

An Evergreen America

Renewing the American Project for the 21st Century

Introduction & Background

We both began our political lives in the shadow of Ronald Reagan's brand of center-right conservatism. I grew up in the dynamic center of modern conservative thought in Orange County. My co-author was born in the heart of the post-9/11 national security apparatus in Northern Virginia. We remember a forward-looking conservatism that spoke of an aspirational America. This was a conservatism that believed the implementation of good policy and good ideas would revitalize the idea of a shining city on the hill for another generation. Unfortunately, this conservatism has faded from the Republican Party. As the median elected Republican moved further and further right, we found ourselves isolated from the direction of the party. The election of Donald J. Trump to the Presidency amplified this feeling, bringing fringe actors out from the woodwork to sell untruths to a base all too eager to believe them. Performative bad-faith policymaking and an un-American desire to "own the libs" no matter the cost became more and more prominent. With Trump, the intellectual side of conservatism was marginalized--new ideas were out, and tired ideas like supply-side economics were in. Old ideas were clutched tighter-and-tighter, with no one pausing to consider the situation had fundamentally changed. It never occurred to anyone within the party that the ideas which stopped stagflation in the 1970s were not ideas suitable for the prolonged recession of the 2010s.

This left us, like many young Americans, drifting leftward. However, we did not lose our concerns about the challenges to liberty created by an endlessly expanding federal government and the post-9/11 security state. While the Republican Party was focused on cutting taxes, they ignored the proliferation of policies and agencies that go against what should be permissible in a free society. Neither of us much care for bleeding-heart liberalism or the nanny state. Government cannot be there to solve every problem, cure every illness, and redress every grievance. The progressive left often mistakes things the government can do for the things the government ought to do. The regressive right often demands the clock be turned back to a time where the government did very little--ignoring the changes wrought on American society by advances in science and technology since then. We split the difference between these two unreasonable extremes. Government power must have limits if liberty and diversity of action and opinion are to be preserved. Acts of active coercion cannot be used to force individuals to conform to a certain conception of "right."

Republican economic dogma ossified some time ago, but many within are afraid to admit it. “Read my lips, no new taxes” has turned into an unwillingness to use the government to confront pressing social problems. Tax cuts have not produced a rising tide that has lifted all ships--rather, they have lifted the large while sinking the small. The government has increasingly begun to pick winners and losers, with incumbents near universally coming out on top. As a result, we have an economy where hard work no longer translates to prosperity--and the hardest working often subsist a missed paycheck away from homelessness. This situation is simply not sustainable. We are at an inflection point, and this offers a unique opportunity for a new movement to chart a fresh course for America.

The economic situation of the United States has fundamentally changed since the era of the Founding Fathers. Wholesale change brought by innovations in communications, transportation, manufacturing, and computing have made that system obsolete. Some of the government’s current economic thinking dates back to the era of the horse-drawn buggy, a poor fit for the era of the electric car. The economy no longer resembles that of 1880, 1932, or 1980, and yet policymakers look to the past for solutions despite the immense changes society has undergone. A new thinking on economics and shared prosperity is needed. The digital revolution and the financialization of the economy has created a disconnect between profits and labor. A large part of the economy involves selling products that are created once, like software, and from that point on do not require more labor to realize more profits. This has created distortions that either need to be managed by regulation or harnessed for productive purposes via taxation.

While we identify as centrists, both economically and politically, many of our solutions will be read as radical by mainstream conservatives. Perhaps if we had begun to tweak things twenty years ago, a less aggressive course correction would be necessary. However, we have let our infrastructure rot, our capital (economic, intellectual, physical, human, and moral) drain, and our economy ossify. Drastic problems require aggressive solutions. We’ve traded much of our shared prosperity for slightly cheaper consumer goods, and nowhere has this pain been felt more than in America’s small towns, from Appalachia to the San Joaquin Valley. To restore prosperity will not be an easy task, but no worthwhile task is easy. Here we lay out our plans for an Evergreen America, an America where all citizens will be able to pursue their own happiness.

What is the American Idea?

From the very beginning, the promise of America was built on the idea of liberty. While our nation has not always delivered on that promise, those famous words in the Declaration of Independence that ‘all men are created equal’ have been our faithful and ever-present guide through stormy seas. From the Native Americans who have called this land home since time immemorial to the bleary-eyed refugee stepping off the jetway, America has always held the promise of prosperity and boundless opportunity.

America has never been bound by the dogma of the old world. We cast off the yoke of a foreign king and instead decided, by mutual consent, upon a government of the people and for the people. This would be a limited government not based on a single ethnic identity, faith, or creed, but upon a shared civic religion and love of the land, its traditions, and the collected wisdom of its many peoples. Our very soil is steeped in the blood of those who laid down their lives to defend limited government from enemies both foreign and domestic.

Because of this, we are the inheritors of an American tradition of wise and sensible governance. We believe in personal responsibility and freedom of choice. These limitations, cleverly devised by the Founding Fathers, symbolize a nation of limits. These are not limits on paper or limits in theory. These are foundational limitations that ensure that American citizens are never oppressed by a tyranny that claims to act only 'for the greater good.' We cannot undo the transition to modernity, nor should we try.

We celebrate a culture that dates back to the First Thanksgiving, where those with a little more extend a helping hand to those with a little less. No matter whether you are Native to this land or a new arrival, America celebrates the unique and extraordinary culture its citizens have created. America is a nation of progress, as we have never been content with mediocrity. We have been home to the brightest scientific minds and the warmest humanitarian hearts. Every citizen has left their own indelible mark on the American project, a project that we believe ought to be renewed for another generation.

Essential Freedoms

Freedom from the scourge of tyranny means freedom from excessive government power. We should never embrace the every-watchful 'nanny-state' with a camera in every car, in every workplace, and in every home. To be American means to embody the pioneer ethos of self-reliance and self-help. To ask for a government that solves all problems is to ask for a government that leaves no problem unsolved. Limitless government is both impractical and un-American.

We are committed to preserving and enhancing the vital Constitutional civil liberties protected by the Bill of Rights that have long marked America as a bastion of individualism. We believe that every American is entitled to freedom of speech, freedom of worship, the ownership of firearms without a permit or license, and protection against government overreach in their personal lives. Americans deserve protection against the excesses of the criminal justice system. Strong protections against unreasonable search and seizure and the menace of civil asset forfeiture must be implemented. So too should be the right to a speedy jury trial and a restriction on the use of cash bail. Access to legal counsel should be made an entitlement so that citizens can hold their

government accountable in court and ensure the administrative state cannot harm them without recourse.

From for-profit probation to the restriction of the foundational right to vote, for too long the poor have had their liberty stolen from them. Over the last two generations the scales of justice have tilted too far from redemption to punishment. We have over criminalized minor offenses and increased fines and prison sentences until the carceral state swallows up all those who simply walk past it. Some states have even criminalized failing to pay rent, harkening back to the oppression of King George the Framers fought against. This is a black stain on the Constitution, and every American should be outraged by the treatment of those who often ended up in such circumstances through no fault of their own.

What We Believe

We believe in an Evergreen America. Periodically, the promise of the American project must be renewed. The collective energy of the American people must be directed toward constructing a new civic structure for the twenty-first century. For too long, too many Americans have been bowling alone, disconnected from civic virtue and the communities in which they live. Through increased civic responsibility, shared sacrifice, and a vibrant patriotism, we can renew the spirit of the American nation. America has always been exceptional, a nation of big dreams where a young man or woman with an industrious spirit can transform vision to reality. Our best days have always been ahead in the joyful, exciting future, not buried in nostalgic dreams of the past.

