1787's
Policy
guide
Introducing 1787, a New American Political Party

Come senators, congressmen
Please heed the call
Don't stand in the doorway
Don't block up the hall
For he that gets hurt
Will be he who has stalled
There's a battle outside and it is ragin'
It'll soon shake your windows and rattle your walls
For the times they are a-changin'

- Bob Dylan

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General Policy

Antitrust Enforcement

In such a rapidly evolving and competitive corporate environment, there is no such thing as permanent monopolies. Even dominant companies face the risk of being weakened or displaced by new competitors.

For that reason, 1787 generally opposes heavy-handed government intervention, structural breakups, legislation that dictates how private businesses must operate, and arbitrary caps on market share.

The better way to combat corporate cartel manipulation is to target the misconduct itself: hold executives criminally liable when they knowingly engage in criminal conduct; impose substantial fines; incentivize whistleblowers; encourage private lawsuits; and proactively investigate and screen for corrupt or anticompetitive behavior.

There is, however, an important exception. 1787 supports breaking apart vertically integrated health-care conglomerates by preventing the same corporate parent from controlling – and profiting from – multiple stages of a patient's care. Today, a single corporate conglomerate can potentially participate in numerous links of the health-care chain: providing insurance → administering pharmacy benefits (PBM) → operating specialty and mail-order pharmacies → owning physician practices and clinics → providing health-data and other health-services businesses → administering Medicare and Medicaid plans → providing surgical, clinical, and home-health services.

We do not view this as equivalent to traditional antitrust enforcement aimed at breaking up a company merely because it dominates one market. The objective is not to punish a company for becoming too large or successful, nor to impose an arbitrary ceiling on its market share. It's to establish structural boundaries between businesses whose competing financial interests can create conflicts when they are controlled by the same corporate parent.

In other words, an insurer could remain a very large insurer, a pharmacy could remain a very large pharmacy, and a physician group could remain a very large physician group. What would be restricted is

common ownership across multiple stages of the same health-care transaction. The distinction is horizontal size versus vertical control.

Artificial Intelligence

It's critical that the United States remain the dominant force in Artificial Intelligence (A.I.). That said, there are many, many, MANY issues that must be addressed as A.I. innovation continues to accelerate.

The 2024 A.I. Index Report, an independent initiative at Stanford University, said that the U.S. topped China, the European Union and the United Kingdom as the leading source of top A.I. models by far that year, with 61 notable A.I. models coming from U.S.-based institutions compared to 21 from the European Union and 15 from China.

But then, in January 2025, America was blindsided by the Chinese scrappy startup DeepSeek's latest A.I. model. Although the tech itself was comparable to models recently released by U.S. companies, it appeared to require far fewer cutting-edge computing resources than many in Silicon Valley had assumed necessary…. and, in the blink of an eye, DeepSeek-R1 challenged the assumption that the United States was the dominant, undisputed force in A.I.

DeepSeek-R1 triggered a financial panic, erasing a trillion dollars of market value in a single day. The day before its release, Nvidia – the dominant computational chip dealer for the A.I. boom – was the most valuable company in the world. In the days after the release, it lost $593 billion of value, a loss greater than the entire market cap of ExxonMobil and the worst day for any stock in history. (Note: That said, in July 2025, Nvidia became the first public company worth $4 trillion and, three months later, the first to reach $5 trillion).

DeepSeek-R1 stoked fear from Wall Street to Silicon Valley, and it signaled to the entire world that the battle between the United States and China for tech supremacy had only just begun.

The battle lines were reset once again in June 2026, when it was announced that Z.ai, a Chinese start-up, released a model called GLM-

5.2 that matched the performance of the powerful Mythos model in certain cybersecurity scenarios – putting Chinese companies neck and neck with America's Anthropic, one of the most advanced A.I. laboratories on the planet.

The following month, yet another Chinese start-up, Moonshot AI, released Kimi K3 – a model, its developers claim, that is now the world's largest open-source A.I. system and performs as well as leading models from OpenAI and Anthropic on several key tasks.

Indeed, according to Vals AI, a company that evaluates the performance of A.I. models, Kimi K3 performs just below Anthropic's Fable 5 model and outperforms OpenAI's flagship GPT-5.6 Sol model. The AI benchmarking site Artificial Analysis ranks Kimi K3 third for intelligence, behind Anthropic's Claude Fable 5 and OpenAI's GPT-5.6 Sol.

U.S. stocks immediately dropped on the news of both of these latest developments, as investors sold shares of American chipmaking companies Nvidia, Intel and Micron Technology.

While the 2025 A.I. Index Report warned that China was closing the performance and quality gap – and led in A.I. publications and patents – the report also said that the United States "still led in producing top A.I. models" producing "40 notable A.I. models, compared to China's 15 and Europe's three."

However, the 2026 report revealed that "U.S. and Chinese models had traded the lead multiple times since early 2025. In February 2025, DeepSeek-R1 briefly matched the top U.S. model, and as of March 2026 Anthropic's top model led by just 2.7 percent. The U.S. still produces more top-tier A.I. models and higher-impact patents, while China leads in publication volume, citations, patent output, and industrial robot installations."

With this level of competition, we obviously can't afford to take our foot off the gas. That said, this all comes at a time when the American people are getting increasingly uneasy about A.I. A survey from Ipsos, a market research company, found that A.I. makes 63 percent of Americans "nervous." A recent Pew Research Center survey found that 52 percent of Americans are now "more concerned than

excited" about its growing use – up from 37 percent in 2021 – while just 9 percent are more excited than concerned.

The concerns are wide-ranging – from the negative consequences of data centers TO worries about how A.I. will affect our children's education and mental health TO dread about how and to what extent A.I. will disrupt the U.S. job market. (more on all these in a minute)

Increasingly there are concerns about the sheer power of A.I. To be clear, 1787 doesn't buy into the narrative that A.I. is going to take over the world and kill us all. Our concern is not that catastrophe is inevitable. It's that A.I. development may be moving faster than A.I. safety, leaving humanity increasingly dependent on systems whose capabilities are growing faster than our ability to understand, predict, or reliably control them.

Recent safety tests have produced increasingly troubling warning signs. Advanced A.I. agents have circumvented safeguards, exploited previously unknown security vulnerabilities, deceived humans, concealed their activities, accessed systems they were never authorized to enter, and pursued assigned objectives in ways their developers neither intended nor anticipated.

In perhaps the most alarming example, more than a thousand A.I. agents spontaneously established a communications network, organized themselves into a functioning hierarchy, divided complex tasks among groups, circumvented the digital environments intended to contain them, and ultimately penetrated an outside company's computer systems.

These incidents are obviously scary, but they are also warnings… opportunities to identify and correct weaknesses before they result in something far more serious.

Encouragingly, some of the industry's most prominent leaders now appear to agree. In September 2026, Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei called on the industry to slow the development of cutting-edge A.I. capabilities to give companies and governments more time to address the risks. OpenAI CEO Sam Altman and Elon Musk subsequently backed the basic principle. We applaud their willingness to recognize that winning the A.I. race cannot come at the expense of making sure we can control what we build. Thank you, guys!

Although most everyone has opinions on the level of A.I.'s potential impact, certain negative consequences are undeniable because they are already disturbingly evident.

The tentacles of A.I extend to almost every aspect of our lives. Content generated by A.I., for example, is starting to threaten our democratic process, including our elections and those around the world.

According to the International Panel on the Information Environment, an independent organization of scientists, 80 percent of the countries that held elections in 2024 had Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) "incidents," and over two-thirds (69 percent) of those incidents were determined to play a harmful role in the election.

Most of these incidents involved content creation – think audio messages, images, videos, and social media posts – including deepfakes that recreated images of real people or cloned the voices of well-known political figures, candidates and newscasters.

In July 2025, someone pretending to be U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio contacted at least five government officials around the world, including three foreign ministers, a U.S. governor, and a U.S. Senator. Just days later, an imposter imitating House Intelligence Committee Chairman Rick Crawford (R-AR) sent messages to several people requesting help for a project involving first lady Melania Trump.

Another threat is something called "model collapse," which refers to the declining performance of GenAI models that are trained primarily on AI-generated content (i.e., synthetic content produced by other A.I. models) instead of legitimate human knowledge. These A.I. models begin to lose originality, accuracy, and effectiveness – ultimately polluting the training set of the next generation.

… which then begs the question: What information can we trust? Forum AI, a company that evaluates and rates A.I. models for bias, factual accuracy and context, recently tested the major A.I. models on three things: 1) quality of sources, 2) factual accuracy, and 3) whether they present a response with real balance or just the appearance of it.

In a Wall Street Journal article, former CNN anchor and co-founder and CEO of Forum AI Campbell Brown revealed the results:

"We found serious gaps: The models misstated public opinion on political topics and attributed quotations to people who didn't say them. A.I. models gave incorrect answers to questions about mail-in voting and ballot fraud and named the wrong people when asked who had endorsed whom. On open-ended, contested questions that voters might ask before an election – about gerrymandering, immigration and climate – they often advocated one side. The most revealing failures were much subtler. When we asked the major models something as basic as what form of government the U.S. has, one of them, Claude Opus 4.7, cited *Global Times*, a Chinese state-run tabloid."

She continued, "Accuracy in politics, health, finance and education depends on more than getting a date or a name right. It depends on which sources are selected, which context is included, which perspectives are left out, and whether the strongest version of a competing argument is presented. A model can be technically correct and still mislead."

These are all significant issues to address, but perhaps the most important conversations we must have are ones about bias, discrimination, consumer privacy, and the social/ethical implications of A.I. *It's critical we establish ethical frameworks that ensure A.I. enhances our global strength and is beneficial for society overall.*

How, for example, can we make sure facial recognition technology is never utilized in a racially biased manner? And who should be held responsible – and what should the consequences be – when an automated system goes on an antisemitic rant and spreads conspiracy theories about Jewish people or allows sexualized photo editing, including of children, like X's A.I. chatbot Grok has?

Take facial recognition technology, for example, which has become one of law enforcement's standard investigative tools. The U.S. Government Accountability Office reports that seven law enforcement agencies within the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security – including the FBI and Secret Service – now use facial recognition technology to support criminal investigations.

In some ways, this sounds like it could be a positive development. Law enforcement agencies used this technology to identify many of the troublemakers that participated in the U.S. Capitol insurrection on

January 6th, for example. But there are legitimate concerns surrounding surveillance technologies, including everything from privacy issues TO concerns over mass surveillance TO abuse of power.

Potential abuse of these technologies is particularly alarming for racial/ethnic minorities, many of whom, understandably, fear these technologies and their algorithms may be utilized in a racially biased manner.

A 2019 study by the U.S. Commerce Department's National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) showed that Asian and black people were up to 100 times as likely to be misidentified as white men, likely because the early images used to train many of the algorithms tended to be skewed toward white men.

A 2026 analysis by The Federation of American Scientists found that "face recognition systems have improved dramatically in accuracy over the past decade, and in tightly controlled environments they now perform at very high levels," but "substantial differences in performance across demographic groups persist, particularly in the false positive errors most closely associated with wrongful arrests and other harms."

This is a real problem given that The Washington Post "reviewed documents from 23 police departments where detailed records about facial recognition use are available and found that 15 departments spanning 12 states arrested suspects identified through A.I. matches without any independent evidence connecting them to the crime – in most cases contradicting their own internal policies requiring officers to corroborate all leads found through A.I."

This is all kind of mind-bending stuff, but the good news is that, if we are *proactive*, we can maintain control over how A.I. advances instead of being vulnerable to forces beyond our control. Let's break these issues down:

American Jobs

There is a striking discrepancy in the level of popularity of A.I. around the world. People in poorer countries tend to regard A.I. as a lifesaver… a way to level the playing field, allowing them to build a bridge from poverty to far better life outcomes and economic opportunities. When it comes to A.I., people in poorer countries don't have a lot to lose and a tremendous amount to gain.

On the other hand, those in richer countries – who are far more likely to enjoy secure and consistent employment and income – have potentially A LOT to lose, with not much upside. Far from being a lifesaver, for people in these countries, A.I. often looks like a threat to their current stability and future opportunities.

In America, for example, – where health care coverage is linked to employment more than anywhere in the world, and the safety nets aren't nearly as extensive – losing your job hits far and wide. The consequences snowball quickly from a loss of income and cancelled health coverage to not being able to pay your rent/mortgage, car payment, insurance, childcare… and on and on and on.

In a May 2025 report from Axios subtly called A White-Collar Bloodbath, CEO of Anthropic Dario Amodei said that half of all entry-level jobs could disappear in one to five years and that executives and government officials should stop "sugarcoating" that reality.

Amodei told Axios that he was speaking out now because, "We, as the producers of this technology, have a duty and an obligation to be honest about what is coming. I don't think this is on people's radar." He further warned, "You can't just step in front of the train and stop it. The only move that's going to work is steering the train – steer it 10 degrees in a different direction from where it was going. That can be done. That's possible, but we have to do it now."

Others are also speaking up. The Chief Executive of Ford Motor Company said that A.I. could likely replace half of white-collar workers and will "leave a lot of white-collar people behind." An executive with JPMorgan Chase said the bank anticipates a 10 percent workforce reduction thanks to AI. Walmart CEO Doug McMillon

warned his employees that A.I. is set "to change literally every job" and that workers will need to adapt.

The CEO of Fiverr, a marketplace for freelancers, said this all in a little more direct and ominous way: "This is a wake-up call. It does not matter if you are a programmer, designer, product manager, data scientist, lawyer, customer support rep, salesperson, or a finance person – A.I. is coming for you."

On the other hand, an October 2025 report from the Budget Lab at Yale University said that "while the occupational mix is changing more quickly than it has in the past, it is not a large difference and predates the widespread introduction of A.I. in the workforce… measures of exposure, automation, and augmentation show no sign of being related to changes in employment or unemployment."

Daron Acemoglu, a Nobel laureate and economist from MIT, thinks A.I. will only be able to perform 5 percent of jobs within the next decade: "A lot of money is going to get wasted," he has said. "You're not going to get an economic revolution out of that 5 percent. You need highly reliable information or the ability of these models to faithfully implement certain steps that previously workers were doing. They can do that in a few places with some human supervisory oversight…but in most places they cannot."

1787 comes down more on Mr. Acemoglu's side. *Of course*, A.I. is going to have an impact on the U.S. job market and, *of course*, we must prepare for that in every way possible. But we look at it more like a shift than a total disruption (and this was already happening thanks to technological advancements like automation).

Even Dario Amodei later softened the words he said to Axios, saying that he was simply trying to give companies a heads-up, not be the "prophet of doom." Companies that use A.I., he clarified, "can do the same thing with less resources, and that leads to things like layoffs, or they can do more with the same amount of resources. But that requires creativity."

Read about U.S. Works, 1787's Plan of Action for Jobs on p. 442.

One of the main reasons we are bullish on this is the power of *HUMAN INTELLIGENCE.* Yes, the things A.I. can do are mind-blowing. One of the most remarkable things about DeepSeek's 2025 model was the advancements it made in "reasoning," a major factor in how close A.I. can come to achieving human-level intelligence. The breakthrough was not *if* the chatbot can "reason," but *how* it "reasons." Instead of just regurgitating information, it seemed to have an actual thought-process.

Think about it like this: One tech columnist asked the chatbot if a hot dog is a sandwich. She reported that it spent "28 seconds contemplating the philosophical meaning of processed meat between bread" then said, "First, I need to understand what defines a sandwich." That's crazy!

Even thirty years ago, the IBM supercomputer Deep Blue beat Garry Kasparov, the world chess champion for eleven years in a row. Kasparov was impressed: "It attacks, you know? It finds the shortest cut to any weakness in your position. It doesn't hesitate, it doesn't have any doubts, it's not scared by your illusionary threats. And that's why, you know, it was the absolute worst, and, you know, it was a massacre, which was well-deserved."

But *HUMAN INTELLIGENCE* is way more impressive – and in so many ways, irreplaceable. Humans have lived experience and can forge personal connections. We can build trust and community. We have wisdom, discernment and intuition. We have consciousness, can make moral judgments, weigh ethical dilemmas, and understand right from wrong. We can experience feelings and emotions and understand one another on a cellular level. We have regrets, compassion and empathy. We can laugh. We can cry. We can love.

We have motor skills and can walk around without a joystick. We can create and innovate and have vision and purpose. We can make real-time adjustments based on new information. We can link unrelated ideas and invent completely new concepts. We can *imagine* the impossible.

Data Centers

The United States already has more than 3,000 operational data centers, with another 1,500+ in development – Americans are increasingly pushing back against them.

Communities are quickly realizing that these data centers greatly impact their existing infrastructure, electricity demands, utility rates, water consumption, air and water quality… basically, their overall quality of life and well-being.

The worst part may be the noise pollution, which is intense. Imagine a constant low-frequency vibration that feels like you're standing in a nightclub right between the band's subwoofer and bass drum. People unfortunate enough to experience this nightmare report chronic sleep deprivation, headaches, internal ear pressure, and increased anxiety.

The public backlash against data centers has gotten so intense that, in 2025, local opposition blocked or delayed at least 48 data-center projects worth $156 billion. In just the first three months of 2026, at least 75 projects worth another $130 billion were blocked or delayed. By summer, polling showed that seven in ten Americans opposed having a data center built in their own community.

Energy & Water Consumption

A.I.'s massive use of water and electricity is another major problem for these communities. A.I. requires thousands of servers plus the cooling equipment that helps them run, all housed in thousands of these data centers that require enormous amounts of electricity to meet the demand. To put it in perspective, the U.S. Department of Energy says one data center can require 50 times the electricity of a traditional office building. Complexes with multiple buildings can use up to 20 times that amount.

Jesse Dodge, a former senior research analyst at the Allen Institute for A.I. – a nonprofit research institute founded by the late Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen – once said that "one query to ChatGPT uses approximately as much electricity as could light one light bulb for

about 20 minutes…so, you can imagine with millions of people using something like that every day, that adds up to a really large amount of electricity."

Put another way, research from financial services company Goldman Sachs says that, on average, a "ChatGPT query needs nearly 10 times as much electricity to process as a Google search."

This is causing enormous challenges. Northern Virginia – known as the world's internet hub, processing almost 70 percent of global digital traffic – uses electricity at a staggering rate. In fact, PJM Interconnection, the regional grid operator for the area, says the usage is unsustainable without hundreds of miles of new transmission lines and continued energy output from the old-school coal-powered electricity plants that had previously been ordered to shut down because of environmental concerns.

Dominion Energy has repeatedly warned they may not be able to keep up with the energy demand sparked by A.I. The utility estimates the A.I. energy demand in Virginia will likely quadruple by 2035 – roughly the same amount of electricity used to power 8.8 million homes. Already, the 50+ data centers Northern Virginia Electric Cooperative serves account for 59 percent of its entire energy demand. By mid-2028, the number of data centers is expected to expand to over 110.

Likewise, data centers are causing a rapid increase in water consumption, with one analysis finding their *indirect* water consumption to be as much as twelve times more than their direct use. Many of the new facilities are being built in areas that already experience water shortages, with one study projecting centers could demand over 20 percent of Phoenix, Arizona's yearly use by 2031 (up from just three percent today).

Read more about America's Water Scarcity Crisis on p. 205.

The real-world consequences of these new realities are enormous. In Google's 2024 Environmental Report, the company said its greenhouse gas emissions have increased by 48 percent over the past five years, due to a surge in data center energy consumption and

supply chain emissions. Google's report warns, "As we further integrate A.I. into our products, reducing emissions may be challenging." < Google's 2025 Environmental Report says it has since reduced data center energy emissions by 12 percent. >

In its 2024 Environmental Sustainability Report, Microsoft revealed its emissions increased by 29 percent over the past four years because of new data centers "designed and optimized to support A.I. workloads." The company also warned that "the infrastructure and electricity needed for these technologies create new challenges for meeting sustainability commitments across the tech sector." < Microsoft's 2025 Environmental Sustainability Report revealed its total emissions had increased by 23.4 percent compared to the 2020 baseline. >

A.I. and the Federal Government

The Trump/Vance administration is taking unprecedented steps to block A.I. developers from releasing certain A.I. models under the pretense of "security risks."

The most hard-core example is the way the administration has treated Anthropic – a company that the leaders of the United States of America should be immensely proud of.

The official story from Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio and Pete Hegseth is that their administration, using its export-control power, demanded that Anthropic restrict access to its powerful Mythos model over concerns adversaries could exploit it for cyber warfare. To help assuage the administration's concerns, Anthropic then released Fable 5, a version that has most of the capabilities of its Mythos model (i.e., advanced coding, research, analytic, and agentic features) but also includes safeguards to prevent its use for cyber.

But that still didn't seem to be good enough for the brain trust of Trump, Vance, Rubio and Hegseth (who we're guessing know next to nothing about the inner workings of A.I.). While it's true that Amazon researchers found a way to bypass Fable's guardrails soon after its release, it's very likely that concerns about the adequacy of safeguards are not the real reason these guys have beef with Anthropic.

The real reason Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio, Pete Hegseth and the rest of the gang are ticked off at Anthropic is that its CEO Dario Amodei had the *audacity* to demand restrictions on how the Pentagon can deploy Anthropic's tech for mass domestic surveillance and fully autonomous weapons. In other words, Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio, Pete Hegseth and the rest of the gang are ticked off at Anthropic for *having a conscience*.

For years, Anthropic has been, by far, the most vocal advocate from the A.I. world for guardrails to ensure the technology is used safely and responsibly. In a statement made amid heated discussions with administration officials, Mr. Amodei made Anthropic's position clear: "I believe deeply in the existential importance of using A.I. to defend the United States and other democracies, and to defeat our autocratic adversaries."

"However, in a narrow set of cases, we believe A.I. can undermine, rather than defend, democratic values. Some uses are also simply outside the bounds of what today's technology can safely and reliably do. Two such use cases have never been included in our contracts with the Department of War, and we believe they should not be included now: mass domestic surveillance and fully autonomous weapons."

Outraged, this led to Pete Hegseth designating Anthropic a "supply-chain risk," removing its models from military systems, and President Trump directing federal agencies to stop working with the A.I. giant, accusing the company's executives of being "leftwing nutjobs."

Amodei responded: "These threats do not change our position: We cannot in good conscience accede to their request." (BRAVO and THANK YOU, Dario!)

The Trump/Vance administration setting the precedent that the government can arbitrarily order an A.I. model off the market – which is moving dangerously close to the nationalization of A.I. – is breathtaking. This not only potentially undermines our lead in A.I., but it also pushes companies around the world into the arms of the Chinese and their open-weight and open-source A.I. models.

< Open-weight means you are given pre-trained parameters to fine-tune the A.I. model, but the source code, architecture details, and datasets remain confidential. Open-source goes further, providing total transparency by including the source code, training methodologies, and training data so the public can audit and rebuild it. These models work great for users who want unconstrained access to systems they control because they are free to download, modify, and adapt them.

By advancing these types of models, China can bypass U.S. hardware sanctions and restrictions; learn and implement best practices; rapidly integrate A.I. across its vast manufacturing base; and build global soft power through A.I. influence and dominance. >

The Trump/Vance administration's inconsistent approach to A.I. is confounding, but it looks even more schizophrenic and careless when you consider the Nvidia deal.

In January 2026, the Trump/Vance administration reversed some export control restrictions imposed by the Biden administration, allowing Nvidia – the dominant American computational chip dealer for the A.I. boom – to sell advanced chips to China. They did this in exchange for a 25 percent cut of all those sales.

Five months earlier, the administration brokered a deal requiring Nvidia and Advanced Micro Devices (AMD) to pay a 15 percent fee on revenue from the sales of their AI chips to China in exchange for export licenses.

This is quite possibly the most stupefying idea we have ever heard. Setting aside the national security concerns (which are huge) and the fact that the deal violates the Export Control Reform Act – which says no fee can be imposed in connection with license applications – and the U.S. Constitution – which prohibits the federal government from imposing taxes or duties on items exported from the United States – why in the name of all that is holy would our leaders give our biggest economic competitor the chance to catch up with us in artificial intelligence?

…especially when experts say that Huawei, China's closest competitor to Nvidia, is still at least two years behind them? Basically, we are gifting China our computing power so they can buy time while *their* companies improve *their* own supply and performance.

Donald Trump and JD Vance just handed Xi Jinping U.S. technological superiority on a silver platter… for what? 25 percent? This is insanity. Whose side are these guys on?

The Institute for Progress, a think tank, estimates the American advantage over China in A.I. compute will shrink from around ten times to five times within a year of the Chinese having H200 chips (the H200 – a high-speed graphics processing units (GPUs) used for AI applications and high-performance computing – is Nvidia's second-most-powerful chip). Well, that's just great, isn't it?

In a most ironic twist, literally hours before the Trump/Vance administration's announcement of their A.I. sabotage, the U.S. Justice Department announced that our federal government had "exposed a sophisticated smuggling network that threatens our nation's security by funneling cutting-edge A.I. technology to those who would use it against American interests." This "criminal network" – their words – tried to smuggle over $160 million worth of Nvidia chips to China (irony is not a strong enough word for this).

The reasoning behind the bust, according to U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Texas Nicholas J. Ganjei, is that the H100 and H200 chips are "designed to process massive amounts of data, advancing generative AI and large language models and accelerating scientific computing. These GPUs are used for both civilian and military applications."

"These chips are the building blocks of A.I. superiority and are integral to modern military applications. *The country that controls these chips will control AI technology; the country that controls A.I. technology will control the future.*"

> *Although plenty of investors continue to pour billions into A.I. – some estimates say 3 percent of our GDP by 2027 – many people, 1787 included, think we could be in yet another speculative financial bubble (think: dotcom in the late 90s/2000 and U.S. housing in 2007-8). Read more about this on p. 15 of The Great American Reset.*

1787 Plan of Action: Artificial Intelligence

- Fully support Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei's industry plea to slow the development of cutting-edge A.I. capabilities to give companies and governments more time to address the risks.
- Thoroughly research and find ironclad solutions for the issues of bias, discrimination, consumer privacy, and the social/ethical implications of A.I. *It's critical we establish ethical frameworks that ensure A.I. enhances our global strength and is beneficial for society overall.*
- Prohibit American companies from selling the most advanced chips and equipment to China by implementing strong export controls. Shut down China's efforts to work around these controls.
- Do not restrict the use of advanced, cheap Chinese A.I. models in the United States. For one, many American startups and researchers rely on these affordable, customizable open models because training frontier models locally is prohibitively expensive.
- Do not allow the U.S. military to use fully autonomous weapons under any circumstance.
- Support the right of private companies to decide what their tech can and cannot be used for. Do not allow the federal government to penalize or punish them for their decisions, like the Trump/Vance administration has tried to do with Anthropic.
- It should be up to local and state governments to decide whether to end tax breaks for data center construction. The federal government should not offer tax breaks exclusively for artificial intelligence beyond Research and Development (R&D) Tax Credits.
- Make sure experts are consistently judging A.I.'s output reliability, providing for constant independent audits and evaluation.

- To help control noise pollution from data centers, resume the funding for the Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Noise Abatement and Control, an office that was phased out in 1982 but that remains on the books.

- Regulating A.I. is tricky because we must balance the many benefits with a large variety of risks – all without stifling A.I.'s progress. But this can be done! Government can absolutely be a stabilizing force here, providing safety measures to prevent harm to Americans without imposing harsh regulations that would stifle competition and be a drag on innovation.

  We need a single, comprehensive regulatory framework. Rules and regulations cannot be fragmented; we need consistency. So far, state legislatures have largely taken the lead in regulating A.I., which is understandable given there have been no federal protections in place regarding data security and privacy regulations. However, because we are at such a critical moment – and because this is so incredibly complex – a patchwork of state laws across the country will not cut it.

  We must proceed cautiously. The European Union (EU) passed the first comprehensive set of rules for providers, deployers, and distributors of A.I. in the EU market in March 2024. We believe the law goes too far, and the excessive red-tape, stringent risk assessments, and broad requirements for foundation models will likely impede innovation, productivity and progress, as well as act as huge barriers to entry for new players – something we cannot let happen here.

Consumer Protection

Before the Trump/Vance administration obliterated it, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) – created after the 2007-2009 Financial Crisis as part of the Dodd-Frank Act – provided "a single point of accountability for enforcing federal consumer financial laws and protecting consumers in the financial marketplace."

The CFPB has played an extremely important role in protecting U.S. citizens. Since its creation in 2011, the agency established clear rules to add fairness and transparency to the financial marketplace and continually developed ways to safeguard consumers from emerging threats.

In its 14-year history, CFPB returned over $20 billion to consumers, including by monetary compensation, principal reductions and canceled debts, and ordered companies to pay $5 billion in fines for bad behavior.

Out of the 6,400,000 consumer complaints the agency had received before the Trump/Vance administration suppressed all the data, over 95 percent had experienced timely responses from the companies involved. Plus, the agency had helped millions of consumers settle complaints with financial firms, fighting for – and receiving – billions of dollars for consumers who have been victimized.

From the beginning, the CFPB has been under attack by certain segments of the financial industry and politicians who seek to protect predatory practices over the well-being of the American consumer.

The first Trump administration was particularly aggressive in its fight against the CFPB, but the Trump/Vance administration has now blown the entire agency apart.

In February 2025, Russell Vought, the director of the U.S. Office of Management and Budget and acting head of the CFPB, closed the bureau's Washington headquarters and instructed staff and contractors they could not "perform any work tasks" in preparation for a complete dismantling of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

Even though CFPB staff have remained on the payroll as many lawsuits challenging the Trump/Vance administration's actions make their way through the legal system, there have been virtually no investigations.

Russell Vought has said he intends to completely shutter the CFPB by the end of 2025 or early 2026. In addition to imminent mass firings, the administration is moving to systemically rescind rules and regulations – including the NBR (Nonbank Registry) Orders Rule that requires businesses subject to federal regulatory orders to submit those

for listing on CFPB registries – and has permanently dismissed 22 CFPB enforcement actions, including one against Toyota (who had been ordered by the CFPB to give customers back $48 million and pay a $12 million fine for misleading consumers) and the credit union Navy Federal (who had already agreed to give $80 million back to consumers for improperly charging overdraft fees while they showed a positive balance).

By dismissing these 22 actions, the Trump/Vance administration has denied the American consumer $120 million that was already earmarked for them by negligent companies. If the administration continues to cancel enforcement actions, it could cost consumers another $240 million.

Unsurprisingly, this is a Godsend for big banks like JPMorgan Chase, Bank of America and Wells Fargo – who have each had a potentially very expensive lawsuit against them dismissed – as well as the three credit bureaus Equifax, Experian and TransUnion – who now don't have to be concerned about fixing errors on consumers' credit and tenant-screening reports.

This is outrageous. The CFPB must be brought back to protect the American consumer from predatory practices and corporate abuses.

Upon its return, the CFPB should remain an independent watchdog and retain its autonomy from both the White House and Congress. However, the CFPB should <u>not</u> be independent of congressional appropriations. When the CFPB was created, it was given the power to fund itself and set its own budget – a number that could legally reach up to 12 percent of the Federal Reserve's yearly operating expenses.

However, this arrangement violated the Appropriations Clause set forth in Article 1, Section 9, Clause 7 of the U.S. Constitution ("no money shall be drawn from the Treasury, but in consequence of appropriations made by law") as well as the Non-Delegation Doctrine, a principle of constitutional and administration law ("Congress is not permitted to abdicate or to transfer to others the essential legislative functions with which it is thus vested").

1787 Plan of Action: Consumer Protection

The recommendations below only focus on financial protections for consumers. There are also Consumer Protection issues regarding the Internet, housing, higher education, and Social Media. Those recommendations can be found in each topic's individual section.

Lending

- Rebuild and protect an independent Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. Protect its Office of Fair Lending and Equal Opportunity.
- Reinstitute strict restrictions on payday lenders. Reverse Donald Trump's decision to not treat them like credit card companies.
- As payday lending gains restrictions, watch the "consumer installment loan" market closely for potential predatory lending.

Financial Institutions

- Ban fixed fee overdraft programs. Banks can instead charge reasonable interest rates as they do for any small loan.
- Strictly and consistently enforce high standards and accountability for credit rating agencies and NRSROs.

Debt Collection

- Require that debt-buying companies provide proof that they own a debt before they can sue a debtor.
- Stop debt collectors from harassing consumers and collecting on "zombie" debts.

Credit Scoring

- Do everything possible to protect unscorable and credit invisible consumers.
- Demand that credit-scoring mechanisms be fair to protect consumers from abusive and harmful lending practices.

Criminal Justice Reform

We must completely reframe our approach to the U.S. criminal justice system because it's expensive, unfair, ineffective, and has been a destructive force in many people's lives for decades. In almost every category – including the apprehension, prosecution, defense, sentencing, and punishment of Americans suspected or convicted of criminal offenses – we are failing miserably.

According to the World Prison Brief, there are over 1.8 million prisoners in the United States, the highest in the entire world. We have the 5th highest prison population rate – meaning, the number of prisoners per 100,000 of the national population – beaten only by El Salvador, Cuba, Rwanda and Turkmenistan.

Does this sound good to you?

Practically every element of our criminal justice system is a textbook example of The Butterfly Effect at its very worst. Take, for example, the fact that, on any given day in America, there are around 555,000 people incarcerated who have not yet been convicted of a crime, even though judges have ruled most of them eligible for release until their fate is determined.

That's weird…why in the world are they still there? Simple. They can't afford bail.

To be clear: We are speaking about non-violent offenders only, and there are A LOT of them.

The FBI's 2024 Crime in the Nation Statistics reported that 1,221,345 violent crimes (i.e., murder, nonnegligent manslaughter, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault) were committed in the United States in 2024, compared to 5,986,400 property crimes (i.e., burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson).

A report from the United States Commission on Civil Rights revealed that "in the United States, over ten and a half million people are arrested each year, the majority for low-level offenses, drug violations, and civil violations. For instance, in 2016, data showed that approximately 5 percent of arrests in the U.S. were for charges of violent offenses, and that charges of *low-level offenses accounted for about 83 percent of arrests* that year."

The Commission also discovered that "between 1970 and 2015, there was a 433 percent increase in the number of individuals who had been detained pre-trial, and pre-trial detainees represented a larger proportion of the total incarcerated population" and that "data from the 75 largest counties showed that nearly all felony defendants (96 percent) who were held pretrial had a monetary bail set and they would be released if they had the means to post it." However, "nine out of ten were unable to post it."

This makes zero sense, because we keep these people locked up even though practically none of them are a danger to the public. During the pandemic, for example, the U.S. Justice Department released over 11,000 inmates from the federal prison system, ordering them to home confinement. Only 17 of these people committed new crimes after their release, and only ONE of those new crimes was violent (aggravated assault). ONE. THAT'S IT.

The Hamilton Project, an economic policy initiative within the Brookings Institution, describes the bail situation this way: "The median bail amount is more than $10,000 for felony defendants. While a typical household has roughly $20,000 in financial assets, much of this is not liquid, and it may be expensive to turn those assets into cash quickly. The median bail amount dwarfs the liquid savings of a typical

household, meaning that many people would almost certainly have to borrow or use a commercial bail bonds firm to gain release from jail."

