own escalation risks between NATO and nuclear-armed Russia. India and Pakistan — both nuclear powers — fought a four-day aerial war in May 2025 that marked the first drone battle between nuclear-armed nations; tensions remain acute over Kashmir, water rights, and cross-border terrorism, with U.S. intelligence assessing that conditions persist for future crises. Pakistan simultaneously faces armed conflict with Taliban-led Afghanistan along its western border, with cross-border hostilities escalating sharply in early 2026.

Tensions across the Taiwan Strait remain a source of profound regional instability. The development of artificial general intelligence is accelerating on a timeline that neither governments nor civil society are prepared to govern, with profound implications for labor markets, military strategy, information integrity, and the very structure of human decision-making that are genuinely unprecedented. And presiding over all of this is an erratic, impulsive President whose decisions — on tariffs, on alliances, on the rule of law, on the administrative state — are compounding every one of these crises rather than addressing any of them.

This list was not assembled for rhetorical effect. Each of these threats is independently documented, independently urgent, and independently capable of producing catastrophic and irreversible global consequences. Their simultaneity — what researchers and analysts have begun calling a *polycrisis*, a convergence of systemic risks that interact and amplify one another in ways that exceed the capacity of any single institution or framework to manage — is the point. There is no historical precedent for a political system facing this many existential-scale challenges at once, and there is no plausible path through any of them that does not require the institutional capacity of a reformed U.S. Democratic Party to rise to this occasion.

This is why the Hedges prescription — which this agenda's author once heartily agreed with and promoted for many years — is strategically inadequate to the moment. Mass movements and civil disobedience are necessary but insufficient. They can shift the Overton window, they can create political costs for inaction, they can build solidarity and sustain moral clarity — but they cannot, by themselves, pass legislation, appoint judges, staff regulatory agencies, negotiate treaties, or govern. And the crises enumerated above require governance — competent, sustained, structurally transformed governance — on a timeline that does not permit the decades-long project of building an entirely new institutional vehicle from scratch.

The Democratic Party's infrastructure — its ballot access in all fifty states, its legal standing, its donor databases, its staffing pipelines, its committee assignments, its institutional memory of governance — is not merely convenient, *it is irreplaceable on the timeline that matters*. Building a third party to comparable institutional capacity would take a generation. The AMOC does not have a generation. The climate does not have a generation. Liberal democracy, under assault from authoritarian movements on every continent, does not have a generation.

This doesn't mean the party's current leadership gets a pass. It means precisely the opposite: the stakes are too high for the progressive movement to accept the party's neoliberal drift as immovable. The Democratic establishment must be confronted with a choice it has spent decades avoiding — between its corporate relationships and its institutional survival. **Because beyond the party's current configuration failing to meet the moment, it is ensuring that the moment will not be met at all.** A party that cannot break from the donor class that benefits from the carbon economy cannot credibly address the climate crisis. A party that will not challenge the financial sector's structural power cannot address the conditions producing economic despair. A party that treats its progressive wing as a nuisance to be managed rather than a base to be empowered will continue to hemorrhage the very voters it needs to win — not to consultants' imagined "moderate center," but to apathy, cynicism, and the authoritarian populism that feeds on both.

That said, intellectual honesty requires acknowledging the alternatives. If the Democratic Party proves unreformable, what options remain…?

A third party. The most commonly proposed alternative — and the least viable on the necessary timeline. The United States' winner-take-all electoral structure, ballot access laws written by the two major parties to exclude competitors, the absence of proportional representation, and the psychological dynamics of strategic voting all constitute structural barriers that no third party has overcome since the Republicans replaced the Whigs in the 1850s—and that transition required the collapse of the existing party system over a question (slavery) that literally divided the nation geographically. The Green Party, the Working Families Party, the People's Party, and every other third-party effort of the past half-century have functioned as protest vehicles, not governing instruments. Building a third party to the institutional scale necessary to contest power across fifty states, thousands of jurisdictions, and every level of government would require decades — decades the polycrisis does not grant.

A mass movement outside electoral politics. This is Hedges' preferred prescription, and it has historical warrant: the labor movement, the civil rights movement, the suffrage movement, and the environmental movement all achieved transformative change through sustained pressure from outside the electoral system. But none of them governed. Each required a political vehicle — a Roosevelt, a Johnson, a Nixon signing the EPA into existence under political duress — to translate movement energy into law, regulation, and institutional change. A mass movement that refuses engagement with electoral politics can create the conditions for transformation but cannot execute it. And in the current environment, where the Right controls the judiciary, the movement's moral victories will be struck down by courts unless there is a governing majority willing to restructure the judiciary itself.

State and local strategies that bypass federal politics entirely. There is genuine potential here — and this agenda has emphasized state-level action throughout. But the crises driving the urgency are overwhelmingly federal and global in scope. States cannot negotiate climate treaties, restructure the financial system, fully regulate artificial intelligence development, or restrain a rogue presidency. State-level progress is necessary and this agenda champions it, but it is insufficient as a primary strategy when the existential risks are planetary.

Waiting for demographic or generational change to resolve the problem organically. Younger voters are measurably more progressive on economic policy, climate, and democratic reform. But generational turnover is slow, and the structural advantages of incumbency, gerrymandering, the Senate's rural bias, and the Electoral College mean that demographic shifts do not automatically translate into political power. Moreover, the polycrisis is not waiting for generational change. The AMOC's tipping point does not adjust its timeline to the electorate's age distribution.

Each of these alternatives contains elements of value, and this agenda incorporates several of them as complementary strategies: state-level pilots, movement pressure, coalition building outside the party's current donor structure. But as *primary* strategies — as substitutes for transforming the Democratic Party — each is even less probable than the admittedly difficult task of internal reform. The party's infrastructure exists. Its ballot access exists. Its institutional memory of governance exists. What does not yet exist is the political will within the party to use that infrastructure for the purposes this moment demands.

The contention here is not that reforming the Democratic Party is easy, or even likely. It's that every alternative is harder, slower, and even less likely to succeed on the timeline the polycrisis imposes. The party must simply change — because it is the least improbable path through a set of converging catastrophes that will not wait for a more convenient vehicle to be built.

PART XI: HOW DO WE REACH FOLKS?

The proposals in this agenda will never reach the Americans who need them most if they are delivered in the language of the institutions those Americans have learned — often with very good reason — to distrust. The policy substance is in the preceding pages. What follows is the translation.

A. What We're Actually Fighting For

These are outcomes, not ideology. Every item on this list is something a majority of Americans already want when it is described in plain language and stripped of partisan framing:

- Your healthcare shouldn't depend on your job, and it shouldn't bankrupt you. We're going to fix that.
- Your kids should be able to afford a home in the town they grew up in. Right now they can't, and we know why.
- If you work full-time, you shouldn't be poor. Period.
- Your tax dollars should build roads, schools, and hospitals — not line the pockets of defense contractors and Wall Street executives.
- Social Security and Medicare should be solvent for your grandchildren. We'll make them solvent by making billionaires pay the same rate you do.
- Small businesses shouldn't be crushed by monopolies that rig the market and then call it "free enterprise."
- Your town shouldn't be hollowed out because some corporation decided it was cheaper to move your job overseas. And when they do, they shouldn't get a tax break for it.
- The water you drink, the air you breathe, and the land you live on shouldn't be poisoned for someone else's profit.
- Your government should work for you. Right now it works for its donors. We intend to change that.
- You shouldn't have to go into debt to get an education, and your local public school should be as good as any private one.
- Veterans should get the care they were promised — fully funded, no excuses, no waitlists that kill.
- The cops who protect your community should be accountable to your community. And the white-collar criminals who steal your pension should go to prison, not to a board meeting.

B. "But That's Socialism" — and Other Objections Worth Answering

Some answers to objections from inevitable disinformation.

- Social Security is a socialist program. So is Medicare, public education, the VA, rural electrification, the interstate highway system, and the postal service. You already depend on socialism. The question is whether you'll let a billionaire-funded scare word stop you from getting more of what already works.

- "We can't afford it." We can't afford the current system. The United States spends more per capita on healthcare than any country on earth and gets worse outcomes. We spend more on defense than the next ten nations combined. The money exists. It's a question of who gets it.

- "The government can't run anything." The government runs the military, which you trust with your life. It runs Social Security, which you depend on for retirement. It ran the highway system that built the middle class. The government does big things well when it is properly funded, competently staffed, and not sabotaged by the same politicians who then point to the wreckage as proof it doesn't work.

- "You just want to raise my taxes." No. If you earn under $400,000 a year, this agenda cuts your costs — on healthcare, on education, on housing, on childcare. The tax increases are on people who can afford a second yacht, corporations that pay zero in federal taxes, and financial speculators who contribute nothing to your community.

- "Both sides are the same." They haven't been — but the Democratic establishment has given you real reasons to think so. This agenda is a direct challenge to that establishment. We're not asking you to trust the party. We're asking you to look at the proposals and judge them on their merits.

- "You're trying to control my life." This agenda expands your freedom. Freedom to see a doctor without going broke. Freedom to start a business without losing your family's health coverage. Freedom from monopolies that fix prices and crush competition. Freedom from a political system that sells your representation to the highest bidder. The people restricting your freedom are the ones who like things the way they are.

C. Two Hard Truths

On party loyalty: Some of the people who would benefit most from this agenda will not support it in the near term because it comes from the wrong team. That's real, and we're not naive about it. Party identity runs deep — it's family, community, culture, not just a set of positions. We don't expect mass conversion overnight. But we do expect that when your premiums go up again, when your kid still can't afford a house, when the plant closes and the tax break goes to the company that closed it — the arguments in this document will be sitting where you left them. This is a long-term project. We'll be here.

On the messenger: These proposals will not be credible coming from the mouths of the people who created the problems they purport to solve. Democratic leaders who championed financial deregulation, who defended corporate donors while wages stagnated, who told working Americans that job losses were the necessary cost of "global competitiveness" — those leaders cannot now deliver this message and expect to be believed. The messenger must be someone whose record demonstrates commitment to these principles, not someone who has discovered economic populism as a rebranding exercise in the wake of electoral failure.

That raises the question: who is credible? Rather than naming names — which ages badly and invites personality-driven debate — we propose a test. Any person who seeks to carry this agenda should be measured against these commitments:

Principles of Commitment

1. Refuses corporate PAC money and relies on small-dollar and public financing.
2. Has a record of opposing — not just rhetorically criticizing — corporate consolidation, financial deregulation, and the revolving door between industry and government.
3. Speaks to rural, working-class, and economically distressed communities as partners with legitimate grievances — not as cultural adversaries to be educated or as electoral demographics to be managed.
4. Names the actual sources of economic harm — monopoly power, wage suppression, regulatory capture, tax avoidance by the wealthy — rather than offering scapegoats based on race, immigration status, or cultural difference.
5. Supports the structural democracy reforms in this agenda (public financing, anti-gerrymandering, voting access) even when those reforms disadvantage their own party's short-term electoral position.
6. Acknowledges the Democratic Party's own failures honestly — including its complicity in neoliberal economic policy, mass incarceration, and the erosion of labor power — rather than treating party history as an unblemished record to be defended.
7. Commits to evidence-based policy and is willing to change positions when evidence requires it, including abandoning proposals that don't survive rigorous pilot testing.
8. Prioritizes material outcomes (wages, healthcare access, housing costs, environmental quality) over symbolic gestures, performative messaging, or culture-war positioning.
9. Has a credible theory of implementation — not just aspirational goals but a specific account of sequencing, coalition-building, and the political prerequisites for each reform.
10. Is willing to be primaried, challenged, and held accountable by the movement that elevated them — and does not treat electoral office as personal property.

Anyone who meets this test is a credible messenger regardless of party background, age, or profile. Anyone who fails it is not — regardless of how progressive their rhetoric sounds. The test is behavioral, not biographical. Apply it without sentiment.

D. An Honest Assessment of The Media Landscape

This agenda will not receive a fair hearing from mainstream media. That is really isn’t paranoia — it’s a structural prediction based on observable incentive structures. Corporate media is owned by the conglomerates whose market dominance this agenda proposes to break. The advertisers who fund commercial broadcasting are the same corporations whose tax avoidance, labor practices, and regulatory capture are named as problems throughout this document. Expecting ABC (Disney), NBC (Comcast), or CNN (Warner Bros. Discovery) to amplify a message that threatens their parent

companies' business models is not strategic thinking — it is wishful thinking. Some individual journalists will cover this agenda honestly. The institutions that employ them will not promote it.

The obstacle is worse than indifference. Steve Bannon articulated the governing media strategy of the American Right with characteristic bluntness: "The real opposition is the media. And the way to deal with them is to flood the zone with shit." This isn't merely a communications tactic — it's a doctrine of information warfare designed to exhaust public attention, destroy the credibility of factual reporting, and ensure that any signal, no matter how clear, is buried under noise. The progressive signal described in this document will face that flood. It will also face coordinated attacks from establishment Democratic operatives and donors whose institutional authority depends on the neoliberal consensus this agenda rejects. The Clinton-era consultant class, the corporate-friendly think tanks, the super PAC infrastructure — these forces will not passively surrender their influence. They will frame this agenda as naive, economically illiterate, and electorally suicidal, because their careers depend on the proposition that no alternative to their approach is viable.

And the noise is no longer merely human-generated. As documented in this agenda's section on AI (Part X.D), generative AI has industrialized the production of synthetic disinformation — deepfake videos, cloned audio, fabricated news broadcasts, synthetic social media personas — at a volume and speed that makes Bannon's original "flood the zone" strategy look artisanal by comparison. In the 2026 midterm cycle, AI-generated attack ads and fabricated media are already being deployed against progressive candidates. The progressive signal must therefore contend not only with a hostile corporate media landscape and coordinated establishment opposition, but with an algorithmically amplified torrent of synthetic content designed to make reality itself indistinguishable from fabrication. The AI verification infrastructure this agenda proposes — provenance labeling, public detection utilities, federal regulation of synthetic political media — is not a separate policy goal. It is a precondition for every communication strategy that follows.

So how does the signal get through?

Grassroots organizing as communication infrastructure. The most effective political communication in American history has never been broadcast — it has been interpersonal. The civil rights movement did not succeed because it had favorable media coverage. It succeeded because it built local organizing infrastructure — churches, community centers, union halls — where trusted figures delivered a message face-to-face to people they had relationships with. The citizens' assemblies, community hubs, and national service program described in Part V are not just governance proposals. They are the communication network. Every canvasser, every community health worker, every national service participant, every citizens' assembly facilitator is a messenger whose credibility is earned through presence, not broadcast.

Platform-native digital strategy. Zohran Mamdani's 2025 New York City mayoral campaign demonstrated that a democratic socialist running against a massively funded establishment opponent can win by building a digital-first communication machine that treats social media as organizing infrastructure rather than advertising space. Mamdani went from single-digit polling to a decisive primary victory by producing platform-native content — short, vernacular, often funny, always tied to a specific policy outcome — that was designed to be shared, remixed, and amplified by supporters who became co-creators rather than passive audiences. His campaign reached over 77 million users through content creator partnerships alone. The lesson is not "go viral." The lesson is: build the machine that converts attention into action — volunteer signups, door knocks, donations, and votes. This requires investment in the technical infrastructure of digital organizing: CRM systems, automated engagement

tools, creator relationships built long before election season, and content teams that understand each platform's algorithm and culture natively.

Memes, brevity, and emotional resonance. The Right did not capture the American imagination with policy papers. It captured it with bumper stickers: "Government is the problem." "Don't tread on me." "Make America Great Again." Each is a compression of an entire worldview into a phrase that triggers emotional identification before rational evaluation even begins. The progressive movement has historically been terrible at this — substituting nuance for clarity, qualification for conviction, and ten-point plans for a clear story about who is hurting you and why. The outcomes listed in Section I of this chapter are a starting point: each is a sentence-length compression of a policy complex into a grievance-and-solution pair. These need to be further compressed into visual, shareable, memetic formats — and that work cannot be done by committee or by consultants who think in television-ad timescales. It must be done by the same creator communities and digital natives who understand the idiom of each platform. "Your boss got a tax cut. You got a copay increase." "They call it socialism when it helps you. They call it a subsidy when it helps them." These are not slogans yet — they are raw material. The finished product will come from the people who live in these media environments, not from those who study them.

Charismatic evangelists. No movement succeeds without human faces that embody its message. The progressive movement needs figures who can do what Mamdani did in New York, what James Talarico has done in Texas with religious language, what Fetterman did in Pennsylvania with working-class authenticity — carry the substance of this agenda in a voice and manner that is credible to people who have learned to distrust political speech. These evangelists cannot be manufactured by a party apparatus. They emerge from communities, from organizing, from the credibility earned by showing up year after year in places that establishment politicians visit only during election season. The Principles of Commitment listed above are the filter. The organizing infrastructure is the incubator. The candidates who survive both will be the messengers this movement needs.

Podcasts, long-form media, and the alternative information ecosystem. The Right built its media ecosystem — talk radio, Fox News, Breitbart, a vast network of podcasts and YouTube channels — through deliberate, sustained investment over decades. The progressive equivalent must be built with the same intentionality. This does not mean simply launching progressive podcasts (though that matters). It means understanding that millions of Americans now get their political information entirely outside the legacy media ecosystem — through Joe Rogan, through gaming streams, through fitness influencers, through faith-based content creators. Meeting people in the media environments they actually inhabit, rather than the ones progressives wish they inhabited, is not a concession to anti-intellectualism. It is a recognition that the medium shapes the message's reach, and that refusing to enter a space because it is imperfect is indistinguishable from refusing to communicate.