We once more stand at the edge of a cliff. Many Americans have lost faith in the basic premise of the American experiment. As was the case during the Great Depression, often hidden economic hardship has fueled a rise in extremist thinking on both the political right and the political left. As the Insurrection on January 6 demonstrated, we can no longer afford to pretend that the ideas that have for so long bound our nation together will continue to do so indefinitely. This is a crossroads, and the choice between vibrant democracy and drab authoritarianism could not be more stark.

We want to renew the American promise for a new generation. A new kind of thinking about government is required to confront a new set of challenges. We need a government that works for the people without imposing a crushing administrative burden on small businesses and the middle class. While the New Deal and the Great Society represented genuine efforts to remedy the inequality that left millions mired in inescapable poverty, they came with reams of red-tape that slowly strangled the economy and created stagflation. We do not seek to repeat those mistakes. Rather, we seek to adhere to the fundamental premise of those projects--a country with great material wealth ought to ensure that it is spread broadly among the populace. Every person deserves the opportunity to grab a slice of the economic pie through the sweat of their brow.

We are in equal parts the descendants of the Conservative tradition of limited government, and the Progressive tradition of a government that refuses to turn away from the suffering of the downtrodden. We are *not* the Progressives of Twitter and other social media sites.. We believe in a pluralistic America, an America where everyone can make their own choices. We are Progressives in the mold of Theodore Roosevelt. We believe in a government that has distinct and clear limits—but a government that seeks to uplift citizens long oppressed by factors outside of their control. For too long, millions of Americans have been oppressed by grinding poverty in a nation of tremendous material prosperity. Every American should have, as their birthright, access to a fair and equal chance at the fruits of prosperity and the blessings of liberty. Even in the darkest depths of the Great Depression, we as a nation have never turned away from these foundational values.

We believe in an America that believes in equality of opportunity. Every child, from the son of billionaires to the daughter of farmworkers, deserves an equal shot to make something of themselves. Broadly shared prosperity, freedom, and justice is the remedy to the ills that ail the country. America has not always lived up to the expectations of its citizens. Throughout our history, there has been great injustice. However, Americans have a proud tradition of standing up for the right thing, and the war for progress is only lost when those with witness oppression turn away from their fellow man. This is what we call an Evergreen America. That is our America.

What Ails Us Socially?

Over the past decade, many Americans have come to the realization that something is fundamentally broken. If you ask liberals, you get one list of problems (a lack of racial justice, police violence, economic inequality, poor access to healthcare, and man-made climate change). If you ask conservatives, you get an entirely different list (urban violence, a decline in religious participation, moral decay, high taxes, and big government). We do not dispute many of these are real problems. However, both sides of the political spectrum are viewing the situation on the ground through a particular lens that makes it difficult to view the root causes.

What are the real social ills that matter on the ground? Hunger, violent crime, suicide, homelessness, unplanned and unwanted pregnancy, domestic violence, drug addiction, and poor mental and physical health, among others. These are not modern problems. The Women's Christian Temperance Union and other anti-liquor crusaders used similar social ills to justify Prohibition. Before the New Deal, a similar list was brought up during every moral crusade. The Depression and New Deal dramatically shifted America's moral concerns, but that has not altered the underlying problem. So too, Nearly all modern America's moral ills can be pinned on a broken economy.

On the whole, while there is a poverty problem, official poverty statistics fail to capture both its breadth and its depth. The economy doesn't work for 60% of the population, and the result has been the growth of an underclass of working poor and the painful decline of the middle class. In the 1950s, it was possible for a single earner without a college degree to comfortably support a family. In the 2020s, the most educated generation in history is struggling to find a job that pays enough to cover the rent of a studio apartment. Marriage, children, and other major life decisions have been placed on the back burner for most young people. This is not a sign of a healthy economy.

While we will touch on other areas of concern, we do so primarily as statements of our general principles on the matter. The vast majority of this document will be focused on poverty, and the myriad ways poverty has birthed the social ills ravaging modern America. There will be a few sections, like immigration, that will be viewed separately because we believe they deserve a fresh look from the perspective of political outsiders. However, the true enemy has always been poverty, and if poverty can be cured--or substantively reduced, we believe that significant improvement will naturally follow.

What's Wrong With Government?

The problem is what has been deemed the "Kludgeocracy."

In the words of National Affairs magazine, "While we can name the major questions that divide our politics — liberalism or conservatism, big government or small — we have no name for the dispute between complexity and simplicity in government, which cuts across those more familiar ideological divisions. For lack of a better alternative, the problem of complexity might best be termed the challenge of 'kludgeocracy.'"

Our government has been built like an inedible dessert over time, with each president haphazardly adding their own layer on top of what came before. While every president from FDR to Obama has manipulated the structure to serve their own ideological ends, all have collectively added to the problem. The last time the federal government has been restructured from the ground up was in 1948. With each new government program and agency comes a new set of constituents and rent seekers. The bureaucracy has bloated over time, and beyond the government payrolls lurk a class of consultants collecting huge paychecks to render "advice" for \$500/hour. This process is self-perpetuating. Once a structure is in place, policymakers rarely think on how to make it more dynamic and more efficient. At best a series of slapdash fixes have been applied, but this is essentially slapping a Band-Aid on an abscess. They have failed to treat the underlying sickness.

The structure of the “kludgeocracy” has warped the incentives of the market and rewarded incumbents at the expense of innovators and daring thinkers. While market-based mechanisms normally operate to reign in bad behavior, the government has prevented them from being addressed early on. Like a small crack in the pavement left unfixed, over time these problems have grown and grown to become a hazardous pothole. The government is now both too close and too distant, over-regulating while still failing to respond to these structural issues until they result in systemic crises. It’s no wonder that “I’m from the government, and I’m here to help” invokes intense fear in middle America.

The “kludgeocracy” has poisoned the general public’s view on what the government can do for them. From criminal justice to monopoly-busting, people have lost faith that the government can be relied upon to do the right thing. The entrenched and monied interests that have captured our legislators, mass media, and commerce often operate at odds with what people view as decent and right. Such complexity means that citizens often struggle to undertake specific action despite instinctively knowing that something has gone terribly wrong. The government is now so complex and inscrutable that a law degree and several courses on constitutional, administrative, and agency law are the basic requirements to understand what the government can and cannot do. This monolithic and faceless automaton dispenses justice and rules with caprice, too often failing to seek input from the very communities the actions are meant to help.

Politics is a game of the possible, and we cannot restore power to the people overnight. Despite this, we believe that the future is federal. The Founders were understandably wary of the kind of expansive federal government that England sought to implement, and so passed the Tenth Amendment to ensure that the vital role of state governments would not be infringed. State government is close to the needs and concerns of the people, and functions as the great sandbox of democracy. Let a hundred flowers bloom and let a hundred schools of thought contend within the sovereign states.

Rent Seeking

In the modern economy, innovation is no longer the vanguard of profitability. Instead, the economy has restructured around capturing a dominant market position and then, like the big kid in a game of king of the hill, using economic power to muscle out potential competitors. Massive corporations like Amazon, Alphabet, and Facebook have maintained their position not through offering superior products, but by simply buying out any start-up that threatens to disturb their position in the marketplace. Various lobbying groups have grown to help preserve this structure, advocating for preservation of the status quo above all else. Every powerful constituency has a small army of highly-paid, highly-educated soldiers on Capitol Hill to besiege legislators every time serious reform is proposed. The end result is a system that has become paralyzed, incapable of doing anything about the real pain that rent-seeking behavior inflicts on the American people.