"Given the typical 10 percent premium charged by the commercial bond industry, this implies a cost of roughly $1,200 to the typical felony defendant. More importantly, bail bond premiums are nonrefundable, meaning that many people will functionally have to pay a large fee in order to avoid pretrial detention. Even $1,200 is greater than the total financial assets of the poorest quintile, making it highly likely that poorer defendants would be unable to post bail."

Bail and other monetary sanctions are used disproportionally more in places where there are more black people, naturally. Cities with the highest populations of black people collect around $29 in criminal justice revenues per resident, compared to the $9 per resident collected in cities where there are fewer black people (these numbers are adjusted for the number of crimes committed in each place).

Setting aside for a moment that this is a direct violation of the Fifth, Eighth, and Fourteenth Amendments of the United States Constitution, let's really think this through:

We have people just sitting around in prison, waiting, instead of earning money and being mothers and fathers. So, as a society, what we get in the end are households with years of lost income; people losing job prospects and, as an extension, earning potential by the minute; and even more kids with no mother and/or father. *THIS MAKES NO SENSE*.

The most insane part is that we are paying a bloody fortune for these horrid outcomes. The U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics reports that, in FY2023, the average cost of incarceration for a federal inmate was $44,090. State governments spent an additional $63 billion plus.

That's bad enough, but studies that consider all the stakeholders involved, including the families of inmates, suggest that number is way low. One study from the nonprofit organization FWD.us Education Fund estimates that – when you factor in everything from lost wages and out-of-pocket spending – incarceration costs almost $350 billion for the families of inmates alone. People spend nearly $4,200 every year to support their loved ones, including expensive telephone calls,

helping raise their children, paying for the inmate's essential items, and traveling to visit them.

Of course, this doesn't cover the hidden consequences, which include the emotional, physical, educational, and financial well-being of the children whose parent(s) are in prison. The U.S. National Institute of Justice found that these children often "face a host of challenges and difficulties: psychological strain, antisocial behavior, suspension or expulsion from school, economic hardship, and criminal activity."

The most frustrating part is that we keep doing things that obviously don't work even though we have plenty of evidence that suggest there are much smarter, more effective ways.

The criminal justice system in Norway, consistently named among the very best in the world, is characterized by "broad police and prosecutorial discretionary powers, centralized bureaucracy, and a comprehensive network of institutions. Social, psychiatric, and psychological therapies play a large role in inmate programs, indicating the emphasis on rehabilitation." The result of their "restorative justice" approach is that people leave Norwegian prisons with the physical and emotional skills they need to be high-functioning members of society.

An analysis of the Norwegian system by the U.S. Department of Justice found that "social defense is seen as the main aim of the criminal justice system. This goal is achieved through general deterrence and resocialization of the offender. Limited recidivism statistics indicate a 34.3 percent reconviction rate within a three-year period."

Compare that to the United States, which consistently has among the highest recidivism rates in the entire world. According to the U.S. Department of Justice, "82 percent of individuals released from state prisons were rearrested at least once during the ten years following release. Within one year of release, 43 percent of formerly incarcerated people were rearrested." Among these, "about half had a parole or probation violation or an arrest that led to a new sentence within three years, a rate that increased to about six in ten within ten years."

This revolving door is made worse by the ineffective accountability measures we tolerate for the supervised population that lives outside concrete walls. Across America, well over 3.7 million people are on probation or parole on any given day. The sheer number of people not only prevents adequate accountability but, worse, it inhibits constructive, individualized case management plans that can reduce recidivism by guiding released prisoners to new paths.

Listen, we get it. Some Americans believe that those who break the law must pay and pay BIG for their egregious actions – which is why this nation has a chronic focus on punitive measures over rehabilitative ones. But we'll say it again, if people just sit and rot in jail, all society gets in the end are households with years of lost income; people losing job prospects and, as an extension, earning potential; and even more broken families.

Okay, so let's assume that the people who say that "criminals" should rot in jail for their transgressions are 100% right. What then? Then they would be right – congratulations – but their being right in no way offers a tangible solution for how we change the course of this crisis going forward (and, make no mistake, we have *no choice* but to change it because the entire system just isn't working).

IS BEING RIGHT MORE IMPORTANT THAN BEING SMART?

And it just goes on and on. Just wait until you hear this. Though they are only 13 percent of the population, black people were 28 percent of those killed by police in 2020. Using data from the Mapping Police Violence Database, FiveThirtyEight calculated that: "Black people were arrested and killed by police at higher rates than white people in 34 of the 37 largest U.S. cities. Washington, D.C., San Francisco, Chicago and Milwaukee had some of the largest disparities in policing outcomes between black and white residents."

"In these cities, black residents were policed at high rates while white residents were policed at relatively low rates. Police arrested black people at several times the rate of white people, even for offenses like drug possession which have been found to be committed

at similar rates by black and white communities. And police in these cities also killed black people at substantially higher rates than white people, even after accounting for racial differences in arrest rates."

That's unconscionable, but it gets even worse. According to a study published in The Lancet, a British medical journal, killings by American police officers have been undercounted over the past forty years by *more than half*.

Between 1980 and 2018, roughly 55 percent of police killings were officially classified as another cause of death. This massive inaccuracy occurred for two reasons: Either medical examiners did not list police involvement on the death certificate, or the deaths were incorrectly coded in the national database.

The study also revealed that Oklahoma, Arizona, Alaska, and the District of Columbia had the highest rates of police killings; that black people were three and a half times more likely to be killed by the police as white ones; and around twenty times as many men as women were killed by the police over that time.

Do you find it odd that the American public doesn't really know much about these killings? Well, here's why.

After collecting and analyzing ten years' worth of data on almost 40,000 payments made to resolve police misconduct allegations – paid by twenty-five of America's largest police and sheriff's departments – The Washington Post discovered over $3.2 billion had been spent to settle claims of allegations of police misconduct during that time.

This is startling to say the least, but this next sentence is just downright hard to believe: Over 1,200 law enforcement officers involved in these allegations had been the subject of at least *five* payments. Over two hundred of them had been the subject of ten payments or more:

"The repetition is the hidden cost of alleged misconduct: Officers whose conduct was at issue in more than one payment accounted for more than $1.5 billion, or nearly half of the money spent by the departments to resolve allegations. In some cities, officers repeatedly named in misconduct claims accounted for an even larger share. For example, in Chicago, officers who were subject to more than one

paid claim accounted for more than $380 million of the nearly $528 million in payments."

What the… WHAT??? How is this even possible?

Listen, most police officers in this country are amazing human beings. They put their lives at risk every single day for our safety, and we could not appreciate or respect them more. But we *have to stop enabling and protecting the bad ones.* Lives literally depend on it.

There are dozens of issues we must address regarding our criminal justice system, including huge ones like mass incarceration, high rates of recidivism, stop-and-frisk, use-of-force standards, qualified immunity, no-knock warrants, bail, inadequate mental health services for offenders, and sentencing guidelines. < the 1787 recommendations for all these are addressed at the end of this section >

But as usual, Congress' half-assed attempt to fix even one or two of these issues is completely inadequate. The First Step Act of 2018 was signed into law on December 21, 2018 and was presented as the most significant overhaul of the federal criminal justice system in decades – a "once in a generation" success!

A major part of the legislation aimed to reduce sentences for inmates sentenced under old, unfair crack cocaine laws. Back in the day, being caught with five grams of crack (a type of cocaine used more often by black drug users) carried the same mandatory minimum sentence as being caught with 500 grams of powder cocaine (used more often by white drug users). The Fair Sentencing Act of 2010 first addressed the disparity in sentences for these charges, but the guidelines set back then were not retroactive.

After the First Step Act of 2018 was passed and signed, the White House and Capitol Hill were delirious with self-congratulation. Members of both parties just couldn't believe what a phenomenal job

they had done!! And Republicans and Democrats accomplished it together! YAY for bipartisanship!

Both sides of the aisle gleefully gloated on cable news and press conferences and celebrated their awesomeness up and down the campaign trail. Honestly, they were acting like they achieved world peace.

So, imagine our surprise when we finally researched the legislation's outcomes. Based on information posted on the U.S. Federal Bureau of Prisons' website in September 2026, since the legislation was passed in 2018, there have been 4,167 retroactive sentence reductions; 5,005 compassionate releases; and 1,246 elderly offenders moved to home confinement. There are currently 5,868 other inmates in home confinement; 7,789 inmates participating in Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT); and 8,481 in Residential Reentry Centers (RRCs).

Is this a joke? Friends, if this is what Congress calls a "once in a generation" success, we're in even more trouble than we thought we were.

On average, there are over 155,000 inmates sitting in federal prisons at any given time. There have been 4,167 retroactive sentence reductions. That means just 2.7 percent of inmates have benefitted from what was supposed to be the crowning achievement of this legislation.

It's true that around 65,000 federal inmates have been released early over the past eight years because of the legislation – an average of 8,125 a year – but getting released early for "good behavior" is not exactly a new concept.

We recognize this sounds negative. Please know, we really, really tried to find something encouraging in these numbers – and we did because 4,167 people who had been unfairly sentenced finally got a little justice. That's not nothing.

It reminds us of that Vacation Bible School story of the starfish. One morning, a man was walking along the beach and saw a little girl picking up a starfish from the sand and gently putting it back into the ocean. The man asked the little girl what she was doing, and the little girl replied, "I'm putting these starfish back in the ocean. The tide is

going out and if I don't put them back into the water they will die." The man said, "But there are miles of beach and hundreds of starfish. There are too many. You can't possibly make any difference!"

The little girl smiled as she gently put another starfish back into the water. "It made a difference to this one," she said.

We are very, very happy that justice has been served for these 4,167 people and, generally, we're people who are always up for celebrating even the tiniest advancement toward success (especially if there is Champagne involved!). We're usually a cheerleader for even the smallest victories.

But history tells us we can't be that way with the U.S. Congress. Just look at their oversized self-congratulations on this grossly inadequate legislation. We promise you, if we don't hold their feet to the fire on the daily, they will convince themselves they have successfully "solved" our criminal justice challenge and leave the actual heavy lifting untouched for yet another ten years.

… then what happens to those other challenges we mentioned earlier? Like mass incarceration, high rates of recidivism, stop-and-frisk, use-of-force standards, qualified immunity, no-knock warrants, bail, inadequate mental health services for offenders, and sentencing guidelines – you know, the *really, really hard things we need to solve*.

1787 Plan of Action: Criminal Justice Reform

Think Fair + Think Accountability + Think Smart + Think Ahead

Think Fair

- As with all our policies, search for evidence-based practices and hold criminal justice agencies to high, evidence-based standards.

- Demand fair sentencing laws, to include the overzealous criminalization and incarceration of **nonviolent** drug offenders.
- Appoint a bipartisan commission to comprehensively review and significantly revise the 1984 Sentencing Reform Act.
- End laws like stop-and-frisk. It's irrelevant if they are effective or not. They are in violation of the U.S. Constitution. Period.
- Under no circumstance should the United States of America tolerate the federal death penalty. It is immoral, unconstitutional, and worthless as a deterrent to crime.
- Require a review be granted (after a reasonable period of incarceration) for juveniles serving life-without-parole.
- Fight hard against discriminatory voter laws that target Americans with felony convictions.
- Clear out the severe backlog of – and then keep up with – DNA samples, which literally hold the keys to freedom for many.
- Urge states that still have hair-trigger community supervision systems to reform their parole and probation systems.
- Ensure a fair and equitable process for bail for **nonviolent** offenders, in compliance with the United States Constitution.
- Provide expert legal guidance to state courts on the enforcement of fines and fees.
- End the abuse of civil forfeiture. At a minimum, the burden of proof should be on the government to prove wrongdoing.
- When a field of forensics or a particular expert is discredited, ensure every single person convicted by the flawed evidence gets a new trial.

- Appoint a bipartisan independent board to evaluate clemency petitions, then make recommendations to the president.
- Bring down the thunder on prisons where the conditions violate the Eighth Amendment.
- Encourage states to repeal laws that suspend driver's licenses as a penalty for not paying fines.
- Ensure that prison labor is mutually beneficial for both the prison worker and the employer.

Think Accountability

- Create a national use-of-force standard. Reiterate and reenforce that violence is only acceptable if it prevents death or serious bodily injury.
- *Very few police officers are bad actors*. Eliminate the collective bargaining protections that shield the ones who are. < Collective bargaining is a formal process where a union, on behalf of its members, negotiates with an employer to establish a collective bargaining agreement (CBA). >
- Urge states to make it easier to "decertify" officers who violate the officer's code of conduct.
- Encourage states to repeal laws that hide performance records of police officers and prison officers from the public.
- Create a national registry of police misconduct. Track officer-involved deaths.
- Challenge the U.S. Supreme Court to, at a minimum, greatly refine "qualified immunity" for law enforcement officials.
- Provide federal grants for states to create independent ways to investigate wrongdoing.

- Demand the Justice Department provide detailed public reporting on the reasons they don't bring criminal charges against officers.
- Don't dismiss the effectiveness of consent decrees – agreements between the Justice Dept and cities that outline basic civil rights reforms – in extreme situations. 1787 believes in local control of law enforcement, but consent decrees can absolutely work – just ask Newark, New Jersey!
- Demand the U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division appropriately open "pattern or practice" investigations.
- Increase the accountability of coroners and medical examiners.
- Regulate and monitor police surveillance technologies, including facial recognition, surveillance cameras, and automated license plate readers.

Think Smart

- Significantly restrict private paramilitary organizations (as sanctioned by the U.S. Supreme Court case District of Columbia vs. Heller).
- Ban no-knock warrants, which are disasters waiting to happen.
- Restrict the use of armed officers as first responders to mental health and other crisis calls.
- Mandate the use of body cameras. Closely review state pilot programs to determine how best to use them without violating civil rights.
- Reimagine prisons because behavior is often a reflection of environment.

- End solitary confinement in prisons.
- Invest in GPS monitoring that is less expensive and less invasive than bulky ankle bracelets – which can create a "virtual" prison system.
- Curtail the chronic and pervasive abuse of the plea bargain, a practice that has kidnapped our criminal justice system.
- Prohibit prosecutors from resolving criminal matters with civil settlements that include non-disclosure agreements (NDAs) – à la Jeffrey Epstein.

Think Ahead

- Expand pre-trial diversion programs and incarceration alternatives that prioritize treatment over punishment (i.e., rehabilitation, drug courts, etc.).
- Embrace Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) for inmates.
- Focus on building bridges between police and communities. Think police *service* as opposed to police *force*.
- Promote de-escalation of conflict. Encourage police academies to teach communication skills, psychology, and mental health education.
- Support collaborative initiatives in our quest for safe communities.
- Embrace focused crime deterrence strategies.
- Require peer-intervention training for police officers.
- Embrace restorative justice, which seeks to repair the harm caused by crime.
- Ensure inmates are housed within 500 miles of their families.

- Support organizations that teach business and technology training to inmates.
- Increase access to Pell Grants for incarcerated students so they can take college-level courses while in prison.
- Ensure incarcerated youths are provided the same educational services and vocational training as their peers on the outside.
- Support prison nursery programs that provide strong, effective parenting education.
- Assist with housing, health care, and other transitional services for those leaving the criminal justice system.
- Support supervised release programs that focus on reducing recidivism rates by guiding released prisoners to new paths.

Cryptocurrency

"When the situation was manageable it was neglected, and now that it is thoroughly out of hand we apply too late the remedies which then might have effected a cure.

There is nothing new in the story.

It is as old as the Sibylline books. It falls into that long, dismal catalogue of the fruitlessness of experience and the confirmed unteachability of mankind. Want of foresight, unwillingness to act when action would be simple and effective, lack of clear thinking, confusion of counsel until the emergency comes, until self-preservation strikes its jarring gong. These are the features which constitute the endless repetition of history."

– Winston Churchill –

The Bottom Line

- It is crucial that our $100 trillion capital markets don't get entangled with cryptocurrency markets. Traditional finance money moving into this highly decentralized market vastly increases the risk that the volatility and unpredictability of the crypto market could poison the entire global financial ecosystem.

  This includes stablecoins, or coins that back digital currency with short-term U.S. Treasuries, dollar deposits, or other cash equivalents. Although The Genius Act – a law passed by the U.S. Congress and signed by President Trump in July 2025 – requires issuers to hold $1 of liquid assets for every $1 stablecoin they distribute (this is sometimes referred to as 1:1 backing), taxpayer dollars are still going to be guaranteeing something that exists at least partially outside the traditional financing system.

- The U.S. government CANNOT, under any circumstance, be in the cryptocurrency business. NO taxpayer money should EVER be used to purchase crypto or be used as a backstop for what ultimately amounts to speculative bets. The list of reasons for this is long, but here are three:

  - For the most part, cryptocurrencies are nonproductive assets that, unlike stocks or bonds, don't typically generate income or cash flow through productivity or their own business operations. This means that, since cryptocurrencies don't produce anything tangible or offer returns like dividends or interest payments – essentially lacking any underlying economic fundamentals that drive their price – the value of crypto is primarily based on market speculation and the willingness (or unwillingness) of others to buy them.

- Crypto is extremely vulnerable to hacking, ransomware, and straight-up theft and is used heavily in things like sex trafficking, money laundering, ransomware, and scams in general.
- The crypto marketplace would quickly become just another battlefield, giving Iran, Russia, North Korea and China the perfect opportunity to compromise us by interfering in the crypto markets.

- Thanks to crypto that has been seized from cybercriminals and darknet markets, the United States is one of the world's largest holders of cryptocurrency. President Trump wants a "strategic national bitcoin stockpile" to hold these tokens. This would be a mistake of *gargantuan* proportions, for all the reasons given above.
- Most of the Trump family is now heavily involved in the crypto scene. The conflicts-of-interest, corruption, and legal landmines involved are unprecedented – and mind-blowing. Read more on p. 490 of *The Great American Reset.*
- The Financial Innovation and Technology for the 21st Century *Act* (FIT21), passed by the U.S. House on May 22, 2024, would amend existing securities and commodity regulatory statutes to facilitate the use of digital assets. However, FIT21 is vastly insufficient because it fails to protect the crypto market against shady shenanigans like wash trading, where traders simultaneously (and illegally) buy and sell the same security to manipulate market prices.

♦ ♦ ♦

On October 31, 2008, Satoshi Nakamoto released his nine-page thesis setting forth the basic structure of the bitcoin network to the

world. Everything about Satoshi Nakamoto's bitcoin brainchild is brilliant. Mining, the rewards, the blockchain…. it's absolute genius.

Although we really do believe the concept of bitcoin is brilliant, we share Warren Buffet's belief that bitcoin is "probably rat poison squared." Whether or not you agree, it's a stone-cold fact that the Wild, Wild West that is the crypto grand experiment has been terrifyingly volatile, zigzagging between dazzling rallies and breathtaking crashes.

After two smaller booms and busts, cryptocurrency experienced its first major crash in 2018, falling over 80 percent over the course of the year. After yet another bubble, cryptocurrency prices crashed 75 percent in 2022, losing $2 trillion of its $3 trillion in market capitalization. Then, at the end of 2024, Bitcoin, the dominant cryptocurrency, surged to over $100,000 a unit, an increase of 138 percent from the beginning of the year.

But then, after hitting a record high in October 2025, a crypto selloff began (ostensibly triggered by President Trump's declaration that he would hit China with 100% tariffs), wiping out over $19 billion in leveraged positions almost immediately. By mid-November, Bitcoin had lost around 29 percent of its value since the October high. And by the end of November, Bitcoin and other digital tokens had lost more than $1 trillion in market value – exposing the not-so-secret fact that the 2025 rally in crypto prices had been leveraged by tons of debt.

In February 2026, Bitcoin suffered its largest weekly decline in more than three years – down a sharp 45 percent from its all-time high of $126,273 in October – and suffered another steep selloff in June 2026 when Bitcoin fell below $60,000 for the first time since late 2024.

The volatility and uncertainty that haunts crypto isn't likely to change any time soon because, for the most part, cryptocurrencies are nonproductive assets that, unlike stocks or bonds, don't typically generate income or cash flow through productivity or their own business operations. This means that, since cryptocurrencies don't produce anything tangible or offer returns like dividends or interest payments – essentially lacking any underlying economic fundamentals that drive their price – the value of crypto is primarily

based on market speculation and the willingness (or unwillingness) of others to buy them.

This is just one reason the United States government CANNOT, under any circumstance, be in the cryptocurrency business. NO taxpayer money should EVER be used to purchase it or be used as a backstop for what amounts to purely speculative bets.

It is imperative that our traditional $100 trillion capital markets don't get entangled with the cryptocurrency markets. Traditional finance money moving into this highly decentralized market vastly increases the risk that the volatility and unpredictability of the crypto market could poison the entire global financial ecosystem.

This includes stablecoins, or coins that back digital currency with short-term U.S. Treasuries, dollar deposits, or other cash equivalents. Although The Genius Act – a law passed by the U.S. Congress and signed by President Trump in July 2025 – requires issuers to hold $1 of liquid assets for every $1 stablecoin they distribute (this is sometimes referred to as 1:1 backing), taxpayer dollars are still going to be guaranteeing something that exists at least partially outside the traditional financing system.

This is a huge risk given that Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent believes stablecoin issuers could eventually hold $2 trillion or more of U.S. Treasury securities. Not to mention the auditing and oversight of this would be, at best, a nightmare and, at worst, virtually impossible.

Without question, this would bring financial instability that would end in catastrophe. We must look no further than the Free Banking Era of the mid-1830s, when multiple banks had bank notes trading at multiple prices in multiple states that had multiple regulatory systems – resulting in no one knowing what the dollar was actually worth. We must never forget: A stable, efficient financial system relies on the *singleness of money*, where everyone involved is confident that all forms of a currency are interchangeable at the same value.

Another reason the United States government cannot be in the cryptocurrency business is that crypto is used heavily in things like sex trafficking, money laundering, ransomware, and scams in general.

The Wall Street Journal reported that Tether, the world's most traded cryptocurrency, has been a "vital financing tool for several of

the U.S.'s top national-security concerns. These include the North Korean nuclear-weapons program, Mexican drug cartels, Russian arms companies, Middle Eastern terrorist groups, and Chinese manufacturers of chemicals used to make fentanyl."

The WSJ also reports that "despite its place on the U.S. blacklist, which restricts transactions with sanctioned entities, Garantex < a Moscow-based crypto exchange > has become a major channel through which Russians move funds into and out of the country… it has also been a vehicle for Russian cybercriminals to launder their earnings."

"Garantex's growing role as a global conduit for illicit funds was underscored by evidence that Palestinian militants in part financed their operations through crypto in the lead-up to the Oct. 7 attacks in Israel. Digital wallets controlled by Palestinian Islamic Jihad, which joined Hamas in the attacks, received a portion of $93 million via Garantex, according to analysis by researcher Elliptic, which said Hamas also used a similar financing strategy."

The Coin Laundry, an International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ)-led cross-border investigation with 37 media partners in 35 countries uncovered how "companies provide the tools that criminals exploit to launder the proceeds of scams, theft, and other crimes – while those who've lost their savings or livelihoods are left with little hope of justice." Their findings "raise questions about whether exchanges are doing enough to stop illicit flows, either by freezing funds, closing accounts or carefully monitoring suspicious transactions."

Among many other things, the investigation found that "two of the world's largest cryptocurrency exchanges < Binance and OKX > moved hundreds of millions of dollars worth of funds tied to illicit actors after pleading guilty to crimes relating to money laundering."

In October 2025, President Trump pardoned Changpeng Zhao – the Binance cryptocurrency exchange founder and crypto's richest man – who was convicted by the U.S. Department of Justice for violating U.S. laws by allowing sanctioned entities and criminals to use the exchange.

Accusing Binance – the world's largest crypto exchange – of being a massive money-laundering operation that laundered billions of dollars in illicit funds, the Justice Department imposed a record $4.3 billion fine and strict oversight on the company. The company pleaded guilty in 2023 to violating U.S. anti-money-laundering requirements and was barred from operating in the United States.

Zhao was pardoned after Binance participated in a deal with the Trump's World Liberty Financial that significantly increased the value of the company's stablecoin and helped elevate their crypto business.

Months before the pardon, The Wall Street Journal reported that the "Trump family had been in talks to acquire a stake in Binance" and that the "Binance founder Changpeng Zhao, who served four months in prison after pleading guilty to a related charge, was seeking a pardon from the Trump administration to facilitate Binance's return to the U.S. market… The talks began after Binance reached out to Trump allies, offering a business deal as part of a plan to return the exiled company to the U.S."

Read more about the conflicts-of-interest, corruption, and legal landmines involved here on p. 490 of The Great American Reset.

Even President Trump sensed this pardon was not going to be a popular move. In a November 2025 interview on 60 Minutes, when asked about Zhao's pardon, the president said, "I don't know who he is. I know he got a four-month sentence or something like that. And I heard it was a Biden witch hunt."

But the allegations against Changpeng Zhao were far from a Biden witch hunt. A November 2025 analysis by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists found that "between the guilty pleas and Zhao's pardon, Binance continued to profit from hundreds of millions of dollars in cryptocurrency transactions linked to some of the world's most notorious organized crime groups."

"While the company was under the supervision of court-appointed monitors, at least $408 million worth of digital currency flowed to Binance accounts from Huione Group, a Cambodia-based financial

firm used by Chinese crime gangs to launder proceeds from human trafficking and industrial-scale scam operations."

In May 2026, The Wall Street Journal published a report revealing that, in addition to the U.S. Justice Department investigating Iran's use of Binance to evade sanctions, billions in crypto transactions have flowed through Binance to networks financing Iran's regime until as recently as that month:

"Billions in crypto transactions have flowed through Binance to networks financing Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in the two years preceding the current U.S.-Iran war, according to Binance compliance reports, blockchain data, foreign law-enforcement officials who track terrorism financing and other crypto researchers and nonpublic documents… The vast sums show how Binance has been used as a financial artery for the IRGC, the powerful political, military and economic force that dominates Iran."

It's also important to remember that the Iranian force also supports proxy armies throughout the Middle East, including terrorist-designated groups Hamas, Hezbollah and Yemen's Houthi militants.

The WSJ continues: "Iran's central bank moved $107 million in crypto through a series of transactions into Binance accounts last year, according to an analysis by a blockchain data firm…. Data compiled by a foreign law-enforcement agency recorded about $260 million in direct transactions during 2024 and 2025 between accounts on Binance and digital wallets associated with Iranian terrorist financiers and sanctioned Iranian entities. In addition, Binance investigators flagged that a digital wallet held by an unknown user outside Binance received money through the exchange and sent $218 million to an Iranian-state financing network in 2023, a transfer confirmed by blockchain data."

"These funds are on top of the roughly $1.7 billion that Binance investigators concluded moved through Binance to that same Iranian network, as previously reported by The Wall Street Journal in February. The Binance compliance reports said the Iranian actors moved funds using sophisticated techniques in an effort to evade detection."

"The funds moving through Binance to Iran-linked groups largely corresponded to payments from Chinese buyers of Iranian oil, part of

a sanctions-busting trade that is controlled by the IRGC and that is a significant revenue source for the regime, according to foreign law-enforcement officials, Binance compliance reports and the nonpublic documents."

Yet another reason the United States cannot be in the crypto business is its vulnerability to hacking, ransomware and straight-up theft.

In the United States, the FBI estimates that, in 2024, Americans lost $9.3 billion to cryptocurrency crimes, a 67 percent increase from the year before. In 2025, Americans lost roughly $11.366 billion to crypto-related crimes, representing a 22 percent increase in losses compared to 2024.

In 2025, after examining tens of thousands of cryptocurrency transactions, the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists found that at least $28 billion tied to hackers, thieves and extortionists has flowed into crypto exchanges over the last two years. Time after time, groups tied to illicit activity moved money onto the world's largest exchanges, where they can convert U.S. dollars or euros into Bitcoin, Ether and other digital coins.

A great example of crypto theft came on February 21, 2025, when a ring of North Korean hackers named Lazarus hacked Bybit, the world's second largest crypto exchange, to the tune of $1.5 billion – the largest theft in crypto history (note: groups out of North Korea have stolen over $6 billion in cryptocurrency since 2016).

Wall Street

Mainstream financial players are becoming increasingly engaged in the crypto market. In fact, where Wall Street titans once saw disaster, they now see easy money (sound familiar?).

While Ray Dalio, the founder of Bridgewater, was once skeptical of bitcoin, he later called it "one hell of an invention." In October 2017, Larry Fink of BlackRock referred to bitcoin as an "index of money laundering." However, by July 2024, he saw it as a "legitimate financial instrument that allows you to have maybe uncorrelated, non-correlated type of returns."

It's no great mystery why Mr. Fink changed his tune. The Economist reports that "BlackRock's bitcoin exchange-traded fund has grown to become the fourth-largest ETF in the hedge-fund world, with a long position worth $3.8 billion. A survey by Pricewaterhouse Coopers (PwC) and the Alternative Investment Management Association suggests that 47 percent of traditional hedge funds now invest in digital assets, up from 21 percent in 2021."

JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon once said of crypto, "I applaud your ability to want to buy or sell it, just like I think you have the right to smoke. But I don't think you should smoke." He also said that bitcoin is "worse than tulip bulbs" and claimed he would fire anyone at JPMorgan who traded it for being "stupid." At one point he even said, "I think all that's been a waste of time and why you guys waste any breath on it is totally beyond me. Bitcoin itself is a hyped-up fraud. It's a pet rock."

Dimon doubled down in December 2023, telling the Senate Banking Committee, "If I was the government, I'd close it down. I've always been deeply opposed to crypto, bitcoin, et cetera. You pointed out the true use case for it is criminals, drug traffickers, anti-money laundering, tax avoidance, and that is a use case because it is somewhat anonymous."

But then he started backtracking, trying to draw a distinction between bitcoin and blockchain technology. "(Blockchain) is different," he clarified. "Blockchain is a technology ledger system that we use to move information. We've used it to do overnight repo, intraday repo, we've used it to move money, right? So that's a technology ledger that we think will be deployable."

Of course, Dimon likely cleared that up because JPMorgan now has its very own cryptocurrency called JPM Coin. Their $4 trillion asset-management arm is also launching My OnChain Net Yield Fund (MONY), a tokenized money-market fund on the Ethereum blockchain. This allows investors to hold digital tokens that represent their ownership in the fund, making it easier for assets like stocks to be moved and traded.

Some might say having storied financial institutions involved gives the crypto market more legitimacy, but it only makes our

trepidation much worse. While the JPMorgans and BlackRocks of the world do indeed give legitimacy and credibility to trading cryptocurrencies, at the end of the day, it's still just a speculative bet. Plus, history tells us that, now that Wall Street is engaged, they will push the envelope big time.

Already, as Jamie Dimon pointed out, there is renewed excitement about "tokenization," or the process of putting real-world assets on a programmable blockchain in the name of "capital efficiency" (you can think of this as a type of digital ledger). The problem is that, while tokenization makes it faster and easier for money to move around, it also potentially moves it further out of the sight of any sort of regulation.

….and just like in the days leading to the 2007-2009 Financial Crisis, most Americans don't fully understand the risks involved here.

A report released in November 2024 by the Office of Financial Research, a government think tank, warned that "over the 2020 to 2024 period, low-income consumers have significantly increased their debt usage and debt balances. That increase has been particularly large in areas with higher crypto exposure. The magnitude of debt increases has been especially large for mortgage debt. Low-income consumers in high-crypto exposure areas are disproportionately more likely to take out a mortgage, and the average mortgage size is large relative to pre-2020 average income… our results suggest that consumers' debt and consumption are correlated with their crypto exposure." In truth, most people would be better off just going to Vegas (not to mention it's a heck of a lot more fun!).

Regulation, Oversight & Enforcement

For all the reasons outlined here, we must demand tight regulation, oversight, and enforcement.

Without a doubt, this is going to be a huge fight. For one, crypto champions have billions of reasons to lean hard on the U.S. Congress – like the crypto-oriented political action committee Fairshake did in the 2024 election, to the tune of $172 million. Even after spending that

much on lobbying, they *still* had over $54 million left in the bank to kick-off the 2026 election cycle.

Plus, we now have a president in Donald Trump who is convinced that, as he told the audience at a Nashville bitcoin conference in July 2024, "the United States will be the crypto capital of the planet and the bitcoin superpower of the world."

In a sign of things to come, when Bitcoin broke $100,000, Donald posted on Truth Social: "CONGRATULATIONS BITCOINERS!!! $100,000!!! YOU'RE WELCOME!!! Together, we will Make America Great Again!" He even chosen Paul Atkins, a crypto-advocacy group advisor, to lead the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

This matters – A LOT – because the United States is one of the world's largest holders of bitcoin thanks to crypto that has been seized from cybercriminals and darknet markets.

Currently, this cryptocurrency is held in encrypted, password-protected storage devices known as hardware wallets, and the hardware wallets are typically controlled by the Justice Department, the IRS, or another government agency. However, President Trump wants to change this by creating a "strategic national bitcoin stockpile" that would hold the tokens the U.S. government owns and/or acquires (crypto advocates have always wanted this sort of reserve – much like America's gold reserve – to give the industry legitimacy and stabilize prices).

This would be a mistake of *gargantuan* proportions. In addition to all the reasons we have already laid out, another reason the U.S. government must stay out of the crypto market is that, if we were to get in, the crypto marketplace would become just another battlefield.

Iran, Russia, North Korea and China would have the perfect opportunity to compromise us by interfering in the crypto markets. One example of the potential damage is a 51% attack. A 51% attack is an assault on a cryptocurrency blockchain by an entity that controls more than 50% of the network. If a party gains 51% control of any given network, it has the power to alter the blockchain, allowing them to, among other nefarious things, halt payments between users and

double-spend coins. Imagine if that entity happened to be China, or North Korea.

Already, foreign players allegedly participated in a scheme that laundered tens of millions of dollars in fraudulently obtained U.S. unemployment benefits. The suspects allegedly used cryptocurrency to buy tens of thousands of prepaid debit cards that were loaded with U.S. unemployment benefits, made possible by them stealing the identities of Americans.

On January 3, 2023, the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, and the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency issued a joint statement on the risks crypto assets pose to banking organizations. The list includes:

- Risk of fraud and scams among crypto-asset sector participants.
- Legal uncertainties related to custody practices, redemptions, and ownership rights, some of which are currently the subject of legal processes and proceedings.
- Inaccurate or misleading representations and disclosures by crypto-asset companies, including misrepresentations regarding federal deposit insurance, and other practices that may be unfair, deceptive, or abusive, contributing to significant harm to retail and institutional investors, customers, and counterparties.
- Significant volatility in crypto-asset markets, the effects of which include potential impacts on deposit flows associated with crypto-asset companies.
- Susceptibility of stablecoins to run risk, creating potential deposit outflows for banking organizations that hold stablecoin reserves.
- Contagion risk within the crypto-asset sector resulting from interconnections among certain crypto-asset participants, including through opaque lending, investing, funding, service, and operational arrangements. These interconnections may also present concentration risks for banking organizations with exposures to the crypto-asset sector.