Local journalism and community media. The collapse of local newspapers has created information deserts across rural and small-town America — and those deserts have been filled by partisan media, conspiracy content, and social media algorithms optimized for outrage. Investing in local journalism — community radio, local digital outlets, high school and community college journalism programs — is both a media strategy and a democratic strategy. People trust local voices more than national ones. A story about how a specific policy affected a specific family in a specific town carries more persuasive weight than any national messaging campaign.

Innovation we haven't built yet. The honest answer to the question "how do we break through the noise?" includes this admission: we do not yet have all the tools we need. The Mamdani model is a

proof of concept, not a universal template. It worked in a dense, young, digitally saturated city. Whether the same approach can reach a 55-year-old former autoworker in Youngstown who gets his news from Facebook and his neighbor is an open question. AI-driven message testing, decentralized content creation networks, interactive policy simulators that let a voter see how a proposal would affect their specific household, community-based "story banking" that collects and amplifies real people's experiences with the broken systems this agenda proposes to fix — these are early ideas, not proven strategies. The progressive movement must treat communication innovation with the same seriousness it applies to policy innovation: pilot, test, measure, iterate, scale what works, abandon what doesn't.

What we know for certain is this: the status quo communication strategy — press releases, cable news hits, campaign ads, and election-cycle mobilization — has failed. It has failed because it was designed for a media environment that no longer exists. The Right understood this fifteen years ago and built accordingly. The progressive movement must build now — not with the arrogance of assuming it knows what will work, but with the discipline to find out. The signal is real. The noise is engineered. The task is to build delivery systems that the noise cannot drown. We will figure it out because we have no alternative but to figure it out.

PART XII: IMPLEMENTATION AND TRANSITION

The Pilot Principle. In keeping with the precautionary principle, new proposals should be tested through incremental, limited-scope pilots with clearly defined metrics before broader implementation.[8] This applies to every major structural innovation in this document: citizens' assemblies, the earned social benefit system, worker ownership transitions, direct democracy mechanisms, the public interest technology authority. Each should be piloted at the state or municipal level, evaluated rigorously, refined based on evidence, and expanded only when results justify it. Revolutionary integrity demands that our methods be as disciplined as our aspirations.[31]

A. What Can Be Done Now

The proposals in this document span a wide range of political difficulty, from executive orders that could be signed on day one to constitutional amendments that may take a generation. But the sequencing matters as much as the substance. Each tier of action creates the conditions for the next, and the failure to prioritize structural enablers over symbolic victories has been the defining strategic error of every recent progressive governing majority.

Executive action. A progressive president can, without congressional approval, restore scientific agency independence, reverse Schedule F reclassification, rejoin international agreements, strengthen antitrust enforcement through existing statutory authority, use the EPA's current mandate to regulate emissions and chemical contamination, expand public lands protections, and reform immigration enforcement priorities. These actions are reversible by a subsequent administration — which is precisely why they are insufficient on their own and why the legislative agenda described below is both tantamount and urgent.

First-tier congressional action. Even without the supermajorities required for constitutional amendments, a simple congressional majority can accomplish a substantial portion of this agenda — provided it begins by reforming the filibuster that currently allows a minority to block majoritarian governance. That reform is the prerequisite for everything else. With it, Congress can restore the Voting Rights Act preclearance regime, pass federal minimum wage legislation, codify reproductive rights, enact campaign finance transparency requirements, fund immigration courts, reinstate Glass-Steagall, pass comprehensive federal data privacy legislation, dramatically increase appropriations for antitrust enforcement, white-collar crime prosecution, public housing, and scientific research, and repeal the 2001 and 2002 AUMFs. Every one of these is achievable through ordinary legislation requiring no constitutional amendment — only political will. A progressive Congress that spends its first months on these structural enablers will have created the conditions for the deeper reforms to follow.

Second-tier congressional action. Once the structural enablers are in place — once voting rights are protected, campaign finance is transparent, and the filibuster no longer grants a minority veto over the majority — the economic foundation can be built: universal healthcare, labor rights and sectoral bargaining, housing investment at scale, and student debt cancellation. These require the political space that first-tier reforms create.

Third-tier structural transformation. Court reform, constitutional amendments, the worker ownership transition, comprehensive tax reform, national service, and citizens' assemblies represent the deepest changes proposed in this document. These all require sustained public mobilization, demonstrated success of earlier reforms, and in some cases supermajorities or state-level ratification. They are long-

term projects — but they should be named, pursued, and organized toward from the outset rather than deferred indefinitely as aspirational abstractions.

State and local action. Ranked-choice voting, independent redistricting, public banking, minimum wage increases, rent stabilization, police reform, citizens' assemblies, zoning reform, public transit investment. Many of these proposals can be piloted at state and local levels even when federal action is blocked — and successful state-level pilots build the political case for national adoption. The conservative movement understood this: its fifty-year project was built from state legislatures upward, not from Washington downward. The progressive movement must learn the same lesson.

B. Institutional Reconstruction After Authoritarian Damage

The proposals in section A assume a functioning federal government — agencies with staff, expertise, institutional memory, data collection infrastructure, and regulatory frameworks intact. That assumption no longer holds. The current administration, following the Project 2025 blueprint with operational precision, has gutted federal agencies to a degree that makes restoration a qualitatively different challenge from ordinary policy reversal. A future progressive administration cannot simply sign executive orders reversing the damage. It must rebuild institutions that have been deliberately destroyed — and it must do so while those institutions' functions are urgently needed.

The distinction between reversal and reconstruction is critical, and failing to understand it will doom the first months of any progressive government to the same dysfunction that currently characterizes the agencies being dismantled. Reversing Schedule F is an executive order. Rebuilding the career civil service after tens of thousands of experienced professionals have been fired, reassigned, demoralized into resignation, or driven into the private sector is a five-to-ten-year institutional recovery project. Reversing the rescission of the EPA's endangerment finding is a regulatory action. Rebuilding the scientific staff, the monitoring infrastructure, the enforcement capacity, and the data collection systems that the EPA requires to actually regulate emissions is a generational investment. Reversing the elimination of the Department of Education is a legislative act. Restoring the institutional knowledge, the enforcement relationships with state agencies, the Title I compliance infrastructure, and the research capacity that the department once possessed — imperfectly, inadequately, but irreplaceably — requires a reconstruction plan as detailed and ambitious as the demolition plan that destroyed it.

This agenda therefore proposes that a progressive transition team begin developing, before taking office, a comprehensive Institutional Reconstruction Plan covering the following elements:

Personnel recovery. Every agency targeted by Schedule F dismissals, DOGE-directed reductions in force, and politically motivated reassignments should be subject to immediate personnel assessment upon a change in administration. Offer reinstatement with back pay and seniority restoration to every career civil servant dismissed without cause. Establish emergency hiring authority — modeled on the authorities used during national security crises — to fill critical vacancies in regulatory, scientific, and enforcement positions. Create a federal service recruitment initiative targeting the graduates who, under normal circumstances, would have entered public service during the years of institutional destruction but were deterred by the hostile environment. Partner with universities, professional associations, and state agencies that absorbed displaced federal talent to create return-to-service pathways.

Data recovery and reconstitution. Multiple agencies have had data collection programs suspended, datasets deleted or made inaccessible, and scientific reports suppressed or withdrawn. Inventory every

dataset, monitoring program, and research initiative that has been terminated or compromised. Prioritize the restoration of climate monitoring, public health surveillance, environmental enforcement data, labor market statistics, and civil rights compliance data — the informational infrastructure on which evidence-based governance depends. Where data has been destroyed, establish protocols for reconstructing baselines using state-level data, academic research, international sources, and the archived records of the agencies themselves — many of which were preserved by career staff who understood what was being lost. Create statutory protections — modeled on the Integrity and Accountability in Science Act proposals — that make the destruction of federal scientific data a criminal offense, not merely a policy choice reversible by the next administration.

Regulatory reconstruction. The regulatory frameworks dismantled by the current administration — environmental rules, labor protections, financial regulations, civil rights enforcement guidelines — cannot simply be reinstated by executive order. Many were vacated through formal notice-and-comment rulemaking, and restoring them requires the same process, which takes months to years. Begin the notice-and-comment process for priority regulations on day one, but also pursue emergency interim rules under the Administrative Procedure Act's good-cause exception where imminent harm to public health, safety, or the environment can be documented — as it can in numerous cases. Simultaneously, pursue statutory codification of the most critical regulatory frameworks, so that they cannot be reversed by a future administration's executive action alone. The lesson of the current crisis is that regulations built on executive authority alone are regulations built on sand.

Institutional durability engineering. The reconstruction must be designed to resist the next demolition attempt. This means statutory mandates for agency missions, mandatory minimum staffing levels for critical functions, funding floors written into authorizing legislation rather than left to annual appropriations, and independent inspector general oversight with the structural protections described in Part III.F. It means creating institutional architecture that a hostile administration can degrade but cannot destroy without an act of Congress — which is a higher political barrier than executive action and provides more time for democratic mobilization in response. The Federal Reserve model — imperfect but durable — demonstrates that independent agencies with statutory mandates, confirmed leadership, and dedicated funding streams can survive hostile administrations. The agencies that Project 2025 has targeted most aggressively are precisely the ones that lacked these structural protections. The reconstruction must not repeat that vulnerability.

A truth and accountability process. The American public deserves a comprehensive, factual accounting of what was done to their government, by whom, and at whose direction. This is not a criminal prosecution — though criminal conduct should be referred to the appropriate authorities. It is a documentation process: a public record of the decisions that were made, the consequences that resulted, the officials who ordered them, and the institutional damage that was inflicted. Modeled on congressional investigation rather than on transitional justice tribunals, this process serves two functions: it creates the evidentiary basis for the statutory protections that prevent recurrence, and it establishes a public record that makes it impossible for future advocates of institutional demolition to claim that the damage was negligible or that the affected agencies were dispensable. The record must be comprehensive, publicly accessible, and permanent.

C. Parallel Institutions as a Complimentary or Pre-Reform Strategy

The structural reforms proposed throughout this agenda — cooperative enterprise mandates, citizens' assemblies, sortition-based governance, universal public services, the care economy — require legislative action, and legislative action requires political power that the progressive movement does not

currently hold and cannot expect to hold continuously. The question of what to do in the interim — or in the event some initiatives are stalled indefinitely — is significant. It is the strategic problem that determines whether the movement survives its own periods out of power with enough institutional capacity to govern when power returns. The answer, inspired by Antonio Gramsci's analysis of cultural hegemony and Elinor Ostrom's empirical work on commons governance, is to build parallel institutions at community scale — self-organized, self-funded, and independent of the governmental structures whose capture by hostile forces is the very problem this agenda addresses.

Worker cooperatives like the Evergreen Cooperatives in Cleveland, Cooperation Jackson in Mississippi, and the Mondragon network in the Basque Country demonstrate that worker ownership is not a policy abstraction but an operational business model that produces measurable outcomes in employment stability, wage equity, and community reinvestment — outcomes that no amount of progressive messaging can communicate as effectively as a neighbor's lived experience of working in one. Community land trusts — the Champlain Housing Trust in Vermont, Dudley Neighbors in Boston, the Oakland Community Land Trust — remove housing from speculative markets and place it under community governance, demonstrating at neighborhood scale the principle this agenda proposes at national scale: that essential resources should be managed as commons rather than commodities. Mutual aid networks, community coregroups organized around the model described in the Level 7 framework, tool libraries, community-supported agriculture, participatory budgeting experiments at the municipal level, and locally convened citizens' assemblies — each of these is an institution that can be built now, without legislation, without federal funding, and without the permission of the political class whose power they are designed to eventually constrain.[56]

The strategic function of these parallel institutions is threefold: they provide lived experience of the alternatives this agenda proposes, which is the only form of political persuasion that survives contact with the "reasonable-sounding" counter-narratives of the Right; they build the social capital — the relationships, the trust, the organizational capacity, the shared norms of cooperation — that a political movement requires to sustain itself across decades rather than election cycles; and they create institutional infrastructure that is already operational when the political window for structural reform opens, so that the movement is not starting from scratch every time it wins power but is scaling institutions whose viability has already been demonstrated. The Right understood this: its fifty-year project was built not from Washington downward but from school boards, church networks, think tanks, talk radio stations, and state legislatures upward. The progressive movement must build its own institutional ecosystem with the same patience and the same seriousness — and with the additional advantage that the institutions it builds actually work for the people who participate in them, which is a form of political power the Right's institutions, by design, cannot offer.

D. Constitutional Amendments

This agenda either requires or would benefit from several constitutional amendments: overturning *Citizens United* and establishing that constitutional rights belong to natural persons; establishing term limits for Supreme Court justices; and potentially establishing the referendum and initiative power at the federal level. These are long-term projects requiring sustained mobilization across multiple election cycles. But the history of constitutional change in America — from abolition to women's suffrage to the Civil Rights Amendments — demonstrates that what seems impossible in one decade becomes inevitable in the next, provided the groundwork is laid deliberately and without interruption. Name the amendments. Build the coalitions. Begin.

E. The Graduated Approach

Many proposals — worker ownership, direct democracy, national service, citizens' assemblies, the earned social benefit system — are designed as graduated transitions, each stage building the constituency and institutional capacity for the next. Each step builds the constituency for the next. Profit-sharing builds the case for equity sharing; equity sharing builds the case for board representation; board representation builds the case for full worker ownership. Community assemblies begin as advisory and grow into governing institutions as they demonstrate their value.[8][10] This is how durable change is built: incrementally, with each step proving the case for the next.

D. What Is AI's Best Application in the Short Term?

The question many experts are asking about artificial intelligence may be the wrong question. They are asking what AI will do to the economy, to jobs, to national security — as if AI were a weather system arriving from outside the political order, to which the only possible responses are adaptation and shelter. The more constructive question is what AI should be made to do, by whom, under what authority, and toward what ends — because AI is not weather. It is infrastructure. And the decision about who builds infrastructure, who controls it, who benefits from it, and whose interests it serves when those interests conflict is the oldest political question in the democratic tradition. The progressive answer to that question has always been the same: infrastructure that affects the public must be accountable to the public, and the profit motive — while sometimes useful as an incentive mechanism — must be subordinated to the public interest in every domain where the two diverge. AI is no exception. It is, in fact, the domain where the principle matters most, because no previous technology has offered this combination of institutional reach, analytical capacity, and operational autonomy in the hands of whoever controls it.

The most immediate and least controversial application is the one already underway in a handful of American cities: using AI to break the bureaucratic inertia that prevents housing, transportation, and energy infrastructure from being built within any reasonable timeline or budget. The United States does not have a shortage of construction capacity. It has a shortage of permits. The median wait time for a building permit in Honolulu before its AI pilot program was six months — not because the plans were complex but because the review backlog was catastrophic and the municipal workforce had been hollowed out by decades of austerity budgets that treated permitting offices as overhead rather than as the enabling infrastructure of a functioning city. Seattle, Austin, Los Angeles, Harris County, and others have now deployed or are deploying AI tools that pre-screen permit applications for code compliance, flag deficiencies before formal review, and compress what had been months-long review cycles into days. Honolulu reported a seventy percent reduction in permit review times. These are not speculative projections but operational results from systems already running. And they deftly illustrate the principle that should govern all progressive AI deployment: the technology does not replace the human reviewer. Instead, it handles the mechanical completeness checks that consume the reviewer's time, freeing the human judgment that actually matters — the discretionary assessment of whether a project serves the community, meets safety standards, accounts for environmental impact — for the work only a human being accountable to the public should be doing.

Scale this principle. Apply it to the environmental review process under NEPA, where legitimate environmental protection has been weaponized by litigants on all sides — by developers seeking to delay competitors, by NIMBYs seeking to block affordable housing, by fossil fuel interests seeking to slow renewable energy permitting — to produce a system in which a single infrastructure project can spend a decade in review while the climate crisis accelerates on a timeline that does not negotiate with procedural delay. AI can process environmental impact data, cross-reference regulatory requirements across jurisdictions, identify genuine conflicts and flag frivolous ones, and produce draft assessments that human reviewers can evaluate in weeks rather than years — not by weakening environmental protections but by making them faster, more consistent, and harder to game. Apply it to transportation planning as well, where the gap between a rail project's approval and its completion is measured in decades and billions of dollars in cost overruns that are themselves partly a function of that delay. Apply it to energy grid permitting, where the interconnection queue for renewable energy projects — the backlog of solar and wind installations waiting for permission to connect to the grid — now exceeds two thousand gigawatts nationally, enough to power the country several times over, which weren't stalled

by engineering constraints but by administrative process designed for a world in which a few large power plants connected to the grid each year…not thousands of distributed generation sources.

The second application is the one that requires the most care: augmenting public safety without building a surveillance state. The existing trajectory — facial recognition deployed without federal regulation, predictive policing algorithms trained on biased arrest data, law enforcement agencies purchasing commercial location data to circumvent warrant requirements — has been addressed elsewhere in this agenda. The question here is whether AI can make people safer without having them watched, tracked, and profiled. The answer is conditional: yes, but only under an architectural constraint that no current deployment in the United States meets. The constraint is that public safety AI must operate on *behavioral pattern recognition* rather than biometric identification, must process data locally rather than transmitting it to centralized databases, must delete non-flagged data automatically on short retention cycles, and must be subject to independent civilian oversight with the authority to audit algorithms, suspend deployments, and impose consequences for violations. Privacy-preserving surveillance isn't an oxymoron — edge processing, differential privacy, anonymized behavioral analytics, and purpose-limited data architectures are established technical methodologies — but it requires that the system be designed from the outset to protect privacy as a structural feature rather than as a policy overlay applied after the surveillance architecture is already built. The distinction is between a system that watches everyone and sometimes respects their rights (our current standard), and a system that is architecturally incapable of watching everyone because the data it would need to do so is never collected, never stored, and never transmitted. Build the second system. Prohibit the first.