We saw this happening in real time after the terrorist attacks of September 11th. Billions of dollars sprung forth from Uncle Sam's coffers to the ill-defined area of "national security." With the stroke of a pen, President Bush gave life to entirely new bureaucracies. Almost immediately, these bureaucracies entrenched themselves through forming constituencies that would fight desperately to protect them. Labor unions wanted to defend the generous salaries and benefits of government jobs, lawmakers wanted to defend the materiel producers that had set up shop in their districts, and consultants wanted to defend the lucrative new industry of terrorism prevention that had emerged almost overnight. As a result, despite the fact that the underlying rationale for the "War on Terror" began to become more and more convoluted, the flow of dollars barely slowed down.

This is not an admonishment to avoid spending money. However, in undertaking new programs, the government ought to be conscious of the rent-seeking that will almost inevitably result. The programs should be designed to have the fewest possible constituents that do not vote. Democracy creates inherent incentives that operate to ensure that government spending is directed in a responsible manner. We need a smaller bureaucracy, fewer government departments, and substantially less administrative overhead. Every dollar spent on a federal government desk jockey is a dollar that cannot work to put dinner on the table of a hard-working family. To beat rent-seeking, we need to get money into the hands of the people, and allow them to figure out how to spend it.

A Vision for Modern Government

We have a vision of a government that is responsive to the problems America is sure to encounter in the vast and unknown future. This government should have offices from sea to shining sea, not just dusty marble mausoleums in Washington, D.C. This is not a government of the Ivy-League diploma but of the home health aide, the third-shift steelworker, and the farmer ever chasing the harvest ahead of a storm. The government need not be big in size and headcount to be effective. Instead, it must be efficient and stripped-down, ensuring that resources go to where they are needed most at the lowest possible administrative cost.

The government should not be squirreled away in an ivory tower accessible only to the privileged few with postgraduate degrees. For ranchers, farmers, and small and medium-sized business owners, the government can often be impossible to bargain with on equal terms. Making simple business decisions should not require the services of a high-priced lawyer. An impenetrable administrative state and an inscrutable criminal justice system have left ordinary people frightened of the government. We should not have a system where a person's livelihood and liberty can be unjustly seized because they violated a rule that no average citizen could possibly understand.

This burden has turned programs designed to help people return to the workforce into full-time jobs. Programs for the disabled have become programs which prevent the disabled from performing meaningful work for fear of losing their meager benefits. A bewildering and labyrinthine process stands between poor folks and the helping hand they desperately need. America must slash this red tape. A future system should be focused on direct cash transfers for every citizen--not coupons, but a check from Uncle Sam that does not discriminate. We should never end up spending money to avoid spending money. While some undeserving people may sneak in, it is a disgrace that in this great nation so many bellies are empty and children left unhoused. The government must seek to redress these ills.

A Better Deal for All Americans

While America has never embraced the communist idea of equality of material goods, we have always believed in equality of opportunity. To be born in America is to be born with one hand outstretched toward the Eye of Providence, ever striving for a brighter future. We cannot deny a chance at prosperity to those born to the wrong families. The son of a farm worker and the son of a billionaire deserve as their birthright the chance to make something of themselves. For too long this chance has been denied by systems more interested in the next fiscal year than giving opportunities to the downtrodden.

For a generation we have transferred to the haves at the expense of the have-nots. The result has been a systemic underinvestment that has left American carnage in its wake. Our small towns, our mid-size cities, our water, power and transportation infrastructure, our social safety net, and our education system have been slowly hollowed out. Forty years of underinvestment have left great challenges that the government must rise to meet. Systems that were once the envy of the Western world have become liabilities that have damaged the public's faith in the promise of good governance. Indeed, even on a societal level, we've traded our tomorrow's for a quick return today.

A generation of youth have been denied economic success even after following all the rules. People now in their late thirties have experienced four once-in-a-lifetime economic crises which have left them drowning in debt in the prime of their lives. They are the best-educated generation in history with the least to show for it. To maintain this current paradigm will only drive more and more people into the hands of dime store authoritarians who offer false prosperity in exchange for the loss of fundamental liberties. On top of this, a soaring national debt will eventually come due, and it will be our children and our grandchildren paying off the principal.

In the last forty years, the wealth of the richest has grown while the wealth of the poorest has fallen. To redress this requires a comprehensive reform of the tax code for the twenty-first

century. This will include eliminating the corporate income tax, instituting a Value-Added Tax, and raising income taxes on high earners. This will primarily be accomplished through raising the capital gains and inheritance taxes back to their historic norms. Vast sums of inherited wealth are incompatible with the American idea of democracy. The Found Fathers explicitly rejected titles of nobility in the Constitution, and we cannot allow people like Jeff Bezos and Elon Musk to establish a new American aristocracy. To stash wealth away in the hands of a few families in perpetuity is a travesty. We dealt with this once before--when the Rockefellers, Vanderbilts, Whitneys and Goulds were taxed appropriately during the last Gilded Age--and we can do so again.

A New Social Safety Net

The mechanisms that once enabled the United States to go without substantial social safety nets began to fade during the 1960s for a variety of reasons. Mutual aid societies, fraternal organizations, churches, and extended families are all weaker forces than they once were, having been replaced by the generous pay and benefits of the stable and steady union or corporate job. However at some point in the early 2000's with the rising tide of globalization, a breakdown of the post-Depression economic consensus, and a rise of short-term thinking over long term planning, those started to disappear too. We're now twenty years on from that and the net result is a nuclear family that is increasingly forced to be self-reliant, with fewer and fewer places to turn during periods of hard times or decreased income. While perhaps ideologically unsavory, the government is the only actor capable of filling the gap that the decline of the traditional social safety net has left.

Cash Benefits, Not Coupons

Our goal is to implement a "free market welfare state," which will harness the productive power of capitalism to raise living standards for Americans left behind by the modern economy. While some may decry this as socialist, the oak tree of democracy grows tallest in the fertile soil of a middle-class nation. A small number of simple-to-understand, easy-to-access programs that provide cash benefits to all Americans is the remedy. While we do not want to repeat the mistake of allowing millions to grow lazy living "on the dole," an injection of cash into struggling communities will provide much-needed capital for small businesses, young families, and the working poor. To harness their full potential, Americans need cash in their pockets. We propose two options in pursuit of this goal. While we prefer the Universal Basic Income (UBI) model, we feel it's important to at least mention both options. That being said, most of this document is predicated on the idea of UBI, as it is a much more transformational idea and would do much more to ease poverty, unleash a tidal wave of innovation, and increase entrepreneurship within our economy than alternatives.

The first option is a Child Allowance. Under the Child Allowance, the government would pay a cash benefit to families for every dependent child until the child turns 21 or graduates a four-year college program. While this is not a silver bullet, a plunging birth rate is ample evidence that too many couples simply cannot afford to raise a family. This injection of cash will ensure that having children will no longer be a luxury off-limits to many in the working classes.

The second option is a UBI. While the number could be varied, we propose a basic number of \$15,000/year, roughly the current earnings of a full-time worker at the federal minimum wage of \$7.25/hour. The UBI payment will provide for a more dynamic economy, far lower rates of poverty, and a far higher velocity of currency. People who can rely on a strong social safety net are far more likely to pursue entrepreneurial enterprises and economic risks. The net result would be a movement of wealth into lagging rural economies and deindustrialized cities, a reversal of the trend of the past forty years.