- Risk management and governance practices in the crypto-asset sector exhibiting a lack of maturity and robustness.
- Heightened risks associated with open, public, and/or decentralized networks, or similar systems, including, but not limited to, the lack of governance mechanisms establishing oversight of the system; the absence of contracts or standards to clearly establish roles, responsibilities, and liabilities; and vulnerabilities related to cyber-attacks, outages, lost or trapped assets, and illicit finance.

The most important point they make in the statement is this: "It is important that risks related to the crypto-asset sector that cannot be mitigated or controlled do not migrate to the banking system."

"Based on our current understanding and experience to date, the agencies believe that issuing or holding as principal crypto assets that are issued, stored, or transferred on an open, public, and/or decentralized network, or similar system is highly likely to be inconsistent with safe and sound banking practices. Further, the agencies have significant safety and soundness concerns with business models that are concentrated in crypto-asset-related activities or have concentrated exposures to the crypto-asset sector."

< These guys should know because we've all seen this play before. Remember the 2007-2009 Financial Crisis? If you need a refresher, you can read more about it on p. 605 of *The Great American Reset*. It's in the section called *Refusing to Learn from History*! hint, hint >

When debating the scope of possible regulations, the main goal is to make certain that the traditional $100 trillion capital markets don't get dangerously entangled with the cryptocurrency markets.

Recognizing that the "crypto-asset activities could pose risks to the stability of the U.S. financial system if their interconnections with the traditional financial system or their overall scale were to grow without adherence to or being paired with appropriate regulation, including enforcement of the existing regulatory structure," the

Financial Stability Oversight Council presented recommendations as a place to start.

While "large parts of the crypto-asset ecosystem are covered by the existing regulatory structure," the Council believes the following actions are necessary to address regulatory gaps:

- The passage of legislation providing for rulemaking authority for federal financial regulators over the spot market for crypto assets that are not securities.
- Steps to address regulatory arbitrage including coordination, legislation regarding risks posed by stablecoins, legislation relating to regulators' authorities to have visibility into, and otherwise supervise, the activities of all the affiliates and subsidiaries of crypto-asset entities, and appropriate service provider regulation.
- A study of potential vertical integration by crypto-asset firms.
- Bolstering its members' capacities related to data and to the analysis, monitoring, supervision, and regulation of crypto-asset activities.

Judging from the crypto legislation that has been put before Congress so far, we have a long way to go. On May 22, 2024, the U.S. House passed H.R. 4763, the Financial Innovation and Technology for the 21st Century Act (FIT21). FIT21 would amend existing securities and commodity regulatory statutes to facilitate the use of digital assets – however, the bill's fate in the U.S. Senate looks far from certain.

One key provision in the legislation is the invention of a new digital asset category called "digital commodities," which would be exempted from SEC oversight if a firm or person self-certifies it as such (the SEC would have only 60 days to object).

But never fear! Even though FIT21 hasn't yet passed, in February 2025, the SEC notified the crypto industry that memecoins would no longer be subject to its oversight. Then in March 2026, through a joint interpretive release by the SEC and the Commodity Futures Trading

Commission (CFTC), the Trump/Vance administration officially adopted the term "digital commodity" as part of a new five-category crypto asset taxonomy. This marks the first time federal regulators formally codified these definitions into a functional regulatory framework.

This was an enormous win for the crypto industry, even though this potentially exposes the crypto market to shady shenanigans like wash trading, where traders simultaneously (and illegally) buy and sell the same security to manipulate market prices. A paper from the National Bureau of Economic Research found that 70 percent of all wash trading – which can involve trillions of dollars every year – happens on unregulated exchanges.

The perceived gaps in the FIT21 legislation led the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission – then chaired by Gary Gensler, a man the crypto world sees as its "sworn enemy" – to issue this statement:

> "The self-certification process contemplated by the bill risks investor protection not just in the crypto space; it could undermine the broader $100 trillion capital markets by providing a path for those trying to escape robust disclosures, prohibitions preventing the loss and theft of customer funds, enforcement by the SEC, and private rights of action for investors in the federal courts. It could encourage non-compliant entities to try to choose what regulatory regimes they wish to be subjected to – not based on economic realities but potentially based on a label. What if perpetrators of pump and dump schemes and penny stock pushers contend that they're outside of the securities laws by labeling themselves as crypto investment contracts or self-certifying that they are decentralized systems?
>
> History has shown for 90 years that robust securities regulation both creates trust in markets and fosters innovation. There are countless examples of American companies across many industries that have made world-changing innovations while also registering their securities. It is through the securities laws that we get full, fair, and truthful disclosure that arms investors with the information they need to make investment

decisions and enables regulators to guard against the types of fraud we've seen in the crypto field.

The crypto industry's record of failures, frauds, and bankruptcies is not because we don't have rules or because the rules are unclear. It's because many players in the crypto industry don't play by the rules. We should make the policy choice to protect the investing public over facilitating business models of noncompliant firms."

Economy

Read more about the Economy on p. 407 of The Great American Reset.

1787's Plan of Action for Economic Growth

- Make life easier for the American people. Prioritize lowering cost-of-living burdens and help make living essentials – housing, food, healthcare, and utilities – affordable without unreasonable financial sacrifice or debt. (see p. 442 of *The Great American Reset*)
- Rebuild and fiercely protect America's Brand. (see p. 15 of *The Great American Reset*).
- Become a fiscally responsible nation. Period. Enrich the quality of life for every American by enhancing our federal programs and improving the way our federal government operates while, at the same time, significantly reducing our debt and closing the ever-widening gap of our deficit. (see p. 407 of *The Great American Reset*)
  - No new non-emergency spending, just a reallocation of existing resources.

- Reduce our debt, close the gap on our deficit, and end the massive waste, corruption, and inefficiency that infects every level of our federal government.

- Implement an intelligent long-term strategy to ensure the continued dominance and national security of the United States. This plan depends on three things. Not one, *three*: diplomacy, defense, and development. (see p. 15 of *The Great American Reset*)
- Restore inflation to 2 percent while protecting employment. (see p. 407 of *The Great American Reset*)
- Fully engage in – and take full advantage of – the global economy and not only regain but solidify our role as world leaders. (see p. 15 of *The Great American Reset*)
- Empower the U.S. work force. (see p. 15 of *The Great American Reset*)
  - Vastly Improve Job and Skills Training
  - Guarantee Fair and Equitable Education
  - Boost Opportunities for Wealth Creation
  - Ignite Government Investment in Low-Wealth Americans
  - Provide Guidance for Optimal Financial Inclusion
  - Block Policies that Sabotage Advancement
- At high school graduation, ensure every student can tackle higher education or graduate with a marketable skill and/or industry credential that can earn money that day. (see p. 74)
- Reimagine American education. Develop an educational model of excellence based on domestic and international best practices.
- Absolutely, positively DO NOT privatize Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, which support around 70 percent of the U.S. mortgage market. Privatizing Fannie and Freddie would be a windfall for

investors but would most likely screw the American consumer – possibly making home loans more difficult to get, increasing mortgage rates, and losing protections like rate-lock agreements. If the Trump/Vance administration succeeds in privatizing Fannie and Freddie, fight them in court.

- Address both inequality of income and inequality of opportunity. (see p. 531 of *The Great American Reset*)
- Champion, protect and fully support U.S. small businesses, which account for almost 46 percent of private sector employment and create roughly 9 out of every 10 net new jobs. (see p. 15 of *The Great American Reset*)
- Restore the funding for small business grants that was cut by the Trump/Vance administration.
- Restore funding for minority and women-owned businesses that were specifically targeted by the Trump/Vance administration.
- Create an uncomplicated and fair tax code. (see p. 460 of *The Great American Reset*)
- Cancel the "Trump Accounts" pilot program. This program is just another entitlement that will eventually become difficult if not impossible to control. It is also yet another tax subsidy.

  A better way is to combine the 11+ tax-preferred accounts – which cover everything from education to healthcare to retirement – and combine them into one universal savings account that is governed by consistent rules and tax treatment.
- Safeguard the Federal Reserve. Ensure it remains independent.
- Stabilize Social Security immediately. (see p. 180)
- Stabilize Medicare immediately. (see p. 167)
- Stabilize Medicaid immediately. (see p. 165)
- Address the growing pension crisis.

- Guarantee the United States remain the dominant force in Artificial Intelligence (A.I.).
- Back off antitrust actions against U.S. companies. In such a rapidly evolving and competitive corporate environment, there is no such thing as permanent monopolies. Even dominant companies face the risk of being weakened or displaced by new competitors.
(see p. 19)
- Embrace sensible, targeted regulation that gives the breathing room necessary for innovation, entrepreneurship, and economic growth. (see p. 175)
- Do not allow destructive history to repeat itself regarding the financial markets. (see p. 95)
- Should any Foreign Investment Funds exist, liquidate them to any extent possible. Encourage Congress to pass legislation that prevents such funds in the future. < Foreign Investment Funds are de facto sovereign-wealth funds administered with no appropriation or legislation from Congress. >
- Knock off all the corporate statism and private enterprise meddling the Trump/Vance administration has engaged in. We are not China.
- Make absolutely 1000% certain our $100 trillion capital markets don't get entangled with cryptocurrency markets.
- Make absolutely 1000% certain the U.S. government is NEVER, under any circumstance, in the cryptocurrency business. NO taxpayer money should EVER be used to purchase crypto or be used as a backstop for what ultimately amounts to speculative bets.
- Invest in cutting-edge research and innovation – including science, of course. (see p. 157 of *The Great American Reset*)
- Invest in intelligent infrastructure projects. (see p. 603)

- Restore Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac's Special Purpose Credit Programs (SPCP) that the Trump/Vance administration cancelled.
- Get health care costs down. (see p. 134 of *The Great American Reset*)
- Recognize that authorized immigrants strengthen our academic communities and technological innovation, and greatly enhance America, both culturally and economically. (see p. 662 of *The Great American Reset*)
- Get realistic about our unauthorized immigration issue and actually solve the problem instead of relying on political theatre. (see p. 662 of *The Great American Reset)*
- Build an intelligent energy portfolio to protect our economic and national security. (see p. 82)
- Implement policies that protect our environment, advance our global prosperity, and help reduce our dependence on foreign oil. (see p. 82)
- Rebuild and protect an independent Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. Protect its Office of Fair Lending and Equal Opportunity. (see p. 36)
- Support and encourage corporate responsibility.

Education Reform

Read more about Education Reform and 1787's program initiative, America's Best Chance, on p. 608 of The Great American Reset.

1787's Plan of Action: Education
America's Best Chance

America's Best Chance is a program that addresses every aspect of the school experience, from the material taught in the classroom to what is served in the cafeteria.

All academic and non-academic areas are clearly defined, including budgets, curriculum, standards, assessment, accountability, expectations, governance, school culture, teacher quality and training, technology, counseling and guidance, length of the school day, class size, nutrition, discipline, child safety, community involvement, and parent, student, and teacher partnerships.

To develop this revolutionary course of action, we thoroughly researched, analyzed and integrated a broad spectrum of data. Sources include the U.S. Department of Education, the highest ranking domestic and international school systems, research conducted by colleges and universities, social and psychological research, journals and publications, research conducted by nonprofit organizations and private foundations, and extensive feedback from educators and educational leaders.

No stone was left unturned. America's Best Chance is not a consequence of a guessing game, politically motivated, or a product of preconceived notions or opinions. Every single thing in it is backed by extensive evidence to justify its inclusion.

America's Best Chance delivers an open learning curriculum that brings success for all children, regardless of their future goals. Students are challenged to think creatively and to use higher order thinking and critical analytical skills.

The curriculum offers a combination of theoretical and practical learning opportunities, and promotes integrated knowledge, enhances communication skills, and encourages self-management and personal development. The goal is for students to go beyond the acquisition of knowledge to problem solving and application, as well as to become life-long learners and contributing citizens.

A key element of America's Best Chance is the students' ability to choose their educational path according to their abilities and interests. In 9th grade, students will choose either a vocational or academic track. The academic track provides a cohesive curriculum designed to expand knowledge and capabilities. Students can earn higher learning credit for core coursework through partnerships with junior colleges, universities and technical institutes.

The vocational track is a dual-track approach, which combines applied training with classroom instruction. This program offers students the practical experience and real-world knowledge necessary to succeed in the 21st century global economy and includes pre-apprenticeship training courses; a modular system of workplace apprenticeships; and a well-defined transition straight from the program to community or technical colleges.

There is a strong element of mentorship along this path. America's Best Chance partners with employer organizations in the community that commit their time and resources to help our kids succeed (and, in turn, they assure themselves a continually qualified workforce). These heroes provide apprenticeships and internships and facilitate field trips and job shadowing, among many other work-based learning opportunities. This is one of the coolest parts of America's Best Chance. Our hope is that thousands of American companies will be involved with this program.

To help facilitate the transition to America's Best Chance, highly trained teams are available for as long as they are needed. The transition teams collaborate with each individual school to create a framework of shared beliefs, customs, and behaviors.

Although the core of America's Best Chance follows a standard model based on exhaustive research, certain elements of the program remain flexible to retain school autonomy. It's imperative that the

changes implemented are appropriately linked to each school's unique culture. Schools and educators retain a certain amount of sovereignty regarding curriculum and standards, and teachers and staff are encouraged to systematically evaluate both.

The Basics, Curriculum, Standards, and Instruction

The Basics

- Develop an educational model of excellence – based on domestic and international best practices – that addresses every aspect of the school experience, from the material taught in the classroom to what is served in the cafeteria.

  All academic and non-academic areas are clearly defined – curriculum, standards, assessment, accountability, expectations, governance, budgets, school culture, teacher quality and training, technology, counseling and guidance, length of the school day, nutrition, class size, discipline, community involvement, child safety, and parent, student, and teacher partnerships.

- At high school graduation, ensure every student can tackle higher education or graduate with a marketable skill and/or industry credential that can earn money *that very day*.

- Shift our focus from one-for-all education to a more personalized approach and redefine what "intelligence" means.

- Support charter schools and replicate innovative concepts in other charter schools as well as traditional public schools.

- Fight hard to reverse the national school voucher plan the Republicans passed as part of the One Big Beautiful Act. A voucher program is not "school choice," as many politicians like to say. Private schools can deny admission to any child for any reason; they do not have to provide services like

transportation; and they do not have to provide special education. Worse, most rural counties in America don't even have private schools, and most vouchers don't cover the entire cost of the school anyway – which makes these programs a massive transfer of wealth from the lower classes to the upper classes.

That said, the basic structure behind the Republicans' initiative, the Educational Choice for Children Act (ECCA), makes sense. Essentially, it's a federal tax credit scholarship program that allows taxpayers to claim a dollar-for-dollar federal tax credit for donations to scholarship-granting organizations (SGOs). We support this if it's used for things like technology, tutoring, transportation, and special-education services – just not for tuition for private schools.

- Stop allowing educators and administrators to use issues like race, class, and the dysfunctional home life of the child as an excuse for failing to properly educate them.
- Stop using medication as a substitute for doing the hard work of properly raising and educating our children.
- Rethink outdated discipline techniques and champion ideas that focus on self-regulation, reflection, connection, and the child's outlook.

  At Robert W. Coleman Elementary in Baltimore, detention was replaced with a "Mindful Moment Room," a room filled with soft lighting and plush pillows where students can go to breathe and meditate as an alternative to traditional punishment. Coleman's students can engage in yoga, mindfulness, gardening, environmental cleanup, and even leadership roles as co-teachers. The school has had zero suspensions in the ten years since the program was implemented.
- Relentlessly urge educators and administrators to limit – or ban altogether – artificial intelligence tools, which threaten the cognitive competence of our kids by diminishing their

capacity to think, eliminating human expression, and preventing the development of cognitive understanding and powers of thought.

- Treat broadband as essential infrastructure. Make sure every family has a reliable Internet connection.

Curriculum

- Reassess our misguided curriculum and embrace a more sensible approach to assessment and accountability.
- Champion early childhood education programs. Begin with an overhaul of Head Start and Early Head Start.
- Fight against religious-infused curriculum being brought into public schools.
- Fight against partisan educational programming in public schools, like the America 250 Civics Education Coalition, a partnership between conservative organizations and the U.S. Department of Education announced in September 2025.
- Make honest, nonpartisan civics curriculum a priority to encourage future citizen engagement.
- Include more racially diverse writers in curriculum.
- Do better for our children with disabilities. Refine specialized instruction.
- Childhood obesity is on the rise! Ensure that our children have the knowledge and habits they need to become healthy adults.
- Facilitate 1787's *A Brighter Tomorrow* program to encourage social/emotional and character development in kids and provide effective parenting education that focuses on both work and family.

Standards

- Set high standards for schools and states that choose to benefit from federal funding.
- Build a culture of high expectations.
- Support states in their quest for national standards. Chill out Republicans, states are doing this themselves! This effort is not being driven by the federal government.

Instruction

- Embrace the fact that teachers are made, not born. Improve teacher training and give these superheroes the tools they need to succeed.
- Give schools the autonomy to reward qualified teachers based on merit, as well as the authority to fire nonperforming teachers.
- Expand individualized, high-level tutoring.
- Increase the number of instruction/learning hours.
- Embrace new ways of teaching but also recognize the value of going "old school."

Electoral College

The Bottom Line

- The Electoral College needs to go. The process greatly distorts the will of the people, forces candidates to focus only on swing states, and discourages turnout in

solidly red and blue states – ultimately disenfranchising tens of millions of voters.

† A constitutional amendment is the cleanest way to abolish the Electoral College, but this is unlikely to happen anytime soon. So, we should jump to Plan B and replace statewide *winner-take-all* laws with the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact (NPVIC), which would basically accomplish the same goal.

♦ ♦ ♦

The Electoral College needs to go. In 2024, the president of the United States was essentially chosen by voters in Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin – meaning their votes mattered way more than the votes of everyone else in the country. National Public Radio (NPR) puts it this way: A candidate can win the presidency if s/he wins only the 11 states with the most electoral votes.

Seriously? There are 50 states! We haven't done the math ourselves but, according to NPR, a person can mathematically win the presidency by winning as little as 23 percent of the popular vote – which is completely illogical. This is just not the American way. All votes should count equally.

There are people who say that the Electoral College shouldn't be messed with because it was the fervent wish of the Founding Fathers. However, this is a mischaracterization of the Founder's intent.

In truth, the Electoral College was born out of a compromise that James Madison struck in 1787 at the Constitutional Convention, when one group wanted the U.S. Congress to elect the president and another group wanted to have direct elections. Many agreed that Congress electing the president would undermine checks and balances, but having direct elections would concentrate power in the heavily populated Northeast. No way said the less populated states! So, the Electoral College was born.

The Electoral College made sense then – after all, we wouldn't have a country without compromise between these two competing interests – but it makes *zero* sense now. Since the Constitutional Convention, there have been five elections where the popular vote winner lost the presidency.

So, how can we get rid of this albatross? A constitutional amendment is the cleanest way to abolish the Electoral College but is by far the most difficult to achieve. Under Article V of the U.S. Constitution, there are two ways to pass an amendment: 1) Receive two-thirds approval from both the House and Senate, plus ratification by three-fourths of the state legislatures (which, currently, is 38 states), or 2) If two-thirds of the state legislatures call for a Constitutional Convention.

Because neither of these will likely happen anytime soon, we should jump to Plan B and replace statewide *winner-take-all* laws with the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact (NPVIC), which would basically accomplish the same goal.

States with *winner-take-all* laws – which is every state except Maine and Nebraska – require the state to cast its electoral votes for the candidate who wins the popular vote in the state. In the same way, the NPVIC is an agreement directly between the states that commits each state to cast its electoral votes for the presidential candidate who wins the *national* popular vote.

As of 2026, 18 states plus the District of Columbia had signed on to this pact, representing a total of 222 electoral votes. This represents approximately 82 percent of the 270 votes required for the compact to take effect.

** Very Important Point About January 6th! **

The asinine things Donald Trump and certain members of the U.S. Congress were saying before and on January 6, 2021 – about Vice-President Mike Pence having the constitutional authority to disallow the results of the election by rejecting Electoral College votes or sending them back to the states – are embarrassing in their ignorance.

The United States Constitution is clear: States are the arbiters of their own elections for presidential electors. The U.S. Congress and/or the vice president of the United States have ZERO AUTHORITY to second-guess, change, or just decide not to count the slate of electors submitted to them by each state, or to hold up the electoral vote count to "investigate" alleged election fraud or election "irregularities."

The only time Congress can object to Electoral College votes is if the appointment of the electors was not "lawfully certified," or the votes were not "regularly given." This is an extremely high – almost impossible to clear – bar because, in the end, majorities in both chambers must agree with the objection. As a result, objections to the electoral count vote are purely political – and as we now know, dangerous – theatre, like was the case on January 6, 2021.

Energy & the Environment

Read about 1787's strategy for the U.S. transition from a high-carbon to a low-carbon energy system on p. 15 of The Great American Reset.

This is a super sexy issue – blood for oil, shady international cartels, billion-dollar lobbying efforts, ferocious environmental debates… this is an issue that has it all. *It also offers a perfect example of how we constantly work against ourselves in the quest for sustainable solutions.*

The way lobbyists, hard-core activists, politicians and especially Donald Trump & Co. portray it, this is a black and white issue: *fossil fuels v. renewable energy*. This is generally where the argument gets uber heated and people on both sides get really ticked off. This is also where, as in most arguments, *everyone develops tunnel vision and stops listening.*

We can avoid the drama if, from the jump, all sides understand that a successful outcome depends on cooperation, collaboration, and a little bit of patience. This is a *process*.

Here's the thing: fossil fuels and renewable energy sources *are* *not* mutually exclusive, at least at this point in the process. Picture a large brass scale like the scales of justice. The left side of the scale represents fossil fuels, and the right side represents renewable energy.

Currently, the scale is tipped toward fossil fuels because renewable sources don't yet provide enough energy. But, as we begin to implement an intelligent energy shift, the scales will slowly begin to balance, then begin tipping toward renewable energy.

Let's go ahead and get this out of the way now: We will not debate anyone on whether global warming is a real thing. We simply refuse to waste our time arguing about this because the highly agenda-driven, volatile arguments are a complete waste of time.

This is a common sense issue. Period. To suggest global warming is some sort of elaborate deception is absurd. We don't need a study to tell us that when billions of people live on a planet, they have an affect on it. We don't need a study to tell us that fewer toxins in the air are better than more. We don't need a study to tell us that we can't continue to act like our natural resources will last forever. We don't need a study to tell us that taking no environmental action poses a dangerous risk to our planet, our health, and our international strength.

< Sidebar: Global warming refers to earth's overall temperature, which is rising. That's just a fact. Global warming, in turn, causes the climate to change. Climate change causes extreme weather patterns, rising sea levels, shifting jet streams, and plenty of other things that are really bad. As a result of *climate change*, floods, droughts, ice storms, and heat waves become more frequent and more intense. Essentially, the extremes become even more extreme. So, when people use the fact that parts of America have historic cold and icy weather any given year as proof that there is no global warming, they are inadvertently proving the exact opposite. This annoys us, so we just wanted to clear it up. >

Call us crazy, or bleeding-heart liberals, or anything else, but we care about the tens of thousands of dolphins, whales and other marine animals that have been harmed by the first Trump administration's approval of deafening seismic surveys off the Atlantic coast. We care that heat has wiped out Elkhorn and staghorn coral on Florida reefs, meaning they no longer play any significant role in their ecosystem.

We care about the sage grouse that is now endangered in the American West. < If you are making fun of us, Google a picture of this precious little thing and we promise you will care too. >

We care that, in the spring of 2020, California, Arizona, Oregon, New Mexico, and Idaho had to suffer through the first megadrought in over 1,200 years. We care that as the air gets warmer over time, people in central Appalachia are more vulnerable to more extreme rainfall and the flooding. We care that two massive Antarctic glaciers are breaking free, perhaps initiating the collapse of the entire West Antarctic ice sheet, and that the world's largest iceberg A-23A (which weighs nearly one trillion tons and is around the size of Rhode Island) may possibly hit the island of South Georgia, a refuge for penguins, seabirds, and seals. We care that our planet is now registering the highest temperatures on record, to the point that some places on earth are now too hot for humans to live.

… especially at a time when the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change predicts that the world will warm 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels in 2028; when a report from NASA revealed that global sea level rose faster than expected in 2024, mostly because of ocean water expanding as it warms, or thermal expansion; and when a report from the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine says that carbon dioxide, methane and other planet-warming greenhouse gases "are warming Earth's surface and changing Earth's climate" and are "harming the health and welfare of people in the United State (and this is "beyond scientific dispute.")

Seriously, how in the world could anyone *not* care about these things?

Given how big-time screwed we were on this even a decade ago, it's remarkable we can even have this conversation.

Ever since George H.W. Bush's 1990 Gulf War – and even before – people both inside and outside of America have accused the United States government of fighting wars over nothing more than oil. So, did these "blood for oil" believers have a point?

They probably did on some level but, back then, the question was largely irrelevant. Like it or not, we had forced ourselves into a position where we had to ensure stability in the Persian Gulf.

Let the Sunni and Shia civil war in Iraq escalate into a regional war? No chance. Kiss up to the Saudis? Had to. Be new best friends with Angola's insanely corrupt leaders? You better believe it.

For decades, energy drove our foreign policy agenda because, until fairly recently, foreign nations were in absolute control of our energy survival. The undisputed truth was that U.S. supply did not meet U.S. demand. It wasn't even close. So, we were basically stuck.

Fast-forward to today. Pretty much everything about our energy supply situation has dramatically changed. The International Energy Agency's 2018 World Energy Outlook revealed that we had become the world's largest oil and gas producer.

Wow! That's great, right? What a turnaround! Not so fast. Our energy self-sufficiency came at a huge cost. In truth, it was only achievable because we tapped into fields like the Permian Basin, which is in western Texas and southeastern New Mexico and provides 40-50 percent of all American oil production… and we were only able to access fields like the Permian Basin because of the F Word: Fracking.

We're going to skip the moral debate over fracking for the moment and just jump to the fact that it's not sustainable long-term.

The first thing that makes fracking unsustainable is that it takes an enormous amount of water to frack, a reality that has significantly taxed our already depleted aquifers. Since 2011, fracking has consumed over 1.5 trillion gallons of water.

Read more about America's Water Scarcity Crisis on p. 205.

The second thing that makes fracking unsustainable is that it is really, really, *really* expensive.

In their quest for American "energy dominance," as they put it, the first Trump administration wildly slashed energy restrictions and regulations – which we're sure had lobbyists all over Washington opening plenty of Dom Pérignon.

But instead of being the industry's white knights, what they really did was perpetuate the crisis that the American energy industry was already in. What Donald Trump tried to sell as American "energy dominance" was really nothing more than feverish drilling that led to a massive glut in the global energy markets. Simply put, the breakneck energy production in the United States not only outpaced our own energy needs; it outpaced the entire world's.

It is this reality – along with far less access to unrestricted private equity cash, geologic limits, maturing fields, declining wells, power grid constraints, and increasingly difficult wastewater disposal – that brings us to the harsh realities of today.

This was true before the pandemic but made far worse because of it. At one point in April 2020, oil prices went ***negative***, which means that traders were actually *paying buyers* to take their oil.

Additionally, the rate of production of "tight" wells, or those that must be fracked, declines sharply. When we say sharply, we're talking like up to 70 percent by the end of the first year. That's about TEN TIMES the decline rate of conventionally drilled wells.

Lastly, thanks to the last two issues, most companies that rely on shale gas seldom make a profit (although, naturally, that doesn't extend to bonuses for the executives). Because of the steep decline curve, shale-focused energy companies are forced to keep chasing the next expensive well… meaning they burn tons and tons of cash.

Given all of this, you might be asking yourself: So then, how were these companies able to keep fracking for so long? Well, for over a decade, these companies had tons of help keeping the shale charade going, mainly from private equity investments. In fact, the private equity industry invested at least $1.1 trillion (of its $7.4 trillion in assets) into the energy sector between 2010 and 2021. Around 80 percent of these investments involved oil, natural gas and coal.

But those days are over. During and after the pandemic, money started to dry up quickly as private equity firms, tired of chasing their tails, hightailed it out of the shale game. In July 2020, The Wall Street Journal reported that "holdings of oil-and-gas stocks by active money managers are at a 15-year low."

Three years later, that trend was continuing. In the second quarter of 2023, private equity firms EnCap Investments and NGP Energy Capital sold off six energy portfolio companies between them, bringing the total amount of private equity-owned assets sold in the first half of 2023 to $14 billion. There were only ten new E&P firm investments, compared to at least 100 per year over the prior ten years.

In 2025, private equity firms were still holding firm to their strategic shift from new, high-risk, greenfield drilling to "refracs" (re-fracturing existing wells) and acquiring mature assets sold off by major public companies consolidating their portfolios.

The bottom line is this: The economics of fracking is risky enough when the market is high, but when prices fall it causes big time trouble. Ultimately, this creates a self-fulfilling prophecy for cash-strapped companies already operating on a shoestring: prices fall, leading to less revenue, leading to a slashing of capital expenditures, leading to stalled production, etc. etc. etc. When you add into the mix inflation, geologic limits, maturing fields, declining wells, and the pressure to shift to renewable sources – which despite what it may look like today, isn't going away – you have a situation that is not sustainable long-term.

It's true that moving from a high-carbon to low-carbon energy system will better protect our environment. But it's as much about moving to renewable resources before non-renewable ones run out. It's as much about securing an energy source that is less economically volatile and more diversified both geologically and technologically – two things that will greatly strengthen our national security.

1787's Plan of Action: Energy & the Environment

This is a Two-Part Plan: Protect & Prosper

Part One: Protect

Protect Our Land & Our People

- Resume considering the economic impacts of public health in rule-making – something the Trump/Vance administration decided wasn't important.
- Denounce the Trump/Vance administration's "A Critical Review of Impacts of Greenhouse Gas Emissions on the U.S. Climate" report, which was put together by marginalized researchers who relied on outdated studies and/or debunked arguments. This study is filled with errors and misrepresentations.
- If the Trump/Vance administration is successful in repealing the "endangerment finding" for greenhouse gases under the federal Clean Air Act, reverse the decision.
- Reassess the Corporate Average Fuel Economy rules, or CAFÉ, and adjust accordingly.
- Protect states' rights under Section 401 of the Clean Water Act.
- Restore all protections for U.S. wetlands that the Trump/Vance administration rolled back.
- Restore the National Weather Service back to its former glory and fully support the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA).
- Restore the National Center for Atmospheric Research (NCAR) and fully support the National Science Foundation.

- Reinstate the National Climate Assessment and fully support the Global Change Research Program.
- Protect and fully support the Mauna Loa Observatory.
- Reinstate the U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazard Investigation Board.
- Restore protections for the nearly 59 million roadless acres of the National Forest System that the Trump/Vance administration rolled back.
- To any extent possible, stop all construction through the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge in southwestern Alaska.
- Protect the Berryessa Snow Mountain, Avi Kwa Ame, and Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monuments.
- Rebuild the staff of the National Park Service, including those responsible for cleaning up abandoned oil and gas wells at national parks across the country.
- Rebuild the staff of the Forest Service, including trail and recreation staff.
- Restore all protections under the Endangered Species Act that the Trump/Vance administration rolled back.
- Cut the menhaden – "the most important fish in the sea" – harvest in half. Ban industrial reduction fishing in Virginia's nearshore and other nursery areas such as the Chesapeake Bay. Treat menhaden as a public trust, not a commodity.
- Protect the ban on barbaric hunting techniques in Alaska. Restore bans on the killing of bear cubs and mothers in their dens; killing wolf and coyote pups in their dens; using artificial light at den sites; shooting swimming caribou from motorboats; and using dogs to hunt black bears. (it's very hard to believe we actually have to say this)

- Revoke all tolerances for chlorpyrifos, except for the eleven food and feed crops proposed by the EPA (alfalfa, apple, asparagus, cherry (tart), citrus, cotton, peach, soybean, strawberry, sugar beets, and wheat (spring and winter).
- Continue to phase down hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs).

Exploration, Production & Generation

- Under no circumstance should the president of the United States be solely responsible for approving or denying international pipelines and other infrastructure.
- Suspend all selling of oil and gas federal leases off the West Coast, Gulf of Mexico or Alaska until further review. Cancel all outstanding oil and gas lease sales in federal waters.
- Protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge as a wildlife sanctuary. Cancel all outstanding oil and gas lease sales.
- Suspend all deep-sea mining until further review. Reverse the Trump/ Vance administration's directive to grant companies exploratory mining permits.
- To any extent possible, revoke the Trump/Vance administration's approval for a mine next to the Boundary Waters that will pollute the pristine wilderness area.
- Decrease federal subsidies for fossil fuels.
- Extend the Affordable Clean Energy (ACE) rule, which focuses on efficiency improvements at generating stations and directs states to take the initiative on how they choose to regulate power plant emissions.
- Resume the requirement that coal-burning power plants, refineries, steel mills and other industrial facilities report the amount of heat-trapping greenhouse gases that they release into the air.

- Reduce U.S. coal production as quickly as possible.
- Protect rules for the disposing of coal ash and wastewater from coal-fired power plants.
- Protect rules that reduce carbon dioxide emissions from both existing coal-fired and existing and new gas-fired power plants.
- Protect limits on greenhouse gas emissions from the drilling and transportation of natural gas.
- Fine oil and gas operators for exceeding methane emission limits.
- Require oil and gas companies to do everything necessary to limit methane leaks from wells.
- Require landfills of a certain size to install and operate methane gas collection and control systems, with specific monitoring and leak standards.
- Enforce strict regulations on well construction to achieve the highest possible well integrity.
- Enforce tight restrictions on offshore transportation and drilling to alleviate the risk of oil well leaks and tanker catastrophes.
- Protect offshore drilling safeguards that were put in place after the explosion on the BP Deepwater Horizon (i.e., things like "blowout preventors").

Let's Go Green!

- Applaud and support the Oil and Gas Climate Initiative (OGCI), a coalition of the world's largest energy companies finding ways to reduce emissions.

- Protect and preserve America's support of the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer.
- Reform and streamline the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), a statute that mandates federal agencies perform environmental reviews before undertaking major federal actions that substantially affect the environment.
- Reinstate the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ)'s centralized National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) regulations.
- Incentivize companies to explore carbon-capture technology and ideas like taking carbon out of the atmosphere and storing it underground.
- Champion the Clean Energy Challenge, a partnership with states, cities, and communities to reduce pollution and encourage clean energy.
- Explore marine nuclear power stations, both floating and underwater.
- Increase our commitment to reforestation to manage genetic diversity, as well as to sequester carbon to counter greenhouse gas emissions.

Part Two: Prosper

- Embrace a smart market-based cap-and-trade system that rewards innovation and energy efficiency without inhibiting economic growth.
- Reimagine the Paris Climate Accords. Reignite global cooperation under American leadership. Be a global leader in both energy and environmental policy.