The third and broadest application is deploying AI as the connective infrastructure of the progressive agenda itself — as the analytical and operational substrate that makes democratic judgment possible at the scale and speed the present crisis demands. Consider what this means concretely. Direct democracy, as proposed in this agenda through citizens' councils and participatory budgeting, requires the processing of enormous volumes of citizen input — thousands of proposals, comments, objections, and counter-proposals that no human staff can synthesize in time to inform decisions that have deadlines. AI can categorize, summarize, identify points of consensus and genuine disagreement, and present the results in forms that enable deliberation rather than drowning it. Fort Collins, Colorado used AI-enabled analysis to process over four thousand long-form citizen responses on a contested land-use question. Bogotá used an AI chatbot to enable tens of thousands of residents to participate in participatory budgeting who would never have attended a public meeting. These aren't replacements for democratic deliberation; they are the scaffolding that makes deliberation possible when the alternative is a comment box that no one reads and a public meeting attended by forty people who do not even represent the community.

Financial regulation also faces a structural asymmetry that AI can address: historically, regulators have been outgunned by the institutions they regulate. Every major financial crisis of the last forty years — the savings and loan collapse, the derivatives explosion, the mortgage-backed securities fraud, and the ongoing migration of reckless lending from regulated banks to unregulated private credit markets — has followed the same pattern. The regulated industry innovates around the regulation faster than the regulators can adapt, because the industry has more money, more talent, and more computational resources than the agencies responsible for oversight. AI regulatory agents — systems that continuously monitor financial flows, flag anomalous patterns, detect the migration of risk from regulated to unregulated entities, and model the systemic consequences of emerging instruments before they become systemic threats — can close that asymmetry. Not perfectly and not permanently, but sufficiently to shift the burden so that financial institutions must justify their innovations to a regulator

that can actually understand what they are looking at, rather than filing disclosures designed to be technically compliant but functionally opaque.

Healthcare costs in the United States are not primarily a consequence of the care delivered. They are a function of the administrative architecture through which care is billed, coded, denied, appealed, and adjudicated — a system that consumes roughly a third of total healthcare spending and doesn't exist to serve patients but to serve the interests of insurers, *whose profit model depends on the friction between claim and payment*. AI can reduce that friction — automate coding, flag billing errors, identify denial patterns that constitute bad-faith claims processing, and provide patients and providers with real-time information about coverage, costs, and alternatives — but only if the AI serves the patient rather than the insurer. An AI system designed by an insurance company to optimize claim denials is not healthcare reform, it is part of the disease. Once again, the distinction is in the governance: who builds the system, who controls its objectives, who audits its performance, and whether the profit motive is present in its architecture at all.

The same principle applies across the full range of applications this agenda envisions. An AI watchtower over media compliance and the information commons — monitoring for undisclosed conflicts of interest, tracking the provenance of viral disinformation, flagging algorithmic amplification of divisive content — can serve the public interest, but only if it is itself publicly governed, transparently audited, and accompanied by tools that help media organizations comply rather than merely punishing them when they fail. AI oversight of fossil fuel industry emissions reporting, carbon credit markets, and transition commitments can prevent the greenwashing that has rendered voluntary climate pledges meaningless, but only if the oversight system is independent of the industry it monitors and has enforcement authority rather than merely advisory capacity. AI support for scientific research — accelerating literature review, identifying experimental design flaws, modeling climate scenarios, optimizing materials science for renewable energy storage — is among the least controversial applications, requiring mainly that the systems be openly available to publicly funded researchers rather than locked behind proprietary paywalls that reproduce the same access inequities the agenda seeks to dismantle. AI agents tasked with regularly auditing organizations, policies, and governance structures for neoliberal drift — the slow replacement of public purpose with market logic, of democratic accountability with efficiency metrics, of citizens with consumers — would constitute something genuinely new in democratic governance: **an institutional memory that does not forget what it was built to protect, does not gradually accommodate the interests it was designed to constrain, and does not retire, get promoted, or accept a consulting position with the industry it used to regulate.**

There is a darker application of AI that this section needs to confront directly, because it represents the most immediate threat to every communication strategy this agenda depends on. Generative AI has industrialized disinformation. The volume of deepfake videos shared on social media has grown from roughly half a million in 2023 to an estimated eight million by 2025 — a sixteenfold increase in two years. In the 2024–2025 electoral cycle, deepfake incidents surged by 303 percent around U.S. primaries alone. In Ireland's 2025 presidential election, a fabricated broadcast depicting a leading candidate withdrawing from the race circulated for days before removal. In the 2026 U.S. midterms — happening as this document is written — national Republican campaigns have deployed deepfake technology in at least three documented attack ads, following the lead of a White House that has released scores of AI-generated videos and gaming-inspired memes designed to disparage opponents and inflate support. A 2025 peer-reviewed study in the Journal of Creative Communications confirmed what the operators of these campaigns already know: people struggle to distinguish deepfake videos from authentic footage, and their political opinions are measurably affected by synthetic content they cannot identify as false. But the damage extends beyond the fakes themselves. The mere knowledge that deepfakes exist

produces what researchers call the "liar's dividend": a perverse epistemic environment in which authentic footage of genuine wrongdoing — a politician taking a bribe, a police officer using excessive force, a corporate executive admitting to fraud on camera — can be dismissed as fabricated, granting the powerful a blanket immunity from documentary evidence that no previous technology has ever provided. This is Bannon's "flood the zone" doctrine automated and scaled beyond anything human operatives could produce — a firehose of synthetic reality that costs almost nothing to generate and everything to debunk.

The AI watchtower over the information commons described above is therefore not purely an aspirational governance innovation. It is a defensive necessity. Without AI-powered provenance verification — systems that can trace the origin of media, flag synthetic content in real time, and provide citizens with the tools to distinguish fabricated material from authentic reporting — the information environment in which democratic deliberation occurs will be rendered functionally unusable. The technical infrastructure exists: content provenance standards like C2PA, watermarking protocols for AI-generated media, and detection algorithms that can identify synthetic artifacts are all operational technologies. What does not exist is the governance framework to mandate their deployment. The EU AI Act requires disclosure when content is artificially generated or manipulated, enforceable from August 2026. The United States has no comparable federal framework — the TAKE IT DOWN Act of 2025 addresses non-consensual intimate imagery but does not touch political deepfakes, and state-level regulations remain patchwork and unenforceable at platform scale. This agenda calls for federal legislation mandating provenance labeling for all AI-generated media distributed on platforms exceeding a defined user threshold, criminal penalties for the knowing deployment of synthetic media to deceive voters or impersonate candidates, and the establishment of an independent, publicly funded AI verification service — a factual infrastructure that operates as a public utility, not as a content moderation decision made by the same platforms whose engagement algorithms profit from the virality of disinformation. The alternative is an information environment in which no one can trust anything they see or hear — and in that environment, as the disinformation researchers have documented, the advantage flows automatically to authoritarians, because when everything is disputed, people default to tribal loyalty and strongman certainty. That is the environment this agenda's opponents are building. AI must be deployed to dismantle it.

And AI can be made to serve the fiscal architecture this agenda proposes — modeling the interaction effects of tax reforms, projecting the revenue implications of structural changes across multiple time horizons, identifying where proposed expenditures offset existing negative externalities and where they require new revenue, and maintaining the kind of dynamic, continuously updated fiscal framework that the Congressional Budget Office's static scoring methodology is structurally incapable of producing. The deficit is the predictable arithmetic consequence of a tax structure that has been systematically hollowed out to benefit the wealthiest Americans and a military budget that exceeds rational defense requirements by any honest assessment. AI cannot solve the political problem of a legislature that refuses to collect the revenue it authorizes in spending. But it can make the arithmetic so visible, so continuously updated, and so resistant to the accounting fictions that both parties use to obscure it, that the political cost of dishonesty rises to an intolerable level.

However, two problems in this arena must be addressed, because ignoring them would constitute precisely the kind of wishful thinking this agenda criticizes. First: the profit motive. The computing infrastructure, the training data, the talent pipeline, and the foundational models on which all of these applications would depend are currently controlled by a small number of private corporations whose fiduciary obligation is to their shareholders, not the public. Subordinating the profit motive in AI deployment doesn’t require pretending these corporations don’t exist or that public institutions can

replicate their capabilities overnight. **It means building public AI infrastructure** — publicly funded compute, open-source models, government AI laboratories staffed at competitive salaries, and procurement frameworks that require public-interest governance as a condition of any contract involving AI systems that affect democratic processes, public safety, or essential services. It means moving in the opposite direction of privatizing government functions with independent contractors who own their product. For example, when a municipality does use a private contractor to deploy an AI permitting tool, the contract specifies that the data remains public property, the algorithm is subject to independent audit, the system cannot be modified to serve the vendor's commercial interests, and the municipality retains the right to switch vendors or bring the function in-house without losing its data or its institutional knowledge. The European Union's approach to AI regulation — whatever its specific flaws — embeds the correct structural principle: that AI systems operating in high-risk domains must meet public-interest standards that the developer does not get to define unilaterally. The American approach, which has been to let the industry regulate itself and hope for the best, has produced exactly the same antagonistic outcomes that approach always produces.

The second problem is institutional durability. Every AI system deployed for progressive governance purposes can be defunded, decommissioned, or repurposed by a subsequent administration with different priorities. An AI watchdog over fossil fuel emissions is effective only as long as someone keeps it running. An AI agent flagging neoliberal drift in policy is useful only as long as the institution it reports to cares about the finding. The solution to this challenge is not technological, it is constitutional and statutory: embedding AI oversight functions in independent agencies with statutory mandates, confirmed leadership, and funding streams that cannot be zeroed out by executive order — the same institutional architecture that protects the Federal Reserve's independence, however imperfectly, from the political pressures of the moment. AI governance cannot depend solely on the goodwill of whoever holds executive power at a given time.

Lastly, the people currently performing the work that AI will partially automate — permit reviewers, regulatory analysts, financial compliance officers, healthcare billing administrators — are not obstacles to be optimized away. They are valued workers, and a progressive agenda that deploys AI to eliminate their jobs while offering nothing in return is not progressive. It is Silicon Valley's vision wearing a different hat. Therefore, every AI deployment in the public sector must include a transition plan for affected workers: retraining, reassignment, early retirement with full benefits where appropriate, and a guarantee that the efficiency gains AI produces are used to expand the capacity and quality of public services rather than to justify further austerity cuts to the public workforce. The goal here is not fewer public servants, but public servants freed from mechanical drudgery to do work that requires human judgment, human empathy, and human accountability — work that, in keeping with this agenda’s most cherished values, is the most important work a democratic society asks anyone to do.

E. A Note on Transition Mechanisms

This agenda describes destinations. It does not yet provide a fully developed theory of how to get there, and that gap must be acknowledged rather than papered over with aspirational language. The Right’s fifty-year project succeeded in part because it had a pragmatic theory of institutional change at every level: which positions to capture first, how to sequence judicial appointments against legislative strategy, how to build state-level power before attempting federal transformation, how to use each incremental victory to create the conditions for the next. A progressive counter-project requires the same operational specificity.

The proposals in this agenda will encounter predictable resistance at every stage, from regulatory capture during transition periods, to legal challenges from entrenched interests, to capital flight in response to tax reform, to institutional inertia within the Democratic Party itself, along with the constant pressure of electoral cycles that reward short-term positioning over long-term structural change. A companion document developing detailed transition mechanisms — sequencing each reform in relation to the others, identifying which state and local pilots should precede which federal initiatives, specifying how existing institutions can be adapted and repurposed, and mapping the political prerequisites for each phase — is an essential next step. Without that operational architecture, even the most comprehensive vision remains a wish list. The ambition of this agenda demands an equal level of discipline in its execution. That said, the next section on fiscal architecture options can begin a discussion around implementation phasing and the economics of transition…but again, it is only a beginning.

Reversing the Right's dogged efforts in its "great deception" will require comparable commitment and patience from a progressive coalition. *But we have creativity, evidence, truth, inclusion, and compassion on our side.*

PART XIII: FISCAL ARCHITECTURE — OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

Every serious political agenda must eventually answer the question it would prefer to defer: how do you pay for it? The progressive movement has historically been weakest here; its proposals don't lack economic merit, but it has allowed opponents to frame every investment in human well-being as an expense, every public good as a cost instead of the infrastructure on which private prosperity depends. The Right understood decades ago that framing is fiscal policy. By relentlessly characterizing public investment as "spending" and tax cuts as "relief," they constructed a rhetorical architecture in which government action is inherently parasitic and market outcomes are inherently legitimate — regardless of the evidence. This section does not accept that frame. It proposes instead a fiscal architecture organized around what the evidence actually demonstrates: that many of the proposals in this agenda are not costs at all but restructurings of existing expenditure, that others are investments whose returns are well-documented but temporally displaced, and that even those which represent genuine net expenditures are better understood as the price of avoiding catastrophic costs that the current trajectory guarantees.

What follows are options for consideration — not quite a scored legislative package, but a framework for understanding how the proposals in this agenda interact fiscally, which ones can proceed immediately, which require phased revenue pairing, and which demand a more expansive accounting of costs and benefits than conventional budget scoring provides. The categories are not rigid; many proposals cross boundaries. But the discipline of categorization forces a kind of honesty that the progressive movement has too often avoided: the honest admission that some things cost money, paired with the honest insistence that not doing them costs more.

A. The Peace Dividend: Military Spending Reallocation as Fiscal Foundation

Before examining the revenue mechanisms and expenditure pairings that follow, this fiscal architecture must name the single largest pool of misallocated federal spending in the United States: the military budget. This agenda has proposed, in Part IX, a significant reduction in military expenditures, the closure of the majority of roughly 750 overseas bases, and an end to the permanent war footing that has persisted since 2001. What has not yet been made explicit is the fiscal consequence of that commitment: the military budget can't be treated as a line item. It is the single largest category of federal discretionary spending, and its reallocation is the most substantial funding mechanism available for the domestic transformation this document describes — dwarfing any individual tax reform or revenue pairing proposed below.

The numbers are not subtle. The FY2026 defense topline — combining discretionary appropriations, mandatory spending through reconciliation, and Department of Energy nuclear weapons programs — approaches one trillion dollars annually. The Administration's own request described a total of $961.6 billion, and Congress approved $838.7 billion in discretionary defense funding alone before mandatory additions. The United States spends more on its military than the next ten countries combined. The Pentagon has never passed a comprehensive audit; its most recent attempt, in 2023, failed for the sixth consecutive year, with the department unable to account for more than half of its $3.8 trillion in assets. The Government Accountability Office maintains a list of high-risk programs within the Department of Defense that consistently waste tens of billions of dollars annually through cost overruns, schedule delays, and procurement failures. The F-35 program alone — the most expensive weapon system in human history — has a lifetime cost estimated at $1.7 trillion, is years behind schedule, and still cannot reliably perform many of its intended missions.

This isn't an argument for unilateral disarmament or strategic naivety. The United States faces genuine security challenges — the ongoing war in Ukraine, the active conflict with Iran that has now closed the Strait of Hormuz and triggered the largest oil supply disruption in history, rising tensions in the Taiwan Strait, the India-Pakistan nuclear standoff that produced a four-day aerial war between nuclear-armed states in May 2025, and the proliferation of advanced military technologies to state and non-state actors. A credible defense is a legitimate function of government, and this agenda does not pretend otherwise. But credible defense and a trillion-dollar budget are not the same thing. The current budget reflects not a sober assessment of security requirements but the accumulated political power of the defense industry — what Eisenhower, a five-star general and Republican president, warned in 1961 had become a "military-industrial complex" whose "total influence — economic, political, even spiritual — is felt in every city, every State house, every office of the Federal government." That influence has only intensified in the six decades since.

A responsible drawdown — phased over a decade, guided by genuine strategic assessment rather than contractor lobbying, and accompanied by the just transition mechanisms this agenda applies to every other sector — could realistically reduce annual military expenditures by $300 to $400 billion without compromising the defense capabilities the United States actually needs. Multiple credible analyses — from the Congressional Budget Office, the Stimson Center, the Project on Government Oversight, the Cato Institute's defense policy program, and the Poor People's Campaign — have identified reductions in this range through a combination of base closures, force structure rationalization, procurement reform, elimination of redundant weapons systems, and the termination of programs designed to fight wars the United States should not be fighting. The savings would come not from cutting troop pay or veterans' benefits — which this agenda would increase — but from eliminating the institutional bloat, contractor profit extraction, and strategic overreach that inflate the budget beyond any defensible requirement.

Three to four hundred billion dollars a year is a transformative sum. To place it in context: it approaches what the federal government spends annually on all non-defense discretionary programs combined — education, transportation, housing, science, environmental protection, diplomacy, and public health. A reallocation of this magnitude would, over a decade, constitute the largest peacetime fiscal restructuring in American history. And it would fund the central commitments of this agenda without requiring a single dollar of new taxation beyond the tax reforms already proposed in the sections that follow.

The first and most urgent pairing is with the national debt. The United States currently carries more than $36 trillion in federal debt, with annual interest payments now exceeding $1 trillion — more than the country spends on defense. This is the fiscal trap that both parties have constructed and neither will name honestly: decades of tax cuts for the wealthy and corporations, combined with military spending that exceeds rational requirements, have produced a structural deficit that constrains every other fiscal commitment. Dedicating a substantial portion of military savings — perhaps $100 to $150 billion annually — to deficit reduction would begin to reverse this trajectory while simultaneously demonstrating the fiscal discipline that deficit hawks demand but never apply to the Pentagon. The progressive movement should not cede fiscal responsibility to the Right. It should claim it — by identifying the actual sources of fiscal irresponsibility, which are not Social Security, not Medicare, not food assistance, but the combination of regressive tax policy and unconstrained military expenditure that both parties have protected for decades.