A federally-administered universal cash benefit program would allow the elimination of over seventy means-tested programs. These programs have substantial inefficiencies built-in, since each has varying rules for eligibility, targets a different constituency, and has its own administrative system. On top of that, many of them require states to match the funds given to them by the federal government. This is money that could be better spent at a micro-targeted local level to suit local needs rather than federal government directives. The federal government could exchange skydrops of money to state and local governments for direct cash transfers to citizens. This injection of cash would then spur economic growth and increase tax revenues for state and local governments, especially in economically depressed rural areas.

There are several structural mechanisms that could be used to accomplish this, all of which avoid the massive overhead costs baked into our current system. Ultimately, the desired effect is to increase the amount of cash in the pockets of the lowest income earners and reduce wealth hoarding among very high-income earners. Much like the pandemic stimulus, this would require an increase in overall taxation. That is a small price to pay, however. We cannot have a dynamic, modern economy until the price of risk-taking is no longer permanent poverty. Only through an enhanced social safety net can America once more embrace the spirit of invention and industry that built the modern world.

Medicine & Healthcare

The working poor bear the brunt of the failing American healthcare system. In 1943, a woman could give birth in a hospital and receive a bill for just \$29.50 (around \$455 in 2021 dollars). Today, a woman will face a bill averaging between \$5,000 and \$11,000 for a normal delivery, and that is if there are no complications. While the very poorest are shielded by programs like Medicaid, those who are just a little above absolute poverty are left out in the cold. The United

States has a world-class healthcare system, but all the monuments to medical science mean very little when much of the population cannot stomach the potential cost of a trip to the hospital.

Universal healthcare is hardly a radical concept. In 1986, President Reagan signed the Emergency Medical Treatment and Active Labor Act (EMTALA), which made access to basic lifesaving care an entitlement regardless of ability to pay. EMTALA was a stopgap measure only. It prevents poor people from dying on the cold, hard sidewalk but imposes a huge unfunded mandate on hospitals. Since people are guaranteed access to healthcare only once they're an inch from death, conditions that can be managed inexpensively when caught early turn into six-figure slice-and-dice jobs for doctors. An ounce of prevention truly is worth a pound of cure. EMTALA likely saves thousands of lives every year, but has also resulted in \$10 cough drops and \$15 acetaminophen pills. The externalities created by EMTALA have decimated hospitals' balance sheets with non-reimbursable expenses that they are expected to bear as the 'cost of doing business.' The emergency room becoming the doctor of last resort meant each hospital became suddenly liable for millions of dollars each year in uncompensated care. Rural hospitals were especially hard hit, with a hospital's closure often meaning the entire healthcare infrastructure packing up and leaving town. Once that is gone, a town's decline often becomes inevitable.

The employer-funded health insurance system brings with it a set of problems that reduce economic dynamism and lock workers into jobs. People with the most experience and capability have become reluctant to take ambitious risks with their careers because the loss of a job means a simple injury can quickly result in financial ruin. As a result, the American economy has become less and less competitive, with a systemic advantage handed to larger companies that can afford generous benefit packages over scappier competitors who lack the capital to do so.

The patchwork quilt of healthcare programs designed to plug the coverage gaps of employer-provided healthcare insurance is the "kludgeocracy" personified. There are seven separate government insurance programs designed to serve a different demographic: Medicare, Medicaid, Tricare, Veterans Administration, Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), the Indian Health Service, and the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHB). This bewilderingly complex and expensive system means that a large stream of money is split into separate agencies, each with a bureaucracy so labyrinthine that lawyers specialize in handling only a single agency. Medicaid and CHIP both require matching funds, which force cash-strapped states to take money from roads and bridges to pay for healthcare, which really ought to be the province of the federal government.

The Affordable Care Act ("Obamacare") was the Democratic Party's solution to the lack of access to healthcare. Unfortunately, the net result was to simply built a new shiny facade over the decaying infrastructure rather than dig down to reach the root problem. Borrowing the idea from the Republican Party, marketplaces were created where the lower-middle class could purchase

government-subsidized insurance plans while Medicaid would expand upward to cover the working poor. Unfortunately, due to an unfriendly Supreme Court ruling, the decision to expand Medicaid was left up to the states. Because Obamacare was a Democratic initiative, Republicans in many states refused to pass the Medicaid expansion, leaving many working poor in the South and Midwest without access to affordable healthcare.

All of this is compounded by prescription drug prices that are among the highest in the world. When President Bush signed Medicare Part D into law, industry lobbying ensured it contained a provision that prohibited Medicare from leveraging its economy of scale to negotiate for lower prescription drug prices. This clear regulatory capture means that the government is left paying enormous sums of money for prescription drugs that could be sourced at a substantial discount. Any healthcare solution must allow the federal government, like any private buyer, to leverage its purchasing power to ensure a favorable deal for taxpayers.

There are two main solutions to the current quagmire of American healthcare. The cheapest option is to create a publicly-funded Universal Catastrophic Coverage (UCC) insurance company. Previously introduced in Congress as Medicare for America, UCC would reduce the fragmentation of our existing system, enable a transition away from the flawed employer-provided insurance model, and achieve universal coverage in a way that is conducive to consumer choice. The simplest version of UCC needs just two parameters: (1) a low income threshold for first-dollar coverage; and (2) a deductible that increases as a function of a household's income. While this involves a complex sliding scale, the end result is that no household will pay more than eight percent of their net income on healthcare. An alternative is to simply extend the current Medicare program to anyone who wishes to enroll in it. This is the least complex option, but comes with higher costs for the federal government. A third option would be a blend of the prior two options, with Medicare-For-All paid for by taxes that rise on a sliding scale alongside income. Whichever option is chosen, it should be simple, easy to explain, and provide universal coverage.

Why is this the job of the federal government? It comes down to portability. While we live in a nation of fifty co-equal sovereign states, certain things should need not be tested in the laboratories of democracy before national implementation. President Franklin Roosevelt wisely made Social Security a national program to meet the pressing needs of the entire American people. We do not want to create a system where one state might try and prevent migration by sweetening the pot too much, while another drives low-income residents out by slashing benefits to the bone. An employee should not fret about losing their coverage as a result of relocating to a different state. To give this system to the states defeats the point. We need a single national healthcare system, not fifty national healthcare systems.

High-Quality Infrastructure

During the post-war boom, the United States led the world in infrastructure. Across the fruited plain and rugged mountain, new interstate highways sprung up to connect the country. Electricity was extended to every home, while new railroads and airports sprung up to move people and goods at ever-greater speeds. We believe this project can be replicated. Every American deserves well-maintained roads and bridges, clean water, high-quality broadband internet, clean and reliable power, and a variety of next-generation transportation options including high-speed rail and protected biking routes.

We harken back to the Rural Electrification Administration (REA) of the New Deal as a model for bringing high-speed broadband to underserved communities. Rather than simply build power systems, the REA made loans to electric cooperatives that were repaid over 30 years. Country folk came together, organized cooperatives, and provided labor to build the systems that they ultimately came to own. The internet today is as important an innovation as the telegraph of the 19th century or the telephone of the 20th. The internet harkened a revolution in the way Americans shop, work, and play. Private industry, despite billions of dollars in government subsidies, has failed to successfully provide broadband to much of rural America. A new agency to connect the underserved parts of America could use a variety of tools, including tools similar to those the REA used two generations ago to ensure that no American is deprived of access to the power of the Internet simply because of their zip code.