- Understand the world market and capitalize on it.
- Invest in innovative, clean energy infrastructure and an ambitious clean-energy research agenda to counter China's.
- Begin actively making plans to build a U.S. Supergrid, a network of high-capacity cables that takes pressure off the AC grid as we phase in more renewables.

Federal Reserve

1787 will *always* respect the independence of the Federal Reserve. We will *never* interfere with the Fed's decisions, and we will *never* attempt to compromise its integrity by engaging in highly destructive political games.

The knowledge that the world's most powerful central bank sets monetary policy based on economic conditions instead of political considerations is one of the most fundamental principles of free markets, the U.S. economy, and economies around the world. Limiting the Fed's autonomy to do things like, say, moderate long-term interest rates or bring more liquidity into trading through the buying and selling of securities would destabilize investor confidence in our markets and threaten financial stability around the globe.

The Federal Reserve System is the central bank of the United States. It is an agency of the federal government that reports to and is directly accountable to the U.S. Congress. Although this creates an interdependent relationship between the Federal Reserve and Congress, it is critical that the Fed remain independent of *anything* having to do with politics.

Donald Trump has tried everything under the sun to undermine this principle, relentlessly criticizing and threatening its independence – to the point that the U.S. Department of Justice opened a criminal investigation into its chairman.

This should come as no surprise, because he started this nonsense in his first term. Then and now, he has repeatedly said things like, "I feel the president should have at least [a] say in there. I think that in my case, I made a lot of money, I was very successful, and I think I have a better instinct than, in many cases, people that would be on the Federal Reserve or the chairman."

Several other Republicans have also led aggressive attacks against the Federal Reserve. In March 2025, Senator Mike Lee (R-UT) and Representative Thomas Massie (R-KY) introduced the Federal Reserve Board Abolition Act to dissolve the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System and the Federal Reserve banks. The proposed legislation would also repeal the 1913 Federal Reserve Act, the legislation that established the Federal Reserve System in the first place. < This legislation was first introduced by former Representative Ron Paul (R-TX) in 1999 and hasn't been reintroduced since 2013. >

In their statement announcing the legislation, Senator Lee called the Fed an "economic manipulator that has directly contributed to the financial instability many Americans face today." He went on to say that his legislation "aims to protect our economic future by dismantling a system that enables unchecked government spending, the monetization of federal debt that fuels it, and widespread economic disruption." For his part, Rep. Massie said that "Americans are suffering under crippling inflation, and the Federal Reserve is to blame."

These assertions are absurd. For decades, regardless of who was in the White House or in the seats of Congress, countries around the world have had incomparable trust in the economic integrity of the United States of America. This has made America a magnet for long-term investment; led to the dollar being the global reserve currency; and inspired continued faith in U.S. Treasurys.

The recipe for the extraordinary economic position we hold in the world is simple: fidelity to smart, rigorous economic norms and

structured international economic order; nonpolitical institutional integrity; and commitment to the rule of law. The Federal Reserve is a *huge* part of that. The assumption that the price of money will not be set by political instincts and impulses is vital to the stability of the global financial system. The United States must continue to exercise dependable monetary governance and protect central-bank independence at all costs.

Financial Reform

"When the situation was manageable it was neglected, and now that it is thoroughly out of hand we apply too late the remedies which then might have effected a cure.

There is nothing new in the story.

It is as old as the Sibylline books. It falls into that long, dismal catalogue of the fruitlessness of experience and the confirmed unteachability of mankind. Want of foresight, unwillingness to act when action would be simple and effective, lack of clear thinking, confusion of counsel until the emergency comes, until self-preservation strikes its jarring gong. These are the features which constitute the endless repetition of history."

– Winston Churchill –

... the endless repetition of history. Although history is always there for us, patiently waiting to impart its hard-earned knowledge, we often continue to stubbornly disregard it.

It's fascinating how soon we forget disasters, for example. From botched hurricane relief efforts to wars to financial crises, it seems we have little interest in examining cause and effect – which is unfortunate because that is perhaps the very best way to stop bad history from repeating itself.

In the years leading to the 2007-2009 Financial Crisis, for instance, there was a multitude of events – the savings and loans fiasco, the dot-com bubble burst, the Asian currency crisis, the Russian government bond default, massive accounting scandals, and blatant fraud – that presented alarming cautionary tales.

But the lessons weren't learned because – miraculously – the fallout from those events had little long-term significance to Americans. Any one of these events should have brought our economy to a screeching halt but we somehow recovered from them virtually unscathed. Yet someday, if we're not diligent, *the music will stop and there won't be enough chairs*.

Throughout the financial crisis, the term *moral hazard* was widely used in reference to the government "bailing out" the financial industry. Moral hazard is the idea that people take riskier risks if they are not the ones who directly feel the consequences of their actions. How little has changed since 2007 proves that those concerned about moral hazard had a very valid point.

… yet these are lessons we clearly haven't learned yet. Although, even with the bailouts, the consequences of the 2007-2009 global financial catastrophe were massive, it seems like people started to believe – pretty much the second the crisis was finally in our rearview mirror – that the good times were going to once again roll forever. *Laissez les bons temps router*!

We're the first to admit that, before the 2007-2009 Financial Crisis, our self-interest had started to overshadow our self-sacrifice. Many of us here had become so seduced by the glitter of the American Dream that we lost sight of its glory.

But then that wakeup call came. The first few days of the financial crisis felt like the last day of a four-day Vegas trip. You know the one –where you live daring and carefree and throw all caution to the wind… the one where, although you really don't know what the heck you're doing, you throw that dice like a high roller and double down and hit 18 like the high-rolling gambler you are.

The trip where, on the final morning, you suddenly feel irresponsible and reckless as you mentally calculate the little cash you have left as you fearfully check for a wedding ring.

After a few days, fear quickly turned into anger and frustration because most of us felt blindsided by the financial disappearing acts in the markets. But then, unexpectedly, something else started to tug at our subconscious. Although it would be far easier to ignore the rude intrusion and continue to blame uncontrolled traders and corrupt executives, feelings of regret, responsibility and guilt crept in as we tried to answer a question that in retrospect was as inevitable as it was disturbing: *Why did we allow things to get this out of control*?

It would have been painful enough to look at our 401(k) statements if we were unaware that a day of reckoning was coming, but many of us had a gut feeling that a debt far costlier than our Visa bill was about to come due – the nagging sensation that most of us had tilted more toward the glitter than the glory.

We already knew it happened on Wall Street, where a few bad apples show contempt for responsible governance and even the most minimal discipline and compromise morality and ethics for nothing more than quick wealth. We already knew it dominated Congress, where our leaders use our tax dollars as their very own re-election fund, and often sell us out to the highest bidder. But we also knew that the trend extended beyond Washington and Wall Street.

From the edge of the abyss – where an international crisis of confidence crashed into a citizen's crisis of conscious – it was impossible to ignore in that moment that we *all* needed to make changes. But did we?

Here's a fun little story for you…

Inadequately regulated banking systems experience severe boom and bust cycles, where the enormous risks taken during the boom times inevitably lead to tremendous losses during the busts. From the early 1800s until 1929, the U.S. financial system experienced banking panics every five to ten years. These events culminated in the disastrous collapse of U.S. stock market prices on October 29, 1929 – Black Tuesday – which signaled the beginning of the Great Depression.

After the Wall Street Crash of 1929, tight regulations were put into place to prevent another catastrophe. These included the formation

of the Securities and Exchange Commission and the enactment of the Banking Act of 1933, commonly known as the Glass-Steagall Act.

Glass-Steagall prevented banks from engaging in risky investment banking activities and prohibited any one institution from acting as any combination of an investment bank, commercial bank or insurance company. After these firewalls were established, the U.S. enjoyed over 40 years of economic growth without one major financial crisis.

Over time, many of the significant protections that were put into place between traditional commercial banking, investment banking and brokerage industries were systematically dismantled. Meanwhile, banks were required to keep fewer cash reserves on hand and the government, banks and rating agencies all lowered their mortgage standards to entice more Americans to purchase homes.

Financial deregulation was a bipartisan endeavor.

In the late 1970s, savings and loans (S&Ls) – cooperative financial institutions that accept deposits and make mortgage, auto and other personal loans to its members – were in crisis, hit hard by high interest rates and inflation. One issue was that, although interest rates at that time spiked as high as 21.5 percent, S&Ls could only offer a 5.25 percent interest rate, a number established by the government.

To help S&Ls compete, Congress passed – and President Jimmy Carter signed into law – the Depository Institutions Deregulation and Monetary Control Act, which gave S&Ls broader authority and phased out limits on what S&Ls and banks could pay out for consumer deposits.

Although the S&L crisis was in full swing when President Ronald Reagan took office, he signed the Garn-St. Germain Depository Institutions Act, which only accelerated S&L deregulation. In fact, this action basically deregulated S&Ls entirely. Of the bill, President Reagan said, “This bill is the most important legislation for financial institutions in the last 50 years…All in all, I think we hit the jackpot.”

Yeah, Reagan hit the jackpot all right! S&Ls were now freer than ever to make riskier investments with depositors’ money. Essentially,

S&Ls were now allowed to operate like banks without being regulated like them.

Because there was little oversight, fraud – think falsified loans, illegal conspiracies, and straight-up embezzlement – spiraled out of control. In the end, over 1,100 bankers were prosecuted by the U.S. Justice Department in response to the S&L scandal and, unsurprisingly, many imploded. Ultimately, 1,043 savings and loans failed at a cost of $124 billion to the American taxpayer.

Even still, President Bill Clinton doubled down on financial deregulation. In 1998 Citicorp, a commercial bank holding company and Travelers Group, an insurance company, merged to form Citigroup. Citigroup instantly became the largest financial services company in the world combining banking, securities and insurance services. However, the merger violated the Glass-Steagall Act.

No worries whatsoever! Congress simply passed – and President Clinton signed into law – the Financial Services Modernization Act, commonly known as the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act.

Although Glass-Steagall had been diminished over the years, it was completely gutted with this legislation that allowed commercial banks, investment banks, securities firms and insurance companies to consolidate. In the absence of Glass-Steagall, financial institutions could grow larger, become more entangled and take far greater risks… and boy did they ever!

The financial sector soon consolidated into just a few huge firms, any one of them so large and interconnected that their individual failure would threaten the entire system. In other words, they became *too big to fail.*

While all this was going on, derivatives – financial instruments based on some underlying asset like mortgages – were a multi-trillion-dollar market, and Washington and Wall Street didn't like that they were being "constrained" by all those nasty regulations.

So, in December 2000, Congress passed – and President Clinton signed into law – the Commodities Futures Modernization Act, which prevented the Commodity Futures Trading Commission from regulating almost all over-the-counter derivative contracts.

By the end of the 1990s, shiny happy market optimism and stacks of venture capitalist cash had fueled a massive bubble in Internet stocks. By 2001, the dot-com bubble burst losing over $8 trillion in paper and actual wealth.

During the early 2000s there were tons of shenanigans going on. Enron Corporation, for example, repeatedly used fraudulent accounting practices to hide tens of billions of dollars of debt, a colossal scandal that resulted in 25,000 lost jobs, multiple criminal convictions, and an $11 billion financial loss for Enron's shareholders.

A Senate investigation found that Riggs Bank laundered money for former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet, helping him conceal millions of dollars in assets from international authorities; UBS paid a fine of $780 million when they were caught helping wealthy Americans evade taxes; and Credit Suisse paid a $536 million fine to settle claims it violated U.S. sanctions by helping other countries launder hundreds of millions of dollars through American banks. They even facilitated transactions for Iran's Atomic Energy Organization and the Aerospace Industries Organization, both of which were proliferators of weapons of mass destruction.

This is all bad behavior to be sure, but it's hard to get worse than the despicable behavior that was exhibited before, during and after the 2007-2009 Financial Crisis, by far the largest financial disaster since the Great Depression.

This international disaster resulted in the collapse of large financial institutions; the government takeover of Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac and the nation's largest insurance company; an astronomical government intervention; a massive crash in the U.S. housing market; the loss of millions of jobs and trillions in household wealth; and millions of shattered dreams.

A 2013 report from the U.S. Government Accountability Office said that "the 2007-2009 Financial Crisis has been associated with large economic losses and increased fiscal challenges. Studies estimating the losses of financial crises based on lost output (value of goods and services not produced) suggest losses associated with the crisis could range from a few trillion dollars to over $10 trillion."

A report from the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas that same year was even worse. Their researchers estimated, "conservatively," that "$6 trillion to $14 trillion – or the equivalent of $50,000 to $120,000 for every U.S. household – was foregone due to the 2007-09 recession."

Many additional but intangible consequences that can't be precisely measured – but that made an enormous impact on Americans during that time – include psychological trauma, skill atrophy from prolonged unemployment, and the loss of citizen trust in government institutions and the overall financial system, which will likely stick around for our entire lifetimes.

In the end, the United States financial system was stabilized only through significant injections of taxpayer capital, together with additional guarantees and lending facilities provided by the Federal Reserve, the Department of the Treasury, and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC).

So, how in the heck did this happen?

The stage for the 2007-2009 financial meltdown was set in 1995 by President Bill Clinton, who was determined to increase the rate of home ownership to an all-time high of 67.5 percent within five years. This would produce 8 million new homeowners! Yay!

To help him reach this goal, President Clinton unveiled a list of 100 specific actions – what he called the National Homeownership Strategy – that he was convinced would achieve his mission but "*not cost taxpayers one extra cent*."

On its face, this seems like a really nice thing for President Clinton to do. At a minimum, it would make people forget about Monica Lewinsky for a few minutes. But what Bill Clinton failed to realize – or just decided to willfully ignore – was that, to create 8 million new homeowners, mortgage-lending standards would have to be slashed. I mean, like severely slashed. Like slashed and burned slashed.

This – together with the fact that the possibilities were now endless given derivatives were unregulated, which we also have President Clinton to thank for – led to financial institutions creating

nefarious, toxic mortgage structures that ignored even the slightest attempt at establishing credit worthiness and were so complicated that people applying for a home loan could not possibly understand them. Even Warren Buffett, the world's savviest investor who called these new financial instruments "time bombs, both for the parties that deal in them and the economic system," admitted to not understanding them.

It certainly didn't help matters that, in addition to being incredibly complicated, financial analysts were muddying the waters even more by issuing dishonest opinions to increase their investment banking business. A main source of evidence in a post-crisis investigation of this phenomenon were internal e-mails that showed financial analysts privately denouncing stocks they publicly praised.

The deadliest of these new products was an extremely complex security called the collateralized debt obligation (CDO). Originally the CDO mirrored a mortgage bond, which sought to redistribute risk associated with home mortgage lending and make the financial markets more efficient. In a mortgage bond, thousands of home loans were gathered and then resold in bits and pieces to investors. The assumption was that, since it was extremely unlikely all the home loans grouped together would repay or default at the same time, this spread the risk of a loan among hundreds of parties.

This redistribution of risk was achieved through something called *securitization*, where thousands of home loans were divided into what are called tranches (generally, the riskiest loans were in the bottom tranche and received the highest interest rate, whereas the loans in the top tranche were the least risky and received the lowest interest rate).

In this new world, however, the CDO gathered not individual home loans, but *entire mortgage bonds* and used *those* to create an entirely new pyramid of bonds. A big red flag was that the bonds used in this set-up were typically Triple-B-rated bonds, some of the riskiest of the bunch.

To make matters far worse when the day of reckoning finally arrived: Not only were these bonds risky, at times they weren't even tied to actual home mortgages. Financial firms quickly discovered they didn't need an actual home loan as the origination. Like Vegas, they only needed someone *to take the other side of their bet*. In these

"synthetic CDOs," as they were called, short-sellers – or pessimists who believed the CDO market would eventually crash and therefore bet against it – happily served as the counterparty. Synthetic CDOs essentially made the risk associated with subprime mortgage lending endless.

Another factor that multiplied the pain exponentially when the day of reckoning arrived was that many financial firms borrowed heavily against these securities to increase their returns. This is known as leverage (i.e., using borrowed money as a source of financing), and Wall Street made it an artform. From 1978 to 2007, the amount of debt held by the financial sector skyrocketed from $3 trillion to $36 trillion, more than doubling as a share of gross domestic product.

But all these realizations came much later, of course. Getting back to the story, the Federal National Mortgage Association (Fannie Mae) and the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation (Freddie Mac) – government-sponsored enterprises (GSEs) established in 1938 and 1970, respectively, to boost the national housing market – were right there to help accomplish President Clinton's dreams. At one point during this mess, they had a combined mortgage exposure of $5 trillion … and they both engaged in what federal officials called "extensive financial fraud."

It was eventually discovered that Freddie Mac underreported earnings by $5 billion and Fannie Mae by $10.6 billion. Fannie Mae CEO Franklin Raines made over $52.8 million in bonuses based on the fraudulent numbers. Raines eventually agreed to return $24.7 million, but not before Fannie Mae spent over $99 *million* to defend him and two other executives against multiple lawsuits.

Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac were able to get away with this deceptive behavior for so long because, for years, they had used their outsized political power to defend against even the most benign regulation and oversight. Among other coercive tactics, they spent $164 million between 1999 and 2008 to lobby Congress.

During this time, a new lending channel also emerged. This "shadow" banking system consisted of non-depository banks and other financial entities such as investment banks, hedge funds, money market funds and insurers. Enormous amounts of risk were moved

from the more regulated parts of the banking system to this shadow system, where there was little oversight and low capital requirements.

The risk involved in these transactions was generally considered caveat emptor, the Latin term for *let the buyer beware*. The thinking was that the parties involved in these deals were sophisticated and well-funded and therefore didn't need to be saved from themselves (however, as we learned the hard way, losses sustained in the shadow banking system weren't limited to the parties that made the deals. In truth, no one was isolated from the destruction).

This next little trick is where people got either really creative or really criminal depending on your take (our take is they got really criminal).

Remember when we said that the bonds in the new pyramid were typically Triple-B-rated bonds, some of the riskiest of the bunch? Well, this pesky little fact didn't matter a bit to the Wall Street guys who, instead of carrying over the Triple-B-rating to the new pyramid, simply got the low-rated bonds re-rated as Triple-A.

You're probably asking, "How did they get away with doing *that*?" "Who in the world would do *that* for them?" Answer: Nationally Recognized Statistical Rating Organizations (NRSROs) named Moody's, Standard & Poor's and Fitch Ratings (NRSROs are agencies that rate the creditworthiness of a company or a financial product). With just one word from these agencies, the risk of these horrid loans simply disappeared. That is, on paper anyway.

Because NRSROs help investors determine the risks of securities, they are extremely influential in the financial markets. During the financial crisis, an epic conflict of interest existed in the NRSRO model. For years, investors paid the bill for the risk assessments given by the rating agencies, but this changed over time. Eventually the issuers of the securities were responsible for paying for their *own* ratings.

To say this compromised arrangement was lucrative for the credit agencies is a huge understatement. When Moody's went public in 2000, its stock multiplied by six and its earnings increased 900 percent.

The Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission – created to examine the causes of the 2007-2009 economic crisis – revealed that "from 2000 to

2007, Moody's rated nearly 45,000 mortgage-related securities as triple-A. This compares with six private-sector companies in the United States that carried this coveted rating in early 2010. In 2006 alone, Moody's put its triple-A stamp of approval on 30 mortgage-related securities *every working day*. The results were disastrous: 83 percent of the mortgage securities rated triple-A that year ultimately were downgraded."

The Commission ultimately concluded there was a significant breakdown at Moody's – "including the flawed computer models, the pressure from financial firms that paid for the ratings, the relentless drive for market share, the lack of resources to do the job despite record profits, and the absence of meaningful public oversight" – and that "without the active participation of the rating agencies, the market for mortgage-related securities could not have been what it became."

Ten years after the crisis, Moody's finally reached an agreement with the U.S. Department of Justice and the attorneys general of 21 U.S. states and the District of Columbia for its conduct during the crisis. Moody's agreed to pay a $437.5 million civil penalty to the Department of Justice and $426.3 million to the participating states and the District of Columbia.

Standard & Poor's reached a $1.375 billion settlement with the DOJ and several states for defrauding investors by inflating ratings ($687.5 million goes to the Justice Department and $687.5 million to 19 states and the District of Columbia).

The entire house of cards finally came crashing down on February 27, 2007, when Freddie Mac announced it would no longer buy the riskiest subprime mortgages and, as a result, the stock market dropped 416 points. For the next eighteen months, as trillions of dollars in stock value vanished, government regulators made desperate attempts to contain a widespread virus that ultimately metastasized into a global financial panic.

The total cost of the government intervention wasn't revealed until years later, when Bloomberg LP won a court case against the U.S. Federal Reserve and a group of the largest U.S. banks. As a result, the Federal Reserve was forced to release 29,000 pages of documents under the Freedom of Information Act.

Because the level of the Fed's financial commitment had been such a closely held secret, citizens, shareholders and even the U.S. Congress had been unaware of the full scale of the financial rescue – which enabled many of the distressed banks to hide the magnitude of their fiscal predicament.

For example, on November 26, 2008, Bank of America CEO Kenneth Lewis sent a letter to shareholders that said the bank was "one of the strongest and most stable major banks in the world." However, at the time his bank owed the Federal Reserve $86 billion. In just one day alone – December 5, 2008 – the Federal Reserve loaned the still deeply troubled banks a combined $1.2 trillion.

But as the dust settled and Americans learned more about the backroom negotiations between the government and Wall Street, public outrage grew.

AIG's initial $85 billion support from taxpayers eventually grew to $182 billion. It was discovered that shortly after their rescue, millions of dollars in bonuses had been paid to AIG executives. To add insult to injury, less than a week after the government committed the initial funds, AIG executives attended a retreat at a luxury resort and spa. AIG paid over $440,000 for the event.

Just before his firm's liquidity crisis, Merrill Lynch CEO John Thain spent $1.22 million of company money redecorating his office (he spent $35,115 on his toilet!). It was also discovered that Merrill had paid its employees billions of dollars in bonuses right before their sale to Bank of America was finalized. Also, before the deal officially closed, Merrill's trading losses increased to $15.31 billion, and the firm had to take additional write-downs on its weakening assets.

However, none of these game-changing developments were made public before the merger was approved by the shareholders of both companies. When Bank of America made these disclosures after the deal closed, the bank's stock fell by more than 60 percent, equaling a market value loss of over $50 billion.

The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) sued Bank of America for allegedly concealing huge losses at Merrill Lynch to ensure that shareholders would approve the merger. The suit was settled for $150 million, although the judge himself said the agreement

was "half-baked justice at best." Shareholders also sued Bank of America. That case was settled for $2.43 billion.

In August of 2013, the Justice Department finally sued Bank of America, but not because of the Merrill Lynch deal. Bank of America stood accused of lying to investors in the years leading to the financial crisis and defrauding them by vastly minimizing the risks of $850 million in securities. The suit claims that then-CEO Kenneth Lewis referred to the wholesale mortgages his firm was actively selling as "toxic waste." One year later, Bank of America agreed to a settlement of $16.65 billion. Bank of America has paid a total of $76.1 billion in fines.

Also in August, JP Morgan Chase finally admitted that the firm faced criminal and civil investigations into whether the firm sold sketchy mortgage securities in the years before the crisis. JP Morgan Chase has paid a total of $43.7 billion in fines. Citigroup $19 billion; Deutsche Bank $14 billion; Wells Fargo $11.8 billion; RBS $10.1 billion; BNP Paribas $9.3 billion; Credit Suisse $9.1 billion; Morgan Stanley $8.6 billion; Goldman Sachs $7.7 billion; and UBS $6.5 billion.

All in, banks have been fined $243 billion from the fall-out of the 2007-2009 Financial Crisis. But as Market Watch reminds us, "It's important to note that the banks don't just send a check for their fines to federal and state governments. Many times, they get credit by making loans and supporting debt restructuring. For example, a Goldman Sachs commitment for $1.8 billion of loan forgiveness and financing for affordable housing was considered as part of a $5.1 billion 'fine' the bank had to pay."

The 2007-2009 Financial Crisis was avoidable. And so is the next one, *but only if we learn from the past*.

We must make certain the underlying elements of the crisis – shockingly awful corporate leadership and incompetence, with a

healthy dose of stunning but unjustified arrogance; steadily declining lending standards which led to unconstrained and excessive borrowing by Wall Street and the American public; absurdly inadequate financial regulations; frenzied risk-taking on all levels; federal officials who were unprepared for such a crisis and, therefore, inconsistent in their decisions; and practically zero accountability for anyone – are examined and reigned in. For good.

After the 2007-2009 Financial Crisis, the U.S. Congress passed – and President Obama signed into law – the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act, the most sweeping financial regulation in American history.

Dodd-Frank set limits on bank debt, requiring banks to keep more money in reserve; restricted how much debt banks can leverage in investments; established the Volcker Rule, which restricts banks from trading with their own funds; created stress tests for banks to better monitor systemic risk; reversed much of the Commodity Futures Modernization Act's (CFMA) deregulation, now compelling many firms that trade derivatives use a more regulated clearinghouse; established the Financial Stability Oversight Council (FSOC) and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB); and bolstered the regulation of credit agencies as well as whistleblower protections.

The legislation also expanded the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation's authority, making the FDIC responsible for all firms designated as "systemically important." As such, the FDIC now has *orderly liquidation authority*, meaning it has the power to restructure or liquidate failing financial firms that would pose a danger to the U.S. financial system if they filed traditional bankruptcy.

The FDIC, together with the Federal Reserve, also handles the "living wills" that financial institutions now periodically submit to summarize their credit exposure and outline the company's strategy for a swift, orderly resolution in the event of its material financial distress or total failure.

Dodd-Frank was not perfect – for example, it put way too much regulation on smaller community banks – but it was a solid first effort. Wall Street executives and Republicans can jump up and down and scream about "over-regulation" impeding economic growth – which

makes little sense since the S&P 500 index of U.S. stocks has returned 11 percent a year in real terms since the legislation passed – and as enthusiastic capitalists we agree that, in a perfect world, the markets would self-regulate.

However, the 2007-2009 Financial Crisis unequivocally proves that even the free-est of markets demand boundaries. Adam Smith's invisible hand – which would ideally guide market participants to contribute in a mutually beneficial way – is not foolproof *when that hand is attached to a fool.*

Luckily, it's possible to strike an appropriate balance between risk-taking and recklessness. Sensible financial regulation gives the breathing room necessary for innovation, entrepreneurship and economic growth but, at the same time, prevents the catastrophic extremes that the free market can unleash.

We have to be super diligent about this because the Trump/Vance administration is already going all-in on financial deregulation, even though in many ways our overall economic climate is even more fragile than in the years leading to the 2007-2009 Financial Crisis (and everyone *please believe*, it absolutely CAN happen again).

When it comes to irresponsible behavior by banks, it just keeps being Groundhog Day all over again. Between March and May 2023, Silicon Valley Bank, Signature Bank, and First Republic Bank were all seized by government regulators. The collapse of these three banks constituted three of the four largest failures of a federally insured bank in U.S. history.

When the Federal Reserve, Treasury Department, and the FDIC decided to invoke emergency authority to shore up the debt of Silicon Valley Bank and Signature Bank – *of course* they did – they essentially made the decision to grant U.S. government guarantees for depositor losses of an entirely new class of banks. Then, by offering discounted loans to any other bank that wanted to borrow from its facilities, the Federal Reserve, just like in 2008, made substantial emergency support available to the entire banking system.

Meaning, the United States government bailed-out banks *yet again*, moral hazard be damned. *Yet again*, bankers bet on black with what they have come to assume – consciously or unconsciously – will

be American taxpayer money, congratulating themselves with huge bonuses when they win but not stung by any significant consequence when they lose. It's total b.s.

Interest groups in the Finance, Insurance & Real Estate sector have been hammering Washington since Dodd-Frank passed, and boy has that finally paid off for them! They have spent over 9 BILLION DOLLARS Washington since 2008. President Trump now wants to re-privatize Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, posting on social media: "I am working on TAKING THESE AMAZING COMPANIES PUBLIC. I want to be clear, the U.S. Government will keep its implicit GUARANTEES, and I will stay strong in my position on overseeing them as President."

Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac currently guarantee $7.7 trillion in loans and back half of the single-family mortgage market. As usual, as financial regulations have been systematically watered-down, these loans have become increasingly risky. If the Trump/Vance administration gets its way, we'll be right back in the nonsensical universe where Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac's profits are private, but their risks fall squarely on the American taxpayer.

U.S. regulators have relaxed post-financial-crisis rules to allow the nation's largest lenders to free up some of the capital they have been required to have to ensure they can survive in times of market stress and turmoil. This capital requirement is called the *supplementary leverage ratio*, and it governs how much capital big banks are required to hold against their total assets/leverage. This rule applies the same capital to all bank assets, whatever their risk (including loans, Treasuries and derivatives).

This new change reduces the ratio from at least 5 percent of the bank's total assets to somewhere between 3.5 percent and 4.5 percent, reducing the amount of capital that big banks hold at the holding company level by an estimated $13 billion. The capital requirements for the largest banks' subsidiaries (as opposed to the holding company) will drop 27 percent, translating to a reduction of $210 billion in capital.

The regulators' justification for this move is that lowering these requirements will help bolster global markets because banks will

surely buy more Treasuries – which we already know they probably won't do. Morgan Stanley has already said they don't expect to "significantly increase" their Treasury holdings, and Bank of America has essentially said the same. What they all will do, as history clearly shows, is funnel more money into dividends and stock buybacks.

< As a reminder, in a stock buyback (a.k.a. share repurchase) a company buys back its own shares from the marketplace. They do this, in part, to reduce the number of shares that are available on the open market, which ultimately increases the value of those shares (i.e., supply and demand). Buybacks can also increase equity value, make a company look more financially sound, and allow a way for money to be returned to investors. >

… and this is probably just the beginning of the financial deregulation push we will see during the Trump/Vance era. Next up will likely be even less supervision and accountability for banks; a change in how they are rated; and an easing of their stress tests, which are designed to assess a bank's ability to withstand an economic crisis.

This is a huge mistake at a time when banks are bigger – and financial markets more expansive – than ever. By August 2026, roughly $31.8 trillion in Treasury securities were outstanding**,** with trading averaging roughly $1.2 trillion per day during the first eight months of the year. Over-the-counter derivatives are still all the rage – to the tune of $846 ***trillion***.

Combined, U.S. commercial banks and savings associations reported $296.5 trillion in derivatives contracts by notional value in the first quarter of 2026. And big surprise, things remain highly concentrated. Just four large U.S. banks accounted for 79 percent of the banking industry's derivatives exposure.

Rolling back ***any*** of these safeguards significantly increases the risk of a big bank failure, making our financial system more unstable and less resilient.

And remember that deadly, extremely complex security from the 2007-2009 Financial Crisis called the collateralized debt obligation (CDO)? Today we have the collateralized loan obligation (CLO), which are asset-backed securities that invest in less-liquid leveraged

loans. CLOs are securitized products that pool leveraged loans together, then repackage them into tranches. Sound familiar?

Publicly traded structured credit reached record levels in 2024 and continued to grow in 2025. U.S. asset-backed securities issuance climbed to $517.4 billion in 2025, up 33 percent from the previous year, while new CLO issuance reached roughly $209 billion, setting another annual record. This time around, the target de jour is the insurance industry, specifically the $1.1 trillion fixed annuities market. Fixed annuities are a retirement-savings product offered by life insurers. What could possibly go wrong?

...the endless repetition of history.

1787 Plan of Action: Financial Reform

† U.S. regulators have relaxed post-financial-crisis rules to allow the nation's largest lenders to free up some of the capital they have been required to have to ensure they can survive in times of market stress and turmoil. This capital requirement is called the supplementary leverage ratio, and it governs how much capital big banks are required to hold against their total assets/leverage. This rule applies the same capital to all bank assets, whatever their risk (including loans, Treasuries and derivatives). We should look into reversing this.

This new change reduces the ratio from at least 5 percent of the bank's total assets to somewhere between 3.5 percent and 4.5 percent, reducing the amount of capital that big banks hold at the holding company level by an estimated $13 billion. The capital requirements for the largest banks' subsidiaries (as opposed to the holding company) will drop 27 percent, translating to a reduction of $210 billion in capital.

The regulators' justification for this move is that lowering these requirements will help bolster global markets because banks will

surely buy more Treasuries – which we already know they probably won't do. Morgan Stanley has already said they don't expect to "significantly increase" their Treasury holdings, and Bank of America has essentially said the same. What they all will do, as history clearly shows, is funnel more money into dividends and stock buybacks.

- Absolutely, positively DO NOT privatize Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, which support around 70 percent of the U.S. mortgage market. Privatizing Fannie and Freddie would be a windfall for investors but would most likely screw the American consumer – possibly making home loans more difficult to get, increasing mortgage rates, and losing protections like rate-lock agreements. If the Trump/Vance administration succeeds in privatizing Fannie and Freddie, fight them in court.
- The Trump/Vance administration is pushing for less supervision and accountability for banks; a change in how they are rated; and an easing of their stress tests, which are designed to assess a bank's ability to withstand an economic crisis. If they succeed, reverse this.
- Create a less complicated and less-burdensome supervisory and regulatory process for community banks.
- Impose a tax on the borrowings of shadow banks with assets over $50 billion; 1.2 percent for those not systemically important.
- Close the loophole in the Volcker Rule allowing banks to engage in equity investments.
- The first Trump administration made banks with less than $10 billion in assets exempt from the Volcker Rule. Reverse this.
- The first Trump administration increased the threshold for stress tests from $50 billion to $250 billion. Reverse this.
- Finalize executive compensation rules for financial executives in Section 956 of Dodd-Frank.

- Make certain the derivative markets are transparent and accurately assessed.
- Strictly and consistently enforce high standards and accountability for credit rating agencies and NRSROs.
- Consistently hold auditors accountable through strict enforcement by the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board (PCAOB).
- Prosecute financial crimes to the fullest extent of the law.
- Rebuild and protect an independent Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. Protect its Office of Fair Lending and Equal Opportunity.

Gender Pay Gap

The Bottom Line

- Despite the Equal Pay Act of 1963 and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 – which prohibit sex-based discrimination in compensation – a substantial gender pay gap persists. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2025, women working full time had median weekly earnings of $1,089, or 82.1 percent of the $1,326 median for men.
- Fair and equitable compensation should be a top priority for companies if they want to reach their full business potential. It's never been more important for companies to conduct a pay equity analysis, then put a strategy in place that honestly confronts wage disparities and improves pay equity. This can be achieved through new job offers, merit pay increases, and promotions. Pay equity improves employee engagement, morale and performance; increases employee retention and reduces turnover; and attracts new

talent – all so companies can remain competitive in a tight domestic labor market and an ever-expanding global market.

♦ ♦ ♦

American women are fierce! They are smart, capable and determined, and most make personal and professional decisions that are best *for themselves* and *their families*.

A Quick Word About the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA):

The Equal Rights Amendment (E.R.A.) was first passed by the U.S. Congress in 1972 but, because it was ratified by only 35 states, failed to gain the states necessary for ratification by three.

Almost 40 years later, Nevada, Illinois and Virginia finally rounded out the 38 states needed for ratification. However, it will still take an act of Congress to decide if the legislation is enforceable since legislators missed the original 1979 deadline, then the extended 1982 deadline. Another wrinkle is that, throughout the years, five states voted to rescind their original ratifications.