The remaining $150 to $250 billion in annual savings — phased in over a decade as drawdown proceeds — would be allocated across the domestic priorities this agenda identifies as urgent:

Universal healthcare transition. The shift to a single-payer system described in Part IV requires substantial upfront public investment even as it reduces total national health expenditure. Military reallocation provides the bridge funding that makes the transition politically and fiscally viable without the austerity the Right would impose as its price.

Infrastructure and climate. The Green New Deal framework in Part VIII — renewable energy, grid modernization, building electrification, public transit, and just transition for fossil fuel communities — requires public capital at a scale that current discretionary budgets cannot accommodate. A portion of military savings dedicated to energy independence also serves a genuine national security function: a nation that generates its own energy from renewable sources is strategically less vulnerable than one dependent on petrostate imports and the military commitments they entail. The current Iran war — which has driven Brent crude up more than fifty percent in five weeks and triggered the largest oil shock in history through the closure of the Strait of Hormuz — is a real-time demonstration of the strategic vulnerability that fossil fuel dependence creates. Every dollar redirected from projecting military force to protect oil supply lines and invested instead in domestic renewable energy infrastructure is a dollar that simultaneously reduces emissions, creates domestic jobs, and eliminates the strategic rationale for the military commitments the drawdown is designed to end.

Education and human capital. Universal pre-K, full Title I funding, free public college, student debt cancellation, and professional wages for teachers — the education commitments in Part VI — are investments in the productive capacity of the population, which is itself the most durable form of national security. No nation has ever defended itself successfully over the long term with an undereducated, indebted, and economically precarious population.

Housing and community development. The housing crisis described in Part IV requires massive public investment in construction, land trusts, and social housing. Military base closures themselves create opportunities for conversion to community use — housing, education, renewable energy installations, and public amenities — as demonstrated by successful conversions at the Presidio in San Francisco, Fort Monroe in Virginia, and dozens of other former military installations through the Base Realignment and Closure process.

Democratic infrastructure. The citizens' assemblies, public media trust, national service corps, and civic renewal programs described in Parts V and VI require funding that is modest by military standards but transformative by civilian ones. The entire annual budget of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting before its defunding was $535 million — less than the cost of a single F-35 squadron. The proposed National Service Corps could be funded for a fraction of what the military spends annually on recruitment advertising alone.

Fundamental science and research. The recommitment to basic scientific research described in Part VI — doubling the budgets of the NSF, NIH, DOE Office of Science, and NASA's Science Mission Directorate — is among the highest-return investments available to the federal government, with the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas estimating returns of one hundred forty to two hundred ten percent on nondefense R&D spending. This allocation also answers the most sophisticated defense of the military budget: the argument that Pentagon spending has produced transformative civilian technologies — the internet, GPS, jet engines, radar, microwave ovens, semiconductor fabrication, and mRNA vaccine platform research, among others. The argument is factually accurate and strategically misleading. These innovations emerged not because the military is an efficient vehicle for scientific research but because the military budget was, for decades, the only politically viable mechanism through which the United States funded fundamental research at scale. The breakthroughs came from the research, not from the

weapons programs that housed it. DARPA's creation of ARPANET did not require the Vietnam War; it required funding for computer scientists. The GPS satellite constellation did not require the invasion of Iraq; it required investment in atomic clocks and orbital mechanics. The lesson of military R&D spillover isn't that the Pentagon should remain the nation's largest science funder by default. It is that fundamental research produces extraordinary returns when funded at scale — and that a dedicated civilian research infrastructure, freed from the distortions of weapons procurement timelines and defense contractor profit incentives, would produce those returns more efficiently, more equitably, and without the requirement that every scientific question be filtered through a military application before it receives public support. Redirecting a portion of military savings to the civilian research agencies whose budgets the current administration has gutted isn't a trade-off between security and knowledge. It's the recognition that knowledge *is* security — and that the nation's scientific enterprise, not its arsenal, is the foundation on which every other form of security ultimately depends.

The political objection is obvious and must be addressed directly: military spending supports millions of jobs, and the defense industry's workforce is disproportionately composed of the working-class Americans this agenda claims to champion. A drawdown that destroys those livelihoods while promising future benefits would be both morally indefensible and politically suicidal. This is why the just transition framework is not optional — it is the precondition for the entire reallocation. Every dollar redirected from military to civilian purposes must be accompanied by concrete, funded transition programs for the workers and communities that currently depend on defense spending: guaranteed employment in the infrastructure, energy, and manufacturing sectors that military savings would fund; portable pensions and healthcare during transition; retraining programs designed with input from the workers themselves rather than imposed by consultants; and priority hiring for defense-displaced workers in federally funded projects. The goal isn't to sacrifice the military workforce on the altar of fiscal reform but to redirect their skills and labor toward purposes that build rather than destroy — an argument that many veterans and defense workers find more persuasive than either party expects.

The deeper argument is structural. A nation that devotes a trillion dollars a year to military expenditure while its bridges collapse, its schools decay, its healthcare system bankrupts families, and its citizens cannot afford housing has not made a rational security choice. It has made an ideological one — the choice to define security as the capacity to project violence abroad rather than the capacity to sustain a just and functional society at home. The fiscal architecture of this agenda proposes to reverse that choice: to define security as the wellbeing of the population, to fund that wellbeing with resources currently consumed by strategic overreach and contractor profit, and to maintain the military capacity actually necessary for genuine defense while eliminating the bloat that serves no purpose except the enrichment of the defense industry and the perpetuation of its political power.

This is the peace dividend that the end of the Cold War promised and that thirty-five years of continuous warfare and expanding military budgets have prevented the American people from receiving. It is time to collect.

B. Revenue-Neutral Structural Reforms: What Can Be Done Now

Several proposals in this agenda require no new government expenditure at all. They are structural reforms that redistribute existing economic flows rather than creating new fiscal obligations. Their cost is political, not budgetary — which is to say, the obstacle to their implementation isn't that the money doesn't exist, but that the people who currently receive it will resist its redirection.

The Worker Ownership Transition (Stages 1–3). The first three stages of the graduated transition to worker ownership — mandatory profit-sharing, equity allocation, and board representation — involve no public expenditure. They are regulatory mandates that redirect existing corporate revenue flows from shareholder extraction to worker compensation and governance participation. The costs are borne by enterprises, but they are not costs in the conventional sense; they are redistributions of value that the enterprises are already generating. The productivity-compensation divergence documented elsewhere in this agenda represents approximately sixty percent of productivity gains redirected from labor to capital since 1973. The first three stages of the cooperative transition are designed to reverse a portion of that redirection. The fiscal impact on government is neutral to positive: higher worker compensation means a broader tax base, reduced reliance on public assistance programs, and increased consumer spending that drives economic growth. The Mondragon Corporation has operated under cooperative ownership structures for nearly seven decades with wage ratios capped at six-to-one, in an economy that competes globally — demonstrating that this model does not require subsidy, only permission.

Pay Transparency and Equal Pay Enforcement. Federal pay transparency requirements, mandatory auditing, and penalties for demonstrated wage discrimination are regulatory reforms whose costs fall on the firms that are currently profiting from discriminatory pay practices. The enforcement infrastructure requires modest public investment — additional staff at the EEOC and the Department of Labor — but the revenue from penalties and the broadened tax base from equalized wages would more than offset those costs within the first years of implementation. The gender wage gap currently costs women an estimated aggregate of hundreds of billions of dollars per year in lost earnings — earnings that, if realized, would generate substantial additional tax revenue without any increase in tax rates.

Sectoral Bargaining and Labor Law Reform. Repealing Taft-Hartley, implementing card-check unionization, and adopting sectoral bargaining are legislative changes with zero direct budgetary cost. Their economic effect — higher wages negotiated through collective bargaining — expands the tax base and reduces public assistance expenditures. The International Monetary Fund has documented that countries with sectoral bargaining systems tend to have lower income inequality, higher labor force participation, and more stable economic growth than those with enterprise-level bargaining. The fiscal impact of these reforms is a structural improvement in the revenue base that makes subsequent investments more sustainable.

Corporate Charter Accountability and White-Collar Enforcement. Increased funding for white-collar crime prosecution, mandatory sentencing for corporate fraud resulting in death or injury, full asset forfeiture for convicted corporate criminals, and corporate charter revocation for repeat offenders — these are enforcement measures whose costs are modest relative to their returns. The Department of Justice's own data consistently show that white-collar crime prosecution generates revenue through fines, penalties, and asset recovery that exceeds enforcement costs by substantial multiples. The current under-prosecution of corporate crime is a subsidy to criminal conduct — one that the public pays for in environmental remediation, healthcare costs, and the social consequences of unpunished fraud.

C. Paired Revenue and Expenditure: Five-Year Phase-In Programs

A second category of proposals involves genuine new government expenditure, but expenditure that can be explicitly paired with dedicated revenue sources and phased in over five years so that the revenue mechanisms are operational before the expenditure reaches full scale. The principle is straightforward: build the revenue pipeline first, then open the spending valve gradually, so that at no point does the program's cost outrun its funding.

Universal Childcare Paired with Wealth Tax Revenue. Universal childcare from infancy through pre-kindergarten is estimated to cost between $150 billion and $200 billion per year at full scale, depending on program design and provider compensation. The Penn Wharton Budget Model estimated universal pre-K alone at approximately $351 billion over ten years. A wealth tax on net worth above $50 million at a rate of one percent — the most conservative of the proposals analyzed by the Tax Policy Center — would raise an estimated $1.9 trillion over ten years, or roughly $190 billion per year. A two-tier wealth tax adding a second bracket above $100 million raises the ten-year estimate to $2.9 trillion. Even at the conservative end, a single-tier wealth tax generates revenue sufficient to fund universal childcare with capacity remaining for other programs. The phase-in sequence: implement the wealth tax in year one with a two-year ramp-up period for compliance and enforcement infrastructure; begin childcare expansion in year two with pilot programs in highest-need communities; reach full-scale implementation by year five, by which time three years of wealth tax revenue have established both the funding stream and the administrative precedent.

Social Security Expansion Paired with Cap Removal. Removing the Social Security income cap — so that every dollar of earned income is subject to the payroll tax, not merely the first $168,600 — would by itself extend the program's solvency for decades and generate substantial additional revenue. Applying the payroll tax to capital gains income would further expand the funding base. These revenue measures can be implemented immediately, with the additional revenue directed first to restoring the program's long-term solvency and then to funding the guaranteed minimum income floor and expanded benefits proposed elsewhere in this agenda. The pairing is natural: the same mechanism that rescues Social Security from manufactured insolvency also funds its expansion, and the cost is borne entirely by earners above the current cap — a population for whom the additional payroll tax represents a small fraction of income.

Housing Guarantee Paired with Financial Transaction Tax. A financial transaction tax of 0.1 percent on stock, bond, and derivative trades — a rate far below the levels that prevailed in the United States before 1966 and currently applied in the United Kingdom, France, and Italy — is estimated to generate between $60 billion and $80 billion per year. Universal housing vouchers for all eligible low-income renters would require roughly $62 billion per year in additional federal spending beyond current Section 8 allocations, according to the Urban Institute. The pairing is nearly exact. Phase-in: implement the transaction tax in year one; expand voucher eligibility to youth aging out of foster care and extremely low-income veterans in year two; extend to all extremely low-income households by year four; reach full universality by year five. The existing public housing capital backlog of $169 billion, identified in the 2024 capital needs assessment, can be addressed through a dedicated ten-year capital appropriation funded by the surplus from the transaction tax above voucher costs, supplemented by bond issuance backed by that revenue stream.

Immigration Court Funding Paired with Employer Sanctions Revenue. The immigration court backlog — currently exceeding three million cases with average wait times measured in years — is a system designed to deny due process through administrative starvation. Massive investment in judges, courtrooms, and legal representation could be funded through a dedicated enforcement mechanism: substantially increased fines and penalties on employers who knowingly hire undocumented workers at below-market wages. This approach pairs a spending increase with a revenue source that also addresses the economic incentive structure driving unauthorized employment, creating a reinforcing dynamic in which enforcement funding and labor market reform advance simultaneously.

D. Negative Externality Offsets: Investments That Reduce Greater Costs

The most intellectually dishonest feature of conventional budget scoring is its treatment of negative externalities — the costs imposed on society by the absence of public action. When a factory pollutes a river and the downstream community pays for water treatment, the factory's profits appear as private sector productivity and the community's costs appear as public expenditure. The accounting framework that produces this result is a subsidy to the polluter, paid for by the public, and rendered invisible by the convention of counting private gains and public losses on separate ledgers. Several proposals in this agenda are investments whose returns take the form of reduced negative externalities — costs that are already being borne, but borne by the wrong people, through the wrong mechanisms, at far greater aggregate expense than the proposed intervention.

Climate Investment and Avoided Catastrophic Costs. The Office of Management and Budget has projected that unabated climate change could reduce U.S. GDP by as much as ten percent by the end of the century, translating to an annual federal revenue loss of roughly $2 trillion in current dollars. Climate-related extreme weather events already cause approximately $120 billion per year in damages domestically. A recent NBER working paper by economists Bilal and Känzig estimates that a permanent one-degree Celsius increase in global temperature could reduce world GDP per capita by more than twenty percent in the long run — a figure several times larger than previous estimates, suggesting that the cost of inaction has been systematically underestimated. The World Resources Institute analyzed 320 adaptation and resilience projects and found that every dollar invested in climate adaptation generates more than $10.50 in benefits over ten years, including avoided losses, induced economic development, and social and environmental co-benefits. The Global Commission on the Economy and Climate concluded that the transition to a low-carbon economy could yield a direct economic windfall of $26 trillion and create over 65 million new jobs by 2030 compared to business-as-usual.

Against this backdrop, a clean energy investment of $2.5 to $5.4 trillion over ten years — the range of serious estimates for a comprehensive energy transition — is not an expenditure. It is insurance, and the premium is a fraction of the projected losses it prevents. The fiscal framing should be reversed: the cost of the clean energy transition is the cost of a policy. The cost of not making the clean energy transition is the cost of a catastrophe. The question isn't whether we can afford the investment, but whether we can survive the alternative.

Housing First and the Cost of Homelessness. The economics of homelessness are among the most thoroughly documented cases of negative externality misallocation in domestic policy. A homeless individual costs the public system between $30,000 and $50,000 per year in emergency services — emergency room visits, police contacts, jail stays, shelter provision, and crisis mental health interventions. Housing First programs, which provide permanent housing with voluntary supportive services, consistently reduce these costs. The CDC's Community Preventive Services Task Force found that every dollar invested in Housing First generates $1.44 in cost savings. A controlled study in Seattle found cost savings of fifty-three percent — nearly $2,500 per person per month — in the first six months of a Housing First program. Milwaukee County's Housing First initiative saved taxpayers approximately $3.5 million per year, including $2.1 million in Medicare costs, $715,000 in mental health costs, and $600,000 in legal costs, while reducing chronic homelessness by fifty-nine percent. The National Alliance to End Homelessness estimates that providing Housing First to all sheltered households would require approximately $9.6 billion in additional annual spending — a figure that sounds large until it is compared to the tens of billions currently spent on the emergency services that Housing First demonstrably reduces. It is a reallocation from expensive, ineffective crisis response to less expensive, effective intervention.

Preventive Healthcare and the Inversion of Medical Economics. The United States spends more per capita on healthcare than any comparable nation and achieves worse outcomes by nearly every public health metric. It is the predictable result of a system that incentivizes treatment over prevention, acute intervention over chronic management, and pharmaceutical profit over population health. The structural incentives of private insurance — in which patients are transiently enrolled and insurers maximize profit by minimizing short-term costs — systematically discourage investment in prevention, even when that investment would reduce total system costs over time. A single-payer system would invert this incentive by making the payer responsible for healthcare costs across the patient's entire lifespan, creating a direct fiscal interest in prevention.

The Trust for America's Health found that an investment of $10 per person per year in community-based prevention programs — physical activity, nutrition, smoking cessation — could save $16 billion annually within five years, a return of $5.60 for every dollar invested. PricewaterhouseCoopers estimated that addressing modifiable risk factors could save nearly $500 billion per year nationally. Preventable causes of death account for nearly forty percent of annual mortality in the United States. Heart disease and stroke alone cost the healthcare system $245 billion per year and produce $168 billion in lost productivity. Diabetes costs $413 billion annually in combined healthcare expenses and productivity losses. These are not hypothetical savings — they are documented costs of a system that treats the consequences of preventable illness rather than preventing it.

The caveat is important and must be stated honestly: the New England Journal of Medicine and the Committee for Responsible Federal Budget have both noted that not all preventive care saves money in conventional budget terms. Some screening programs cost more than they save when only direct medical expenditures are counted, because screening catches conditions in people who would never have become symptomatic, and because healthier people live longer and eventually incur other healthcare costs. But this accounting treats a longer, healthier life as a fiscal liability rather than a human achievement — an analytical framework so perverse that it deserves to be named rather than accepted. A fiscal architecture that counts years of healthy life as costs has confused its ledger with its purpose.