Part of the blame for why it has become so expensive for governments at all levels to build things in America can be pointed at the pile of regulations even small-scale building projects must satisfy. Environmental Impact Statements (EIS documents) are a hurdle imposed by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), and were originally intended to give key decision-makers a brief overview of the environmental impacts a particular project would create. Unfortunately, over time, EIS documents have ballooned to thousands of pages out of fear of litigation or clear legal requirements as to what constitutes “adequacy of review” or “accretion of regulatory requirements.” Some states even require EIS documents to include such niceties as possible effects on historic buildings or traffic studies when replacing a bridge with a substantially identical bridge. EIS documents have, as a result, become massive regulatory undertakings that can in some cases add years and hundreds of thousands of dollars in costs to infrastructure projects. While well-intended at the start, EIS documents have become something in desperate need of streamlining.

Bankruptcy Reform

Once upon a time, bankruptcy existed as a relief valve for the poor. Nearly all forms of consumer debt were dischargeable in bankruptcy, and bankruptcy was a straightforward and minimally-expensive process. As a result, there developed a healthy balance between consumer

and creditor, where creditors were judicious in extending credit and consumers had to prove that they deserved the privilege of unsecured loans. Over the past twenty years, (especially with the 2005 Bankruptcy Abuse Prevention and Consumer Protection Act (BAPCPA)), consumer debt has ballooned as debt has become increasingly difficult to discharge. As a result, millions of Americans are saddled with debts that they have no possible hope to repay and that leave them unable to move forward with their lives.

We need broad-based bankruptcy reform, including allowing student loans to be discharged like any other form of debt through Chapter 7 bankruptcy. If creditors are concerned about the potential losses of this process, they ought to be more careful in extending credit rather than relying on an obtuse bankruptcy process to prevent over-burdened consumers from getting rid of unpayable debts. In many states, debt collectors can request bench warrants and use the police as a debt-collection tool, upending the lives of debtors in the process. A simplified bankruptcy process and a general prohibition on the use of law enforcement to collect debts would go a long way in protecting consumers and ensuring the great chain of commerce remains unbroken by zombie debts.

Criminal Justice Reform

For too long, every time a new crisis emerges and the public temper grows hot, a politician's default response has been "there ought to be a law." While in many cases where that happens there probably ought to be a law, the way the criminal justice system is structured ultimately results in yet another criminal penalty. Since the justice system is keenly focused on vengeance rather than rehabilitation, this means another act becomes subject to fines and jail time. Part of reducing poverty is reducing the burden on those who, like all of us, live imperfect lives. One mistake should not mean an end to the pursuit of the American Dream.

We need a wholesale reduction in mandatory minimum sentences for non-violent offenders, and a re-evaluation of the concept generally. There is minimal evidence that longer sentences translate to meaningful improvements in public safety or offender reform. This courtesy should also be extended to violent offenders, based upon ample evidence that a person's propensity towards violence massively drops after the age of forty. Keeping senior citizens in prison has no justifiable rationale in most cases--it is intensely cruel and a waste of taxpayer funds that can be better spent elsewhere.

Everyone deserves a fresh start. A felony should not be a lifetime ban on employment. After a reasonable amount of time has elapsed, the records of most criminal offenders should be sealed. This goes for background checks, employment forms, leases, credit applications, and all other commercial endeavors. However, even data provided to law enforcement should have a limited shelf life; arrest records, histories of interaction with law enforcement, and prior convictions

should drop off a person's record after a set period of time. This should further be applied to occupational licensing, because there is no logical reason a person who has bounced a check should be denied a barber's license. A chance for redemption and change should not be the sole province of young white people.

Finally, the right to vote should never be infringed. The only crimes that warrant stripping the right to vote involve malicious assaults on the electoral process and the integrity of government such as election fraud, abuse of public office, or violation of the public trust. All other offenders should have their fundamental right to vote restored as soon as their sentence is complete. This cannot be subject to obvious disenfranchisement measures like requiring fines and fees be paid in full. Once the sentence is served, the rights must be restored.

Qualified Immunity renders it virtually impossible to sue a police department unless there is a pattern of bad behavior or prior case law matching the exact circumstances the plaintiff's rights were violated in. It has become increasingly clear over the past few years that qualified immunity is a doctrine in desperate need of re-evaluation. Protecting police departments from market-based incentives reduces the impetus to get unqualified and incompetent police officers off the streets. While suing individual police officers is not the best answer due to their generally shallow pockets, allowing injured plaintiffs to seek redress from police departments will ensure that their personnel are monitored far more closely.

Civil asset forfeiture is an issue that primarily affects low-income people with minimal access to bank accounts, credit cards, and other forms of digital cash transfer. Law enforcement officials have often stopped innocent folks on their way to make a large purchase, spotted the cash, and then confiscated someone's life savings on a mere whiff of suspicion of a crime. Once a civil asset forfeiture proceeding has been initiated, the property owner is left to prove the property is "innocent," an expensive and often near impossible task. At both the federal and state levels, reforms must be instituted such that a criminal conviction must be obtained before any assets are forfeited to the government. Any property seized through this process ought to be assigned directly to the treasury office, as a method of ensuring there is no incentive for officers to unduly seize property to fund police operations.

Improved Access to Civil Redress

The United States inherited the English system of adversarial justice, in which a 'trial-by-combat' by sharp legal minds is undertaken to redress wrongs. While this process works well for people of wealth, for those of more moderate means, access to the civil court system is cost-prohibitive. When the co-author worked as a law clerk, his supervising attorney billed clients \$450/hour for his time. If an indigent person is lucky, they may be able to find an attorney or legal aid society willing to take their case *pro bono*. However, the need for free legal work is

far greater than the number of attorneys willing to work for free. As a result, most poor people simply take their lumps and move on, eating whatever loss the other party has inflicted on them.

Improving access to the civil court system would greatly improve the lives of the working poor. When a landlord doesn't return their security deposit or an employer fails to pay the wage that is due, the only redress is civil. As a result, while conservatives often talk about the rule of law, an entire class of people broadly lack access to the enforcement mechanisms that make the law binding. Simply encouraging lawyers to offer more pro-bono hours to the general public each year is not sufficient to meet this demand. Instead, the legal industry should be deregulated. Following Utah's example, non-lawyer ownership in some legal corporations should be permitted, and a new category of non-lawyer legal experts ought to be allowed to handle certain categories of low-value, routine civil litigation. There is a hugely underserved market for legal services, and regulations should be loosened to allow poor people equal access to justice.

A Better Deal for a New Economy

Capitalism and the free market have been the greatest tool in human history for raising living standards and improving quality of life the world over. While communist East Germany was saddled with the wheezing, pollution-spewing Trabant, the middle class of capitalist West Germany enjoyed beautiful, Autobahn-capable sedans like the BMW 5-Series. However, the markets have limits. They have few internal feedback mechanisms to prevent established players, like tall trees in an old-growth forest, from smothering new growth and innovation by soaking up all the sunlight. While regulated capitalism creates untold wealth for all participants--rich and poor alike--the key is regulation. Vigorous antitrust action, consumer protection against abusive practices, environmental regulation, and regulation of working conditions are all necessary to avoid returning to the horrors that Upton Sinclair documented in *The Jungle*.

Business ought to be largely left to do what it does best. That does not mean, however, the kind of anarcho-capitalism that has been thoroughly-criticized. At the same time, however, we must be wary of regulatory capture. The administrative state prior to the deregulatory undertakings of President Carter were known for their biased, ponderous, and excessively deliberative decision-making processes that often meant important decisions sat in limbo for years. This had real world consequences, with several rail carriers suffering greatly by the Interstate Commerce Commission's (ICC) inability to make a timely decision. While the ICC is dead and buried, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) is currently dominated by the telecommunications industry, often issuing decisions that favor large internet providers over the small businesses that rely on a free and open internet to do business.

The single most important thing we can do here is end the overt influence of lobbyists in Washington, D.C. by permanently shutting the revolving door between political agency

appointees and major industry players. A new federal law should be implemented to place a ten year ban on either side of the revolving door.