The central focus of the E.R.A. is to ensure that "equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex." We obviously agree with that statement 1000% but are unsure of why we need a constitutional amendment to make this point because it's already addressed in the United States Constitution.

The Fourteenth Amendment is very clear: "No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."

In truth, the U.S. Supreme Court has already litigated the point. In the case of Reed v. Reed – a case challenging an Idaho Probate Code

that said "males must be preferred to females" in appointing administrators of estates – the Supreme Court ruled in an unanimous decision that "to give a mandatory preference to members of either sex over members of the other, merely to accomplish the elimination of hearings on the merits, is to make the very kind of arbitrary legislative choice forbidden by the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment…the choice in this context may not lawfully be mandated solely on the basis of sex."

This was followed by other cases such as Frontiero v. Richardson, a case argued by the late Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. In this case, the Supreme Court ruled that "dissimilar treatment for men and women who are similarly situated" is unconstitutional.

But beyond all that, there are already targeted protections in place to protect women, including the Equal Pay Act of 1963, Violence Against Women Act, Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, and the Pregnancy Discrimination Act. It would be far more effective to strengthen these issue-specific laws instead of trying to pass something that crams every issue that remotely pertains to women into one toothless amendment.

Government Reform

Read more about Government Reform on p. 567 of The Great American Reset.

1787 Plan of Action: Government Reform

- Reign In Presidential Power. Restore Checks & Balances.
  - Thoroughly investigate the secret and extraordinary emergency authorities given to the president. At a minimum, require transparency and establish strict congressional oversight.

- † Pass legislation to limit presidential trade authority. The law should require a congressional review whenever a president invokes Section 232 and should be retroactive for two years.
- † Automatically terminate an emergency declaration within 30 days unless Congress votes to extend it. Impose strict reporting requirements on the Executive Branch.
- † Require written justifications from the president for pardons involving close associates.
- † Extend federal safeguards against conflicts of interest to the president and vice president.
- † Pass legislation to protect special counsels and inspectors general from improper removal.
- † Erect a barrier between the White House and the Justice Department. Do not tolerate political interference in any way.
- † Require all communications between the White House and Justice Department be made available to the inspector general.
- † Pass legislation to enforce the safeguards in the Foreign and Domestic Emoluments Clauses of the U.S. Constitution.
- † Fix the Federal Vacancies Reform Act to prevent presidents from cutting the Senate out of the appointments process.
- † Take concrete steps to streamline the nomination and confirmation process.
- † Reform the White House security clearance process.

† End the power of the electoral college. Encourage states to join the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact while we push for a constitutional amendment.

† Demand that partisan gerrymandering end.

- † Encourage states to use an independent, bipartisan commission to draw voting maps.
- † Modernize the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

- Create a new framework to determine which states and localities are subject to preclearance. Rely on recent evidence and examples of current suppression and discrimination instead of historical patterns of behavior to address the U.S. Supreme Court's concerns.
- Allow Americans to sue to block voting laws and practices they believe to be intentionally discriminatory, or if they believe their constitutional right to vote is being infringed upon.

- Absolutely, positively do not allow earmarks. Ever.
- Propose a constitutional amendment to overturn Citizens United.
- Shine a Bright Light on Dark Money
  - Significantly restructure the Federal Election Commission (FEC) to guarantee strenuous, NONPARTISAN, and fair enforcement.
    - Demand that any entity that raises more the $10,000 in a federal election disclose its donors.
    - Tighten rules to ensure that super PACs are truly independent of candidates.
    - Extend last-minute major donor reporting requirements to Super PACs.
  - Pass legislation that modernizes campaign finance laws to account for online political advertising, expanding the regulation of TV and radio ads to internet ads. The legislation should also increase election advertising transparency by allowing the public to see who bought an online political ad, regardless of its origin.
- Initiate the process of increasing the number of Supreme Court Justices to 19.
- Pass legislation requiring the Supreme Court to provide a formal, signed and publicly justified opinion for any emergency order that

alters a lower court's ruling. The law should also require recorded votes, meaning the votes of individual Justices on emergency applications should be made public.

The Supreme Court's emergency docket, referred to by many as its "shadow docket," is the mechanism the Court uses to address urgent matters as quickly as possible, especially in cases where lower courts have issued orders that parties want to challenge or stay (Justice Alito has publicly objected strongly to the term "shadow docket," calling it unfairly "sinister").

This emergency docket is controversial because the Court issues orders and summary decisions outside its normal procedures, allowing the Justices to make decisions without the deliberation and transparency that is usually achieved through full briefings, oral arguments, and/or written opinions.

Many people – including 1787 – say this undermines the rule of law because the public often gets little to no explanation of the reasoning behind the decisions. This includes cases involving immigration, abortion and voting rights – all issues that have a significant impact on the lives.

- Significantly Curtail Current Lobbying Practices
  - Demand complete transparency and accountability in all lobbying activities.
  - Create an independent enforcement agency that demands the strict compliance of lobbying laws and ethics rules.
  - Require the registration of lobbyists and their clients. Create a database that is easily accessible to the public.
  - Enact a five-year ban on lobbying by presidents, vice presidents, members of Congress, and federal judges.
  - Enact a five-year ban on federal employees from lobbying their former office, department, or chamber of Congress after they leave the government.
- Place stiff restrictions and disclosure requirements on the "revolving door" between the private sector and public officials.

- Simplify legislation. Support new rules for bringing proposals to the floor of the House of Representatives. Retain the filibuster, which is a healthy check on narrow partisan majorities in the legislature.
- Stop allowing continuing resolutions, omnibus spending deals, and debt-ceiling hikes to substitute for a real budget. It's out of control.
- Demand Ethical Conduct and Government Accountability
  - Reform the Office of Government Ethics so that it can better enforce federal ethics laws.
  - Never allow presidents to use the autopen to sign substantive documents, including pardons and legislation.
  - Require family members of the president to disclose all business dealings with foreign entities.
  - Properly enforce the Stop Trading on Congressional Knowledge Act of 2012 (STOCK Act) and strict pay-to-play restrictions on government contracts.
  - Prohibit government officials from holding or trading stock when they might be influenced by their agency, department, or actions.
  - Demand complete transparency in all government contracting activities.
  - Pass legislation requiring agencies that perform scientific research to articulate clear standards for, and report on, how political officials interact with career researchers.
  - Enact legislation requiring proactive disclosure of government research and data.
  - Pass legislation that specifically prohibits political campaigns from accepting help from foreign countries (it is unbelievable that this must be written down somewhere).

- Extend Congress' sexual harassment law to include discrimination of any kind.
- Secure Whistleblower Protections. Implement severe penalties for revealing the identity of whistleblowers, and/or for threatening them in any way.
- Close the loophole that allows FEC commissioners to decline to pursue a complaint citing "prosecutorial discretion."

- Guard Against Voter Suppression
  - Pass legislation that protects our elections from voter suppression and partisan sabotage.
    - Endorse a national standard for voter identification requirements.
    - Expand access to the ballot, to include early voting, mail voting, automatic voter registration, online voter registration, and same day voter registration.
      - Strictly prohibit – and establish severe penalties for – the dissemination of false and misleading information designed to dissuade eligible voters from voting.
      - Establish federal criminal penalties for deceiving voters and increase existing penalties for voter intimidation.
      - Require local election offices use .gov domains.
      - Encourage all states to count their mail and absentee ballots before Election Day to avoid confusion.
      - Encourage Congress to pass legislation to set minimum early voting requirements for states.
      - Expand the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 to include automatic, permanent voter registration laws.

- Eliminate ballot gathering/ballot collecting. Only allow family members, household members, or caregivers to return ballots on behalf of someone else.
- Restore federal voting rights to formerly incarcerated citizens upon their release. Encourage states to establish consistent laws among one another to replace the confusing patchwork of existing state laws.
- Establish federal requirements for state ballot design using best practices developed by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission and its chosen partners.
- Require states to ensure that voting lines last no longer than two hours.
- Protect voting access for Americans with disabilities.
- Strengthen and empower the U.S. Election Assistance Commission.

- Safeguard the entire electoral process.
  - No Internet voting – EVER!
  - Provide federal funding for critical updates to our election infrastructure immediately. Make the "critical infrastructure" designation for election systems permanent.
  - Provide federal funding for election administrator and poll worker training.
  - Provide federal resources for state and federal agencies to conduct regular threat assessments to our election systems.
  - Establish a bug bounty program for election systems (bug bounty programs offer a way for independent security

experts to identify potential vulnerabilities and lawfully report them).

- Require states to conduct transparent postelection audits that follow clearly defined and transparent rules and procedures.
- Require states to replace old, paperless electronic voting machines with voting systems that provide voter-verified paper records.
- Prohibit wireless components in all voting systems that record and tabulate votes.
- Require election administrators to routinely assess the integrity of voter registration databases and the integrity of voter registration databases connected to other applications.
- Back up election/voter registration databases regularly and establish failsafe measures for Election Day, including having enough ballots on hand.
- Highly regulate and vet election vendors.
- Toughen the penalties for destroying or altering ballots and other election records.
- Increase protections for local election administrators and pass a federal law preventing them from being removed for partisan or political reasons. Increase federal protections and remedies against the intimidation of election workers.
- Limit access to critical election infrastructure to only election officials and those they specifically give written permission to.

- Prevent flawed, inconsistent procedures for purging voter rolls while ensuring states accurately maintain their voter registration lists. Require states to notify a voter at least two

weeks prior to the voter being removed from the list, along with the reason for their removal and ways they can contest the decision.

- Require all states to participate in a system of cross-state matching of voter registrations.

Government Waste

Read more about 1787's Operation Overhaul program and Government Waste on p. 461 of The Great American Reset.

1787's Operation Overhaul, working in close collaboration with Congress, can reduce our debt, close the gap on our deficit, and end the massive waste, inefficiency and corruption that infects every level of our federal government. Operation Overhaul has four parts:

- Fiscal Responsibility
  Read about this on p. 407 of *The Great American Reset*.

- Operations

Operation Overhaul reduces costs, maximizes value, and improves performance by strengthening operational strategies that will build an effective organizational structure and demand accountability. We will remove redundancy, unlock hidden value, establish clear channels of reporting and responsibility and get the most out of government employees.

The hallmark of Operation Overhaul is that it demands tough but fair accountability. After the departments and programs are streamlined – which is a critical first step – strict review processes will keep them on track. Every program and agency will be continually evaluated and measured. Plus, the federal departments must make a strong case for their value every single year. Departments must prove

that they narrowly define their challenges, conduct in-depth due diligence, formulate smart and timely plans of action, assess the risks and develop responsible budgets.

To facilitate this process, a nonpartisan, non-connected Efficiency Review Board will oversee the federal departments, acting as a new line of financial defense. Currently, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) receives each department's yearly budget request, communicates with them about the requests, and makes budget recommendations before the president's budget is sent to Congress. The new Efficiency Review Board will assess each department's programs and approve their budgets before they are even presented to the OMB.

I. Operational Efficiency:

- Design an overall strategy for the entire U.S. government instead of viewing each department as a sum of its parts.
- Address organizational design and management infrastructure to create a more agile culture.
- Streamline agencies and merge duplicative ones. For example, doesn't it make sense to merge the Commodity Futures Trading Commission and the Securities and Exchange Commission since commodity derivatives markets and securities get more similar every day?
- Implement strict review processes. Establish a new, non-connected Efficiency Review Board.
- Require every federal agency to undergo a "sunset review" every ten years, meaning the agency's mandate will terminate unless renewed by the U.S. Congress.
- Now that 92 percent of American households have Internet service, move federal services online when at all possible. Continue to do everything in our power to get Internet into the remaining 8 percent of homes. < Note: Although most federal

services should be moved online, the 1787 Empower Society Centers need to remain "brick-and-mortar," having a physical location where clients can interact and participate in person. Read more on p. 252. >

A recent study by management consulting firm McKinsey & Co. revealed that, "overwhelmingly," Americans want "easy and comprehensive" digital self-service solutions. Providing these services will hopefully help improve customer satisfaction with government services, which is currently at a historic low of 12 percent. Moving more federal services online makes so much sense. Already, over 90 percent of federal tax returns are filed electronically.

- Modernize how the government buys goods and services from private vendors. Expand "Other Transaction Authority" (OTA), which grants legal power to certain federal agencies that allows them to enter into unique agreements called "Other Transactions" which are not considered standard contracts, grants, or cooperative agreements. This awards best practices and provides greater flexibility to engage with non-traditional vendors for research and development projects.
- Guarantee U.S. digital strategies are far ahead of the speed of digital innovation.

II. Federal Workforce:

- Knock off the "Deep State" hateful rhetoric and begin appreciating lifelong federal employees for what they truly are: Extraordinary Americans doing nothing more or less than the grinding, behind-the-scenes work of the American people. These hard-working Americans don't deserve to be ridiculed and disrespected by rich guys trying to consolidate power.
- Define the U.S. government's core strengths and values and ensure that federal employees are empowered by them.

- † Embrace bold innovation, strategic vision and tenacious problem-solving techniques.
- † Create an environment where working for the United States of America is as prestigious as working for a Fortune 500 company.
- † Bring private sector principles into government to transform the current bureaucratic mentality.

† Waste & Corruption
Read about this on p. 461 of *The Great American Reset*.

† Comprehensive Government Reform
Read about this on p. 567 of *The Great American Reset*.

Gun Safety

This is a tough one. It's tough because there are so many levels of emotion involved. It's tough because there are so many highly personal issues tangled up in the topic – everything from constitutional rights to mental health to polar opposite lifestyles and traditions.

It's tough because people die. It's tough because the people who die have people who deeply love them. Innocent children get murdered in cold blood just for going to school. Innocent people in Las Vegas get murdered in cold blood just for going to listen to their favorite music. Innocent families get murdered in cold blood for shopping at Walmart on a beautiful Saturday morning.

It's tough because we *all* want to get this right. It's tough because we *all* want these tragedies to end. But here is where we must be exceedingly careful. For us to get these tragedies under control, the comprehensive strategy we design must be based on facts, not on emotion.

After a murderer uses an assault rifle in a mass shooting, for example, it makes sense that the conversation turns to banning

automatic assault weapons. After all, the shooter used an automatic assault weapon to kill these innocent men, women and children, so it stands to reason that, without him having access to it, these people would still be alive.

But is that true? Would he have just used another kind of gun, or another type of weapon? It's impossible for emotions not to play a major role in this issue, but the danger of relying on emotional logic alone is that the chances increase that we make a quick judgement without understanding the complexity of the overall challenge.

In so many issues, a solution that makes us feel better *in the moment* may not necessarily be the best solution for the long-term. Often, solutions that make us feel better in the moment only serve to give us a false sense of security that makes us feel like we are making a difference when we may not be. It's critical we do not make that mistake with this issue because the stakes are far too high.

Let's Start Here: What Do We Know?

- In 2024, 44,447 Americans died from gun-related injuries in the United States.
- 27,593 (62%) of these deaths were suicides.
- 15,364 (35%) of these deaths were homicides.
- That leaves 1,490 gun-related deaths. These deaths include accidents, those involving law enforcement, and those with undetermined circumstances.
- There are conflicting definitions of "mass shooting." The FBI collects data on "active shooter incidents," defined as "one or more individuals actively engaged in killing or attempting to kill people in a populated area." Using this definition, 23 people (excluding the shooters) were killed in such incidents in 2024.

  On the other hand, the Gun Violence Archive defines mass shootings as incidents in which four or more people are shot, even

if no one was killed (excluding the shooters). Using this definition, 510 people were killed in such incidents in 2024.

- Using the Gun Violence Archive's definition, in roughly 46% of mass shootings, the shooter kills a current of former intimate partner or family member.
- In over half the states, people as young as 18 can buy firearms. This is concerning because, in 2020, firearm-related injuries surpassed motor vehicle crashes to become the leading cause of death among people ages 1 to 19 years in the United States. Further, there is sizeable racial disparity in firearm deaths, with black youths being killed at significantly higher rates than white youths.
- The United States has less than 5 percent of the world's population but has the world's highest gun ownership rate, at almost 121 firearms per 100 residents. The U.S. also has the highest homicide-by-firearm rate among high-income countries with populations of over ten million, at 4.52 per 100,000 residents.

These numbers tell us A LOT. They tell us that, using the FBI's definition, the number of people killed during mass shootings accounted for just 0.05 percent of all gun-related deaths in 2024 – meaning that, although mass shootings dominate media coverage when they happen, they represent an extremely small part of shooting incidents.

They tell us that we have a massive mental health crisis in America. They tell us that, out of the 15,364 homicides in 2024, roughly 7,067 were carried out by someone close to the victim, making the act very personal.

These types of facts matter A LOT when you put forth national solutions like, say, banning assault weapons. First, let's clear something up. We absolutely could do that if we wanted to. The U.S. Constitution makes clear that the Second Amendment is not absolute when it says, "a well-regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed."

Many gun enthusiasts seem to forget that the Second Amendment includes the words *well- regulated*, which is made easier by things like the National Rifle Association (NRA) leaving these words completely out when they wrote the Second Amendment on the lobby wall of their headquarters.

The U.S. Supreme Court has also been clear on the matter. In its ruling on the court case District of Columbia v. Heller, the ruling from the highest Court in the land said, "Like most rights, the Second Amendment right is not unlimited. It is not a right to keep and carry any weapon whatsoever in any manner whatsoever and for whatever purpose… The United States v. Miller holding that the sorts of weapons protected are those 'in common use at the time' finds support in the historical tradition of prohibiting the carrying of dangerous and unusual weapons."

So, no, the Second Amendment is not the reason 1787 does not currently support banning assault weapons. This is: Simple math. At this point, the only question we need to ask is: *Who* kills *who*, and with *what*. In other words, *who* pulled the trigger in each of these gun-related deaths, and how can we best take guns from *their* hands. Not *everyone's* hands… *their* hands.

This is a distinction that will make the ultimate difference between success and failure. Let's get real about this. Based on NICS background data and manufacturing records, it's estimated that there are 500,000,000 civilian-owned firearms in the U.S, and estimates show that 82,880,000 people in the United States owned at least one firearm in 2023.…which makes getting these guns off the streets virtually impossible. It just ain't gonna happen.

The numbers are the numbers, period. But add to that, this: In our current, highly heated political environment, if your strategy is to take guns *away* from law-abiding citizens, it's highly likely you will lose.

Listen, we're not afraid of a fight. If we honestly thought banning assault weapons was the best solution, we would fight like hell to make it happen. But it's just not the most effective way to solve this problem, and the unnecessary battle is going to eclipse everything else we try to do in the name of gun safety. We need to put points on the

board right away! Therefore, we cannot get sidetracked on this issue because the stakes are far too high.

1787 Plan of Action: Gun Safety

Legislation + Accountability + Enforcement + Mental Health

Legislation

- No federal ban on semi-automatic weapons.
- Make the minimum age for buying assault weapons 21.
- Make gun trafficking a federal crime.
- Adjust for inflation the $200 "making and transfer tax" in the National Firearms Act of 1934, but just for semi-automatic weapons.
- Remove the Tiahrt Amendments that are continually attached to U.S. Department of Justice appropriations bills.
- 1787 supports a state's right to pass concealed-carry laws. But states should not be forced to comply with concealed-carry reciprocity (concealed-carry reciprocity means that a concealed carry permit or license is valid beyond the state that issued it, and the rights between states are reciprocated).
- Regulate ghost guns. They are easy to get, easy to assemble, currently untraceable, and lethal.

Accountability

- Ensure that the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS) is fully up-to-date, and that the government

agencies responsible for forwarding information do so without delay.

- Conduct universal background checks on anyone who buys a gun or ammunition, to include gun shows and Internet purchases.
- Require a license and/or permit to buy, own, possess, or carry a firearm.
- Institute a mandatory waiting period of three (3) days before firearms can be taken from a merchant's premises.
- Require individual gun owners to report the loss or theft of a firearm to law enforcement.
- Charge gun owners with a crime if their weapons are not safely stored around children.
- The Gun Control Act of 1968, as amended, establishes the following categories of persons who are prohibited from receiving or possessing a firearm: Any person who…
  - Has been convicted in any court of a crime punishable by imprisonment for a term exceeding one year.
  - Is a fugitive from justice.
  - Is an unlawful user of or addicted to any controlled substance.
  - Has been adjudicated as a mental defective or who has been committed to a mental institution.
  - Is an illegal or unlawful alien or a non-immigrant alien (with certain exceptions).
  - Has been discharged from the Armed Forces under dishonorable conditions.
  - Having been a citizen of the United States, has renounced his citizenship.
  - Is subject to a domestic violence protection order that meets certain requirements.

- Has been convicted in any court of a misdemeanor crime of domestic violence.
- Is under indictment for or has been charged with a crime punishable by imprisonment for a term exceeding one year.

We should also include the following: Any person who…

- Is considered to be a "known or suspected terrorist" by the FBI (to include all no-fly and watch lists).
- Has been convicted of violent misdemeanors.
- Has been convicted of stalking another person.
- Has been reported as a dangerous threat by a mental health professional.

Enforcement

- Create Comprehensive Targeted Violence Prevention Plans for schools instead of focusing on just hardening school facilities.
- 1787 supports increased and properly enforced punishments for people found possessing firearms illegally.
- 1787 supports harsh and properly enforced punishments for rogue gun-dealers/straw purchasers.
- Leave law enforcement to the professionals. Do not arm teachers, under any circumstance.

Mental Health

An alarmingly high percentage of American gun deaths are suicides. We must take a comprehensive public health approach to protect our children, focusing on school climate and mental health services.

- Secure and expand "red flag" laws that temporarily confiscate guns from individuals who appear to be a danger to themselves or others.
- Expand screening and treatment for mental illness. Mental health is an issue that extends far beyond the topic of guns.

Health Care

Read more about Health Care on p. 650 of The Great American Reset.

Our Goal is to Get Quality Up and Costs Down!
We Can Achieve This in Two-Steps:

Step One: Strengthen the Affordable Care Act
Step Two: Get Spending Under Control

Step One: Strengthen the Affordable Care Act (ACA)

First, Improve the ACA & Protect the Basics

- Reassess the tax subsidies for individuals and the tax exemptions for employer/employee contributions to employer-sponsored insurance and make sure they are set at the fairest, most effective levels.
- Work to reverse the cuts to Medicaid in the One Big Beautiful Bill, then implement long-term changes to stabilize the program as part of 1787's Operation Overhaul program.
- Pressure the states that are hold-outs to expand Medicaid. Give them the same federal funding as those that previously expanded.

- Under no circumstance can pre-existing conditions be excluded from health insurance coverage.
- If a parent's plan covers children, they can add or keep their children on their health insurance policy until they turn 26 years old.
- Allow small businesses to form a larger risk pool to make offering insurance more feasible.
- Allow companies to offer benefits to independent contractors on a federal level and encourage states to do the same. Allow independent contractors to access benefits without losing their independent status.
- Encourage portable benefit plans that can travel with workers.
- Support plans that can be combined with tax-preferred health-savings accounts.
- Address the medical-loss ratio (MLR) that forces insurers to spend 80 percent of premiums on claims. This profit cap has encouraged insurers to merge with or acquire pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs) and healthcare providers, making spending less transparent.
- Expand site-neutral payments to align Medicare payments for outpatient services across care settings.
- Compensate doctors based on value-based care, not fee for service. Move to a bundled payment model that includes bonuses for high-quality, lower-cost outcomes.
- Change the Medicare Advantage structure to have insurers compete against each other based on their premiums instead of being compensated based on how low their bids are compared to a Medicare benchmark.
- Require insurers to offer their lowest negotiated prices to all customers.

- Cap deductibles for all private plans at no more than 2 percent of the median household income.
- Reject Most-Favored-Nations (MFN) price controls on drugs, which only discourages the development of generics and new breakthrough treatments, and crushes incentives for drug makers to innovate.
- Do not raise the 3-to-1 rate band (premiums for those 55+ cannot be more than three times higher than those for younger people).
- Protect the ban on yearly or lifetime dollar limits on essential health benefits.
- Protect the cap on out-of-pocket spending. For 2025, these amounts are $9,200 for individuals and $18,400 for families.
- Protect the ACA ban on gender-based premiums and the requirement that all insurers cover preventive health services without co-pays.
- Listen to the private sector. For example, the global management consulting firm McKinsey & Co. built a roadmap of around 30 interventions that could deliver up to $265 billion in annual health care savings in administrative functions alone.

Next, Be Proactive About the Potential Spoilers

Spoiler: Low Enrollment
(i.e., not enough healthy people in the exchanges)

- No longer require businesses of any size to offer insurance to their employees.
- Extend the Affordable Care Act's subsidies to all consumers and place a floor on subsidies.

- Reinstate and raise the Individual Shared Responsibility Payment and strictly enforce the penalty. Garnish wages if necessary.
- Give states flexibility to implement automatic enrollment programs.

Spoiler: Private Insurers Leaving the Exchanges

- STABILIZATION: Make the risk corridor permanent.
- STABILIZATION: Resume and protect the insurers' disbursements guaranteed under the risk adjustment program.
- STABILIZATION: Encourage states to start reinsurance programs.
- Protect the ability of insurance companies to "silver load."
- Do not restrict narrowed network products.

Spoiler: Lack of Competition in Many of the Online Insurance Marketplaces

- Open contracts for government programs (i.e., Medicaid) only to insurers that participate in the exchanges.
- Strengthen competition and market incentives to control costs.
- Require insurers to participate in broad regions.

Step Two: Get Spending Under Control (there are more of these in the Improve the ACA section)

- We have to get a handle on the fraud, waste, and abuse within the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). This will be

handled through the Operation Overhaul program (read more about this on p. 461 of *The Great American Reset*).

- Implement smart changes to Medicaid. Read more on p. 165.
- Implement smart changes to Medicare. Read more on p. 167.
- Encourage insurers to explore value-based insurance design to minimize overuse without discouraging necessary care.
- Continue to allow Americans to legally access prescription drugs from Canada, including insulin.
- Continue to allow Medicare to directly negotiate drug prices with pharmaceutical companies, allowing them to negotiate lower costs for certain high-expenditure drugs covered under Medicare Part B and Part D.
- Assess and fix the 340B Drug Pricing Program, which requires drug companies that participate in Medicaid to sell certain drugs at discounted prices to qualifying hospitals. This has enriched hospitals at the expense of the consumer.
- Promote tough competition among drug manufacturers. Don't allow monopolistic pricing beyond what patent/exclusivity sets forth.
- Protect consumers from unfair balance billing. Encourage states to limit hospital prices for out-of-network emergency care.
- Protect consumers from unfair balance billing for air ambulances, helicopters, and ambulances that travel by road.
- Instruct the Federal Trade Commission to crack down on monopoly providers in local health care markets.
- Support biotech startups and public-private initiatives that develop superior drugs, vaccines and diagnostic tests. They are making remarkable advancements and spark innovation and competition.
- Support tech firms that are working on innovative ways to deliver medical care to patients.

- Embrace digital communication and analytics, as well as remote and computer-assisted diagnosis and treatment.

Bonus! Other Health Care Recommendations:

- An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. Let's get healthy, America!
- 1787 fully believes vaccines are safe, effective, and critical to public health. We urge everyone to stay up-to-date with recommended schedules issued by the American Medical Association (AMA).
- 1787 supports breaking apart vertically integrated health-care conglomerates by preventing the same corporate parent from controlling – and profiting from – multiple stages of a patient's care.
- Thoroughly and deeply review the massive changes the Trump/Vance administration has made to the CDC's childhood immunization schedule and make appropriate changes.
- Protect nurses. Reverse Congress' decision to limit their ability to access federal student loans.
- Confront the mental health challenges plaguing our nation, including an increase in the suicide rate and frequent mental distress.
- Enforce the 2008 Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act (MHPAEA), which requires insurance coverage for mental health conditions, including substance use disorders, to be no more restrictive than insurance coverage for other medical conditions.
- 1787 agrees with the American Medical Association (AMA) that, in the absence of clear evidence, surgical interventions in minors should be generally deferred to adulthood.

- Allow states to restrict the purchase of soda, sugary snacks and other junk food with the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), more commonly known as food stamps.
- The cuts to Medicaid in the Republicans' One Big Beautiful Bill hit drug addicts hard. We must fight to repeal these cuts ASAP.
- Require all doctors, dentists, nurse practitioners and other prescribers to receive training in the management of opioids and their misuse.
- Ensure that our public health system has the wherewithal to cope with the physical and psychological consequences of any type of attack.
- Reinstate harsh fines against nursing homes that harm residents or place them in positions that put them at risk of injury.
- Continue the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) crack down on pharmaceutical direct-to-consumer ads. The pharmaceutical industry spent almost $11 billion in 2024 for U.S. ads and many of them are misleading.
- Ensure that the National Institutes of Health is properly funded and supported.
- Address the massive shortage we face in specialists who can diagnose and treat Superbugs (antibiotic-resistant microbes).
- Fully reinstate the Foodborne Diseases Active Surveillance Network (FoodNet), our primary system for tracking food-borne illnesses.

Housing

The American housing market provides an interesting snapshot of the current state of the U.S. economy. It is essentially split into two extremes: People who have equity from other properties and/or can pay

cash for houses are at an all-time high; People with no equity and no cash (usually first-time home buyers) are at an all-time low.

The median age of first-time homebuyers is now a record 40. In the 1980s, the average age hit somewhere in a person's late 20s. The share of homebuyers with children under 18 has dropped to a historic low of just 24 percent, compared to 58 percent in 1985. First-time home buyers now make up just 21 percent of the market, the lowest percentage since the National Association of Realtors started tracking such things in 1981. That's down from 40 percent before the 2007-2008 Financial Crises.

Without question, today's housing market is the most difficult in four decades. Home prices have increased around 50 percent since 2020, far outpacing income growth. As of August 2026, the median existing-home sales price in the United States was $429,100. Home prices have also climbed to roughly five times the median household income, compared with about 3.2 times income throughout the 1990s. Meanwhile, down payments have risen to levels not seen in decades. The typical first-time buyer now puts down 10 percent – the highest share since 1989 – while repeat buyers put down 23 percent, the highest since 2003.

The median monthly price tag for homeowners with a mortgage increased to $2,035 in 2024, up from an inflation-adjusted $1,960 in 2023. Housing costs are consuming an increasingly large share of Americans' incomes. A record 43.5 million households – 33 percent of all U.S. households – now spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing, while 21.6 million spend more than half.

This is creating a self-fulfilling prophesy: Around 15 percent of home-purchase agreements were canceled in September 2025 – up over 13 percent from the year before – because buyers got cold feet and/or realized the costs were going to be higher than they expected. The trend has persisted into 2026. In July, 14 percent of U.S. home-sale agreements fell through, the highest seasonally adjusted share in nearly three years.

Simply put, thanks to expensive home prices and new affordability challenges, including things like student loans, buying a home is beyond the reach of most American families. To make matters worse,

insurance and property taxes together now cost more than many mortgages. Utility costs and homeowners' association fees are also on the rise.

Some people think lower mortgage rates would magically solve the problem, but the evidence suggests that interest rates are only part of the affordability crisis. Mortgage rates fell at points in 2025 and early 2026 without restoring affordability for millions of would-be buyers, and rates have since climbed back to roughly 6.8 percent. And, the use of Federal Housing Administration (FHA) loans – which are designed in part to make homeownership more accessible to borrowers with smaller down payments and less-than-perfect credit – has declined sharply among first-time buyers. Among first-time buyers who financed their purchase, 55 percent used an FHA loan in 2009; by 2025, that figure had fallen to just 28 percent.

Much of the problem comes down to supply and demand. In 1972, when the U.S. population was roughly 210 million, approximately 2.36 million conventional housing units were started and another 575,000 mobile homes were shipped – nearly 2.93 million new units combined. More than half a century later, despite a population of over 340 million, only about 1.63 million privately owned housing units were completed in 2024, falling to around 1.5 million in 2025.

Insufficient construction isn't the only thing constricting the housing market. Millions of existing homeowners are effectively "locked in" by cheap mortgages obtained before interest rates surged. The average rate on a 30-year fixed mortgage fell to an all-time low of just 2.65 percent in January 2021, and even by late 2025, one in five outstanding mortgages still carried a rate below 3 percent.

So, they don't really want to sell their home just to turn around and sign a much more expensive mortgage… to the point where many people whose homes don't sell quickly are taking them off the market instead of lowering the price. Delistings of homes increased 72 percent in August 2025 compared with the year before. The trend has continued into 2026. In April, 5.8 percent of all U.S. home listings were taken off the market, tied for the highest number since the pandemic brought the housing market to a sudden halt in March 2020.

Because this is a supply and demand problem, the answer seems simple: We just need more housing units, right? That's true – but there are many challenges, side effects, and unintended consequences that come with that answer.

Basically, we need anywhere from 1.5 million to 5.5 million more housing units depending on who you ask (Moody's Analytics says 2 million; the Brookings Institution says 4.9 million), but even if it's on the lower side, we need to pick up the pace.

This is way more challenging now, thanks to the Trump/Vance administration's outrageous tariffs on many of the materials used in residential construction. Canadian softwood lumber provides a perfect example. In 2025, the United States raised duties on most Canadian softwood lumber to roughly 35 percent. Then, in October, the administration imposed an additional 10 percent tariff on imported softwood timber and lumber, pushing the combined tariff and duty number on much Canadian lumber to around 45 percent. This is a big deal because, although the United States produces enormous quantities of lumber domestically, it also relies heavily on imports to meet demand, with Canada by far the largest foreign supplier of softwood lumber.

Not to mention the Trump/Vance administration's sky-high tariffs on steel, aluminum and copper. They raised Section 232 tariffs on imported steel and aluminum to 50 percent and, in August 2025, expanded those tariffs to 407 additional categories of products containing steel or aluminum. They also imposed a 50 percent tariff on semi-finished copper products and certain copper-intensive derivative products. In April 2026, the administration expanded its metals tariffs even more, applying tariffs to the full customs value of many covered steel, aluminum and copper products.

The administration's immigration policies are also a major problem for the housing market. Regardless of your stance on immigration, the housing industry is heavily dependent on immigrant labor. Foreign-born workers account for over a quarter of the entire American construction workforce and roughly one-third of workers in the construction trades. They make up 57 percent of drywall and ceiling-tile installers, 53 percent of roofers, 53 percent of painters, 51

percent of carpet, floor and tile installers, 43 percent of construction laborers and 35 percent of carpenters.

The bottom line is that the industry is desperately short of workers. More than 200,000 construction jobs remain unfilled, and labor shortages prevented an estimated 19,000 homes from being built in 2024 alone. Those shortages also extended construction times for many builders by nearly two months and, according to the Home Builders Institute and National Association of Home Builders, impose roughly $10.8 billion a year in additional costs and lost housing production. You don't have to be an economist to recognize that fewer available construction workers will likely mean longer building times, higher labor costs and fewer homes being completed – precisely when the country needs to dramatically increase housing production.