Evidence-based social work reforms. Every domain in which social workers intervene — child welfare, elder protection, mental health crisis response, hospital discharge planning, substance abuse treatment, criminal justice diversion, family preservation — is a domain in which the absence of competent, timely, adequately resourced intervention generates costs that dwarf the cost of the intervention itself. The numbers are stark. The full system cost of placing a single child in foster care — including Title IV-E administration, court involvement, caseworker overhead, Medicaid-funded behavioral health services, and placement instability — ranges from $41,000 to $198,000 per child per year, while the family preservation services, emergency rent assistance, and in-home support that could have prevented that removal typically cost $3,000 to $10,000.[83] Hospital readmissions — overwhelmingly concentrated among Medicare and Medicaid patients, and disproportionately triggered by inadequate discharge planning — cost the federal government over $26 billion annually, with an average readmission cost exceeding $15,000 per episode; competent social work follow-up at discharge is a fraction of that figure.[84] A person in mental health crisis who encounters a police officer instead of a crisis social worker is more likely to be arrested, jailed, and released without treatment — entering a carceral system that costs taxpayers a median of $61,000 per year at the state level and over $127,000 in states like California, while generating no therapeutic outcome whatsoever and leaving the next crisis as inevitable.[85] The logic is identical to the logic that justifies climate investment, Housing First, and preventive healthcare: the question here isn't whether society will pay, but whether it pays a modest amount now through competent professional intervention, or a vastly larger amount later through

emergency rooms, courts, prisons, foster systems, and homeless services that function as the most expensive and least effective social work program in the world. The social work reform proposed in Part V isn't just a moral commitment to the profession and the populations it serves — it is a fiscal investment whose returns, measured in reduced downstream costs across every system this agenda proposes to reform, exceed its costs by multiples that the existing evidence base, constrained as it is by measuring outcomes in a chronically under-resourced system, *almost certainly understates*.

E. Time-Displaced Returns: Public Goods That Grow GDP

Some investments produce returns that are real, documented, and substantial — but temporally displaced. Their benefits materialize over decades rather than budget cycles, which means that conventional ten-year scoring systematically undervalues them. These are the public goods whose returns are masked by time — not because the returns are speculative, but because the accounting window is too narrow to capture them.

Education, Moral Development, and Social-Emotional Learning. The Durlak et al. meta-analysis of 213 school-based social-emotional learning programs involving over 270,000 students found significant improvements across social-emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes, with an eleven-percentile-point academic achievement gain. Three independent replications confirmed these findings with positive effects persisting up to eighteen years. The economic returns of quality education investment are among the most consistently documented in economics: higher lifetime earnings, broader tax base, reduced incarceration, reduced public assistance dependence, and increased civic participation. Early childhood education specifically produces returns estimated between $4 and $9 for every dollar invested, with the highest returns concentrated among disadvantaged populations. These returns do not appear in a five-year budget window. They appear over a generation. A fiscal architecture that refuses to invest in education because the returns extend beyond the scoring period is a fiscal architecture that has chosen to discount the future at an infinite rate — a rate that no serious economist would defend in any other context.

National Service Corps and Community Infrastructure. A National Service Corps — absorbing workers displaced by automation, providing meaningful public-service employment in infrastructure, conservation, eldercare, education support, and community development — is a genuine expenditure whose returns are distributed across multiple domains and time horizons. The direct fiscal return is the value of public goods produced: rebuilt infrastructure, restored ecosystems, expanded eldercare capacity, and community institutions strengthened. The indirect returns include reduced unemployment insurance expenditure, reduced social costs of idleness and despair, workforce skill development, and the civic integration benefits documented in studies of previous national service programs. The Civilian Conservation Corps of the New Deal era planted three billion trees, built eight hundred parks, and constructed roads, bridges, and public facilities across the country — infrastructure still in use nearly a century later. The fiscal return of that program has never been seriously calculated because the accounting frameworks available at the time, and since, do not know how to value a park that is still serving the public eighty-seven years after its construction.

The Social Contribution Recognition System. The Social Contribution Recognition System — in which credits earned through caregiving, community service, civic participation, mentorship, and ecological stewardship convert to retirement benefits — is funded by progressive taxation and represents a modest ongoing expenditure. Its fiscal return is indirect but substantial: by creating incentives for prosocial labor that the market does not compensate, it builds the social infrastructure — neighborhood stability, intergenerational connection, civic engagement, mutual aid networks — that reduces demand

for public crisis services. Communities with strong social cohesion have lower crime rates, better health outcomes, and higher economic resilience. These benefits do not appear as line items in a federal budget. They appear as the absence of costs that would otherwise be incurred — a category of return that conventional fiscal analysis is structurally unable to recognize.

F. The Expanded Ledger: Negative Externalities as Fiscal Architecture

The categories above treat negative externalities as a feature of specific programs. But the deeper argument is structural: the United States does not have a fiscal crisis. It has an accounting crisis. The conventional federal budget counts government expenditures and government revenues and calls the difference the deficit. What it does not count is the ocean of costs that are generated by the absence of public action and borne by individuals, families, communities, and future generations — costs that are no less real for being excluded from the ledger.

When a family pays $15,000 per year for childcare that a public system would provide for a fraction of that cost, the family's expenditure appears nowhere in the federal budget — but it constrains their economic participation, reduces their consumption, and limits their children's opportunities in ways that depress long-term GDP. When an uninsured worker avoids preventive care and eventually presents at an emergency room with a condition that could have been managed for a tenth of the cost, the emergency room visit appears in healthcare spending statistics but the years of lost productivity and preventable suffering do not. When a community downstream of an industrial polluter pays for water treatment that the polluter should have funded, the treatment cost appears as a municipal expense and the pollution appears as private sector output. When climate change intensifies a hurricane and the federal government spends billions on disaster relief, the relief spending appears in the budget but the climate inaction that caused it does not.

An expanded fiscal ledger would account for these costs by incorporating three categories that conventional scoring excludes:

Displaced private costs: expenditures currently borne by individuals and families that public investment would reduce or eliminate. Childcare, healthcare out-of-pocket costs, and predatory lending losses fall in this category. When universal childcare saves a working family $10,000 per year, that family's increased disposable income drives consumer spending, generates sales and income tax revenue, and reduces demand for public assistance — none of which appears in the CBO score of the childcare program.

Avoided crisis costs: public expenditures on crisis response that preventive investment would reduce. Housing First reduces emergency service costs. Preventive healthcare reduces emergency room utilization. Climate investment reduces disaster relief spending. Drug treatment and mental health services reduce incarceration costs. Each of these represents a dollar spent on prevention that saves multiple dollars on crisis response — but because the prevention spending and the crisis spending are scored in different programs, often by different agencies, across different budget cycles, the offset is invisible to the scoring process.

Unrealized productivity gains: the economic output lost when people are prevented from participating fully in the economy by barriers that public investment would remove. The gender wage gap costs the economy hundreds of billions per year in unrealized output. Disability exclusion from the workforce costs tens of billions. The failure to provide childcare keeps millions of parents — disproportionately women — out of the labor force or in reduced-hours employment. The failure to invest in education, job training, and community infrastructure in disadvantaged communities produces multi-generational

poverty that depresses regional GDP. None of these losses appears in the federal budget. All of them appear in the economy.

An honest fiscal architecture for this agenda would present two balance sheets side by side: the conventional budget score, which will show a net cost for most of these proposals in the standard ten-year window, and the expanded ledger, which would account for displaced private costs, avoided crisis costs, and unrealized productivity gains. The conventional score will be used by opponents to argue that the agenda is unaffordable. The expanded ledger will demonstrate that the status quo is unaffordable — that the costs of inaction are already being paid, in full, by the people least equipped to bear them, through mechanisms designed to make those costs invisible to the people making fiscal policy.

A Note on Sequencing and Political Reality

Nothing in the preceding analysis should be mistaken for a claim that implementation will be easy or that the fiscal mathematics are free of genuine uncertainty. Wealth tax revenue estimates vary by trillions of dollars depending on assumptions about avoidance, capital flight, and enforcement capacity. The Tax Policy Center estimates avoidance rates ranging from the mid-teens to the mid-forties as a percentage reduction in the tax base — a range so wide that it spans the difference between comfortable surplus and significant shortfall. France's experience with a wealth tax produced capital flight that some analysts argue cost more in lost revenue than the tax itself generated. The document's own section on international coordination acknowledges this constraint and proposes both multilateral agreements and unilateral enforcement mechanisms to address it, but neither is guaranteed to work, and the fiscal architecture must be designed to function even under adverse assumptions.

The sequencing proposed above — military reallocation and revenue-neutral structural reforms first, paired revenue-expenditure programs second, externality-offset investments third, time-displaced public goods fourth — is designed with this uncertainty in mind. Military savings are the most fiscally reliable source in this architecture: they do not depend on behavioral assumptions about avoidance or capital flight, they do not require international coordination, and they produce savings on a predictable schedule determined by the drawdown timeline. They are the fiscal bedrock on which the more uncertain revenue mechanisms can be layered. The first category of structural reforms requires no new revenue and builds the political constituency for the categories that follow. The second category establishes the principle of dedicated funding paired with phased implementation, creating institutional precedents that survive political transitions. The third category reframes the fiscal debate by making the costs of inaction visible, shifting the burden of proof from those proposing action to those defending the status quo. The fourth category invests in returns that outlast any budget cycle and any political administration — the recognition that some obligations extend beyond the horizon of electoral politics because the people they serve have not yet been born.

The Right's fifty-year fiscal project didn't succeed because its mathematics were sound — the Laffer Curve has been empirically discredited, supply-side tax cuts have repeatedly failed to generate the revenue growth their proponents promised, and the national debt has grown most dramatically under the administrations that most aggressively cut taxes on the wealthy. Instead, it succeeded because it offered simple, repeatable framing: government spending is waste, tax cuts are freedom, and the market will provide. The progressive response can't be equally simple, because the truth is not simple. But its narrative can be equally disciplined: every proposal paired with its funding mechanism, every cost measured against the cost of doing nothing, every investment evaluated not by whether it fits within an arbitrary budget window but by whether the society it builds is one in which the next generation inherits less wreckage than this one.

G. A Caveat That Must Be Stated

The fiscal architecture above addresses the governmental side of the ledger — how public expenditure is funded, sequenced, and justified against the costs of inaction. But this agenda demands far more than governmental action. Throughout this document, the proposals call for progressive think tanks funded at the scale of Heritage and Cato, a leadership pipeline to counter the Federalist Society's judicial capture, state-level policy organizations across all fifty states, community land trusts, worker cooperative incubators, mutual aid networks, citizens' assemblies convened at the local level, media accountability infrastructure, civic education programs, and the sustained organizational capacity to coordinate all of it across decades. These are not government programs. They are the parallel institutional ecosystem described in Part XI — and they carry costs that no line item in any federal budget will cover.

This is the caveat that must be stated clearly: this agenda's vision of a participatory, prosocial democracy does not merely propose new policies. It proposes a fundamentally different relationship between citizens and their society — one that asks people to show up, contribute, deliberate, organize, and fund institutions that the current political economy neither incentivizes nor rewards. The Bill of Rights and Responsibilities in Part I names this expectation explicitly: "Every person has a responsibility to show up — to participate in assemblies, to serve when called, and to invest in civic and cultural life." But naming the responsibility is not the same as making it achievable. A working single parent with two children, holding down a job that barely covers rent, cannot be expected to attend weekly citizens' council meetings, volunteer at a community land trust, and donate to a progressive think tank — no matter how sincerely they share the values this agenda espouses. If the only people who can participate are those with disposable time and money, then the participatory democracy this agenda envisions will reproduce the class stratification it aims to dismantle.

This is less of a hypothetical concern than the most common and legitimate objection to participatory governance models; it must be addressed structurally rather than wished away with appeals to civic virtue. The following mechanisms are proposed as pilot frameworks — experiments to be tested, evaluated, and refined through the same functional intelligence methodology described in Part XIII. Whether these mechanisms, individually or in combination, can resolve the tension between participatory ambition and material constraint is an open empirical question. What is not open is whether the tension can be ignored. It cannot.

The Ostrom Model: Proportional Contribution and Mutual Benefit

Elinor Ostrom's research on common pool resource governance — already foundational to this agenda's design principles — offers an instructive model for how participatory institutions fund themselves without either state subsidy or philanthropic dependency. Ostrom's second design principle, proportional equivalence between benefits and costs, is the key: members of a self-governing community contribute to the maintenance of the common resource in proportion to the benefits they receive from it, and those contributions take forms negotiated collectively rather than imposed from above. The Swiss alpine communities, the Japanese village commons, the Spanish irrigation systems, and the Philippine "zanjeras" that Ostrom studied did not rely on external donors or government grants. They sustained themselves because the people who benefited from the resource also governed it, and the governance costs were distributed according to capacity and use rather than uniform assessment.

Applied to civic infrastructure, this principle suggests that a community citizens' assembly, a cooperative incubator, or a local civic media outlet should be funded primarily by the community it serves — not

through flat membership dues that exclude the poor, but through graduated assessments tied to capacity and proportional to benefit. A worker cooperative that benefits from the incubator's services contributes more than an individual member who participates in assembly deliberations. A local business that benefits from the community's governance stability contributes differently than a retired volunteer. The Ostrom insight is that sustainability comes not from the generosity of outsiders but from the self-interest of participants who recognize that the institution serves them, and who therefore have a rational stake in maintaining it. This is fundamentally different from a donation model, and it is fundamentally different from a tax. It is a commons model — and it is the model most consistent with the cooperative, self-governing ethos this agenda espouses.

AI as a Force Multiplier for Participation and Institutional Capacity

The participation burden this agenda imposes can be substantially reduced — though not eliminated — by the intelligent application of the same AI tools discussed in Parts VI and XI. The reduction operates on two distinct fronts: lowering the time cost of individual civic participation, and dramatically reducing the operational costs of the parallel institutional ecosystem.

On the participation side, AI-enabled deliberation platforms are already demonstrating that meaningful civic engagement does not require synchronous, in-person attendance at multi-hour meetings. Stanford's deliberation.io, the Polis platform developed by the Computational Democracy Project, and similar tools enable asynchronous deliberation in which participants contribute on their own schedule — during a lunch break, after putting children to bed, on a bus. AI can synthesize thousands of individual contributions into coherent policy positions, identify areas of consensus and genuine disagreement, translate across languages, and provide plain-language summaries of complex policy questions so that participants can engage meaningfully without reading a hundred-page report. As mentioned previously, France's Convention Citoyenne used AI to make its climate policy recommendations accessible to the broader public through a conversational interface. Fort Collins, Colorado used AI-enabled analysis to process over four thousand detailed responses on a contested land-use question. These aren't speculative projections; they are operational systems. The working parent who cannot attend a Thursday evening assembly can contribute asynchronously to the same deliberative process from a mobile device, and AI-facilitated synthesis can ensure that their input receives the same analytical weight as that of participants who attended in person.

On the institutional side, AI represents perhaps the single most consequential cost-reduction tool available to the progressive infrastructure project. The Right's think tank ecosystem — Heritage, Cato, AEI, the State Policy Network — operates on budgets exceeding a billion dollars annually in aggregate, employing thousands of researchers, policy analysts, communications specialists, and legislative liaisons. Building a progressive equivalent at dollar-for-dollar parity may not be necessary if AI tools can perform much of the analytical and drafting work that currently requires large staffs. A progressive think tank equipped with AI research tools can produce state-level policy briefs, economic impact analyses, legislative language drafts, amicus briefs, and rapid-response communications at a fraction of the staffing cost that the Heritage Foundation required in 1980 — or even in 2020. This does not eliminate the need for human expertise; it means that a smaller core of senior policy experts, working with AI as a research and drafting partner, can generate output at a scale that previously required an institutional budget orders of magnitude larger. The same principle applies to leadership training organizations, legal advocacy networks, and civic media: AI compresses the cost curve in ways that make the progressive infrastructure project substantially more feasible than it would have been even five years ago.

The caveat within the caveat: AI-facilitated participation and AI-augmented institutions carry their own risks, several of which this agenda addresses elsewhere. Asynchronous digital deliberation can exclude those without reliable internet access or digital literacy. AI synthesis of citizen input can flatten nuance or introduce biases inherited from training data. AI-generated policy briefs can produce confident-sounding analysis that is subtly wrong in ways that a smaller, less-resourced organization may lack the expertise to catch. The principle established in Part XI applies here as well: AI handles the mechanical and analytical load; human judgment retains authority over values, strategy, and final decisions. The technology is a force multiplier, not a substitute for the civic engagement it is designed to support.

Tiered Participation: Matching Engagement to Capacity

Not every form of civic engagement requires the same time commitment, and the expectation that every citizen participate at every level is neither realistic nor necessary. A tiered architecture would distinguish between baseline civic duties — voting, completing brief asynchronous deliberations on referendum questions, responding to community surveys — and deeper engagement such as serving on a sortition-selected citizens' assembly, mentoring through the National Service Corps, or participating in cooperative governance. The baseline tier should be designed to require no more than two to four hours per month and should be accessible through AI-facilitated digital platforms with accommodations for disability, language, and work schedules. The deeper engagement tier would be compensated and structured with rotating terms short enough that no single individual bears the burden indefinitely.

Compensation for deeper-tier participation must be genuine, not the token gesture that jury duty pay represents in most American jurisdictions. The current jury duty model — in which participants receive as little as ten to fifty dollars per day while forgoing regular income — is a poor precedent. It is a cautionary example of how nominally compensated civic service effectively excludes the self-employed, hourly wage workers, parents without childcare, and anyone whose economic survival depends on showing up to work every day. Participants in sortition-selected assemblies and other formal civic bodies should receive compensation at the local living wage rate for all hours of service, with subsidized childcare and transportation provided as standard accommodations. The cost isn't trivial, but is modest relative to the democratic legitimacy it purchases — and it can be funded through the same proportional-contribution mechanisms described above, supplemented where necessary by the progressive taxation infrastructure this agenda has already proposed.

The Social Contribution Recognition System proposed in Part IV already provides a mechanism for crediting civic participation toward earned retirement benefits — extending this to all forms of recognized civic engagement creates a tangible, long-term incentive that does not require participants to have discretionary income in the present. A parent who serves on a community assembly earns credits toward their retirement security. A worker who mentors through the National Service Corps accumulates social contribution credits alongside their wages. The incentive is recognition that civic participation produces public value and should be compensated as such. It's not charity.