Similarly, we need to ensure that pressure is put on major trade groups like the American Bar Association and the American Medical Association to expand access and ensure that there exists an adequate supply of lawyers, doctors, and other professionals. These organizations have collectively made becoming a doctor or lawyer expensive to justify the high salaries doctors and lawyers often command. While standards should not be dropped, the barriers thrown up often seem based on a rationale of reducing competition rather than preventing inadequate competence. Postgraduate education is simply too expensive, and this deprives poor Americans of access to the professional experts they desperately need.

This is not to say that we do not need high skill, highly educated experts. However, the needs of many Americans could be served equally well by individuals that have learned through apprenticeships or on-the-job training rather than prohibitively expensive certification programs. Occupational licensing is too often used as an anti-competitive measure. Since it does not require 1,000 hours of classroom instruction to properly dye hair, the obvious explanation is that such restrictions are imposed to maintain limited access and high prices. The net result is that in many areas of the country, access to services is minimal, and millions of Americans struggle to access a licensed hairdresser, let alone a lawyer or a doctor.

Intellectual Property Reform

Copyright and patent are foundational property rights explicitly enshrined in the Constitution, and for good reason. Without the ability to profit from their creations and inventions, far fewer people would put in the hard work necessary to produce a worthwhile contribution to the cultural and economic milieu. However, the Founding Fathers never intended intellectual property protections to transform into a blank cheque for rights holders. Copyright has, at the behest of large corporations, been extended to a ridiculous term. Certain ancillary doctrines like the “anti-circumvention rule” allow corporations to sue their own customers for repairing equipment they rightfully own.

Copyright terms should be cut back to a more reasonable length. At a minimum, we suggest restricting it to the life of the author, plus ten years, or twenty-eight years, whichever is longer. In this way, the author may rightfully reap the benefits of their work while not locking away parts of popular culture in perpetuity. Patents need to be restricted so that they no longer cover the categories of business methods and software. Patents for trivial improvements to existing devices and medications should also be categorically restricted. Finally, a right-to-repair law, requiring manufacturers to make their software and hardware available to end users for repair, should be implemented to prevent manufacturers from destroying the market for independent and at-home

repair services. These are just a starting point for discussion. We have let a morass of intellectual property laws build up over the last 120 years, and it is clearly time for balance to be restored.

Aggressive Antitrust Enforcement

“The great corporations which we have grown to speak of rather loosely as trusts are the creatures of the State, and the State not only has the right to control them, but it is duty bound to control them wherever the need of such control is shown.” President Roosevelt uttered these words before embarking on a trust-busting campaign that shattered consumer-overcharging industry titans like the Standard Oil Company. However, in the last 35 years, the federal government has largely abdicated its role as the market’s policeman. Virtual monopolies have grown unchecked in new markets, the largest among them involving new (and formerly new) technologies. It is clear the growing power of corporations in the digital economy needs to be checked, and companies reformed or broken up to ensure that a competitive marketplace can emerge.

Not all mergers have been bad for consumers. Indeed, many have produced the expected economic benefits realized by economies of scale and cross-platform connectivity. However, low prices and attractive product integration comes at a serious cost to the market as a whole. Companies like Amazon and Google use their existing platforms--which essentially print money--to fund their entry into new markets, pricing their products at a loss in order to drive competitors out of business. Any potential competitor is purchased immediately, in the same way Facebook now owns both Instagram and WhatsApp. The concentration of power in the media, telecommunications, and other economic sectors is dangerous to the economic and political health of our nation. We can no longer afford to allow this monopolization to go unchecked.

Internet Access & Freedom

The power of large corporations to regulate the content their platforms carry has affected both sides of the political spectrum. The free exchange of ideas is the cornerstone of American democracy. In America we are not afraid to follow truth wherever it may lead, nor to tolerate any error so long as reason is left free to combat it. While content platforms should not be forced to tolerate views that are anathema to a civilized society, the ‘highways and hotels’ of the internet should be regulated as common carrier platforms.

Last mile internet service should be treated as a “common carrier” under Title II of the Communications Act of 1934. This will ensure that internet access is available to all citizens on a fair and equal basis. Internet providers should not be able to take kickbacks from retailers, steaming services, and other online content providers to make their data flow faster than that of

their competitors. Further, cloud providers such as Amazon Web Services (AWS) are currently unregulated, yet over the past ten years have become the scaffolding on which large portions of the internet have been built. Crucial internet infrastructure should be treated as a “common carrier” to ensure that unpopular--but not hateful--speech is not unduly quashed.

Environmental & Energy Policy

Native Americans who first made their homes under the boundless sky lived in harmony with the land. Land was more to them than a mere certificate of title; instead, they held a deep and abiding reverence for Mother Earth and the material wealth that sat upon her. No one has the right to unduly pollute the land; by polluting land, the fundamental value is stolen from the owner. The air and the water Americans collectively rely upon must be protected, and the public commons safeguarded for future generations. As the caretakers of the land for the uncountable souls that will someday call America home, we have a sacred duty to ensure that natural beauty and natural resources are protected.

We will never allow ourselves to return to the devil-may-care attitude of the first half of the 20th century, where thousands of Americans were maimed, sickened, or even killed by hazardous chemicals. However, the current approach to environmental policy creates an excessive barrier of red-tape that strangles smaller players in the marketplace. The rulemaking processes can often take years to create a final rule, with large corporations often putting pressure on agencies to craft rules that accommodate them while giving no such leeway to small and medium size businesses. New regulatory options should be explored to reduce the burden on the flow of commerce without sacrificing the quality-of-life Americans have come to enjoy, such as taxation-based environmental policy.

In line with that approach, the future of energy should be designed to mitigate climate change and reduce the air pollution associated with fossil fuels. Nuclear, hydroelectric, geothermic, wind, solar, biomass, tidal, and even human power should be considered. None will be a silver bullet--instead all of them in combination are needed to produce the power necessary for a green and energy-independent America. While the transition away from fossil fuels will not be immediate--natural gas plants will remain online during periods of peak demand--we believe an investment in renewable power is critical to building a next-generation economy.

Nuclear power will be an essential part of this mixture. While nuclear power plants have suffered serious safety issues in the past, the latest generation of nuclear power reactors are safer, cleaner, and more efficient than ever. The federal government should work to provide loan guarantees to pilot a new generation of nuclear power facilities, as well as investing in next-generation nuclear technology with lower costs. The power of the mighty atom promises to reduce our reliance on fossil fuels and create tens of thousands of high-paying, blue-collar jobs in areas chronically

short of decent work. There is no excuse but fear mongering for not embracing the promise of nuclear energy.

Oil isn't going anywhere. From the plastics that store our food, to the chemicals that make the modern economy possible - petroleum is a miracle substance that will be hard to entirely replace. Our dependence on petrochemical derivatives means it is critical we don't waste oil for so base a purpose as power generation. We must preserve our oil stock for generations to come, and renewable power offers the key.

Race & Equality

The United States has always had a fraught and complex relationship with non-white racial groups. Every successive wave of immigration has brought with it a fresh upwelling of discrimination and unrest. Until the immigrant group gains widespread acceptance, they face intense challenges to building a new American identity. For some groups, this process has taken generations. America can--and must--do better. We must commit ourselves to the foundational truth that we are a nation of immigrants. Until we redress past wrongs, we cannot move forward to fulfill the great promise of this land.