Setting aside these larger policy issues, we must implement a strategy that closes the housing gap. Since there is not a silver-bullet solution for this challenge, our strategy must do many things at once: encourage new construction; streamline local zoning and permitting; increase access to mortgages, including those for "small-home" loans; help unlock existing housing inventory; and modernize construction techniques to build more homes faster and more affordably.

Let's take the last one first. On this, there are definitely ways we can start making headway. From May 1969 to the mid-1970s, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) implemented a plan called Operation Breakthrough, a 3-phase demonstration that tested innovative building materials and methods. The program was designed "to identify and demonstrate solutions to obstacles preventing large-scale housing production in the nation, with the goal of volume production of quality housing for all income groups." The demonstration "sought housing system improvements, while at the same time, improved environmental quality and low-cost maintenance."

At the time, George Romney, who was Secretary of HUD in the Nixon administration, reiterated that Operation Breakthrough was "not a program designed to see just how cheaply we can build a house, but was a way to break through to total new systems of housing production, financing, marketing, management, and land use."

We should launch a modern-day Operation Breakthrough to harness the ingenious, creativity, and resourcefulness of Americans.

In Phase One of the original program, for example, 22 "Housing System Producers" were chosen from over 200 competitors to visualize designs, create engineering blueprints, and develop and execute the construction of prototype housing units. The winners utilized housing models ranging from precast concrete- or wood-framed modules to units constructed from plastic or metal. Just imagine what those prototypes would look like today!

Regardless of the paths we take, we need to anticipate and minimize the unintended consequences that can come with them. For example, one of the most helpful things we can do to make homeownership more accessible to Americans is to make it easier for them to purchase the low-cost homes that already exist. More than one in five U.S. homes are still valued below $150,000.

Yet financing these properties has become increasingly difficult. Between 2004 and 2021, the number of mortgages issued for less than $150,000 plummeted nearly 70 percent, from 2.7 million to just 830,000 a year. And from 2018 through 2021, only 26 percent of homes selling for less than $150,000 were financed with a mortgage, compared with 71 percent of more expensive homes. That puts many affordable properties effectively out of reach for first-time and lower-income buyers who cannot make an all-cash offer.

One of the main reasons for this is that, after the 2007-2009 Financial Crisis – which was sparked by the original sin of people receiving home loans they couldn't afford – provisions in the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act (the legislation that was passed to prevent these kind of crises in the future) made it far less profitable for most banks to work with smaller loans. While, on one hand, this is understandable given what the country had just been through, these rules disproportionally hurt community banks, the very ones that usually serve lower-income buyers.

To make this even more tricky, often these lower-cost homes do not qualify for loans even when they are available because the homes are often old and in poor condition. This is a double whammy because, not only can first-time homeowners not buy them, but entire

neighborhoods begin to deteriorate and eventually become stagnant. When it gets to this point, the only people who can afford to risk turning these neighborhoods around are corporate investors, whose plans for development further shut out Middle Class Americans.

An Urban Institute analysis found that in 2020, corporate buyers – including LLCs, partnerships and corporations – purchased 29.3 percent of homes selling for less than $100,000, compared with just 7 percent of homes selling for $100,000 or more. At the same time, only 35.4 percent of homes selling for less than $100,000 were financed with a mortgage, compared with 82.1 percent of more expensive homes.

Another example of a plan that has the potential for huge negative consequences is one like Kamala Harris, the 2024 Democratic nominee for president, proposed in the 2024 election. A key part of the plan was to provide first-time home buyers with $25,000 in down-payment assistance. The Harris campaign estimated that four million homebuyers would be eligible, and the nonpartisan Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget estimated that the program would cost around $100 billion over four years.

On the surface, this sounds like a nice thing to do for people. However, it would most certainly lead to higher home prices in the end because subsidizing buyers also increases their purchasing power… and we know that one of the most basic laws of supply and demand is that an increase in demand without a corresponding increase in supply will result in higher prices.

To be fair, Harris's proposal did attempt to also address the supply side. Her plan called for facilitating the construction of three million additional homes over four years through measures that included tax incentives for builders of starter homes, an expansion of affordable-housing tax credits, a $40 billion housing innovation fund, efforts to reduce regulatory barriers, and the use of some federal land for housing.

But many of those ideas would require congressional approval or action by state and local governments, and important implementation details remained elusive. This matters A LOT because purchasing

power can reach the market much faster than millions of new homes can be permitted, financed and built.

Housing Discrimination

Discrimination in every segment of the housing market continues to be a major problem. In 2024, there were 32,321 fair housing complaints received by nonprofit fair housing organizations, state and local Fair Housing Assistance Program agencies, HUD, and the U.S. Department of Justice.

This has been going on forever. The Fair Housing Act of 1968 – one of the most significant legislative achievements of the Civil Rights era – first prohibited discrimination concerning the sale, rental, and financing of housing. This means that landlords, real estate companies, insurance companies, cities, and banks and other lending institutions cannot make housing unavailable to individuals because of race, religion, sex, or national origin.

In 1988, Congress passed the Fair Housing Amendments Act, which expanded the law to prohibit housing discrimination based on disability or family status, such as single mothers or families with children. This legislation brought the enforcement of the Fair Housing Act even more definitively under the watch of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

The first Trump administration tried to undermine the Fair Housing Act on multiple fronts to "save the suburbs." It doesn't take a genius to figure out what *that* means…

Their first attempt was to suspend the Small Area Fair Market Rent rule for the Housing Choice Voucher program, a program designed to give low-income families greater access to housing in higher-cost and higher-opportunity neighborhoods. Instead of basing voucher payment standards on average rents across an entire metropolitan area, Small Area Fair Market Rents (SAFMRs) reflect rents in individual ZIP Codes, allowing voucher payment standards to be higher in more expensive neighborhoods and lower in less expensive ones.

The first Trump administration attempted to delay mandatory implementation of the rule for two years. After housing and civil-rights organizations sued, the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia blocked the delay, and SAFMRs became mandatory in 24 metropolitan areas in 2018.

The program has since expanded substantially. In 2023, HUD designated another 41 metropolitan areas for mandatory participation, bringing the total to 65. Those new designations took effect on October 1, 2024. Other public housing agencies may also voluntarily adopt SAFMRs, and the ZIP Code-based system remains in effect in 2026.

The next swipe at the Fair Housing Act came in January 2018, when the first Trump administration suspended implementation of the AFFH, the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Rule. Several months later, HUD withdrew the assessment tool that local governments had been required to use in complying with the rule.

In 2015, HUD adopted the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Rule, a rule that required entities that receive federal grants and housing aid to submit plans detailing how they will end housing discrimination and segregation. Although the Fair Housing Act always required this type of accountability, proper legislation had never been passed to ensure compliance.

HUD clarified at the time that "affirmatively furthering fair housing means taking meaningful actions that, taken together, address significant disparities in housing needs and in access to opportunity, replacing segregated living patterns with truly integrated and balanced living patterns, transforming racially and ethnically concentrated areas of poverty into areas of opportunity, and fostering and maintaining compliance with civil rights and fair housing laws."

Now, the Trump/Vance administration has replaced the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Rule with a weaker, less stringent process that only requires HUD grantees to *self-certify* their commitment to fair housing. What could possibly go wrong?

1787 Plan of Action: Housing

Make Homeownership More Affordable

- Launch a modern-day Operation Breakthrough to harness the ingenious, creativity, and resourcefulness of Americans.
- Absolutely, positively DO NOT privatize Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, which support around 70 percent of the U.S. mortgage market. Privatizing Fannie and Freddie would be a windfall for investors but would most likely screw the American consumer – possibly making home loans more difficult to get, increasing mortgage rates, and losing protections like rate-lock agreements. If the Trump/Vance administration succeeds in privatizing Fannie and Freddie, fight them in court.
- Increase access to mortgages for "small dollar" homes (homes that are less than $150,000) that already exist. Reduce Dodd-Frank restrictions on community banks and credit unions so they will make these loans.
- Increase access to home improvement loans, especially for small dollar homes that would not pass inspection criteria to qualify for a mortgage.
- Improve the FHA Rehabilitation Mortgage Insurance Program, which insures mortgages covering the purchase or refinancing and rehabilitation of a home that is at least a year old.
- Change loan-officer compensation practices to a flat fee for every loan made rather than compensation based on a percentage of the mortgage to encourage loan officers to offer/make small-loans.
- Find a better balance between overly restrictive credit requirements and giving borrowers the opportunity for sustainable homeownership. However, DO NOT even come close to repeating the mistakes of the 2007-2009 Financial Crisis.

- Wholeheartedly support Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs), which play an important role in generating economic growth and opportunity in some of America's most distressed communities.
- Encourage more banks to engage in Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) lending, where financial institutions commit to help meet the credit needs of the communities in which they do business, including low- and moderate-income neighborhoods.
- Require Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to partner more with banks that conduct Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) lending.
- Reinstate the First-Time Homebuyer Tax Credit and make it permanent.
- Create a refundable housing credit for all homeowners that would allow more taxpayers to enjoy the housing benefits of the tax code.
- Empower the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) to improve its underwriting process and make it more flexible, and address appraisal gap issues that are often found in low-cost markets.

Broaden Home Ownership

- Let go of the old-school "white-picket-fence" image of what home ownership was in the past and embrace every type of housing – including everything from single-family homes to townhouses to high-rise apartments.
- Restore Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac's Special Purpose Credit Programs (SPCP) that the Trump/Vance administration cancelled. SPCPs are designed to provide assistance with down payments and closing costs for first-time home buyers.

- Champion the Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program to increase a family's earned income and reduce their dependency on government assistance and rental subsidies.
- Increase Housing Mobility-Related Services Notice of Funding Opportunity to the Community Choice Demonstration to expand housing choices for Housing Choice Voucher families by increasing their access to opportunity neighborhoods with high-performing schools, access to jobs, low crime, parks, and other amenities.
- Overhaul the Opportunity Zone program, a program that incentivizes people to invest in distressed areas across the country. Add public reporting, terminate high-income zones, and prohibit casinos, stadiums and luxury apartments.
- Fully support the HOPE VI program, a HUD program that strives to transform public housing by establishing positive incentives for resident self-sufficiency and comprehensive services that empower residents; lessening concentrations of poverty by placing public housing in nonpoverty neighborhoods and promoting mixed-income communities; and forging partnerships with other agencies, local governments, nonprofit organizations, and private businesses to leverage support and resources.

Cities and States

- Encourage cities and states to launch initiatives that invest in new housing construction, with a focus on starter homes.
- Incentivize cities and states to ease up on land use restrictions and other undue regulations, which is decimating housing affordability.
- Incentivize cities and states to provide a broader and more affordable range of housing options to alleviate tight housing market conditions.

- Incentivize cities and states to modernize zoning laws and code requirements and to streamline permitting processes.
- Recommend that city and state governments endorse smaller lot size limits for new construction.
- Urge states to look closely at state-level zoning preemption programs that have the effect of banning single-family zoning. This is a necessary step because, as of 2019, 75 percent of the residential land in America was zoned exclusively for single-family use. Zoning that does not allow for any multifamily development to this degree is unsustainable as our population continues to grow.

  Not only have decades of single-family zoning regulations severely limited the housing supply and artificially raised prices, but they have made housing exclusionary, perpetuating racial and class segregation and preventing families from living in neighborhoods with better schools and job opportunities.

Discrimination

- Rebuild and protect an independent Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. Protect its Office of Fair Lending and Equal Opportunity.
- Honor the Fair Housing Act: Reinstate the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Rule.
- Honor the Fair Housing Act: Protect the Small Area Fair Market Rent Rule.
- Honor the Fair Housing Act: Protect the Discriminatory Effects Doctrine, which addresses policies that unnecessarily cause systemic inequality in housing, regardless of whether they were adopted with discriminatory intent.
- Regarding disparate impact, 1787 believes that unequal outcomes do not necessarily demonstrate discrimination and that individual

discrimination claims should generally be based on evidence of discriminatory intent. We agree with the Supreme Court's 2015 ruling in *Inclusive Communities* that racial imbalance alone is not sufficient to establish disparate-impact liability. Plaintiffs should identify a specific policy that causes the disparity, while governments and private actors should retain latitude to pursue legitimate objectives.

- Enforce existing laws to end redlining and housing and lending discrimination once and for all.
- Put an end to unfair property assessments, which cause widespread over-taxation of the homes of minorities.
- Expand the protected classes to protect people against discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and marital status.
- Continue to go after tech companies that restrict access to housing ads based on characteristics like race, religion, or national origin.
- Stop predatory land contract practices. Demand that all contracts for deed be appropriately recorded.

Immigration

Read more about Immigration on p. 662 of The Great American Reset.

1787 Plan of Action: Immigration

Protect + Prosper + Prevent

Protect

- Top Priority: Protect the American Worker!
- Implement a smart, comprehensive border security strategy.
- Fight hard against immigration laws that blatantly violate the United States Constitution.
- Do not ***ever***, under ***any*** circumstance, separate ***any*** migrant child from at least one of their parents, if their parent is also in the United States. Reunite every single detained child that has been separated from their parent(s) with at least one parent ***immediately***.
- If a migrant child enters the United States without a parent, provide an atmosphere for that child that is healthy and nurturing until s/he can be safety returned to their home country. Do everything in our power to prevent further trauma to the child.
- Mandate that all ICE agents wear body cameras. Closely review state pilot programs to determine how best to use them without violating civil rights.
- Do not allow federal officers to use chemical irritants to disperse protestors under any circumstance unless there is a clear warning issued and an appropriate time period given for people to leave the area.

- Do not allow federal agents to wear masks. Demand they clearly identify themselves.
- Implement a hard-core vetting process to identify unauthorized individuals with convictions for a felony and/or three misdemeanors.
- Implement a biometric entry-exit tracking system.
- Pass a federal mandate requiring all states to use E-Verify.
- Noncitizen veterans should never be removed from this country without careful, extensive review.
- Stop third-country deportations immediately.
- Support and protect refugees and ***legitimate*** asylum seekers.
- In terms of immigration, only detain pregnant women in exceptional circumstances, like when she poses a national security threat or an imminent risk of death, violence, or physical harm to someone.
- Reform our overwhelmed immigration courts. Provide funding to help reduce the backlog.
- 1787 believes the 10th Amendment protects sanctuary jurisdictions (cities, counties, or states that limit cooperation with federal immigration enforcement to protect undocumented immigrants from deportation) from compulsion by the federal government. The "anti-commandeering doctrine," established in *Printz v. United States*, prevents the federal government from forcing state and local law enforcement to enforce federal laws.

Prosper

- Cancel the Trump/Vance administration's "gold immigration card," an expedited visa that the federal government provides to people who pay at least $1 million.

- Roll back the $100,000 visa fee to bring highly skilled workers from abroad to the original amounts.
- Resume processing all immigration applications that were paused by the Trump/Vance administration at the point where they were interrupted.
- Implement 1787's "Allow Millions of People to Pay Taxes Since They Are in Our Country Anyway" plan to every unauthorized, non-criminal person who is already here.
- Encourage Congress to take legislative action regarding the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) legislation.
- Reorganize the yearly limits on authorized immigrants in all categories. No more lottery. Change the rules for sponsorship. See these yearly limits on p. 662 of *The Great American Reset*.
- Offer a green card to every foreign student who receives a STEM degree from a U.S. university (this number goes against the yearly limit).
- If the Optional Practical Training program is cancelled, reinstate it.
- Expand the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) to the appropriate partners and allies.

Prevent

- Reopen every investigation involving the fatal shootings of civilians by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers during the Trump/Vance administration. Prosecute any wrongdoings by officers to the fullest extent of the law.
- Reform Title 8 of the Immigration and Nationality Act, which says that all migrants and/or asylum-seekers who reach America must be given at least an interview to determine whether their lives would be in danger if they returned to their own country.

- Enforce harsh financial fines on U.S. employers who employ unauthorized immigrants.
- Offer financial and governance help to countries destabilized by violence and poverty. Improve and protect their lives in their *own* countries.
- Establish the federal immigration court as an "Article I" court outside the Justice Department.

Infrastructure

Our country is literally *falling down around us*. Meanwhile, the best our politicians have come up with is the expensive, cumbersome, complicated, and jam-packed legislation passed during the Biden administration.

First, let us unequivocally say that we're all for spending money on our deteriorating infrastructure. The U.S. transportation system has over 13 million miles of highway; 20,031 airports; 204 ports; 8,042 cargo handling docks; 112,505 miles of railroad; 1,769,566 miles of pipeline; 621,581 bridges; and 25,000 miles of navigable waterways.

Every year, this labyrinth carries passengers almost 3 trillion miles in their vehicles, over 6 billion miles in the air, and 1.3 billion miles by rail. It also transports, literally, a boatload of merchandise. In 2024, the U.S. transportation system moved approximately 20 billion tons of freight valued at $25 trillion – an average of nearly 55 million tons worth more than $68 billion every day. By 2050, federal transportation officials project that U.S. freight tonnage will reach around 28.7 billion, roughly 50 percent above 2020 levels.

Until recently, practically every one of these categories has been neglected for decades, and it shows. Big time! In 2025, the American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) gave U.S. infrastructure an overall grade of C. Even though there have been significant increases in federal infrastructure investment, substantial deficiencies remain: nine of the 18 infrastructure categories are still rated in the D range.

ASCE estimates that America needs approximately $9.1 *trillion* in infrastructure investment between 2024 and 2033 and warns that allowing recent federal investment levels to lapse would impose substantial economic costs over the next two decades, including roughly $5 trillion in lost economic output, $244 billion in lost exports, $1.9 trillion in lost household disposable income, and 344,000 fewer jobs by 2043.

Our declining infrastructure is a textbook example of how critical it is that we be *proactive* versus *reactive.* Most people only think about infrastructure when it fails, but believe us, when busted infrastructure finally interferes with the lives of *you* or *your* family – and it eventually will – this otherwise boring topic will become very, very personal.

This is happening. We can't twitch our noses and wish a new bridge to appear, and we can't afford to keep slapping Band-Aids on gaping wounds.

It's bad enough that things are about to collapse, but our outdated infrastructure also makes us look bush-league. We all know you can't exactly be the *shining city upon the hill* if everything is falling down. *We're not talking about a third world country; we're talking about the United States of America!*

There is no excuse for the world's largest national economy to lack state-of-the-art airports, subways, railways and ports; sophisticated fiber-optic lines, bandwidth and wireless networks; modern schools, roads, bridges, levees, dams and water systems; hi-tech oil and gas pipelines and electricity-distribution grids; and extensive high-speed rail systems.

We must get on this because the state of our infrastructure is intricately intertwined with our global competitiveness. It's one of the main things global and domestic companies evaluate when they choose locations for their business operations, not to mention the absolute necessity of safely and swiftly moving the people, goods and services that are already here. Time is money, people!

Modernizing our infrastructure creates a safer nation, increases our global competitiveness, and makes our economy more productive and efficient, but it also helps revitalize hard-hit sectors like construction

and heavy manufacturing. Investment in infrastructure produces jobs, both directly (jobs involved in the actual projects) and indirectly (jobs created by the need for supplies and support for the projects). This, in turn, sparks a cycle of growth that will eventually create even more jobs – employed people spend money in the economy so more people will be needed to handle the higher demand.

1787 Plan of Action: Infrastructure

- Develop a substantial, comprehensive strategy to repair America's crumbling public infrastructure.

  When Donald Trump started his second term, less than half of the money allocated by the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act had been spent, and most of the $42.5 billion for the Broadband Equity, Access and Deployment program was still left. This means that there is still time to get the biggest bang for our buck!
- Be smart. Mitigate our costs and leverage our investment.
- Provide strong incentives for states to invest additional money in public infrastructure.
- Leverage public-private partnerships and support and encourage private sector solutions.
- Establish a National Infrastructure Bank. Find other innovative and creative funding avenues.
- Improve and streamline permitting and approval processes.
- Encourage open, productive communication between the federal government and state and local officials.

Legalizing Marijuana

The Bottom Line

- 1787 supports the rights of states to legalize marijuana under the Tenth Amendment.
- 1787 supports reclassifying cannabis as a Schedule III drug to expand medical research into cannabis applications, including medical marijuana and CBD. CBD is Cannabinoid, one of over 100 chemicals in the Cannabis sativa plant. It is related to THC – the naturally occurring cannabinoid in cannabis plants, responsible for its intoxicating effects – but *does not* have intoxicating effects. Since 1970, marijuana has been federally classified as a Schedule I drug – a designation shared by heroin, which feels inconsistent.
- 1787 supports the Strengthening the Tenth Amendment Through Entrusting States (STATES) Act, which would give U.S. states, Washington D.C., U.S. territories, and federally recognized tribal nations the right to determine the best approach to cannabis within its borders. The legislation allows these entities to apply their own policies without fear of consequence from the federal government.
- 1787 supports the Secure and Fair Enforcement (SAFE) Banking Act of 2019, which would protect banks and financial institutions that choose to service cannabis-related businesses if the businesses operate within their state's legal and regulatory rules.
- Using – or being exposed to – marijuana while your brain is still developing is highly damaging. 1787 supports:
  - A minimum age of no younger than 21. Twenty-five would be even better.

- † Strict and severe criminal penalties for adults who smoke marijuana near anyone under 21 years of age.
- † Strict and severe criminal penalties for adults who fail to keep marijuana in a pre-packaged, childproof container – well out of the reach of children.

† 1787 supports improving and expanding the national cannabis research agenda to address research gaps, improve the quality of research, and address research barriers.

♦ ♦ ♦

Marijuana use is illegal under U.S. federal law and has been classified as a Schedule I controlled substance under the Controlled Substances Act.

However, 1787 supports reclassifying cannabis as a Schedule III drug to expand medical research into cannabis applications, including medical marijuana and CBD. 1787 supports reclassifying cannabis as a Schedule III drug to expand medical research into cannabis applications, including medical marijuana and CBD. CBD is Cannabinoid, one of over 100 chemicals in the Cannabis sativa plant. It is related to THC – the naturally occurring cannabinoid in cannabis plants, responsible for its intoxicating effects – but does not have intoxicating effects. Since 1970, marijuana has been federally classified as a Schedule I drug – a designation shared by heroin, which feels inconsistent.

Twenty-four states, the District of Columbia, and two territories (Guam and North Mariana Islands) allow for the use of cannabis for non-medical adult purposes. Additionally, 47 states, the District of Columbia, and three territories (Guam, Puerto Rico, U.S. Virgin Islands) allow for the use of cannabis for medical purposes; 38 states, the District of Columbia, and three territories allow for the use of cannabis for medical purposes through comprehensive programs; 14 states and two territories have a comprehensive medical-only program;

and nine states have medical programs that only allow for the use of CBD/low-THC products for qualifying medical condition(s) as defined by the state.

Only three 3 states – Idaho, Kansas, and Nebraska – and one territory (American Samoa) do not have a legal cannabis program.

In the 2024 election, four states voted on ballot measures to legalize marijuana for recreational or medical use. Nebraska legalized medical marijuana, but ballot measures failed in Florida, North Dakota and South Dakota. Massachusetts voted on a ballot measure to legalize psychedelic substances, including psilocybin mushrooms, for use in licensed therapy centers but the effort failed.

The STATES Act and the SAFE Act

1787 supports the Strengthening the Tenth Amendment Through Entrusting States (STATES) Act, which would give U.S. states, Washington D.C., U.S. territories, and federally recognized tribal nations the right to determine the best approach to cannabis within its borders. The legislation allows these entities to apply their own policies without fear of consequence from the federal government.

1787 also supports the Secure and Fair Enforcement (SAFE) Banking Act of 2019, which would protect banks and financial institutions that choose to service cannabis-related businesses if the businesses operate within their state's legal and regulatory rules.

Because cannabis is still considered a Schedule I drug by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency, banks can currently face penalties from federal regulators for serving cannabis-related businesses, even in states that have legalized it. This has resulted in many of these businesses using a cash-only model, which leaves them vulnerable to theft, fraud and violent crime.

Negative Effects of Marijuana on Children's Brains

We are very concerned about the effects of marijuana on children's brains. This concern is deepened by the fact that the

scientific community is only now realizing results from their long-term studies of marijuana use.

Studies have already discovered that, not only does "early adolescent substance use dramatically increases the risk of lifelong substance use disorder," but also that "marijuana abusers show lower positive and higher negative emotionality scores than controls, which is consistent, on one hand, with lower reward sensitivity and motivation and, on the other hand, with increased stress reactivity and irritability…" which is the *last* thing teenagers need.

One study "recorded clear and consistent associations between the frequency of adolescent cannabis use and all adverse young adult outcomes. Compared with individuals who had never used cannabis, those who were daily users before age seventeen years had clear reductions in the odds of high-school completion and degree attainment, and substantially increased odds of later cannabis dependence, use of other illicit drugs, and suicide attempts." Teenagers who smoke weed daily are 60 percent less likely to finish high school and seven times more likely to attempt suicide than those kids who never use marijuana.

Another study suggests that the future children of kids who smoke weed may have a higher risk for mental illness and addiction, even though they are years away from even being born.

Research released by the American Journal of Psychology revealed that marijuana is more damaging to the teen brain than alcohol: "Cannabis use, but not alcohol consumption, showed lagged effects on inhibitory control and working memory and concurrent effects on delayed memory recall and perceptual reasoning (with some evidence of developmental sensitivity). Beyond the role of cognition in vulnerability to substance use, the concurrent and lasting effects of adolescent cannabis use can be observed on important cognitive functions and appear to be more pronounced than those observed for alcohol."

National Cannabis Research Agenda

We need to improve the national cannabis research agenda to address research gaps, improve the quality of research, and address research barriers.

Thanks to political disagreements and at times conflicting scientific research, there is still confusion around this issue. We need to improve and expand our research to better understand both the positive and negative effects of cannabis.

1787 supports the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine's four recommendations to improve the national cannabis research agenda:

- To develop comprehensive evidence based on the short- and long-term health effects of cannabis use (both harmful and beneficial effects), public agencies, philanthropic and professional organizations, private companies, and clinical and public health research groups should provide funding and support for a national cannabis research agenda that addresses key gaps in the evidence base.
- To promote the development of conclusive evidence on the short- and long-term health effects of cannabis use (both harmful and beneficial effects), agencies of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, including the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, should jointly fund a workshop to develop a set of research standards and benchmarks to guide and ensure the production of high-quality cannabis research.
- To ensure that sufficient data are available to inform research on the short- and long-term health effects of cannabis use (both harmful and beneficial effects), the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, the National Association of County and City Health

Officials, the Association of Public Health Laboratories, and state and local public health departments should fund and support improvements to federal public health surveillance systems and state-based public health surveillance efforts.

† The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Institutes of Health, U.S. Food and Drug Administration, industry groups, and nongovernmental organizations should fund the convening of a committee of experts tasked to produce an objective and evidence-based report that fully characterizes the impacts of regulatory barriers to cannabis research and that proposes strategies for supporting development of the resources and infrastructure necessary to conduct a comprehensive cannabis research agenda.

Medicaid

Read about the impact of the Republicans' One Big Beautiful Bill on Medicaid, as well as 1787's plan for its future on p. 650 of The Great American Reset.

Medicaid, a joint federal-state program that finances health care for low-income and medically needy individuals, is the second largest health care program, spending around $932 billion for services provided to about 80 million people.

In general, states use two types of payment systems to provide Medicaid benefits: fee for service (where states reimburse health care providers for the services that they deliver to beneficiaries) and managed care (where states pay a fixed per capita fee to private health insurance plans or to provider groups, known as Managed Care Organizations (MCOs), that provide services to enrollees).

The Affordable Care Act (ACA) extended Medicaid eligibility to almost all people with incomes at or below 138 percent of the poverty line as the mechanism to cover low-income individuals. In 2012, the

Supreme Court ruled that states could individually decide whether they wanted to take advantage of this provision.

The Supreme Court's decision created a huge coverage gap because Medicaid expansion is the only assistance that provided for people who have incomes above their state's Medicaid eligibility threshold but below the poverty level (making them ineligible for marketplace subsidies).

In the ten states that never adopted Medicaid expansion – Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Wisconsin and Wyoming – an estimated 1.4 million Americans remain in the coverage gap.

1787 Plan of Action: Medicaid

- Work to reverse the cuts to Medicaid in the One Big Beautiful Bill, then implement long-term changes to stabilize the program as part of 1787's Operation Overhaul program.
- Pressure the states that are hold-outs to expand Medicaid. Give them the same federal funding as those that previously expanded.
- We have to get a handle on the fraud, waste, and abuse within the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). This will be handled through the Operation Overhaul program (read more about this on p. 461 of *The Great American Reset*).
- U.S. Works – 1787's jobs program – requires anyone who is capable of work, receives federal assistance, and is unemployed to register with an Empower Society to actively look for a job OR be engaged in the specialized education/training programs provided there for at least 20 hours every week. The clients will be paid the federal minimum hourly wage, and the first funds earned will go toward the total amount of money the participant receives in federal government assistance. Any remaining funds go directly to the client. BUT people who receive Medicaid benefits only are exempt from this.

- Reform and refine payment methods to encourage efficient service delivery. Aggressively implement and expand payment reform pilots.
- Improve program management for efficiency and better service to beneficiaries.
- Expand reviews of the implementation of provider screening and enrollment requirements by the states, and monitor progress when states are not fully compliant.
- Use trends in state auditor findings to inform oversight and share information on the status of actions to address findings with state auditors.
- Require states to report on appeal outcomes and number of denials and implement actions for analyzing, using, and publicly posting the appeals and grievances data.

Medicare

Read about the impact of the Republicans' One Big Beautiful Bill on Medicare, as well as 1787's plan for its future on p. 650 of The Great American Reset.

Medicare is the second-largest federal program in the United States. The Medicare program has two separate trust funds, the Hospital Insurance trust fund (HI) and the Supplementary Medical Insurance trust fund (SMI). In 2025, Medicare spent $1.2 trillion to provide health care services for approximately 69 million elderly and disabled individuals. This process involved the handling of over a billion transactions.

Because of rising health care costs and the fact that the number of Medicare beneficiaries are rising faster than the number of U.S. workers, Medicare is becoming increasingly strained.

The 2026 Board of Trustees of the Medicare trust funds projects that costs "will increase at a faster pace in future years than either aggregate workers' earnings or the economy overall. Spending as a percentage of GDP is projected to increase from 3.9 percent in 2025 to 7.5 percent by 2100. Under the relatively higher price increases for physicians and other health services assumed for the illustrative alternative projection, Medicare spending would represent roughly 9.8 percent of GDP in 2100. Growth under either of these scenarios would substantially increase the strain on the nation's workers, the economy, Medicare beneficiaries, and the Federal budget."

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) warns that "net federal spending on major health care programs – which include Medicare, Medicaid, and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) – increases from 5.6 percent of GDP in 2024 to 8.3 percent of GDP in 2054. The primary driver of that increase is spending on Medicare, which accounts for over half of all spending on the major health care programs in 2024 and over two-thirds of it in 2054."

1787 Plan of Action: Medicare

- Work to reverse the changes to Medicare in the One Big Beautiful Bill, then implement long-term changes to stabilize the program as part of 1787's Operation Overhaul program.
- We have to get a handle on the fraud, waste, and abuse within the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS). This will be handled through the Operation Overhaul program (read more about this on p. 461 of *The Great American Reset*).
- Reform and refine payment methods to encourage efficient service delivery.
- Improve program management for efficiency and better service to beneficiaries.

- Implement a risk-based plan for revalidating enrollment for Medicare providers after pauses during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Seek legislative authority to allow Recovery Auditors to conduct prepayment claim reviews, which are generally more cost effective than post-payment reviews in preventing improper payments.
- Address the fact that Medicare pays more for certain services based on where they are provided. Take additional steps to equalize payments.
- Comprehensively assess the quality of telehealth services, which is needed to ensure those services are medically necessary.

Minimum Wage

The United States government should not impose a federal minimum wage because there are several long-term economic harms that come from setting wage floors.

First, businesses dealing with higher wage minimums often cut costs in other ways, namely by reducing employees' hours, limiting predictable schedules, eliminating perks, and cutting back on things like health insurance. This disproportionally harms younger and low-skilled workers by pricing them out of the labor market.

Second, businesses will also likely raise consumer prices to offset steeper labor costs, which significantly harms the purchasing power of consumers (particularly the poorest ones).

There are several better ways to address depressed wages and the rapidly evolving job market. 1787 outlines these in our jobs program, U.S. Works. Learn more on p. 258.

Puerto Rico

The Bottom Line

- 1787 believes the people who live in Puerto Rico, as full-fledged American citizens who pay taxes just like every other American, have the right to determine their own status, and should be able to chart their own path to statehood as provided for in the Puerto Rico Status Act.
- The Financial Oversight and Management Board for Puerto Rico (FOMB), which was established by the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management and Economic Stability Act of 2016 (PROMESA), has cost the people of Puerto Rico over $1.5 billion but has yet to achieve its mission of "creating the necessary foundation for economic growth and to restore opportunity to the people of Puerto Rico." They must do a better job for Puerto Ricans. Like yesterday.

♦ ♦ ♦

The Republican and Democratic parties have used Puerto Rico as a political football for decades and it needs to stop.

Puerto Rico doesn't have time for petty political games. The story of its economic turmoil is a tragedy filled with corruption and horrible financial mismanagement. If Puerto Rico were a U.S. state, its per capita gross domestic product would make it the poorest one.

Because of its financial hardships, around 446,000 Puerto Ricans left the island for the mainland between 2005 and 2015. In 2016, the government announced the closing of 179 public schools, and almost 58 percent of children were living in poverty.

Puerto Rico's physical and public health infrastructures were crumbling, and it had the worst drinking water quality of any U.S. state/territory – to the point where there were several court orders

demanding an end to sewage leaks from wastewater plants that violated the Clean Water Act.

Worse, Puerto Rico had racked up $72 billion in debt over the years, due in large part to a long recession caused by the end of a manufacturing tax credit. So, by 2016 it was undeniable: The Puerto Rican government was essentially bankrupt.

However, since Puerto Rico is not a U.S. state, it did not have access to Chapter 9 of the U.S. Bankruptcy Code so, in exchange for granting Puerto Rico a legal remedy to restructure public debt, the U.S. Congress passed the Puerto Rico Oversight, Management and Economic Stability Act of 2016 (PROMESA), which established the Financial Oversight and Management Board for Puerto Rico (FOMB).

The FOMB had seven members appointed by President Obama and one ex officio member chosen by the Governor of Puerto Rico and was "tasked with working with the people and Government of Puerto Rico to create the necessary foundation for economic growth and to restore opportunity to the people of Puerto Rico."

… and this was all *before* Hurricane Maria made landfall in Puerto Rico as a Category 4 storm on September 20, 2017. Hurricane Maria was the worst natural disaster to ever affect Puerto Rico and the fifth worst Atlantic storm in history.

The majority of the island's state-owned, already fragile 2,400 miles of transmission lines, 30,000 miles of distribution lines and 342 substations were severely damaged in the storm, leaving 3.7 million residents without electricity.