Funding the Parallel Ecosystem: Beyond Donor Dependency

The Right's institutional ecosystem was built by strategic, sustained investment from a relatively small number of wealthy donors — the Kochs, the Bradleys, the Olins, the Scaifes — who understood that ideological infrastructure compounds over decades. The progressive movement has its own donor class and a much larger base of small donors, but it has historically directed those resources toward electoral campaigns rather than institutional infrastructure. This is a strategic error that must be corrected — but correcting it by simply replicating the Right's donor-dependency model creates a tension that cannot be

ignored. An infrastructure built to challenge plutocratic power cannot itself depend on the goodwill of plutocrats, even sympathetic ones. Donor priorities shift; donor conditions constrain; and donor dependency breeds the same institutional capture this agenda diagnoses as the central pathology of American governance.

The resolution — or at least the best available approximation of one — lies in a hybrid model that combines initial philanthropic investment with structures designed to achieve operational self-sustainability. The cooperative model itself provides the template. Worker cooperatives generate revenue through economic activity; a percentage of that revenue, negotiated collectively, funds the cooperative's governance and development infrastructure. Community land trusts collect ground rents that fund their operations. Credit unions generate revenue from lending that funds their member services. In each case, the institution sustains itself not through external charity but through the economic activity of its members — precisely the Ostrom principle of proportional contribution by those who benefit.

For the progressive think tank and policy infrastructure, the model would work in two phases. In the first phase, endowed foundations seeded by major philanthropic commitments — what might be called Progressive Anchor Institutions — provide startup capital and initial operating budgets, explicitly structured with sunset provisions that force a transition to self-sustaining revenue within a defined period. In the second phase, revenue is generated through a combination of sources: membership contributions from the cooperative enterprises and community organizations the infrastructure serves, scaled to organizational capacity; fees for policy research, legal analysis, and legislative drafting services provided to progressive legislators and advocacy organizations; revenue from civic media operations; and a small, collectively negotiated percentage of surplus from the cooperative enterprises whose creation the infrastructure facilitated. The AI cost-reduction discussed above makes this transition substantially more achievable: an institution that requires a hundred-million-dollar annual budget to produce policy output at Heritage's scale is far harder to sustain independently than one that achieves comparable output with a ten-million-dollar budget augmented by AI tools.

Employer Civic Leave and Structural Accommodation

Participation in sortition-selected assemblies and other formal civic bodies should be protected by federal civic leave legislation — guaranteeing that workers cannot be terminated, penalized, or docked pay for fulfilling civic service obligations. For enterprises operating under the cooperative ownership structures proposed in Part IV, civic leave would be a governance norm rather than an external mandate, since worker-owners have a direct interest in the democratic institutions that shape the environment in which their enterprise operates. For non-cooperative employers during the transition period, a modest tax credit for documented civic leave accommodation would reduce resistance and establish the norm before mandate. The principle is straightforward: if the society requires civic participation to function, the economy must accommodate it rather than penalize it.

Can These Tensions Be Resolved?

The honest answer is: probably not entirely, and certainly not in advance. The tension between the participatory demands of a self-governing democracy and the material constraints of citizens living in an economy that has systematically stripped them of time, energy, and resources is not a problem with a clean solution. It is instead a condition that must be managed, iteratively, through the same polycentric experimentation that Ostrom documented in successful commons governance worldwide. Some communities will find that AI-facilitated asynchronous deliberation resolves the time burden sufficiently. Others will find that proportional-contribution funding models sustain their local institutions without external support. Still others will discover that the costs exceed what any of these mechanisms can cover, and that some form of ongoing public subsidy — justified under the same negative-externality logic applied elsewhere in this fiscal architecture — is necessary to prevent civic participation from becoming a privilege of the comfortable.

What cannot be accepted is the current default: a political system that demands nothing of its citizens except a vote every two or four years, and then expresses surprise when civic culture atrophies, institutional trust collapses, and demagogues fill the vacuum. The proposals above are experiments, not certainties. But the experiment must be run. The alternative — an agenda that proposes participatory democracy without addressing who participates and at whose expense — isn't an agenda. It's a fantasy. And this document has attempted, however imperfectly, to offer something better than that.

PART XIV: FUNCTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AS A UNIFYING DISCIPLINE

Our aim is to be comprehensive. This agenda proposes structural reforms to democratic governance, a fundamental reordering of the relationship between labor and capital, an ecological transformation of the economy, a cultural strategy for rebuilding the social infrastructure that atomizing consumerism has destroyed, and an implementation sequence designed to make all of this politically achievable. What it has not yet named is the discipline that determines whether this project is coherently effective — whether the relationship between what this movement believes and what it actually does will demonstrate the integrity its proposals demand of everyone else.

That discipline has a name: *functional intelligence*.[37] This is the demonstrated capacity to perceive, clarify, and operationalize one's values in observable action, and then to assess the outcomes of that action honestly enough to correct course when the results diverge from the intentions. It is not intelligence as measured by cognitive tests, analytical prowess, emotional sensitivity, or any single faculty of mind. It is intelligence as expressed in the alignment — or misalignment — between what a person or group claims to value and what the consequences of their actions actually produce. In the most pragmatic and unforgiving sense, it answers a single question: are we doing what we say we believe, and is what we are doing achieving what we intend?

The progressive movement does not lack intelligence in any of its conventional forms. It has analytical brilliance, moral sensitivity, creative imagination, and empirical rigor. What it consistently lacks is this integrative discipline — a sustained, self-aware practice of aligning all of these capacities with a clearly ordered set of priorities, and then measuring the results with the same honesty it demands of its opponents. Policies have been enacted and then left to bureaucracies whose operative tendencies bore little resemblance to the values that produced the legislation. Movements have built extraordinary coalitions around shared ideals, only to discover that no one had done the work of clarifying which ideals took precedence when they inevitably conflicted. Leaders have articulated visions of justice and inclusion while presiding over internal cultures of hierarchy and exclusion. The pattern is so consistent across progressive history that it cannot be attributed to bad luck or bad actors. It is a structural deficit, and *functional intelligence* is one way to address it.

A. Why Values Must Be Clarified First

Functional intelligence cannot operate without a target. Before any strategy can be assessed as effective or ineffective, before any outcome can be measured as aligned or misaligned, the values against which those judgments are made must be articulated with enough clarity that disagreement about them is possible. This sounds obvious, but outside of some narrowly focused efforts in a handful of disciplines, it seems rarely to be accomplished, let alone considered.[38] [39]

One reason this approach may be rare is that most of our operative values are not conscious choices. They are intuitive — embedded conclusions about what matters, forged by experience, conditioning, temperament, and the accumulated weight of every relationship and institution through which we have passed. These intuitive values govern our priorities in-the-moment, usually without our awareness, and they frequently diverge from the ideals we profess. A person may sincerely believe in democratic participation while habitually centralizing decision-making. A movement may declare solidarity with marginalized communities while too often privileging the voices and comfort of its most advantaged members. An institution may enshrine equity in its mission statement while reproducing the very hierarchies it was created to dismantle. In each case, the conscious ideal is real — but the intuitive

value, the one that actually governs behavior when attention lapses or pressure mounts, is often countervailing.

Four qualities determine whether a values system is usable as a guide for action. **Clarity:** can we observe and interpret our operative values — not what we wish we valued, but what our behavior over time reveals that we do? **Emphasis:** which values actually command the greatest share of our attention, energy, and effort? **Hierarchy:** what is the ordering of priority among values — which are foundational and which are instrumental, and which meta-values govern the entire structure? And **consistency:** does that hierarchy hold across contexts — do we demonstrate the same priorities with allies and with opponents, under comfort and under pressure, in public and in private? Where these qualities are absent, functional intelligence has nothing to work with. There is no stable reference against which to measure whether actions are aligned with intentions, because the intentions shift with every change in audience or circumstance.

B. Being Functionally Intelligent About This Agenda

Asserting we want to be functionally intelligent about this agenda is to make a specific commitment: that the proposals in this document will be pursued with disciplined attention to the relationship between the values that animate them and the outcomes they actually produce. This is a feedback loop, not a declaration. It means that the movement measures itself — continuously, empirically, and publicly — against its own stated priorities. When actions produce outcomes that reinforce and advance those priorities, the approach is retained and refined. When they do not — when efforts consistently fail to produce the intended alignment, when unintended consequences undermine the values that motivated the effort, and when the same mistakes recur because feedback is ignored or suppressed — the approach is corrected. Not rationalized. Not blamed on external enemies. *Corrected.*

This requires the movement to do something that political movements almost never do: distinguish between its non-negotiable commitments and its operational strategies, and hold the former constant while subjecting the latter to relentless empirical scrutiny. The proposals in Parts III through X of this document are strategies. They propose the best current judgment about how to operationalize a set of values in a specific historical moment. They should be tested, piloted, assessed, and revised — as the Pilot Principle described earlier demands. What should not be revised on the basis of political convenience are the foundational values those strategies are designed to serve. The distinction between values and strategies is where most movements lose their coherence: either they treat their strategies as sacred and refuse to adapt when evidence shows they aren't working, or they treat their values as negotiable and adapt them to whatever the political market will bear. Functional intelligence is the discipline of doing neither.

C. What Undermines This Discipline

If functional intelligence is so straightforwardly useful, why is it so rare? Because the barriers to it are structural, self-reinforcing, and — most insidiously — they masquerade as virtues. Five barriers deserve particular attention, because each has demonstrably undermined progressive movements from within.

Social conformance elevates the values of one's peer group above one's own examined priorities. On the Left, this often manifests as ideological purity testing — the subordination of strategic judgment to the performance of correct belief — and it produces organizations that are exquisitely attuned to internal signaling and catastrophically blind to external effectiveness. Conformance masquerades as

solidarity, but genuine solidarity requires the freedom to disagree about means while sharing ends, and that freedom is precisely what conformance eliminates.

Ignorance — not stupidity, but the absence of honest self-knowledge about one's actual operative values and the actual consequences of one's actions. A movement that does not rigorously assess its own outcomes will continue to repeat strategies that feel righteous but produce nothing. The ignorance is often willful, because honest assessment risks the discovery that cherished approaches have failed.

Disempowerment — the learned conviction that one cannot create conditions aligned with one's values, and the resulting abdication of responsibility to leaders, experts, or historical forces that are presumed to be beyond influence. On the Left, this frequently takes the form of structural determinism — the belief that systemic forces are so overwhelming that individual and local action is futile, which conveniently excuses the failure to attempt it.

Egotism — the prioritization of personal or factional status above the collective values the movement claims to serve. On the Left, egotism often wears the costume of moral authority: the insistence that one's own analysis is so superior that disagreement can only be attributed to ignorance or bad faith. It produces leaders and factions that would rather be right than effective.

Traditionalism — the reliance on strategies, frameworks, and organizational forms whose efficacy in the present is assumed rather than tested. There are organizing models, rhetorical strategies, and coalition structures that have been carried forward for decades on the strength of past success and romantic attachment, even as the political landscape they were designed to navigate has changed beyond recognition.

These barriers combine synergistically. Conformance reinforces ignorance by discouraging honest assessment. Ignorance enables disempowerment by preventing the discovery that effective action is possible. Disempowerment feeds egotism, because when one cannot act effectively, the compensation is to assert moral superiority. And egotism entrenches traditionalism, because admitting that past approaches have failed threatens the identity of those who built their authority on them. Once this cycle establishes itself, every failure is attributed to external forces, every internal critique is treated as betrayal, and the movement's functional intelligence approaches zero regardless of how brilliant, compassionate, or committed its individual members may be.

C. Community-Level Groups as Laboratories

Functional intelligence operates most effectively in small groups — spontaneously formed, voluntarily maintained, and regularly reconstituted. The ideal range is likely somewhere between five and fifteen participants, though the precise threshold depends on the complexity of the decisions being made and the maturity of the group's members. Beyond this scale, the barriers described above tend to rigidify into permanent structural features. Below it, there is insufficient diversity of perspective to prevent the echo-chamber effects that masquerade as consensus.

This document has already advocated, throughout its proposals, for the creation and empowerment of exactly these kinds of groups: citizen assemblies, cooperative governance boards, participatory budgeting committees, community land trust councils, neighborhood planning bodies, local mutual aid networks. These groups are the primary sites where functional intelligence is practiced, tested, and refined — not merely administrative mechanisms for implementing the agenda, but the laboratories in which the movement's broader commitments are translated into local action. They are the laboratories

in which the movement's broader commitments are translated into the specific, situated values hierarchies that govern local action.

This means that the work of values clarification — the foundational step without which functional intelligence cannot operate — is not something this agenda can do for the movement. It is something each community-level group must do for itself. A cooperative in rural Appalachia and a tenant organizing committee in South Los Angeles share certain foundational commitments — they would not be part of this movement if they did not — but the specific ordering of priorities, the specific metrics by which they assess their own effectiveness, and the specific strategies they deploy will differ, and should differ, because the conditions they are responding to differ. What functional intelligence demands isn't uniformity of values but discipline in the practice: that each group does the work of clarifying its own operative values, establishing its own hierarchy among them, defining its own metrics for success, and then honestly assessing its outcomes against those metrics on a regular and public basis.

What Each Group Undertakes

Establish a values hierarchy. Not a mission statement — mission statements are the prose equivalent of wallpaper. A values hierarchy is a rank-ordered set of commitments that answers the question: when these values conflict with each other, which one wins? Every group will face moments when solidarity conflicts with transparency, when autonomy conflicts with accountability, when the urgency of action conflicts with the discipline of assessment. A values hierarchy does not eliminate these tensions — it makes the resolution of them deliberate rather than accidental, and visible rather than hidden.

Define metrics for self-assessment. Not metrics imposed by a national organization, a funding body, or a political campaign — metrics that the group itself defines as the observable indicators of whether its actions are aligned with its stated values. These metrics should be concrete enough to be measured, honest enough to reveal failure, and revisable enough to improve as the group's understanding of its own effectiveness deepens. A cooperative might measure member participation rates, wage ratios, community reinvestment levels, and the diversity of its decision-making body. A citizen assembly might measure the range of perspectives represented, the proportion of recommendations adopted by the governing body it advises, and the demographic composition of participants relative to the community it serves. The specific metrics matter less than the commitment to having them, applying them, and reporting them.

Identify the transformative work that aligns with the group's values. This is where functional intelligence becomes operational. Once a group has clarified its values hierarchy and defined its assessment metrics, it can ask: given these priorities, given the conditions we face, given the resources available to us, what is the most effective action we can take? This question is fundamentally different from the question most political groups actually ask, which is: what is the action that will make us feel most like we are doing something? Or: what is the action our national organization is telling us to do? Or: what is the action we have always done? Functional intelligence replaces habit, deference, and emotional satisfaction with a disciplined assessment of which actions are most likely to produce outcomes that align with the group's own stated values. And then it measures whether they did.

Practice ongoing correction. Assessment without correction is performance. When the metrics reveal that outcomes are not aligning with values — when the organizing strategy is not reaching the people it is designed to reach, when the cooperative's governance structure is reproducing the power dynamics it was created to replace, when the citizen assembly is attracting the same narrow demographic despite stated commitments to inclusion — functional intelligence demands that the group change its approach as opposed to rationalizing the discrepancy. This is the hardest component, because it requires relinquishing attachment to strategies and identities that may have cost enormous effort to build. But a group that cannot correct course has mistaken its methods for its values, and that mistake is eventually fatal.

D. Shared Commitments That Define the Movement

Local autonomy in values clarification does not mean that anything goes. A group that clarifies its values and discovers that its primary commitment is to the enrichment of its own members at the expense of surrounding communities is not practicing functional intelligence within the framework of this agenda — it is practicing functional intelligence in the service of values this document explicitly opposes. The distinction matters, and it requires being explicit about the foundational commitments that define membership in this project.

These commitments are also not a catechism. They are the minimal shared framework without which the word “progressive” has no content and the movement has no coherence. They can be stated simply. A commitment to the sustained flourishing of all life, including the ecological systems on which all life depends — not as an abstraction, but as the operational constraint that no strategy is acceptable if it systematically undermines the conditions for that flourishing. A commitment to democratic self-governance as the only legitimate basis for the exercise of power, which means that every concentration of unaccountable authority — political, economic, or cultural — is a problem to be structurally addressed. A commitment to compassionate justice — justice grounded in empathy and repair rather than retribution, and extended to the most vulnerable rather than the most powerful. And a commitment to epistemic honesty — the willingness to pursue truth through evidence, to revise conclusions when evidence demands it, and to resist the corruption of knowledge by power, including the movement’s own power.

These four commitments are the load-bearing walls. Everything else — every policy proposal, every organizing strategy, every institutional design, every tactical decision — is more like furniture. The furniture can be rearranged, replaced, or discarded as evidence and experience dictate. The walls cannot be removed without collapsing the structure. A community-level group practices functional intelligence when it clarifies its own values hierarchy within the space these commitments define, and then pursues the transformative work that its own assessment identifies as most aligned with that hierarchy. The movement practices functional intelligence when it aggregates the learning from hundreds of such groups into a continuously improving understanding of what actually works — not what ought to work, not what worked in 1968, but what produces measurable progress toward the shared commitments in the conditions that actually exist.

E. A Binding Discipline

This, then, is what binds the proposals of this document into a coherent project rather than a policy catalog. Every section — from democratic reform to economic restructuring to ecological transformation to cultural renewal — is an attempt to create the conditions under which human beings can align their actions with their values at progressively larger scales. The community-level groups this document advocates are not merely implementing bodies. They are the sites where the movement’s intelligence actually resides — where values are clarified in context, where strategies are tested against local conditions, where outcomes are assessed with the honesty that only small-group accountability can sustain, and where correction happens fast enough to matter.