Race

The history of America is rich and complex, but is not without its blemishes. Millions of Native Americans were killed in the pursuit of Manifest Destiny. We kept the majority of Black people in bondage for centuries, failing to protect those in the South once the Fourteenth American guaranteed them the same freedoms as white people. We failed to offer a path to the American Dream for many racial minorities until recently. These indelible stains on our history cannot be expunged. Every American has a duty to examine the history of this nation and the scars this land bears in order to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past and continue to work on a more perfect union. Together, we can move forward hand-in-hand, as citizens of the *United States of America*.

We acknowledge and understand the seemingly calls for endless retribution and inquiry in the name of social justice, but the promise of equality can never be fulfilled when some citizens are branded forever as the 'oppressed' and others as the 'oppressor.' The spirit of America is too rich and too proud to be defined by its wrongs alone. There is still much work to be done. We have grave injustice and inequality in policing, in criminal justice, and economic justice. However, to dwell on the pain of the past alone is to prevent ourselves from solving many of our longstanding issues, much less renewing the social contract for a new generation.

There is no neat and immediate solution for these problems. The original sin of slavery was present at the Founding, and the inequities that bondage has created will be with us for the foreseeable future. However, through careful work as individuals, we can work toward restorative justice for the wrongs people of color have suffered. While most people harbor some inherent bias as part of the human condition, that does not prevent us from working towards a future free of prejudice. It is up to each of us to undertake careful introspection as individuals. Through discovering our own individual biases, we learn how to prevent them from coloring our judgment.

Equality

From the time of the Founding, this country was built upon the principle that all those willing to build for themselves a life here with the strength of their back and the sweat of their brow had a place in the American experiment. Minority rights are a conservative issue, because a strong and united America cannot divide ourselves internally on the basis of skin color or sexual orientation. For decades, a diverse coalition of groups have fought for recognition and legal protection of their identities, from the Black Americans of the 1960s to the lesbian, gay, and bisexual Americans of the 1990s to the transgender Americans of the present. No one should feel afraid of their fellow Americans as a result of their own immutable characteristics. We support broad nondiscrimination protections at both the federal and state levels to ensure that no person struggles to find work, a place to live, or government services.

Social Issues

Throughout American history, there have been moral panics and bitter divides over whether the country is heading in the right direction. Social issues have often been used as a wedge by both major parties to gin up their respective bases. While no one seems particularly interested in actually achieving the most extreme points of their social agenda, these extreme positions are used to whip up both money and votes among the most fiery portion of the party base. In doing so, the net amount of division and fear in the country rises as the other side fears that the maximalist position will become the ascendant law of the land. The focus on maximalist positions on religious liberty, gun control, and abortion often prevent agreements from coming into place where there is already substantial public agreement.

Religious Liberty

From the early days of settlement on the American continent, religious liberty has been a foundational aspect of American civil society. The Founding Fathers intended there to be a significant right to religious freedom, and so ensured that it was enshrined in the Bill of Rights. While there was never intended to be freedom *from* religion, the government should not give preference to one religion over another. As noted by the Treaty of Tripoli (1797), “[T]he

Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion,” and we must ensure people of all faiths--and those with none--are accommodated in the public square and on public property.

Extending rights to one group of people should never come at the expense of another group’s rights. We believe in “fairness for all.” Fairness for all would ensure that LGBT Americans cannot be denied access to employment, housing, credit, federal social services, and public accommodations on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity. Fairness for all would also protect churches and religious organizations that define marriage or gender identity differently than the United States government by protecting sincere religious beliefs against anti-discrimination lawsuits. We believe this compromise will settle the conflict between minority rights and religious freedom, both of which are key American values.

Abortion

For a generation since the Supreme Court decision in *Roe v. Wade*, abortion has been a cultural wedge issue. Untold millions of dollars and millions of volunteer hours have been spent to move the political needle a fraction of an inch. Abortion is a contentious issue that we will not weigh in on. The only real consensus among Americans as to abortion is that they prefer, by a broad margin, the current status quo.

The United States is a diverse nation. We believe that abortion should be legal in some form in all fifty states, but that the ease of access and time-based restrictions on abortion should be influenced by local preference and custom. Abortion should not define a political movement. Many unplanned and unwanted pregnancies are related to poverty, and ensuring that parents can financially afford to both access high-quality birth control and to raise children will likely remove much of the heat from the abortion debate. Abortion should remain safe and legal, however, beyond that, states should find their own compromises.

Gun Rights

Until the deep and pervasive economic issues that ail the United States are solved, there is little point in engaging in a deep debate over firearm ownership. Poverty and a lack of access to adequate mental healthcare are both major contributing factors. Attempting to tackle gun violence right now would be akin to painting a house while it is already on fire; we need to put the fire out before we start painting the house, much less have a discussion as to what color it ought to be.

In the interim, the lives of law-abiding gun owners should be made easier. Going along with our general stance that the government should place as small of a burden on civil liberties as

possible, we believe in reducing the number of laws that criminalize innocuous behavior. We need safe harbor laws for travellers with firearms, allowing out-of-state travellers to pass through a state's jurisdiction without immediately having to comply with its firearms laws. We would like to see a federal law mandating universal reciprocity for resident concealed carry permits. The National Firearms Act (NFA) of 1934 is substantially outdated, and certain categories of matériel such as suppressors, short-barreled rifles, and short-barreled shotguns should be removed from NFA jurisdiction. We also believe that no citizen who can lawfully purchase a firearm should need a permit to conceal carry in their home jurisdiction.

In the same vein of stabilization, we believe that the current epidemic of spree shootings and irresponsible gun use poses a fundamental threat to firearm ownership. This is an issue that cannot be solved entirely by the passage of new legislation or new government initiatives. Firearm owners as a community must come together to police their own. The toxic culture that mixes gun ownership and violent rhetoric must be expunged. Firearms are tools for sport, self-defense, and hunting; they should never be tools of threat or intimidation in the public square. We suggest a transition to limit the open carry of handguns and long guns. Rather than a permit to conceal carry, outside of certain circumstances, local jurisdictions should have the option to require a permit to openly carry a handgun or long gun. Background checks should be strengthened and must fail safe instead of dangerous. A non-response from an agency should be the same as a fail, not a pass, and generally no one should be able to purchase a firearm from a stranger without a background check..

Immigration Policy

As a nation of immigrants, there is a certain amount of irony in immigration policy being one of the most intractable political issues of the twenty-first century. Our current system is complex, slow, and intractable. It has created decades-long backlogs in some countries, leaving many deserving people--including those who have honorably served in interpreter roles for the United States military--at risk in their native lands. The net result is that a broken immigration system has produced distortionary effects on our society and economy.

Since the decision in *United States v. Wong Kim Ark* (1898), it has been the policy goal of the United States to ensure that all newcomers to this nation are eventually given the status of Americans, even if this is a generational project. A huge shadow population that cannot interact with civil society because of a lack of legal statute produces severe negative externalities. Crime in the communities of undocumented immigrants often goes unreported out of fear that police will phone immigration officers and potentially deport them. Because undocumented immigrants cannot access simple financial instruments like checking accounts, they end up working in the cash-based informal economy. This deprives the public purse of much-needed funds and prevents the undocumented immigrant from realizing the full value of their labor. Those brought

here as children suffer the most, as they are treated like criminals by an immigration process without exceptions for people who know no other land than America.

The existing system of employer sponsored work visas encourages employers to import employees who then become virtually indentured to them by nature of the terms of their work visas. If an employee is let go by their employer while on an H-1B visa, they have only sixty days to find another job or face deportation. This is almost never enough time in the sectors where H-1B visas are most often used. It is not surprising that this system is used to depress wages. Look at any job posting with a laundry list of requirements paying far below market wages and see for yourself how employers game the system. Once that posting is roundly ignored by applicants, the employer then has permission to look overseas to fill the positing. Practices like this must end, as they're both profoundly unfair to new immigrants and established American employees.