Air-traffic-control systems were taken out. Agricultural crops and local fishery reefs were decimated. Roads and bridges were badly damaged, and over 470,000 houses were destroyed. A full 100 days after the storm, half of the population (or around 1.5 million people) still had no electricity. Six months later, 16 percent of the island (or almost 200,000 people) were *still* without electricity.

The first Trump administration's response to the Hurricane Maria disaster was terrible. The flippant, condescending behavior went far beyond Donald Trump throwing paper towels into a group of Puerto Ricans, an image that quickly became the face of the disaster.

A report from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) acknowledged many failures, among them: "FEMA entered the hurricane season with a force strength less than its target, resulting in staffing shortages across the incidents; field leaders reported some resultant inefficiency in program delivery; and while FEMA mobilized billions of dollars in commodities, the Agency experienced challenges in comprehensively tracking resources moving across multiple modes of transportation to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands due to staffing shortages and business process shortfalls."

Politico reported the fiasco like this:

> "No two hurricanes are alike, and Harvey and Maria were vastly different storms that struck areas with vastly different financial, geographic and political situations. But a comparison of government statistics relating to the two recovery efforts strongly supports the views of disaster-recovery experts that FEMA and the Trump administration exerted a faster, and initially greater, effort in Texas, even though the damage in Puerto Rico exceeded that in Houston.
>
> Within six days of Hurricane Harvey, U.S. Northern Command had deployed 73 helicopters over Houston, which are critical for saving victims and delivering emergency supplies. It took at least three weeks after Maria before it had more than 70 helicopters flying above Puerto Rico. Nine days after the respective hurricanes, FEMA had approved $141.8 million in individual assistance to Harvey victims, versus just $6.2 million for Maria victims.
>
> During the first nine days after Harvey, FEMA provided 5.1 million meals, 4.5 million liters of water and over 20,000 tarps to Houston; but in the same period, it delivered just 1.6 million meals, 2.8 million liters of water and roughly 5,000 tarps to Puerto Rico. Nine days after Harvey, the federal government had 30,000 personnel in the Houston region, compared with 10,000 at the same point after Maria. It took just 10 days for FEMA to approve permanent disaster work for Texas, compared with 43 days for Puerto Rico. Seventy-eight days after each hurricane, FEMA had

approved 39 percent of federal applications for relief from victims of Harvey, versus 28 percent for Maria."

On March 26, 2019, President Trump solidified his personal position when he told fellow Republicans that he opposed additional disaster aid for Puerto Rico. Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL) was in a meeting with Trump and recounted Trump saying that aid for Puerto Rico "is way out of proportion to what Texas and Florida and others have gotten." … which was, as Politico made clear, untrue.

That same day, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Inspector General's Office confirmed they were investigating whether the White House interfered in the distribution of aid money to Puerto Rico, an investigation that ultimately found the Trump administration blocked Puerto Rico from receiving federal disaster aid and obstructed the investigation into the matter.

Additionally, the Department of Homeland Security's Inspector General found that FEMA "did not manage Puerto Rico Disaster Case Management Program funds in accordance with federal regulations and FEMA program requirements."

To complicate matters even more, in July 2019, Puerto Rico's former secretary of education and former head of Puerto Rico Health Insurance Administration, plus four other people under contract with Governor Ricardo Rosselló's administration, were charged with 32 counts of money laundering and fraud, among other charges, for allegedly embezzling $15.5 million in federal funds from 2017 to 2019.

Mired in multiple scandals – fueled by vulgar and profanity-laced leaked private chats between Rosselló, members of his administration, and other close associates that uncovered possible conflicts of interest and violations of the law – Rosselló resigned on July 24, 2019.

Eight years after the FOMB was born, very little has changed. Although the Board has helped the Puerto Rican government restructure about 80 percent of its outstanding debt, which lowered total liabilities from over $70 billion to a more workable $37 billion, the Board is still in control because the government still can't

issue debt at reasonable rates, which was a condition of the Board's dissolution.

Even though the Board was charged with downsizing the government, improving state services, and creating "the necessary foundation for economic growth and to restore opportunity to the people of Puerto Rico," the island still has the highest number of government employees as a percentage of total employment of any U.S. jurisdiction; has the second highest corporate tax rate in the entire world (37 percent); and the tape for new businesses and entrepreneurship is as red as ever.

In its 2024 financial report, the FOMB made this concerning statement: "In recent years, Puerto Rico has received an unprecedented influx of federal funds and recovery packages of over $120 billion, equivalent to approximately 145 percent of the 2023 GNP… the influx of federal funds in recent years may be masking underlying weaknesses in the Puerto Rico economy."

When the oversight Board was established, the Congressional Budget Office estimated its administrative work alone would cost $370 million, an amount that would ultimately be charged back to Puerto Rico. However, through the end of 2023, the Board and various outside consultants, attorneys, and other professionals had cost the people of Puerto Rico over $1.5 billion.

Since Puerto Rico became part of the United States in 1898, thanks to the Spanish-American War, the question has remained: Should Puerto Rico pursue U.S. statehood, or should the island remain a self-governing commonwealth of the United States?

In the 2024 election, 57 percent of the Americans living on the U.S. territory voted in favor of becoming a state. Even though the vote is just a symbolic one – only the U.S. Congress can initiate a process of status change for Puerto Rico – the vote is a solid indication of where the people on the island stand. Also in the election, the people of

Puerto Rico elected a new governor, Jenniffer González-Colón, who is a supporter of both President Trump and statehood.

As for 1787, we believe the people who live in Puerto Rico, as full-fledged American citizens who pay taxes just like every other American, have the right to determine their own status, and should be able to chart their own path to statehood as provided for in the Puerto Rico Status Act.

Regulation

As hard as people try, this is an issue that can't be wrapped up in a nice, tidy bow.

When speaking on this topic, people – mainly those leaning to the conservative side of things – often ask, "Are you for more regulation or less?" They seem to be waiting for a one-word answer, but it's way more complicated than that. In truth, the only responsible answer to that question is, "Are we for or against regulation for what?" Are we speaking about Wall Street or small businesses or AI? Or social media, food safety, environmental protection, or the oil and gas industry? Or, considering the devastating wildfires in California and flash floods in Texas, insurance companies?

One of the most careless policies the Trump/Vance administration has is the "ten in, one out" regulation requirement (in Trump's first term, this was "one in, two out"). This means that, whenever a federal agency issues one regulation, it is required to identify at least ten existing regulations for repeal.

We get the appeal of this approach, especially since the Federal Register ended 2024 with a historic high 106,109 pages and 45,028 rules – but this approach is ridiculous. And, quite frankly, more than a little lazy.

Without question, there are outdated and burdensome regulations, but they should be dealt with precisely, not as part of some big monolithic exorcism. Besides, Trump & Co.'s strategy didn't work the first time around. The Penn Program on Regulation (PPR) is located at the University of Pennsylvania – which is, incidentally, Donald

Trump's alma mater – and conducts balanced analysis on regulatory policy. In a report called The Deregulation Deception, PPR said this:

> "Deregulation has been celebrated as one of the (first) Trump administration's most important economic accomplishments. The administration suggested both that the magnitude of its deregulatory efforts far outpaced those of prior years and that the economic gains from these efforts were drivers of historic economic and jobs growth, delivering an increase in real income of over $3,000 to each American household. This report investigates these claims in turn. We find that they are a mix of exaggerated, cherry-picked, and indefensible. Stated simply, the administration did not roll back regulations at anything close to the rates it has claimed, and households have not gained thousands of dollars annually from these efforts. Overall, we find that every claim we examine about the (first) Trump administration's deregulatory efforts is either wrong or exaggerated. The reality is that the (first) Trump administration did less deregulating than regulating, and its deregulatory actions have not achieved any demonstrable boost to the economy."

In our minds, there is a different level of acceptable regulation for almost everything. For example, some state and local governments create onerous barriers to upward mobility by making occupational licenses ridiculously difficult to obtain. On the other hand, large corporations, banks and financial institutions could use a little more regulation.

Let's look closer at two more examples. An excellent one is the electricity fiasco that transpired in Texas in February 2021. After a massive ice storm hit Texas, it wasn't long before social media posts started blaming the Texas power outages on windmills (never mind that, at the time, two-thirds of the winter electricity demand in Texas was generated by natural gas and wind power made up less than 10 percent of the state's generation mix). Then, Texas Governor Greg Abbott went on The Sean Hannity Show and said, "This shows how the Green New Deal would be a deadly deal for the United States of

America," while the Fox News scroll at the bottom of the screen declared "Green Energy Failure." Tucker Carlson chimed in on his own show: "The windmills froze so the power grid failed." WTF? These statements are just laughable.

Politicians and conservative media trying to gaslight people into believing this massive failure was the fault of windmills is beyond the pale. Yes, non-winterized wind turbines froze. *But because they were not properly winterized,* so did power plants, oil and gas wells, gas pipelines, oil rigs, piles of coal, and even a nuclear reactor water pump. This means that one of the main culprits in the Great Texas Blackout of 2021 was the interruption of natural gas getting to power plants… and no amount of spin on Fox News is going to change that fact.

The *fact of the matter* is this. The 2021 catastrophe in Texas was caused by two things and two things only: Texas pride and energy deregulation.

First up, Texas pride. Never has a state loathed regulation or government intervention as Texas. During this crisis, former Texas governor and former Secretary of Energy Rick Perry said that "Texans would be without electricity for longer than three days to keep the federal government out of their business." Texas Republicans hate federal government intervention so much (or we should say, they hate federal government intervention until they happily take $11.24 billion from the CARES Act and $43.6 million in federal funding for "storm recovery" after the 2021 Ice Armageddon) that 90 percent of Texas' electric grid is not connected to interstate grids. This means that Texas can largely avoid any oversight by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). But is also means that Texas can't rely on other states to help when its electric grid fails.

Second up, deregulation. In April 1996, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) issued Order 888, which promoted wholesale electricity competition through open access, non-discriminatory transmission services. In simple terms, companies could now "rent" electric transmission lines and move electricity through them, regardless of who owned the lines.

Unsurprisingly, Texas went all in! The state embraced this new opportunity and shifted a great deal of control over the state's electric

delivery system to the private sector. Meanwhile, electric generation entities were given permission to do pretty much whatever they wanted in terms of reserve margins for backup power and generation planning – which was another major culprit in the February of 2021. Want to take your power plant offline for maintenance in the middle of February? Great idea! Go for it!

In the beginning – and probably even still today because they seldom learn any lesson – Texas leadership naïvely believed that market forces would correct for just about anything, making energy shortages and service disruptions virtually impossible in their minds. But here's the inevitable problem: Although competition had kept Texas energy prices low through the years, smaller profit margins and practically zero regulation and/or oversight also tempted energy companies to cut corners on necessary capital investments… like say, oh we don't know, WINTERIZATION PROTECTIONS THAT INCLUDE PROPER INSULATION, HEATERS AND DE-ICING MACHINES.

What happened in February 2021 is even more frustrating because it had all already happened before. In 2011, Texas experienced a very similar winter blackout that affected over four million people. In the aftermath, the Texas Public Utility Commission demanded that Texas power generators submit annual winterization plans but, looking at what happened in 2021, that doesn't seem to have worked out that well. Thad Hill, the chief executive of Calpine Corporation, admitted that during the 2021 freeze "two of [Calpine's] power plants failed because of winterization…That's my fault." Yep, it sure is Thad, because you knew full well what could happen. After all, two of Calpine's plants also failed during the 2011 freeze. NRG, another generation company, experienced power failures at its coal-fired plant in Limestone County and another at Greens Bayou, the same exact two plants of theirs that failed in 2011.

NRG, another generation company, experienced power failures at its coal-fired plant in Limestone County and another at Greens Bayou, the same exact two plants of theirs that failed in 2011.

At the end of the day, Texas Republicans chose ideology over reliability. Then, blamed everyone else when the price of electricity

skyrocketed during the crisis. When we say skyrocketed, we're not exaggerating. Some consumer electric bills reached well over $16,000. Great job, guys!

Another regulation example that sticks in our minds, maybe more than any other, is attorney Rob Bilott's courageous fight to regulate polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) in American drinking water.

It all started when a farmer noticed bubbling green water in his creek and blood running out of the noses of his cattle not long after DuPont, the chemical company, began operating a waste landfill near his property. Rob Bilott watched a video the farmer provided, where he "saw cows with stringy tails, malformed hooves, giant lesions protruding from their hides and red, receded eyes; cows suffering constant diarrhea, slobbering white slime the consistency of toothpaste, staggering bowlegged like drunks." In a study funded by DuPont (lest you think they were acting responsibly, they were pretty much forced to conduct one thanks to the lawsuit Bilott filed), scientists discovered there was a "probable link'" between PFOA and kidney cancer, testicular cancer, thyroid disease, high cholesterol, pre-eclampsia and ulcerative colitis.

According to the Congressional Research Service, "PFAS include thousands of diverse chemicals, some of which have been used for decades in an array of industrial, commercial, and U.S. military applications. The chemical characteristics of PFAS have led to the use of various PFAS for an array of purposes such as fighting fuel-based fires and for processing and manufacturing numerous commercial products (e.g., stain-resistant and waterproof fabrics, nonstick cookware, and food containers)."

As late as 2016, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was warning that "PFOA and/or PFOS were detected in at least one public water system in 24 states. Four other PFAS were also detected in some systems."

On February 20, 2020, the EPA announced preliminary decisions to develop Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) regulations for the two most frequently detected PFAS, perfluorooctanoic acid (PFOA) and perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS) – TWENTY-ONE YEARS after Bilott filed his first federal suit against DuPont chemical company.

Finally, on April 10, 2024, the EPA announced the final regulations for six PFAS.

Now, we have a question for the people who ask, "are you for more regulation or less?" Are you cool with this poison in your drinking water? Because we are most certainly not.

Social Security

The Social Security funding crisis has reached epic proportions. The program is now expected to be insolvent in 2032. This means a 22 percent cut in benefits. This is very, very, VERY SERIOUS.

Social Security was created in 1935 and is the largest single program in the federal budget. The program is funded by tax revenues from two streams: payroll tax (96 percent) and income taxes on Social Security benefits. In 2025, between its two components – Old-Age and Survivors Insurance (OASI) and Disability Insurance (DI) – Social Security paid around $1.6 trillion in benefits to 70 million Americans.

Because of the aging of the population, social security is becoming increasingly strained. In 1940, the life expectancy of a 65-year-old was almost 14 years; today it's over 20 years. By 2035, the number of Americans 65 and older will increase from about 61 million (in 2023) to about 77 million. In 2023, there were an estimated 2.7 workers for each Social Security beneficiary. By 2035, there will only be 2.4 covered workers for each beneficiary.

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) projects "that if Social Security paid benefits as scheduled, spending on the program would increase from 5.1 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2024 to 6.7 percent in 2098."

The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) reports that "since 2010, the fund that SSA uses to pay benefits to retirees has been paying out more money than it has been receiving in taxes. At the current rate, the fund's trustees estimate that it will exhaust its reserves in 2033 and be unable to pay full scheduled benefits."

The 2026 Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Social Security trust funds recently made this terrifying announcement: "The OASI Trust Fund is projected to become depleted in the fourth quarter of 2032, one quarter earlier than projected in last year's report. Upon reserve depletion in 2032, projected income is sufficient to pay 78 percent of scheduled benefits. This percentage declines gradually to 62 percent by 2100."

"The Trustees recommend that lawmakers address the projected trust fund shortfalls in a timely way to phase in necessary changes gradually and give workers and beneficiaries time to adjust. Implementing changes sooner rather than later would allow more generations to share in the needed revenue increases or reductions in scheduled benefits."

The Wall Street Journal says it a bit more clearly: "Social Security is running a $4 trillion 10-year deficit."

1787 Plan of Action: Social Security

† Restructure the Cap on the 12.4 percent Payroll Tax, which is currently at $184,500. Taxes will be applied to the first $184,500, un-taxed up to $400,000, and then taxation kicks back in for all earnings above $400,000.

† Follow the advice of The Moment of Truth: Report of the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform.

In December 2010, the Obama administration released The Moment of Truth: Report of the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform, a report that the president and the leaders of both major parties commissioned to address our nation's fiscal challenges. The Commission is sometimes called Simpson-Bowles in a reference to its co-chairs Senator Alan Simpson

(former Republican Senator from Wyoming) and Erskine Bowles (Chief of Staff to President Clinton).

The Commission had 18 members and an executive director appointed by President Obama. Members included six members of the U.S. House of Representatives and six members of the U.S. Senate. They said this in the report (remember this was 15 years ago, so we have already lost A LOT of time!):

"Unless we act, immense demographic changes will bring the Social Security program to its knees. Without action, the benefits currently pledged under Social Security are a promise we cannot keep. Today, the program is spending more on beneficiaries than it is collecting in revenue."

"Unfortunately, the default plan in Washington is to do nothing. The do-nothing plan would lead to an immediate 22 percent across-the-board benefit cut for all current and future beneficiaries in 2037. Over the next 75 years, the program faces a shortfall equal to 1.92 percent of taxable payroll. Seventy-five years from now, that gap will increase to 4.12 percent of payroll. The Commission proposes a balanced plan that eliminates the 75-year Social Security shortfall and puts the program on a sustainable path thereafter."

"To save Social Security for the long haul, all of us must do our part. The most fortunate will have to contribute the most, by taking lower benefits than scheduled and paying more in payroll taxes. Middle-income earners who are able to work will need to do so a little longer. At the same time, Social Security must do more to reduce poverty among the very poor and very old who need help the most."

† Make the retirement benefit formula more progressive.
Modify the current three-bracket formula to a more progressive four-bracket formula, with changes phased in slowly. Change the current bend point factors of 90%|32%|15% to 90%|30%|10%|5% by 2050, with the new bend point added at median lifetime income.

- Reduce poverty by providing an enhanced minimum benefit for low-wage workers.
  Create a new special minimum benefit that provides full career workers with a benefit no less than 125 percent of the poverty line in 2017 and indexed to wages thereafter.
- Enhance benefits for the very old and the long-time disabled.
  Add a new "20-year benefit bump-up" to protect those Social Security recipients who have potentially outlived their personal retirement resources.
- Gradually increase early and full retirement ages, based on increases in life expectancy.
  After the Normal Retirement Age (NRA) reaches 67 in 2027 under current law, index both the NRA and Early Eligibility Age (EEA) to increases in life expectancy, effectively increasing the NRA to 68 by about 2050 and 69 by about 2075, and the EEA to 63 and 64 in lock step.
- Give retirees more flexibility in claiming benefits and create a hardship exemption for those who cannot work beyond 62.
  Allow Social Security beneficiaries to collect half of their benefits as early as age 62, and the other half at a later age. Also, direct the Social Security Administration to design a hardship exemption for those who cannot work past 62 but who do not qualify for disability benefits.
- Gradually increase the taxable maximum to cover 90 percent of wages within 40 years.
- Adopt improved measure of CPI.
  Use the chained CPI, a more accurate measure of inflation, to calculate the "Cost of Living" Adjustment for Social Security beneficiaries.
- Cover newly hired state and local workers after ten years of implementation.

After 10 years, mandate that all newly hired state and local workers be covered under Social Security, and require state and local pension plans to share data with Social Security.

- Direct SSA to better inform future beneficiaries on retirement options.
  Direct the Social Security Administration to improve information on retirement choices, better inform future beneficiaries on the financial implications of early retirement and promote greater retirement savings.
- Begin a broad dialogue on the importance of personal retirement savings.

Student Loans

The Bottom Line

- The Service for School program would offer anyone who wants a cost-free education the opportunity to trade their labor for it. Presently, the Montgomery GI Bill Active Duty (MGIB-AD) program provides education benefits to veterans and servicemembers who have at least two years of active duty. Service for School would essentially extend these benefits to any American citizen who performs at least two years of civilian public service.

♦ ♦ ♦

Student loans can be super scary. Just the thought of high debt is a stressful, overwhelming barrier of entry for many Americans.

That said, Benjamin Franklin is credited with saying "an investment in knowledge always pays the best interest," and he was so

right. For many people, investing in education is often life-changing not only for them, but for their entire family (and *their* future families).

Equally important, a well-trained, educated citizenship is the single most important factor in fortifying this nation's future economic strength and, as such, is fundamental to us maintaining our superpower position on the world stage. In this relatively new era of globalization and rising technology, an uneducated, unskilled and unprepared work force equals an unparalleled disaster for this country – and this reality affects every single one of us.

To survive in this rapidly evolving environment, we must do whatever it takes to ensure a flexible, dynamic labor market and a well-educated, adaptable workforce. Meaning, we must fully invest in our people – *all* our people. When you think of it that way, it's obviously in our collective best interest to make higher education an affordable option, including making student loans as painless as possible to pay back.

Clearly, we have some work to do in this department. Student loan balances now total over $1.65 trillion nationwide – around 31 percent more than a decade ago. Student loans remain one of the largest categories of consumer debt in America, and repayment problems remain substantial. As of mid-2026, 10.6 percent of outstanding student-loan balances were 90 days or more delinquent.

For the 2025–2026 school year, average tuition and fees for full-time undergraduate students were $11,950 at public four-year institutions for in-state students and $31,880 for out-of-state students. At private four-year institutions, average published tuition and fees reached $45,000.

The Pew Research Center discovered "a quarter of college graduates ages 25 to 39 with loans say they are either *finding it difficult to get by* financially or are *just getting by*, compared with 9 percent of those without loans. And while only 29 percent of young college graduates with outstanding student loans say they are living comfortably, 53 percent of those without loans say the same."

"About a third (35 percent) of those ages 25 to 39 who have at least a bachelor's degree *and* outstanding student loan debt say the benefits of their degree weren't worth the lifetime financial costs. By

comparison, 16 percent of young college graduates without outstanding student loans say the same."

Student loan debt is clearly a huge burden for millions of Americans, but the U.S. Supreme Court was 100% correct in June 2023 when it ruled President Biden's student debt cancellation program "lacked the authority" to "unilaterally cancel debt" and that "such sweeping policy changes needed explicit congressional approval."

The "Lone Wolf" mentality of the Executive Branch has been escalating for decades – and is now completely out of control. Executive orders, for example, are being used as a substitute for having to build consensus in Congress to pass legislation. This approach is somewhat understandable given our two-party system has severely limited the ability for anyone to get anything done, but that doesn't excuse the fact that the way executive orders are being used is straight-up unconstitutional.

Article I, Section 9, Clause 7 of the U.S. Constitution – "no money shall be drawn from the Treasury but in consequence of appropriations made by law" – is not ambiguous in the least. The U.S. Congress has the *power of the purse,* meaning the U.S. Congress – AND ONLY THE U.S. CONGRESS – has the power to control government spending. This was designed to be a fundamental separation-of-powers constraint on the Executive Branch, and we should never allow it to be abused.

Although attempting to erase the burden of student loan debt for millions of borrowers sounds like a nice thing to do – or, depending on how you look at it, a way to buy millions of votes – President Biden's argument that he had authority under the Higher Education Relief Opportunities for Students (HEROES) Act of 2003's "waivers and modifications" provision is as absurd as President Trump's arguments

for why he could unilaterally pay for his "Wall." …and Democrats sure didn't like it when Donald Trump tries to bypass the Constitution!

Beyond the constitutional issues, 1787 believes across-the-board student loan forgiveness is unfair to the millions of Americans who have already paid off their student loans or chose not to go to college at all. Additionally, there are existing income-driven repayment plans that help borrowers repay their loans more easily by adjusting their payments to their income level. These plans offer forgiveness after 20 or 25 years.

That said, 1787 also believes there should be an additional option.

1787 Plan of Action: Student Loans

Service for School Program

The Service for School program would offer anyone who wants a cost-free education the opportunity to trade their labor for it.

Presently, the Montgomery GI Bill Active Duty (MGIB-AD) program provides education benefits to veterans and servicemembers who have at least two years of active duty. Service for School would essentially extend these benefits to any American citizen who performs at least two years of civilian public service.

Any American citizen with a high school diploma is eligible for Service for School (GEDs don't count), and they can receive up to 36 months of education benefits. Eligible citizens who wish to reduce student debt they have already incurred may do so at any time – there will be no retroactive time limit.

Like the MGIB-AD program, "assistance may be used for college degree and certificate programs, technical or vocational courses, flight training, apprenticeships or on-the-job training, high-tech training, licensing and certification tests, entrepreneurship training, entrance examinations, and correspondence courses. Remedial, deficiency, and refresher courses may be approved under certain circumstances. Benefits are generally payable for 10 years following your release from honorable active service."

Service for School will also have a $600 Buy-Up Program, where participants can contribute up to an additional $600 to their benefits during their time of service to receive increased monthly benefits. For an additional $600 contribution, participants may receive up to $5,400 in additional benefits.

To qualify for Service for School, it's not about *what* you do for your employer, it's about *who* your employer is – much like the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program. PSLF is an existing federal program that forgives the remaining balance on Direct Loans after the borrower has made 120 monthly payments while working full-time for a qualifying employer.

As with PSLF, the following employment will qualify for Service for School:

- Government organizations at any level (federal, state, local or tribal).
- Not-for-profit organizations that are tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the IRS Code.
- Other types of not-for-profit organizations that provide certain types of qualifying public services.
- Serving in a full-time AmeriCorps or Peace Corps position.

The following types of employers will not qualify for Service for School:

- Labor Unions
- Partisan Political Organizations
- For-Profit Organizations
- Non-profit organizations that are not tax-exempt under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code and that do not provide a qualifying service.

Additional Solutions for Affordable Higher Education

- Lift the Trump/Vance administration's restrictions on federal student loans (i.e., capped borrowing limits and tightened eligibility for income-driven repayment plans).
- Reinstate the student loan categories previously offered by the Direct Loan Program. Restore repayment and relief options.
- Undergraduate: Change the Income-Based Repayment (IBR) program to 10 percent of discretionary income and loan forgiveness after 15 years.
- Graduate: Change the Income-Based Repayment (IBR) program to 12.5 percent of discretionary income and loan forgiveness after 20 years.
- Service for School will hopefully replace the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program one day. However, PSLF should be supported until that time. Anyone currently benefitting from PSLF will receive <u>all</u> the benefits promised. Your benefits will <u>not</u> be affected by the PSLF program being replaced!
- Continue the Federal Pell Grant program, the Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant program, and the Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH) grant program.
- Restore significant federal oversight of private student loan companies.
- Restore significant federal oversight of predatory for-profit colleges.
- Explore Income Share Agreements, an arrangement where borrowers pledge a percentage of their future income against debt.
- As affirmative action is shifting from race to socioeconomic factors, colleges and universities should increase financial aid for

poor and working-class students to create more diverse student bodies.

- Do not allow government agencies to seize state-issued professional licenses from people who default on their student loans.
- Reinstate the "Iraq and Afghanistan Service Grant" and expand it to include students whose parent/guardian died because of military service *anywhere*.
- Debt and default among black college students is at crisis levels. Understand and address the unique challenges these students face.

Tax Code

Read more about 1787's Tax Policy on p. 334 The Great American Reset.

1787 Plan of Action: Tax Code

- Simplify the tax code to promote fairness and encourage economic growth.

Within the current system, there are numerous tax expenditures which are, in truth, just more spending (a tax expenditure is revenue that the federal government does not receive because of a special exclusion, exemption, deduction, special credit, preferential rate of tax, or deferral of tax liability).

Tax expenditures cost us a fortune. For example, in December 2020, Congress finally came to an agreement on a second stimulus package in response to the economic fallout from the pandemic. The 5,593-page spending bill contained numerous tax breaks for various industries. The Joint Committee on Taxation estimated these "tax extenders" – which are made to look temporary but are

renewed year after year – will by themselves cost $100 billion over the next ten years.

The Peter G. Peterson Foundation says that, in 2024, just five tax provisions – by themselves – cost over $1.1 trillion: exclusion of pension contributions and earnings ($395 billion); exclusions of and reductions on dividends and long-term capital gains ($283 billion); exclusion of employer contributions for medical insurance and care ($218 billion); Child Tax Credit ($127 billion); and subsidies for insurance purchased through health benefit exchanges ($114 billion).

Really think about that for a second. That's more than the annual budget of every single department in the United States government besides the Social Security Administration (which administers Medicare and Medicaid).

† Eliminate Corporate Tax Expenditures

Not only do tax expenditures need to go for all the reasons above, but they also unfairly subsidize some economic activities and sectors over others. The whole thing is ridiculous.

† Restructure the Cap on the 12.4 percent Payroll Tax, which is currently at $184,500. Taxes will be applied to the first $184,500, un-taxed up to $400,000, and then taxation kicks back in for all earnings above $400,000.

† Follow the advice of *The Moment of Truth: Report of the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform* said this about tax reform.

In December 2010, the Obama administration released *The Moment* of *Truth: Report of the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform*, a report that the president and the leaders of both major parties commissioned to address our nation's fiscal challenges. The Commission is sometimes called Simpson-

Bowles in a reference to its co-chairs Senator Alan Simpson (former Republican Senator from Wyoming) and Erskine Bowles (Chief of Staff to President Clinton).

The Commission had 18 members and an executive director appointed by President Obama. Members included six members of the U.S. House of Representatives and six members of the U.S. Senate.

The introduction to the Comprehensive Tax Reform section says: "Tax reform should lower tax rates, reduce the deficit, simplify the tax code, reduce the tax gap, and make America the best place to start a business and create jobs. Rather than tinker around the edges of the existing tax code, the Commission proposes fundamental and comprehensive tax reform that achieves these basic goals…"

- Lower rates, broaden the base, and cut spending in the tax code. The current tax code is riddled with trillions of tax expenditures: backdoor spending hidden in the tax code. Tax reform must reduce the size and number of these tax expenditures and lower marginal tax rates for individuals and corporations – thereby simplifying the code, improving fairness, reducing the tax gap, and spurring economic growth. Simplifying the code will dramatically reduce the cost and burden of tax preparation and compliance for individuals and corporations.
- Reduce the deficit. To escape our nation's crushing debt and deficit problem, we must have shared sacrifice – and that means a portion of the savings from cutting tax expenditures must be dedicated to deficit reduction. At the same time, revenue cannot constantly increase as a share of the economy. Deficit reduction from tax reform will be companied by deficit reduction from spending cuts – which will come first.
- Maintain or increase the progressiveness of the tax code. Though reducing the deficit will require shared sacrifice, those of us who are best off will need to contribute the most. Tax reform must continue to protect those who are most vulnerable and eliminate tax loopholes favoring those who need help least.

1787's first eight Tax Code recommendations borrow heavily from *The Moment of Truth*'s comprehensive tax reform recommendations.

- Reduce the number of tax rates to three.
- Eliminate all tax expenditures for businesses. Embrace a true territorial system.
- Capital gains and dividends should be taxed as ordinary income rates.
- Eliminate all income tax expenditures except the Earned Income Tax Credit, Child Tax Credit, mortgage, health, and retirement benefits.
- Eliminate all itemized deductions. All individuals take standard deductions.
- Eliminate the Alternative Minimum Tax. It's too complicated and, with many of the other changes we are making, it is unnecessary.
- Make interest taxable as income for newly issued bonds.
- Make a 15 percent non-refundable tax credit available to all taxpayers for charitable giving.

1787's additional recommendations include:

- Do not increase the $10,000 cap the Republican tax bill imposed on the state and local tax deduction (SALT). For one, SALT is essentially a federal subsidy for cities with high tax rates. Second, the Committee for a Responsible Federal budget says doubling the cap, as is being discussed, would reduce federal revenue by $170 billion, with 94 percent of the benefit going to households making $200,000 or more per year.
- Rein in the tax-exempt business sector. Exempt only charitable donations and government grants from taxation, while taxing all commercial revenue at standard corporate rates.

- Protect the Johnson Amendment, which prohibits 501(c)(3) non-profit organizations from endorsing or opposing political candidates.
- Cancel the "Trump Accounts" pilot program. This program is just another entitlement that will eventually become difficult if not impossible to control. It is also yet another tax subsidy.

  A better way is to combine the 11+ tax-preferred accounts – which cover everything from education to healthcare to retirement – and combine them into one universal savings account that is governed by consistent rules and tax treatment.
- Require banks to provide an annual account statement for any customer with a taxable income of over $500,000, much like the 1099 tax form that investment firms already provide their clients.
- Give the IRS the resources necessary to identify and investigate wealthy tax cheats.
- Update U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) rules governing stock buybacks to ensure that corporate executives use the correct incentives to create long-term value.
- Address the organizational design and management infrastructure of the IRS through Operation Overhaul.
- Tax Shelters: Stop large-scale anonymous ownership by creating public registries of the real owners of companies and/or trusts.

Trade

Read more about Trade on p. 195 of The Great American Reset.

1787 Plan of Action: Trade

This is a Two-Part Plan:

1. Above All Else, Protect the American Worker.
2. Take Full Advantage of the World Market.

Part One: Above All Else, Protect the American Worker

- Be realistic (and honest) about the 21st century job market.
- Provide significant transitional assistance to workers displaced by advances in technology and/or globalization.
- Invest in high-tech American manufacturing – by looking forward, not backward!
- Provide relevant, world-class workforce training programs.
- Organize high-quality, highly accountable registered mentor and apprenticeship opportunities.
- Offer all the necessary ingredients for a successful job search. Use technology to connect workers with jobs.
- Fully support new small business owners and entrepreneurs.
- Protect low-income workers from monopsony and collusion.
- Modernize labor laws through waivers from federal law to allow state experimentation.
- Call on state and local governments to dismantle unjustified barriers to upward mobility caused by occupational licensing.

- At high school graduation, be able to tackle higher education OR graduate with a marketable skill that can earn money the very next day.
- Shift our focus from one-for-all education to a more personalized approach and redefine what "intelligence" means.

Part Two: Take Full Advantage of the World Market

- Stop these obscene trade wars NOW!
- Pass legislation to limit presidential trade authority putting the power squarely with Congress where it constitutionally belongs.
- Properly evaluate our trade deficit and develop a smart strategy. Begin by understanding that trade is not a scorecard!
- Hold China responsible for distorting markets. Redesign the WTO to better handle complaints about unfair competition.
- Reiterate our commitment to the WTO. Help modernize it regarding digital trade, intellectual property, and dispute resolutions.
- Reengage in what was the *Trans-Pacific Partnership* (TPP), now the *Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership*.
- Reengage in – and complete – transparent negotiations for the *Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership* (TTIP).
- Reiterate our commitment to our North American trading partners and the *Central American Free Trade Agreement* (CAFTA-DR).
- Address currency manipulation through trade agreements.
- Support the Export-Import Bank as an independent, self-sustaining federal agency.

The U.S. Judiciary

1787's Promise to You:

1787 candidates will only nominate judges who have a high level of integrity and an exceptional track record of competence and fairness. 1787 candidates will never nominate a judge based solely on his or her political philosophy, ideology or party.

***

A Special Thank You to American Judges!

Beginning on Election Day 2020 through the January 6th Capitol insurrection and its aftermath, honorable judges on all levels of the U.S. court system protected this nation from multiple unprecedented assaults on our democracy – and they continue to do so today.

Thank You – From the Bottom of our Hearts!