The national-scale proposals in this document create the structural environment in which that local intelligence can operate: the democratic reforms that prevent concentrated power from overriding local self-governance, the economic reforms that distribute resources widely enough for local groups to act, the ecological framework that establishes the boundaries within which all action must be conducted, the cultural strategy that builds the relational infrastructure without which small-group deliberation degenerates into factional infighting. But the intelligence itself — the living, adaptive, self-correcting practice of aligning values with action and measuring the results — cannot be legislated, institutionalized, or centrally administered. It can only be practiced, group by group, community by community, in the ongoing discipline of asking whether we are doing what we say we believe, and whether what we are doing is producing what we intend.

The progressive movement has failed, repeatedly, not because its values were wrong but because the relationship between its values and its actions was never subjected to this kind of sustained, honest scrutiny. The proposals in this agenda will greet the same fate unless the movement builds, from the

ground up, the disciplinary habit of functional intelligence: the relentless, self-aware, empirically grounded commitment to doing what we say we believe, measuring whether it worked, and changing course when it did not. Functional intelligence will be foundational to the agenda's success. Without it, every structural reform remains vulnerable to the slow, silent drift in which institutions designed to serve one set of values are gradually captured by another. With it, the movement has something rarer and more durable than political power: the capacity to learn and grow.

PART XV: CONCLUSION

This document is so lengthy because the crisis it addresses is both enduring and expansive. The Right's fifty-year project has operated across every domain of American life through its seven institutional pillars,[9][24] and has built infrastructure designed to outlast any single election, any single administration, and any single generation of opposition. The progressive response must be equally comprehensive, equally disciplined, and equally committed to the long run — but it must also be honest about what it is up against, because the forces arrayed against democratic self-governance in the United States are not limited to domestic actors, and indifference to the scale of the opposition is a luxury the movement cannot afford.

The rhetorical battle has taken a form that progressives must learn to name before they can hope to win. *It is a battle of the obvious against the "reasonable."* The progressive position — that concentrated wealth corrodes democracy, that universal healthcare produces better outcomes at lower cost, that fossil fuel combustion is destabilizing the climate, that voter suppression undermines self-governance, that workers who share in ownership are more productive and more secure — is not the matter of *ideological preference* that the Right stridently claims. **It is a matter of hard, clean, bold evidence.** This agenda's propositions have been demonstrated empirically, implemented successfully in other democracies, and in many cases piloted and validated within the United States itself. They are obvious in the way that settled science is obvious: not beyond refinement, but beyond serious dispute by anyone engaging honestly with the data.

What the Right has accomplished — and it is a genuine rhetorical achievement, however destructive it has become — is the construction of an alternative epistemology in which conclusions driven entirely by emotional reasoning, class interest, and ideological commitment are wrapped in the language of reasonableness, moderation, and common sense. Tax cuts for the wealthy are presented as "pro-growth." Deregulation that poisons water supplies is presented as "reducing burdensome government overreach." Voter ID laws designed to suppress minority turnout are presented as "election integrity." Climate denial is presented as "skepticism." The packaging is calm, measured, and superficially rational. But the content is magical thinking — the assertion that outcomes which have never occurred in the past will occur *this time,* if only the market is freed from the constraints that were imposed precisely because those outcomes never occurred. The progressive movement must stop treating this packaging as if it deserved the intellectual engagement it requests. It does not. **The appropriate response to a reasonable-sounding argument built on fabricated premises is not a sophisticated counter-argument. It is the clear, repeated, unembarrassed statement of *what is obvious* — backed by the evidence, delivered without apology, and repeated until the repetition itself becomes a form of political power.**

This agenda does not float freely in a vacuum, and the forces aligned against it are not confined to the Heritage Foundation, the Federalist Society, the Koch network, and the domestic apparatus of the American Right. The project of liberal democracy in the U.S. faces external adversaries whose strategic objectives align with — and in documented cases actively support — the domestic forces of democratic erosion. Vladimir Putin's Russia has conducted sustained information warfare operations against American democratic institutions for more than a decade, employing the full spectrum of "active

measures" — disinformation campaigns, social media manipulation through troll farms and bot networks, the exploitation of existing social divisions along racial, ideological, and cultural lines, the fabrication of conspiracy theories and false-flag provocations, and the systematic discrediting of legitimate journalism, academic research, and democratic processes.[57] The bipartisan Senate Intelligence Committee's five-volume investigation confirmed that Russia conducted "an aggressive, multi-faceted effort to influence, or attempt to influence, the outcome of the 2016 presidential election," including social media operations that were "overtly and almost invariably supportive of then-candidate Trump" — an interference campaign that Republican and Democratic committee members alike characterized as unprecedented in its scope and sophistication.[58] China pursues its own program of influence operations, economic leverage, and technological competition aimed at reshaping the international order in ways fundamentally incompatible with democratic governance. These external forces are as well-funded, well-staffed, and relentless as the domestic Right-wing government-capture project — and they are not merely parallel operations. They converge. The interests of an authoritarian Russian state that benefits from American democratic dysfunction and the interests of a domestic political movement that benefits from the same dysfunction are not identical, but they are structurally aligned, and that alignment has produced coordination — sometimes tacit, sometimes overt — that the progressive movement ignores at its peril.

What this means in practice is that the progressive movement must work both harder and smarter, with a long-suffering patience that won't come naturally to people who are justifiably angry about injustice they can see and measure. Mass demonstrations matter — they are essential signaling mechanisms for solidarity, for mutual emotional support and community-building, for the visible assertion that the values under attack are held by millions of people who will not be silent. But, even as No Kings approaches the attendance seen over the course of the Black Lives Matter movement, demonstrations alone are not enough to counter the forces described here. They will not reverse a fifty-year institutional capture project. They will not overcome a Supreme Court majority installed through strategic manipulation of the confirmation process. They will not counter information warfare operations run by foreign intelligence services. They will not dislodge gerrymandered legislative majorities or the dark money infrastructure that sustains them. The Right did not build its current power through mass demonstrations. It built it through patient, disciplined, unglamorous institutional work sustained over decades — capturing school boards, funding think tanks, training judges, writing model legislation, building media ecosystems, and staffing every level of government with people who shared its objectives and understood that the project would outlast any individual career. The progressive movement must match that discipline or it will continue to win moral arguments and mass appeal while losing structural power — which is to say, it will continue to lose.

As another important caveat, the temptation to accelerate — to welcome systemic crisis as the midwife of transformation, to imagine that if the existing order collapses dramatically enough, something better will emerge from the wreckage — is understandable, but it is also dangerous, and the historical evidence against accelerationism as close to unanimous as historical evidence gets. The French Revolution's principles of liberty, equality, and fraternity were eviscerated by the Terror, corrupted by the Directory, and extinguished by Napoleon's empire. The economic catastrophe of Weimar Germany did not produce democratic renewal — it produced Hitler. The fall of the Soviet Union did not produce liberal democracy

in Russia — it produced oligarchic looting followed by the authoritarian consolidation of Vladimir Putin, who now wages information warfare against the very democracies his country's collapse was supposed to join. The Arab Spring toppled dictators across the Middle East and produced enduring democratic transition in exactly one country — Tunisia — which has itself been systematically dismantled by presidential autocracy since 2021. Egypt returned to military rule. Libya descended into civil war. Syria became a charnel house. Even the most morally unambiguous systemic rupture in American history — the Civil War defeat of the Confederacy and the abolition of slavery — destroyed the institution without destroying the moral consciousness of the slaveholder, which reasserted itself within a decade through Black Codes, convict leasing, Jim Crow, and a century of racial terrorism that required a second liberation movement to even partially address.

The pattern isn't subtle: when severe collapse occurs, it most often destroys the very conditions — institutional capacity, civic trust, organizational infrastructure, shared norms of cooperation — that would be required to build something better from the ruins. What fills the vacuum is not the most just alternative but the most organized one, and in conditions of chaos, the most organized forces are almost invariably authoritarian, because authoritarian organization is simple and democratic organization is complex. The durable democratic transformations of the modern era — post-Franco Spain, post-apartheid South Africa, post-Soviet Poland and Czechoslovakia — succeeded because robust parallel institutions and resilient civil society had been built *before* the transition and were ready to sustain governance *during* it. The progressive movement must learn this lesson, or it will keep repeating it: we cannot burn down a house we intend to live in. We must renovate it, room by room, while building the addition next door — and make sure the new addition is structurally sound before we move any load-bearing walls.

With all of this said, this agenda does in fact include some new additions. It is a vision of a fundamentally different kind of society — one built on the recognition, warned about for 2,400 years, that democracy is fragile and must be actively defended through institutions, culture, and the moral maturity of its citizens.[18][19][27] The principles that unite this platform draw on concepts developed over two decades — the Goldilocks zone of integral liberty, a desirable moral development strata trajectory, a universal social backbone, daily direct democracy, the earned social benefit system, and the concepts of revolutionary integrity and functional intelligence — alongside the insights of forward-thinking philosophers, sociologists, economists, ecologists, and psychology researchers, and the long tradition of progressive, socialist, and civil rights activism and thought that has saved capitalism from itself at every turn.[18]

The integrated architecture proposed here — a guaranteed income floor, universal public services, national service, citizens' assemblies, worker ownership, the earned social benefit system, sortition-based governance, shorter work weeks, the care economy, and the donut economics framework — doesn't aim for a smorgasbord of separate programs bound by similar values. It is a *coherent design* for a society in which every person has what they need to live with dignity, every person contributes according to their capacity, and the collective decisions that shape our lives are made democratically, transparently, and within the ecological limits of the planet we share.[17] And every element has already been tested somewhere; many have been tested extensively. The proposals that have not yet been validated at scale must be accompanied by the pilot frameworks, evaluation criteria, and institutional

safeguards that this agenda demands of every novel intervention. The progressive position is empirical, not utopian. And this is obvious to anyone willing to look at the evidence rather than fret endlessly over the packaging.

As progressives, our ultimate aim should be to achieve the greatest diffusion of power and wealth possible, for the good of all.[8][17] The question before us isn't whether these goals are achievable — history is full of transformations that seemed impossible until they happened, and the forces that opposed them seemed invincible until they weren't. The question is instead whether the progressive movement will match the discipline, the institutional seriousness, the strategic patience, and the willingness to do unglamorous work over decades that the forces of concentrated wealth and authoritarian ambition have demonstrated — forces that include not only the domestic architects of the status quo but the foreign powers that profit from American democratic failure. This opposition is formidable. It is funded. It is patient. It is ruthless. But it is beatable.

In conclusion, these rights and responsibilities aren't gifts to be received. They are commitments to be made, institutions to be built, coalitions to be forged, and a society to be constructed — with the same deliberateness, the same strategic discipline, and the same refusal to accept defeat that the forces opposing this agenda have demonstrated for half a century. The difference is that they built their project to serve a select and privileged few. This one will be built to serve everyone. That is its vulnerability — a coalition of everyone is harder to organize than a coalition of the wealthy — and it is also its strength, because when such an effort is comprehensively and thoughtfully organized, there is nothing on earth that can stop it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

T.Collins Logan has been researching and writing about moral philosophy, personal transformative practice, spirituality and religion, and how to engineer a new political economy for more than two decades. You can find many of his ideas and writing at www.tcollinslogan.com, www.level-7.org, and independent.academia.edu/TCollinsLogan. The *Progressive Agenda for Democratic Renewal* project represents an intermediate but realistic step towards what he believes are existentially critical objectives for humanity over the long term. Those objectives include:

- Restoring moral maturity, loving kindness, and prosociality to all dimensions of society and personal life as the basis for our overall purpose, contributions, and civic activism.[30].[54]
- Encouraging practices and priorities that have become very challenging in modern society, such as opportunities to participate in close community, engaging in regular civic discourse and self-governance, and balancing the most valuable aspects of deep cultural and spiritual traditions with post-enlightenment empiricism (often described as *post-postmodernism* or *integral theory*). [54]
- Opposing the most potent and pervasive threat to all of these beneficial restorations — the veneration of private property and the profit motive as they manifest in neoliberalism, crony capitalism, laissez-faire, and market fundamentalism.[8],[55]

T.Collins is a self-ascribed libertarian socialist, a tradition which spans some 150 years from Proudhon and Kropotkin to Bookchin and Chomsky, but he favors a left-leaning minimalist State model, represented in this agenda, where a combination of government agencies and non-profit worker-owned cooperatives provide a *Universal Social Backbone* of standards, services, and evidence-based expertise to support both civil society and free enterprise.[82]

T.Collins' arrived at a prosocial framing for societal fitness through both empirical and spiritual disciplines. The scientific perspective, focused mainly on the evolutionary "group fitness" advantages of prosociality, was introduced through insights from E.O. Wilson, Frans de Waal, Barbara King, and others in various fields. T.Collins is also immersed in the *perennial philosophy*, a mystical tradition that views world religions as grounded in the same fundamental spiritual reality. Practitioners who access that reality via nondual gnosis can then be transformed by an abiding love-consciousness.[81] He derives his own essential spiritual nourishment — and many of the insights peppered throughout his writing — mainly through the tradition of Christian contemplative prayer.

Personal Thoughts

Warning: personal biases ahead.

One criticism I have faced over many years of writing, teaching, and personal praxis is that I am fundamentally "overly optimistic" about the positive, prosocial capacities of people in general — and certainly the potential of nearly every person I have ever come to know personally. From meditation classes, to coaching individuals and couples in Integral Lifework principles, to managing teams in for profit and nonprofit organizations, I've held fast to a belief that, at their best, everyone has immense power to learn, grow, and improve both their own lives and the world in which they live. This belief has persisted for most of my life.

But this tenet was acutely challenged beginning in 2016, when millions of Americans chose a transparently malicious, deceitful, and reckless con man as their POTUS, seemed to increasingly embrace counterfactual and dangerous conspiracy theories *en masse*, were then angrily rebellious during COVID when asked to put the well-being of society as a whole above personal preferences, and began othering and persecuting immigrants, people of color, trans folks, and other scapegoats with ever-increasing hostility. Yes, we can't ignore how this population was manipulated by social media algorithms and Russian misinformation. And we can't ignore the real economic and cultural pain that energized misplaced trust in false causalities. But all of this resulted in a devastating emotional and even spiritual setback for me, evoking acute cognitive dissonance around lifelong convictions. Yes, I had learned about the rise of the Nazi party in Germany, the Holocaust, the Inquisition, McCarthyism, the Soviet Great Purge, and the Cultural Revolution in China…but this was happening in my lifetime, in my country, impacting people I personally knew. I am chagrined to admit I thought American society had evolved past a need for myopic bigotry and petty tyrants — at least at this scale.

For many months, I struggled to make sense of the loud counterexamples to a foundational worldview that were arising all around me: were humans just irrational and antisocial at their core? Was there something fundamentally broken in us? Could mass media propaganda really be so persuasive? Sigmund Freud faced similar challenge after observing the atrocities of WWI. His answer was to speculate that Thanatos, the "death drive," was an integral part of the human psyche that opposed all other impulses to live, grow, and thrive. I had no such grand hypothesis, but, after struggling with my own disappointment and doubt, I arrived at a surprisingly simple conclusion.

There is a term in psychology and behavioral science called "incompatible environment." Simply put, this is when the surrounding environment brings out the worst in us — triggering our worst insecurities or anxieties, enticing our addictions, heightening our levels of stress or anger, and so on. What I came to believe I was seeing in the world was just that: the results of an environment *incompatible* with our better selves, bringing out the very worst. Around that time, I also came across some modern "fakelore" that was surprisingly helpful.

It was an invented Native American folktale entitled "The Tale of Two Wolves." The actual origins (early versions are credited to various Christian authors, with later Cherokee attributions) is much less important than the core principle of the story itself. The version I encountered tells of a young man asking his grandfather for advice. The young man is worried that two wolves seem at war within him. One is loyal, peaceful, loving, hopeful, generous, joyous, truthful, and kind. The other is selfish, angry, greedy, arrogant, prideful, egotistical, and deceitful. When he asks his grandfather which wolf will win, his grandfather replies: "The one you feed."

Setting aside for the moment a Jungian analysis of integrating the Shadow self, I thought this story spoke profoundly to that current moment — and still does. It was my sense that modern society had created

an *incompatible environment* that, incessantly and overwhelmingly, encouraged us to feed the wrong wolf. After returning to the U.S. in the early 1980s, after living in West Germany for five years, I experienced the U.S.A. as a jolting culture shock. At that time, I found American culture deeply and increasingly consumeristic and acquisitive, self-centered, egotistical, and pedantically overconfident in its self-justification of these tendencies. I would routinely hear folks declare "greed is good," or "you've got to look out for yourself, because nobody else will," or "that's on you, buyer beware," or "fuck you, I can do anything I want…" Clearly, it seemed we were feeding the wrong wolf.

But what was causing this? Was it somehow endemic to American culture? Had it been here all along, and my time in Germany had just distanced me from it? Or was there some other force at work?

In this *Progressive Agenda*, as in a majority of my writing, I settle on what I believe has been a primary culprit for a long time: *capitalism*. Is it the only cause? Not at all, but it serves as a unifying system of incentives for too many antisocial tendencies. And perhaps there is some theoretical system of capitalism possible that would not inherently gorge and titillate the bad wolf, but the one we have is a master chef. The profit motive has become a wanton celebration of deceitful greed; free markets have become an anything-goes, vicious and deceptive competition with vanishing protective guardrails for individuals, workers, and society; private property ownership has largely become a cudgel to either exclude or seek rent from those without it; and success has become a zero-sum game that concentrates all wealth and power in a select few at the injury and expense of everyone and everything else. And nearly every aspect of U.S. culture and society — education, politics, religion, medicine, wellness, romantic and family relationships, work, play, identity — has been either distorted or corrupted by the touch of unconstrained individualistic materialism. Which is why I've asserted so confidently in this agenda that the central conflict of our time is an economic one, and that nearly all other tensions and disagreements are secondary.