What we propose is a simple system, built on a single premise: we shouldn't have a class of long term resident non-citizens. Either a person is here for a temporary duration and explicit purpose, or they should be on track to become a citizen. The entire citizenship process should take no more than five years in order to ensure that the melting pot continues melting, and does not congeal into an inedible sludge. These proposed visas are not meant to be all inclusive. Some elements of our existing immigration system could be reformed and continue on, such as those relating to education. This would involve some level of modification, such as integrating a citizenship track and allowing visa holders to work during their time in the United States.

The Foreign National Immigration Visa

Under the Foreign National Immigration Visa, any foreign national who can: (1) pass a security vetting; (2) pass an English language exam; (3) pass the; and (4) pay a fee of \$10,000 will be able to acquire a five-year work visa. At the end of that five year period, the person may either apply for citizenship (which comes paired with an automatic extension until their citizenship is granted) or apply for an extension and then return home at the end of that extension. After processing undocumented immigrants, this program would be capped at between 33% and 50% of the previous year's birth number to ensure that new arrivals do not subsume native-born Americans.

The Youth Work-Travel Visa

The Youth Work-Travel Visa is a program without a citizenship track. It is designed to allow youth from other countries to participate in a hybrid work-travel program. The youth would be permitted to come to the United States for a period of up to five years in order to work, travel the country, and experience American culture. The end goal is diplomatic; the United States needs to

win hearts and minds abroad, and there is no better way of doing that than giving foreign youth a chance to understand the deep and abiding love the American people have for this nation. It would be open to any foreign national who: (1) is under twenty-five years old; (2) can pass a security vetting; (3) can pass an English language exam; and (4) can pay a processing fee of \$250. America has so much to share with the world, and it is about time to once more show the world what makes the United States a global leader.

The Unskilled Guest Worker Visa

The Guest Worker Visa would be a short-term work visa program without a citizenship track that individuals could apply to in order to supply unskilled labor for seasonal agricultural work or similar industries. Employers would kickstart the process by submitting a list of positions they need filled to the federal government, as well as a list of languages that they can accommodate. The government would then advertise abroad and deal with the recruitment, transport, and immigration status of employees. The Unskilled Guest Worker Visa system would be open to any foreign national, who can: (1) pass a security vetting; (2) pay a small application fee (based upon local cost of living); and (3) pass a physical fitness test showing they are able to undertake the nature of the work their visa is expected to be used for.

This visa is non-renewable. At most, it would allow for a two years on, two years off cycle of temporary employment. Notably, this visa would require holders to pay a special 3% payroll assessment to handle the additional administrative costs associated with the visa. In exchange the government would be responsible for travel to and from their home country to fulfill the term of the visa, and employees would be paid a bonus (calculated according to local wages) upon successfully returning home. Any roles filled by this visa would be paid the prevailing wage by employers; this is not a tool for cutting corners and underpaying employees.

The Skilled Guest Worker Visa

The Skilled Guest Worker Visa is employer-sponsored, but is not tied to any particular employer. The visa would be valid for five years, and is renewable for up to five years. To obtain a Skilled Guest Worker Visa, the employer must pay \$20,000 up front and certify that any wages paid will be at prevailing rates for the market; the visa holder must (1) pass a security vetting; and (2) pass an English language test.

Like the Unskilled Guest Worker Visa, visa holders would be required to pay a special 3% payroll assessment. In exchange the government would be responsible for travel to and from their home country to fulfill the term of the visa, and employees would be paid a bonus (calculated according to local wages) upon successfully returning home. Any roles filled by this visa would be paid the prevailing wage by employers; this is not a tool for cutting corners and

underpaying employees. Once in-country, individuals on this visa would be eligible to apply for a normal Foreign National Immigration Visa, and all in-country applications would automatically get priority processing.

The Exceptional Talent Visa

The Exceptional Talent Visa program is designed to acquire individuals with exceptional talents and special skills from around the world. A board composed of leading industry and scientific groups would be imbued with the authority to set immigration skills priorities in designated fields. While priorities would be set as needed, examples include the hard sciences, medicine and medical research, manufacturing technology and mechanical engineering. Holders of the Exceptional Talent Visa must: (1) pass an English language proficiency test; (2) pass the United States citizenship exam; and (3) hold an advanced degree or have exemplary experience, expertise in their field, or be approved on a case-by-case basis by the board. Once obtained, this visa would allow for a path to citizenship with up to ten years of permanent residency. Because of the nature of the demand for individuals who meet this profile, the government would pay for relocation and any other reasonable expenses in bringing the individual to the United States.

Undocumented Immigrants

For those who are already here, the Foreign National Immigrant Visa would be expanded to cover the bulk of the undocumented immigrants currently in the United States. No quota system would be applied to those who are already here, and all processing fees would be waived for all those brought to the United States as children. While some might object to this program as unearned amnesty, every wave of immigration to the United States has required mass nationalization. Most undocumented immigrants are American in all but title. They've been living our values, they've endured our struggles, and they've fought to stay here. It seems foolish in a country that celebrates the dynamic American spirit made of countless nationalities to send away people who clearly believe in that same spirit.

There are practical considerations here as well. The United States is a large vibrant country, and with around twelve million undocumented immigrants, it is all but a logistical impossibility to round everyone up and ship them home. Even attempting this project would do incalculable damage to the American economy and the fabric of society in many neighborhoods. We must allow the undocumented to remain and build a new life here--as Americans.

Border Security

Once the process of phasing in immigration reforms has been undertaken, the topic of border security can be considered ripe for discussion. We must first legalize all undocumented immigrants who desire citizenship status, humanely deporting those who do not. After that time,

the federal government can then make remaining in the United States without papers as difficult as possible while still respecting civil liberties. This means criminalizing landlords who rent to people without legal status and criminalizing employers who hire people without legal status. It should be impossible to get a bank account, any form of ID, and access to government services should be heavily restricted. While this may seem somewhat harsh, the end goal is to encourage the flow of legal immigration through the newly-established visa channels rather than sneaking across the border.

Conclusion

While this statement of principles has focused on sweeping changes to the federal government, movements do not begin with the election of a President. Winning one election at a time at the state and local levels will help cement a base of support that can in time turn into the kind of political power that wins federal elections.

To fight for an Evergreen America at the local level, we urge you to stick to these Seven Guiding Principles:

First, *Simplify government*--shrink bureaucracy and make government work for the common people.

Second, *Reduce the rent seekers*--move power to constituents that vote and examine the status quo and see if it actually serves the majority of the voters.

Third, *Bring people together*--nearly any problem can be solved when people of good faith come together - people of disparate backgrounds work together better than you think.

Fourth, *Respect essential freedoms*--the government should work for the people but it should never run roughshod over the Bill of Rights.

Fifth, *Restore broad prosperity*--income inequality and wealth hoarding should be attacked, with the proceeds used to elevate the material conditions of the poor.

Sixth, *America is for all Americans*--no one has a monopoly on the American project and we include all regardless of their immutable characteristics.

Finally, *Remember who we are*--America has always done big things, and our big dreams for the future are within our grasp.

Our goal here is to restore the promise of this--an Evergreen America. We cannot do this alone. We must find others who yet believe in the promise of this storied land. We hope that in reading this document, you too will see the path that lies ahead. Our plea is you will join us and help do what must be done to ensure the sacred flame of liberty will never be extinguished.

Fiat lux.