> "Thus it is manifest that the best political community is formed by citizens of the middle class, and that those states are likely to be well-administered in which the middle class is large, and stronger if possible than both the other classes, or at any rate than either singly; for the addition of the middle class turns the scale, and prevents either of the extremes from being dominant. Great then is the good fortune of a state in which the citizens have a moderate and sufficient property; for where some possess much, and the others nothing, there may arise an extreme democracy, or a pure oligarchy; or a tyranny may grow out of either extreme — either out of the most rampant democracy, or out of an oligarchy." Aristotle, *Politics*, Book IV, Chapter 11[73]

For me, the consequences of a society celebrating selfishness and greed are as obvious now as they have been to countless others commenting on the same phenomenon: Aristotle, Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, St. Augustine, Spinoza, Hegel, Rousseau, Marx, Veblen, Weil, Arendt, and so many others have explicitly named different dimensions of this problem, *but the nexus is a lust for status, wealth, and power.* And the remedy is also obvious. And yet, much of America is still either entranced by the spectacle, ignorant of the underlying causes of their suffering and alienation, or thoroughly misled by the sustained neoliberal project described in this agenda. So the road to healing and restoration isn't just a path less-travelled, it's completely invisible to most people. This agenda is intended to point progressive-minded folks in a helpful direction, though I would concede that, in many ways, it falls short of what I believe to be the ultimate goal. Here the profit motive is still an accepted driver, private property remains a central feature, and the tacit acceptance of disempowering hierarchies persists. But reifying this agenda is an essential beginning to an essential journey. Eventually, to save ourselves and the planet, we will likely need to relinquish our attachment to capitalism altogether. These are some first steps toward feeding the right wolf and nurturing our better selves to build a more just and enduring society, but they cannot be the last.

— *T.Collins Logan, March, 2026*

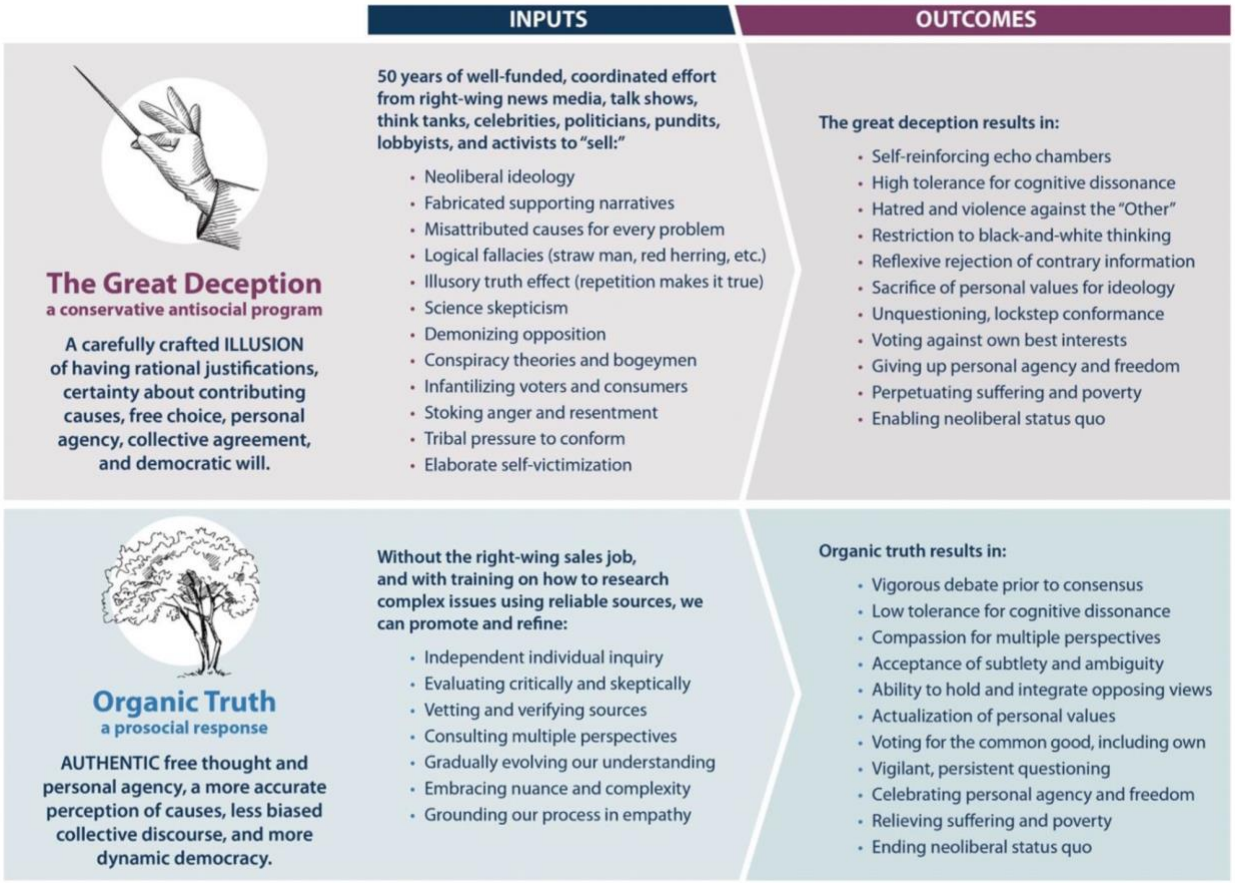
APPENDICES

Appendix A: The Neoliberal Anti-Science Propaganda Process

Source: T. Collins Logan, www.level-7.org. This diagram illustrates how the same funding sources, think tanks, PR firms, fake scientific authorities, and media outlets are repeatedly deployed to discredit scientific findings that threaten corporate profits.

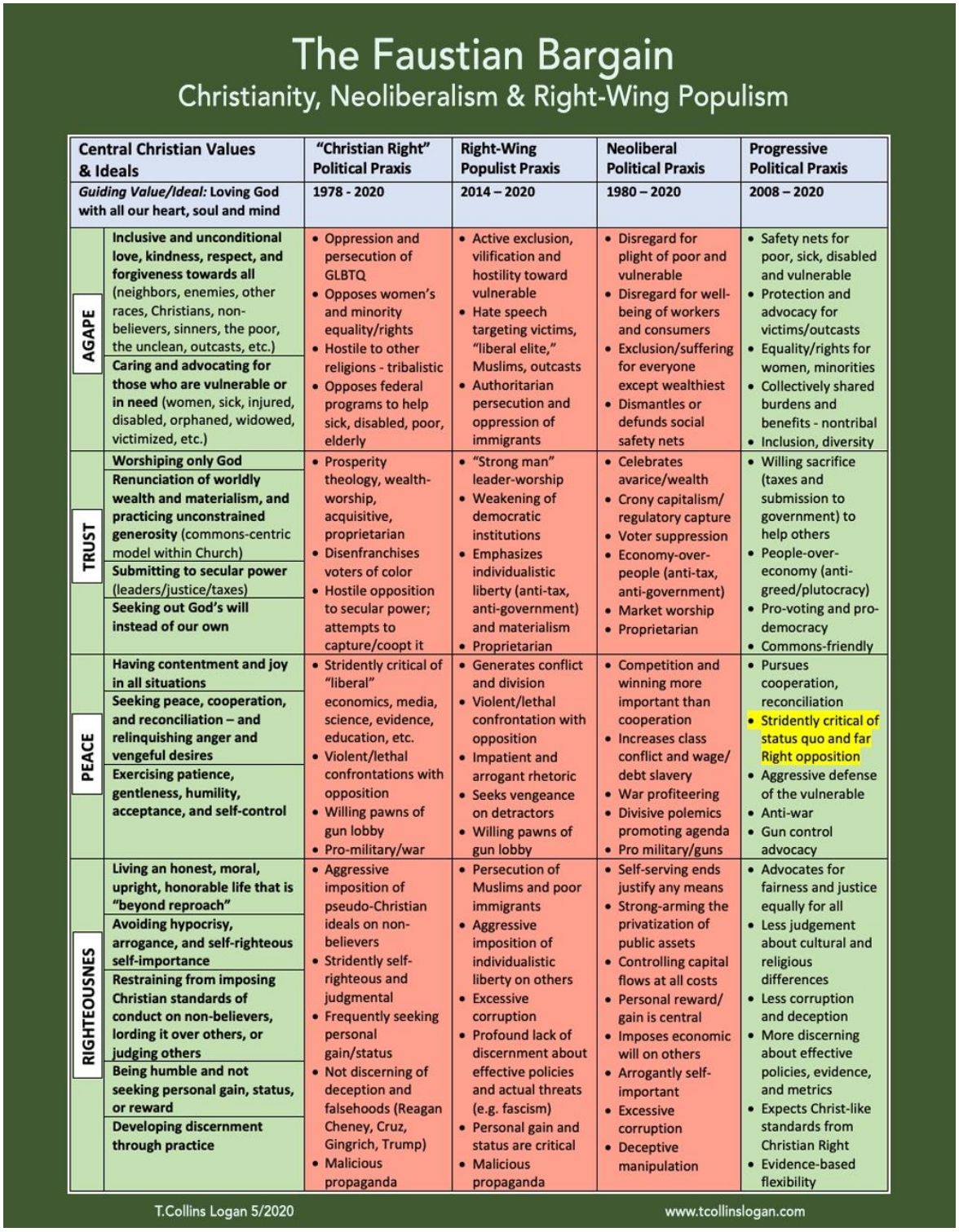
Appendix B: The Great Deception – Inputs and Outcomes

Source: T. Collins Logan and Mollie Kellogg, from The Rise of Demagogues and Tyrants in Democracy (2025). This graphic captures the central dynamic: replacing the great deception with organic truth as both balm and antidote.



Appendix C: Praxis Comparison of Four U.S. Political Movements

Source: T. Collins Logan, from Christianity, Neoliberalism, & Right-Wing Populism: A Faustian Bargain (2020). This chart demonstrates that progressive political praxis aligns more closely with New Testament Christian values than the Christian Right's own praxis does.



The Faustian Bargain

Christianity, Neoliberalism & Right-Wing Populism

	Central Christian Values & Ideals	"Christian Right" Political Praxis	Right-Wing Populist Praxis	Neoliberal Political Praxis	Progressive Political Praxis
	Guiding Value/Ideal: Loving God with all our heart, soul and mind	1978 - 2020	2014 – 2020	1980 – 2020	2008 – 2020
AGAPE	**Inclusive and unconditional love, kindness, respect, and forgiveness towards all** (neighbors, enemies, other races, Christians, non-believers, sinners, the poor, the unclean, outcasts, etc.) **Caring and advocating for those who are vulnerable or in need** (women, sick, injured, disabled, orphaned, widowed, victimized, etc.)	• Oppression and persecution of GLBTQ • Opposes women's and minority equality/rights • Hostile to other religions - tribalistic • Opposes federal programs to help sick, disabled, poor, elderly	• Active exclusion, vilification and hostility toward vulnerable • Hate speech targeting victims, "liberal elite," Muslims, outcasts • Authoritarian persecution and oppression of immigrants	• Disregard for plight of poor and vulnerable • Disregard for well-being of workers and consumers • Exclusion/suffering for everyone except wealthiest • Dismantles or defunds social safety nets	• Safety nets for poor, sick, disabled and vulnerable • Protection and advocacy for victims/outcasts • Equality/rights for women, minorities • Collectively shared burdens and benefits - nontribal • Inclusion, diversity
TRUST	**Worshiping only God** **Renunciation of worldly wealth and materialism, and practicing unconstrained generosity** (commons-centric model within Church) **Submitting to secular power** (leaders/justice/taxes) **Seeking out God's will instead of our own**	• Prosperity theology, wealth-worship, acquisitive, proprietarian • Disenfranchises voters of color • Hostile opposition to secular power; attempts to capture/coopt it	• "Strong man" leader-worship • Weakening of democratic institutions • Emphasizes individualistic liberty (anti-tax, anti-government) and materialism • Proprietarian	• Celebrates avarice/wealth • Crony capitalism/ regulatory capture • Voter suppression • Economy-over-people (anti-tax, anti-government) • Market worship • Proprietarian	• Willing sacrifice (taxes and submission to government) to help others • People-over-economy (anti-greed/plutocracy) • Pro-voting and pro-democracy • Commons-friendly
PEACE	**Having contentment and joy in all situations** **Seeking peace, cooperation, and reconciliation – and relinquishing anger and vengeful desires** **Exercising patience, gentleness, humility, acceptance, and self-control**	• Stridently critical of "liberal" economics, media, science, evidence, education, etc. • Violent/lethal confrontations with opposition • Willing pawns of gun lobby • Pro-military/war	• Generates conflict and division • Violent/lethal confrontation with opposition • Impatient and arrogant rhetoric • Seeks vengeance on detractors • Willing pawns of gun lobby	• Competition and winning more important than cooperation • Increases class conflict and wage/ debt slavery • War profiteering • Divisive polemics promoting agenda • Pro military/guns	• Pursues cooperation, reconciliation • Stridently critical of status quo and far Right opposition • Aggressive defense of the vulnerable • Anti-war • Gun control advocacy
RIGHTEOUSNES	**Living an honest, moral, upright, honorable life that is "beyond reproach"** **Avoiding hypocrisy, arrogance, and self-righteous self-importance** **Restraining from imposing Christian standards of conduct on non-believers, lording it over others, or judging others** **Being humble and not seeking personal gain, status, or reward** **Developing discernment through practice**	• Aggressive imposition of pseudo-Christian ideals on non-believers • Stridently self-righteous and judgmental • Frequently seeking personal gain/status • Not discerning of deception and falsehoods (Reagan Cheney, Cruz, Gingrich, Trump) • Malicious propaganda	• Persecution of Muslims and poor immigrants • Aggressive imposition of individualistic liberty on others • Excessive corruption • Profound lack of discernment about effective policies and actual threats (e.g. fascism) • Personal gain and status are critical • Malicious propaganda	• Self-serving ends justify any means • Strong-arming the privatization of public assets • Controlling capital flows at all costs • Personal reward/ gain is central • Imposes economic will on others • Arrogantly self-important • Excessive corruption • Deceptive manipulation	• Advocates for fairness and justice equally for all • Less judgement about cultural and religious differences • Less corruption and deception • More discerning about effective policies, evidence, and metrics • Expects Christ-like standards from Christian Right • Evidence-based flexibility

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Appendix D: Reframing Profit

Source: T. Collins Logan, Reframing Profit (2017). This chart captures a deliberate shift away from historically toxic and destructive incentives towards more prosocial ones that support and strengthen civil society.

Nature of Profit	***Level 7***	***Traditional Crony Capitalism***
1) As a reward for...	• Demonstrated Creativity • Demonstrated Complex or Demanding Learned Skills & Abilities • Demonstrated Innate Talents • Demonstrated Knowledge • Enhancing or Strengthening Civil Society • Innovations & Research that Benefit Health & Well-Being • Reviewed & Validated Scientific Discoveries • Demonstrated Self-Sacrifice for the Betterment of Others • Demonstrated Endurance (Longevity) and Effectiveness in a Social Services Roll • *Technocratic Expertise* • Exceptional or Unusual (Outlier) Contributions to a Particular Field • Demonstrated Efficiencies or Lowering Overhead within Ostrom's Common Pool Research Management Schema • Solutions That Demonstrate Long-term Viability & Sustainability • *Increasing Market Share through Competitive Differentiation/Improvements* • *High-Risk Startup Investment*	• Increased Efficiencies of Production or Lowering Overhead (automation, reducing wages, outsourcing to developing economies, etc.) • First-To-Market Innovations • Top 5% of Exceptional Creativity/Skill/Ability • *Increasing Market Share through Competitive Differentiation/Improvements* • *High-Risk Startup Investment* • High Pressure Sales & Persuasive or Deceptive Advertising/Marketing • Creating Consumer Dependency & Addiction • Coercing Maximum Labor Output • Disregard for Worker Safety • Reckless Natural Resource Extraction & Depletion • Monopolization • Price-Fixing & Anti-Competitive Practices • Disregard for Negative Externalities • Disregard for Consumer Safety • Conspicuous Consumption Coupled with Price-Elastic Demand • Engineering of Artificial Scarcity • Rolling Back Regulations • Lowering Business Tax Rate • Socializing Risk While Privatizing Profit • Encouraging Consumer Debt • Encouraging High-Risk Speculation (Gambling) • Overcharging, Excessive Fees, Interest Gauging, Hidden/Undisclosed Costs • Planned Obsolescence • Bait & Switch • Delivering Illicit Products/Services • Aggressive Self-Promotion & Political Cleverness • *Technocratic Expertise* • Zero-Value-Add Rent-Seeking Activities
2) To be shared by...	• All Workers and Member-Shareholders of a Cooperative, Democratic Enterprise	• Select Owner-Shareholders & Senior Executives in A Command-Style Enterprise
3) With *holistic valuations* & margins to be influenced by...	• Self-Managed Workers • Community Organizations • Citizens Councils • Direct Democracy Referenda	• Owner-Shareholders, Executive Board Members & Senior Managers
4) With standardization & regulation of for-profit enterprise via...	• Elected Technocrats with Specialized Expertise • Direct Democracy Initiatives & Referenda • Co-Created Legislation (Technocratic Initiatives as Approved by Direct Vote) • Citizen's Councils	• Corporate Lobbyists • Career Politicians Who Often Have Little-to-No Specialized Expertise

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