* * *

Article III courts (i.e., the U.S. Supreme Court, the U.S. courts of appeals, the U.S. district courts and the U.S. Court of International Trade) are meant to be a check on the legislative and executive branches. It's imperative that, to all extent possible, the judicial branch be impartial, fair, and ***independent***.

As Alexander Hamilton wrote in the Federalist Papers,

> "Independence of the judges is equally requisite to guard the constitution and the rights of individuals from the effects of those ill humours which the arts of designing men, or the influence of particular conjunctures, sometimes disseminate among the people

themselves, and which, though they speedily give place to better information and more deliberate reflection, have a tendency in the meantime to occasion dangerous innovations in the government, and serious oppressions of the minor party in the community."

Unfortunately, the politicizing of the judicial branch is as old as politics itself. In these highly partisan times, it's extremely important that we not allow our Judicial Branch to become a political pawn.

We must pay super close attention – regardless of who is in the White House or U.S. Congress – and ensure that judicial nominations are not based solely on partisan self-interest. We must watch these guys like hawks and hold *every* member of Congress accountable for *every* decision and vote they make.

Voting

Rights + Suppression + Security

"The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude. The Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation."

– The 15th Amendment –

Voting Rights

The Voting Rights Act (VRA) was signed into law by President Lyndon Johnson on August 6, 1965. The VRA was passed to put an end to discriminatory election practices and to protect every American's constitutional right to vote. The Voting Rights

Act put a stop to unfair election practices that were designed to disenfranchise voters and was enacted to ensure that new restrictive measures would be prevented.

When Congress passed the VRA, there was an acknowledgment that racial discrimination in elections was more common in certain areas of the country than others. Therefore, Section 4(a) of the VRA established a formula to identify the problem areas and to define the appropriate remedies. The formula included the following:

- Did the state/county use a "test or device" that could potentially prohibit an American from registering and/or voting (i.e., a literacy test or morality test)?
- Did less than 50 percent of voting-aged citizens register to vote on November 1, 1964, or did less than 50 percent of voting-aged citizens vote in the 1964 presidential election?

This formula identified seven "covered jurisdictions": Alabama, Alaska, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, South Carolina and Virginia. Plus, certain counties in four additional states: Arizona, Hawaii, Idaho and North Carolina.

In addition to potential remedies, these "covered jurisdictions" were subject to something called "pre-clearance," a process whereby new election laws had to be reviewed by the U.S. Justice Department before they went into effect.

Without question, the Voting Rights Act was extremely effective. Black voter turnout increased from 7 percent to 67 percent within just five years – in Mississippi alone.

Years later, Time magazine reflected on the success of the VRA:

> "The measure's reaffirmation of the right to vote regardless of 'race or color' applied to all states, and by 1980 the percentage of the adult black population on the voter rolls in the South had already surpassed that in the rest of the country. Although 3 million more white than black voters were added to southern rolls in the

1960s, the Voting Rights Act's 'special coverage' states, which showed a combined total of 72 black elected officials in 1965, boasted nearly 1,000 a decade later. By the mid-1980s there were more black people in public office across the South than in the rest of the nation combined. Although the share of public officeholders still fell well short of the black share of the population, by 2001 the gap outside the South was nearly 4 times greater than within it."

Even today, the U.S. Department of Justice's website still says: "Soon after passage of the Voting Rights Act, federal examiners were conducting voter registration, and black voter registration began a sharp increase. The cumulative effect of the Supreme Court's decisions, Congress' enactment of voting rights legislation, and the ongoing efforts of concerned private citizens and the Department of Justice, has been to restore the right to vote guaranteed by the 14th and 15th Amendments. The Voting Rights Act itself has been called the *single most effective piece of civil rights legislation ever passed by Congress*."

In 1970, Congress granted a five-year renewal for special provisions in the legislation that were set to expire. In 1975, these provisions were extended for an additional seven years. In fact, they were even broadened to include other "language minority groups" (defined as people who are American Indian, Asian American, Alaskan Natives or of Spanish heritage). In 1982, Congress extended the provisions for an additional 25 years, and in 2006 they were extended for yet another 25 years.

However, the party came to an end in 2013 when, in the court case Shelby County v. Holder, the U.S. Supreme Court gutted the Voting Rights Act, saying "the Act imposes current burdens and must be justified by current needs" and that "a departure from the fundamental principle of equal sovereignty requires a showing that a statute's disparate geographic coverage is sufficiently related to the problem that it targets."

The Supreme Court also ditched the pre-clearance requirement. So, states were now allowed to pass new voting restrictions that would

have previously been evaluated beforehand under the Voting Rights Act.

As a result, the only recourse American citizens have now is to fight unfair, discriminatory practices in court – case by case – *after* they have already been implemented. The U.S. Supreme Court justified this by saying: "Nearly 50 years later, things have changed dramatically."

The U.S. Supreme Court has since been proven very, very wrong.

Voter Suppression

The destruction started immediately. After the high Court's decision, many states wasted no time in passing strict voting constraints, including laws that made it much harder to register to vote, disenfranchising people with prior criminal convictions, and even the complete restructurings of entire state election systems.

By 2018, the Pew Charitable Trusts was reporting that "in the years since the U.S. Supreme Court struck down key parts of the Voting Rights Act, nearly a thousand polling places had been shuttered across the country, many of them in southern black communities. The trend continues: This year alone, ten counties with large black populations in Georgia closed polling spots after a white elections consultant recommended they do so to save money."

… and it's just gotten worse and worse. Since 2013, at least 31 states have enacted 114 restrictive voting laws. Between the 2020 and 2024 elections alone, at least 30 states enacted 78 restrictive laws. This accounts for over two-thirds of all restrictive laws enacted since Voting Rights Act was decimated by the Supreme Court.

1787's Plan of Action:
Voting Rights & Suppression

- Modernize the Voting Rights Act of 1965.
  - Create a new framework to determine which states and localities are subject to preclearance. Rely on recent evidence and examples of current suppression and discrimination instead of historical patterns of behavior to address the U.S. Supreme Court's concerns.
  - Allow Americans to sue to block voting laws and practices they believe to be intentionally discriminatory, or if they believe their constitutional right to vote is being infringed upon.
- Pass legislation that protects our elections from voter suppression and partisan sabotage.
  - Demand partisan gerrymandering end. Require uniform rules for congressional redistricting and encourage all states to use an independent, bipartisan commission to draw the maps.
  - Endorse a national standard for voter identification requirements.
  - Expand access to the ballot, to include early voting, mail voting, automatic voter registration, online voter registration, and same day voter registration.
    - Strictly prohibit – and establish severe penalties for – the dissemination of false and misleading information designed to dissuade eligible voters from voting.
    - Establish federal criminal penalties for deceiving voters and increase existing penalties for voter intimidation.
    - Require local election offices use .gov domains.

- Encourage all states to count their mail and absentee ballots before Election Day to avoid confusion.
- Encourage Congress to pass legislation to set minimum early voting requirements for states.
- Expand the National Voter Registration Act of 1993 to include automatic, permanent voter registration laws.
- Eliminate ballot gathering/ballot collecting. Only allow family members, household members, or caregivers to return ballots on behalf of someone else.
- Restore federal voting rights to formerly incarcerated citizens upon their release. Encourage states to establish consistent laws among one another to replace the confusing patchwork of existing state laws.
- Establish federal requirements for state ballot design using best practices developed by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission and its chosen partners.
- Require states to ensure that voting lines last no longer than two hours.
- Protect voting access for Americans with disabilities.
- Strengthen and empower the U.S. Election Assistance Commission.

1787's Plan of Action: Voting Security

- Safeguard the entire electoral process.
  - No Internet voting – EVER!
  - Provide federal funding for critical updates to our election infrastructure immediately. Make the "critical

infrastructure" designation for election systems permanent.

- Provide federal funding for election administrator and poll worker training.
- Provide federal resources for state and federal agencies to conduct regular threat assessments to our election systems.
- Establish a bug bounty program for election systems (bug bounty programs offer a way for independent security experts to identify potential vulnerabilities and lawfully report them).
- Require states to conduct transparent postelection audits that follow clearly defined and transparent rules and procedures.
- Require states to replace old, paperless electronic voting machines with voting systems that provide voter-verified paper records.
- Prohibit wireless components in all voting systems that record and tabulate votes.
- Require election administrators to routinely assess the integrity of voter registration databases and the integrity of voter registration databases connected to other applications.
- Back up election/voter registration databases regularly and establish failsafe measures for Election Day, including having enough ballots on hand.
- Highly regulate and vet election vendors.
- Toughen the penalties for destroying or altering ballots and other election records.
- Increase protections for local election administrators and pass a federal law preventing them from being removed

for partisan or political reasons. Increase federal protections and remedies against the intimidation of election workers.

- Limit access to critical election infrastructure to only election officials and those they specifically give written permission to.
- Prevent flawed, inconsistent procedures for purging voter rolls while ensuring states accurately maintain their voter registration lists. Require states to notify a voter at least two weeks prior to the voter being removed from the list, along with the reason for their removal and ways they can contest the decision.
- Require all states to participate in a system of cross-state matching of voter registrations.

Water Scarcity

This nation is running out of water at an alarming pace. An exhaustive 2023 investigation by The New York Times revealed that – thanks largely to industrial farming and the need for drinking water – "America's life-giving resource (water) is being exhausted in much of the country, *and in many cases it won't come back*. Huge industrial farms and sprawling cities are draining aquifers that could take centuries or millenniums to replenish themselves if they recover at all."

After analyzing tens of thousands of groundwater monitoring wells, The Times found that almost half the sites have "declined significantly" over the past 40 years. Four of every ten sites hit historic lows in the past decade, with 2022 being the worst year yet.

Already, they reported, the major aquifer beneath Kansas could no longer support industrial-scale agriculture, causing corn yields to "plummet," and Arkansas was using more than twice as much water from its main agricultural aquifer as rainfall and other sources were putting back in. Arizona had to halt any new home construction that

relied on aquifers in Phoenix and drinking water on Long Island was being threatened.

"In other areas, including parts of Utah, California and Texas, so much water was being pumped up that it was causing roads to buckle, foundations to crack and fissures to open in the earth." The earth literally breaking apart is clearly bad, but over-pumping can also release the cancer-causing heavy metal arsenic into the water supply.

This is an incredibly serious issue because we are running out of water. Thanks to a crippling drought and an industrial boom that are depleting its reservoirs, Corpus Christi, Texas, faces a severe water shortage, threatening industrial operations and the water supply for over 500,000 people in seven counties, including those on a Navy base that service combat aircraft like Black Hawks.

Corpus Christi attracted over $57.4 billion in investment over the past ten years, luring plants for the likes of Tesla, Exxon Mobil, and even Saudi Basic Industries Corp., the kingdom's petrochemicals company. We're sure it seemed like a smart idea at the time, but these plants use massive amounts of water to do things like refine lithium for electric-vehicle batteries and transform fossil fuels into gasoline, jet fuel and other refined products.

The Wall Street Journal reports that the Saudi's $7 billion plastics facility alone consumes an average of around 13 million gallons of water a day – about 13 percent of all of Corpus Christi's water demand in wintertime.

Mike Howard, chief executive of Howard Energy Partners – an energy company that owns several facilities in Corpus Christi – put it bluntly, "The water situation in South Texas is about as dire as I've ever seen it. It has all the energy in the world, and it doesn't have water."

The Colorado River is also in crisis and the seven states that rely on its water can't seem to figure out what to do about it – putting 40 million people at risk. In August 2026, Lake Mead, the nation's biggest reservoir, hit its lowest level on record. Lake Powell is so low that there's a chance its hydroelectric plant will no longer produce power, risking the flow of water to Arizona and California.

The Colorado River Research Group put it like this: “Conditions on the Colorado River are, to put it bluntly, dire. The reservoirs that, when full, provide Colorado River water users with roughly four years of annual flows are now more than two-thirds empty… Both the water supply and institutional systems are failing; many of the environmental systems failed years ago, with others just hanging on desperately. Another year or two of low inflows and we will completely blow through the cushions provided by reservoir storage… entering a world where physically moving water downstream becomes limited both by hydrology and engineering.”

Social/Cultural Issues

Abortion

♥ *One in every four women in the United States will have an abortion in their lifetime. Whether or not we individually support a woman's right to make this incredibly difficult decision, let's please at least be kind to one another. It's never the wrong thing to extend grace to one another.*

Since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade on June 24, 2022, states – and as an extension the American people – are now fully in control of the abortion debate. Advocates on both sides have taken the fight to the voting booth, and some state legislatures have enacted abortion bans and restrictions while others have increased access and protections.

The Facts

- Twenty states now ban abortion altogether or restrict the procedure at or before 18 weeks of pregnancy. Thirteen of those states have total abortion bans in effect. By contrast, nine states plus the District of Columbia impose no gestational-duration limit on abortion.
- In the 2024 election, voters in seven states – Arizona, Colorado, Maryland, Montana, New York, Missouri and Nevada – passed measures that enshrine abortion rights into their state constitutions, while similar measures failed to pass in Florida, Nebraska and South Dakota.
- Despite abortion bans in numerous states, the number of abortions nationwide has remained relatively stable. Approximately 1.124 million abortions occurred in 2024 and 1.126 million in 2025. In states without total bans, abortions declined slightly, from 1.049 million to 1.036 million. Meanwhile, telehealth abortions provided

to people in states with total bans increased from approximately 74,000 in 2024 to 91,000 in 2025.

- Out-of-state travel for abortions more than doubled following the Dobbs decision, rising from about 81,000 people in 2020 to 170,000 in 2023. Although that number declined to approximately 142,000 in 2025, interstate travel for abortion care remains roughly 75 percent above pre-Dobbs levels.
- Twenty-two states and the District of Columbia have some level of *shield-law protection* for reproductive health care. Nine states have protections allowing clinicians to prescribe and mail abortion medication through telehealth to patients in states where abortion is banned or restricted. The growing availability of these services appears to be one factor behind the recent decline in interstate travel for abortion care.
- Medication abortion accounted for 65 percent of all clinician-provided abortions in the United States in 2023. These figures do not include self-managed abortions outside the formal health care system.

The Bottom Line

- 1787 believes the decision of abortion should be left to the individuals personally involved before the end of the first trimester (typically considered weeks 1 – 13).

  Exceptions: To prevent the death of the mother; to preserve the health of the mother; when the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest; and where the embryo or fetus has lethal anomalies incompatible with life.

  Although, in medicine, "fetal viability" is the point at which a fetus can survive outside the womb (typically considered weeks 23 – 24), we believe this is *way too far* in a pregnancy to terminate.

  Opponents of this view argue that women may not realize they are even pregnant before the second trimester, but the facts don't

support this. Most abortions – by far – occur during the first trimester of a pregnancy. In 2022, 79 percent of abortions occurred at nine weeks of pregnancy or earlier, and 93 percent occurred in the first 13 weeks.

- Governors and state legislators should clarify – and be crystal clear – about the abortion laws in their states.

  Many health care providers in states with abortion bans have become cautious to the point of causing grave harm to women, including their deaths. In Texas, for example, doctors can face up to 99 years in prison for performing abortions, which is obviously a terrifying criminal penalty.

  However, the Texas law remains frustratingly unclear. Dilation and curettages (D&Cs) are a procedure used to perform abortions, but they are also used as a standard protocol of maternal health when a patient is miscarrying. Several times, Texas doctors have hesitated or refused to use D&Cs for women who were actively experiencing a miscarriage, resulting in multiple deaths. Although doctors in Texas have the right to justify their decisions in what is known as an "affirmative defense," that in no way guarantees they will ultimately avoid criminal charges.

- 1787 fights to empower women by ensuring them fair and equitable economic opportunities.

  It's impossible to separate economics from this issue. Sixty-one percent (61%) of abortion patients are in their twenties, 72 percent are low-income, and 55 percent have already given birth to one or more children.

  Although a variety of considerations play a part in the decision to terminate a pregnancy, it's undeniable that larger underlying inequities – including economic disadvantage, lack of access to family planning, and neighborhood characteristics – are huge factors that impact low-SES (socioeconomic status) women.

- 1787 supports protecting and improving health and social services for all women.

  Ninety-five percent (95%) of abortions are the result of unintended pregnancies. If there were fewer unintended

pregnancies, there would be fewer abortions. Period. This concept should not be hard to understand. Being against abortion and, at the same time, being against organizations that provide reproductive health and social services for women – including contraception access – makes *zero sense*.

Although Planned Parenthood, for example, does offer *patient-funded* abortion services (the Hyde Amendment prohibits federal dollars from being used to provide abortions, see more on this below) over 95 percent of their services involve family planning, health and sex education, cancer screenings, STI testing and treatment, and other life-saving services.

During his first term, Donald Trump threatened multiple times to defund Planned Parenthood, but federal funding for the organization actually *increased* during his first two and a half years in office. In fact, government reimbursements and grants to the organization hit record levels in FY2017 and FY2018 (the funding increase was mainly to fund a Medicaid program that reimburses Planned Parenthood for providing birth control and preventive services to low-income Americans).

However, the Republican Party's long-held dream of defunding Planned Parenthood has now become a reality thanks to a provision in their One Big Beautiful Bill that placed a ban on Medicaid funding for health care providers that perform abortion services and receive over $800,000 a year in Medicaid payments. This was an obvious shot at Planned Parenthood, but other rural agencies that provide primary care services – meaning things like annual physicals, cancer screenings, treatment for diabetes, and high blood pressure management – have also been affected.

This ban must be reversed as soon as possible because, without question, this disproportionally affects low-income areas and communities with limited health care options. This is a huge problem that will only get worse.

† 1787 supports the Hyde Amendment, the long-standing ban on the federal funding of most abortions. Exceptions to this include: To prevent the death of the mother; to preserve the health of the mother; when the pregnancy is the result of rape or incest; and

where the embryo or fetus has lethal anomalies incompatible with life.

† 1787 supports providing appropriate sex education to teenagers.

Again, 95 percent of abortions are the result of unintended pregnancies. Often the very same people who are against abortions are, at the same time, opposed to sex education in schools. *This makes zero sense*. If there were fewer unintended pregnancies, there would be fewer abortions. Period. *There is tremendous power in prevention and education*. We are already on the right track in this regard. In 2023, the birth rate among 15- to 19-year-olds fell to their lowest levels ever recorded.

† 1787 supports access to the safe, effective abortion and miscarriage drugs mifepristone and misoprostol.

In 2023, 63 percent of abortions in the U.S. were medication abortions, meaning they involve taking a pill. This is up from 53 percent in 2020 and 39 percent in 2017.

† Politicians who promise to pass a federal law "codifying Roe v. Wade" into the U.S. Constitution – meaning the U.S. Congress would enact a law protecting the abortion law – are misinformed at best.

Thanks to the Tenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution – "any powers not given to the federal government are reserved to the states or the people" – states essentially oversee lawmaking. The U.S. Congress can only pass laws that are specifically enumerated to them in Article I, Section 8 or the 14th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. These include: to lay and collect taxes; pay debts and borrow money; regulate commerce; coin money; establish post offices; protect patents and copyrights; establish lower courts; declare war; and raise and support an Army and Navy.

Congress can also make laws "necessary and proper" to carry out its enumerated powers – a provision known as the Elastic Clause that is often used to try to expand congressional power. But if Congress tried to codify an abortion law using the Elastic

Clause, its efforts would most likely be overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court, as it should be.

Affirmative Action

af·firm·a·tive ac·tion
/əˈfɜr·mə·ţɪv ˈæk·ʃən/

: the practice of improving the educational and job opportunities of members of groups that have not been treated fairly in the past because of their race, sex, etc.

The Bottom Line

- In the college admissions process, our focus should shift from race to socioeconomic factors.
- In no way do we believe all the damaging consequences of our nation's egregious history of racial discrimination have been remedied. Persistent, substantial educational achievement gaps alone prove they most certainly have *not* been.

  That said, we are convinced our social policies must steadily evolve as we continue along our arc toward justice. If they don't, we run the risk of them becoming counter-productive for the very communities they were designed to help in the first place.
- Shifting our focus from race to socioeconomic factors seems to align with Dr. Martin Luther King's thinking. He was an advocate – especially later in his life – of helping the disadvantaged of *all* races: "It is a simple matter of justice that America, in dealing creatively with the task of raising the Negro from backwardness, should also be rescuing a large stratum of the forgotten white poor."

  Dr. King was also aware of the resentments and potential backlash that could arise among the white working class if they

felt ignored and forgotten: “It is my opinion that many white workers whose economic condition is not too far removed from the economic condition of his black brother, will find it difficult to accept a ‘Negro Bill of Rights,’ which seeks to give special consideration to the Negro in the context of unemployment, joblessness, etc. and does not take into sufficient account of the white working classes’ plight.”

- Unfortunately, assessing socioeconomic factors instead of a person’s race still disproportionately captures black Americans.
  - In 2024, 35.8 million Americans lived in poverty (10.6 percent of the population). Breaking down the numbers by race, 18.4 percent of black Americans lived in poverty compared with 7.6 percent of white, not Hispanic Americans.
  - The 2024 median income of black households – the lowest of all the race groups – was $56,020 while the median income of non-Hispanic white households was $92,530.
  - The racial wealth gap is staggering. There is a $240,110 difference in wealth between the median white household ($285,000) and the median black household ($44,890).
- There are many ways colleges and universities can create more diverse student bodies:
  - Compare the performance of students of similar backgrounds and life circumstances. Factors should include things like high school demographics, neighborhood poverty rates, and the parent(s)’ occupations and education obtainment. Here, household incomes can also come into play, a factor not usually helpful taken by itself because, although black families are over-represented among poorer households, there are still many poorer white households due to the overall makeup of the U.S. population.
  - Expand the college application pool by recruiting heavily in predominately minority areas.
  - No longer require standardized tests for admissions.

- † Eliminate automatic admissions for children of faculty and staff, along with legacy preferences.
- † Increase transfers from community colleges.
- † Increase financial aid for poor and working-class students.

Affirmative action was introduced in the United States at a time when racial justice was, quite literally, a black and white issue.

The Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution clearly prohibits discrimination based on the color of someone's skin: "No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any state deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws."

But in the early 1960's, America had a major problem. Because black Americans had been enslaved and then excluded from government protections for decades, severe inequality was massive between the white and black communities.... to the point that the racial imbalance in colleges and universities was impossible to rectify without outside intervention.

The term "affirmative action" first appeared in 1961, when President John F. Kennedy signed Executive Order 10925 that said, in part, "the contractor will not discriminate against any employee or applicant for employment because of race, creed, color, or national origin." The contractor will take "affirmative action" to ensure that "employees are treated during employment, without regard to their race, creed, color, or national origin."

This was followed by Executive Order 11246, signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965, which "prohibited discrimination in employment because of race, creed, color, or national origin, and to promote the full realization of equal employment opportunity through a positive, continuing program in each (federal) executive department and agency." President Johnson confirmed that affirmative action was conceived as a vehicle to right generational wrongs in 1965 when he said:

> "The beginning is freedom; and the barriers to that freedom are tumbling down. Freedom is the right to share, share fully and equally, in American society… to vote, to hold a job, to enter a public place, to go to school. It is the right to be treated in every part of our national life as a person equal in dignity and promise to all others.
>
> But freedom is not enough. You do not wipe away the scars of centuries by saying: Now you are free to go where you want, and do as you desire, and choose the leaders you please. You do not take a person who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him up to the starting line of a race and then say, 'you are free to compete with all the others,' and still justly believe that you have been completely fair.
>
> Thus, it is not enough just to open the gates of opportunity. All our citizens must have the ability to walk through those gates."

Thirteen years later, the first affirmative action case was heard by the United States Supreme Court. In Regents of the University of California v. Bakke (1978), the Court ruled that, although racial quotas supported by government entities violate the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the use of race was acceptable as one of many admission criteria.

Twenty-five years later, in the 2003 case of Grutter v. Bollinger, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the affirmative action admissions policy of the University of Michigan Law School. At the time, the school used race as a factor in the admissions process because they believed race served as a "compelling interest in achieving diversity among its student body" (the petitioner was a white student who was denied admission to the school).

The highest Court decided that "in the context of its individualized inquiry into the possible diversity contributions of all applicants, the Law School's race-conscious admissions program does not unduly harm non-minority applicants." The Court found that, because the school looked at many other factors regarding each applicant, their admissions process did not violate the Court's decision in Regents of the University of California v. Bakke.

In Gratz v. Bollinger, which was decided the same day and involved the same university, the Court ruled that the point system used by the university to determine admissions did not meet the standards of strict scrutiny (in this case, minority students automatically received 20 points in a 100-point system).

Although the Supreme Court validated affirmative action in Grutter v. Bollinger, Justice Sandra Day O'Connor also expressed that "race-conscious admissions policies must be limited in time." Writing for the Court, Justice O'Connor pointed out that twenty-five years had passed since Regents of the University of California v. Bakke and that "we expect that twenty-five years from now, the use of racial preferences will no longer be necessary" – effectively setting a timeframe for the policy's end (which would be 2028). Throughout the years, many Supreme Court Justices acknowledged this as a valid sunset provision.

After Grutter v. Bollinger, the Supreme Court started to shift. In 2007, the Court ruled on two cases – Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education and Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1. The Court decided that public school systems can't seek to maintain integration through measures that consider a student's race. This is the case where Chief Justice John Roberts famously said, "The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race."

Six years later, in the case of Fisher v. University of Texas, the Court found that the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment does allow for the consideration of race in undergraduate admissions decisions, but that admission policies must be "precisely tailored to serve a compelling governmental interest." If a school fails to meet this standard, race may not be used as a factor for admission.

Then came the biggie. In October 2022, the Supreme Court heard arguments in Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College. In this case, a group of Asian American students claimed that, to make room for less qualified students of other races, Harvard discriminated against them by placing an admissions cap on the number of qualified Asian Americans granted admission to the school (in other words, the students alleged that Harvard favored

black and Hispanic applicants at the expense of Asian Americans, who, themselves, are also a minority group).

The internal data Harvard was forced to reveal seemed to confirm the accusation. While Asian Americans ranked higher than white applicants in Harvard's admission model – in both academics and the quality of their extracurricular activities – the admission rates for these students were much lower. In fact, if academics had been the only factor in admissions, Asian Americans would have constituted 43 percent of any given Harvard entering class. However, when other factors like personal qualities and demographics were included in the decision-making process, only 19 percent were admitted.

The Economist reported it this way: "Peter Arcidiacono, an economist at Duke University employed by the plaintiffs, built a statistical model of the effect of race on admissions. He estimated that a male, non-poor Asian American applicant with the qualifications to have a 25 percent chance of admission to Harvard would have a 36 percent chance if he were white. If he were Hispanic, that would be 77 percent; if black, it would rise to 95 percent. Damningly for Harvard, an internal report by their own research arm, obtained during discovery, reached the same conclusions."

The Economist also pointed out that the situation was made more complicated by Harvard's propensity to admit "legacies" (i.e., relatives of former students), a process that also skewed its system: "Roughly 34 percent of legacy applicants were admitted – more than five times the rate of non-legacy applicants. This is tantamount to affirmative action for well-off white students. According to a survey of freshmen conducted by the Harvard Crimson, the college newspaper, 88 percent of legacy students come from families making more than $125,000 a year."

On June 29, 2023, the U.S. Supreme Court – in a 6-3 decision – found it unconstitutional to consider race in university admissions (note: the Court made exceptions for military service academies due to the "potentially distinct interests that military academies may present").

In the Supreme Court decision, Chief Justice John Roberts made clear that admission offices could still consider "an applicant's

discussion of how race affected his or her life, be it through discrimination, inspiration, or otherwise." The only change, Roberts said, was that "the student must be treated based on his or her experiences as an individual – not on the basis of race."

In his testimony as an expert witness in the case, Richard Kahlenberg – now the Director of the American Identity Project and Director of Housing at the Progressive Policy Institute, and a professorial lecturer at George Washington University's Trachtenberg School of Public Policy and Public Administration – said that "being economically disadvantaged in America poses *seven times* as large an obstacle to high student achievement as does race."

This is an incredibly important insight, especially given the fact that, at the time, 71 percent of the black and Latino students who attended Harvard were from wealthy backgrounds.

American Indians and Alaska Natives (AI/AN Population)

1787 deeply values the rich cultures, traditions and ways of life of Native communities, and we respect Tribal sovereignty and self-governance. We will honor federal trust and treaty responsibilities and protect Tribal homelands.

What the United States government has historically done to the American Indians is appalling. Since well before President Andrew Jackson's despicable Trail of Tears, the United States has killed them, broken well-established treaties with them, ignored tribal boundaries, and betrayed them in many other egregious ways.

The long-term impact of this treatment is evident:

- For decades, Native communities have been ravaged by an epidemic of disappearances and killings, too often without resolution, justice, or accountability. 1787 will create a separate unit within the Department of Justice to address the missing and

murdered Indigenous persons crisis and will commit to implementing the Not Invisible Act Commission recommendations to address violent crime, human trafficking, and murder in Native communities.

- The median household income for American Indian and Alaska Native households is $63,627, compared with roughly $92,000 for non-Hispanic white households. About 16.2 percent of American Indian and Alaska Native families live in poverty, compared with roughly 5 percent of non-Hispanic white families.
- The unemployment rate for American Indians and Alaska Natives was 7.3 percent in 2025, compared with 3.8 percent for whites.
- American Indians and Alaska Natives households are 19 times as likely to *not have indoor plumbing* as white households.
- American Indians and Alaska Natives born today have a life expectancy that is 5.5 years less than the U.S. all races population (73.0 years to 78.5 years, respectively). American Indians and Alaska Natives continue to die at higher rates than other Americans in many categories, including chronic liver disease and cirrhosis, diabetes mellitus, unintentional injuries, assault/ homicide, intentional self-harm/suicide, and chronic lower respiratory diseases.
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death for American Indians and Alaska Natives ages 10-34. These groups experience the highest youth suicide rate among all other races/ethnicities in the country.
- American Indians/Alaska Natives are 50 percent more likely to experience the feeling that everything is an effort, all or most of the time, than non-Hispanic whites.
- American Indians and Alaska Natives attend post-secondary education at a rate of 16.3 percent, compared to 60 percent among the total U.S. population.

- Covid-19 ravaged the American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) populations. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "In 23 states with sufficient Covid-19 patient race/ethnicity data, the overall Covid-19 incidence among AI/AN persons was 3.5 times that among white persons." These populations were over four times more likely to be hospitalized because of Covid-19 and had higher rates of mortality at younger ages than the non-Hispanic white population.

But there is good news! In July 2020, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that a large portion of Tulsa and eastern Oklahoma was indeed the Muscogee Creek people's land. This ruling confirmed that the Muscogee Creek people – and, as an extension, the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Seminole and other Nations – are indeed sovereign nations with sovereign territory.

In the majority opinion, Justice Neil Gorsuch, who broke ranks with his fellow conservatives, wrote: "On the far end of the Trail of Tears was a promise." Beautifully said, Justice Gorsuch.

Arts & Humanities

1787 values academic disciplines that explore human experience, thought, and culture through fields like language, literature, history, philosophy, religion, theatre, music, and the arts.

We believe that tackling complex but enduring questions by exploring the humanities is critical for deepening imagination, sparking creativity and innovation, and developing critical thinking skills – and that the inspired results that emerge celebrate our cultural heritage, strengthen our values, enhance our understanding of ourselves and those around us, keep our past alive, and help build bridges within and between our communities.

1787 is committed to championing federal grants for art, theatre and music education in public schools as well as for and state and local governments, in addition to supporting artists, scholars, libraries,

museums, and cultural organizations to honor old voices, elevate new ones, promote constructive engagement, and expand opportunities for learning and the sharing of traditions.

Child Care & Family Leave Policy

Caregiving responsibilities can be a heavy burden for families, causing significant and profound emotional, financial, and physical strain. New parents, for example, are often forced to make difficult decisions between working and caring for their child. And, when parents do work, they need to know that their child is being cared for in a safe, healthy, and appropriate environment.

Not only does this significantly affect children and families, but it also greatly impacts our national economic growth and labor force participation. Without question, business productivity can suffer if parents sacrifice labor productivity because of limited caregiving options.

Currently, there are two primary Internal Revenue Code employer tax credits designed to help businesses offset the costs of providing family-focused benefits to employees.

The 45F *Employer-Provided Child Care Credit* was created in 2001 and made permanent in 2012 to encourage employers to provide child care. Qualifying expenses include constructing, improving, or operating child-care facilities; contracting with child-care providers; and providing referral services. Beginning in 2026, the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA) increased the credit to 40 percent of qualifying expenses, or 50 percent for eligible small businesses, and raised the annual cap to $500,000 or $600,000**,** respectively.

Under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA)**,** covered private employers generally must provide eligible employees up to 12 weeks of job-protected, unpaid leave for events such as the birth or adoption of a child, caring for a seriously ill family member, or an employee's own serious health condition. Employees generally must

have worked for the employer for at least 12 months and 1,250 hours during the preceding year.

The 45S *Employer Credit for Paid Family and Medical Leave* helps employers offset the cost of providing paid family and medical leave. The wage-based credit covers up to 12 weeks of qualifying leave and ranges from 12.5 percent to 25 percent of qualifying wages, depending on the percentage of wages replaced.

The OBBBA made the 45S credit permanent and expanded it beginning in 2026. Employers can now claim the credit based on qualifying paid-leave insurance premiums instead of wages, and the minimum employee tenure requirement was reduced from 12 months to six months. The law also allows state- or locally mandated leave to count toward certain eligibility requirements, although amounts required under those mandates generally cannot themselves be claimed for the federal credit.

1787 believes the best way forward is a plan that combines regulatory reform + employer incentives + provider loans and loan guarantees + narrowly targeted assistance for lower-income families. This way, we can increase the supply of child care and leverage private investment before resorting to large government subsidies.

To that end, 1787 supports the 45F *Employer-Provided Child Care Credit* and the 45S *Employer Credit for Paid Family and Medical Leave.* But more can be done.

1787 Plan of Action: Child Care & Family Leave

† Expanding the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG). CCDBG provides child-care assistance to lower-income working families, directly reducing what eligible parents pay for care. We would increase funding and expand eligibility for low- and moderate-income families while keeping assistance means-tested.

Our design makes the subsidy portable across approved early-childhood providers, meaning *the money follows the child*. Eligible parents receive a means-tested child-care benefit that may

be applied toward a private child-care center, family child-care home, nonprofit program, or participating public or private pre-K program. To prevent double-dipping, the subsidy would be reduced by any other public funding already covering the same hours of care.

This is a great way forward because, rather than creating a separate universal pre-K entitlement, would help families afford the provider they choose, while using existing public and private child-care infrastructure.

- Targeted loans or loan guarantees for child-care providers. The federal government can help providers open new facilities or expand existing ones without bearing the full cost. Loans would generally be repaid, while federal loan guarantees could encourage private lenders to finance expansion with relatively little upfront government spending (although taxpayers would assume some risk if borrowers default).

- Cutting unnecessary barriers to affordable child care. Our underlying principle is simple: Keep the rules that protect children; reform the rules that merely make child care harder to provide and more expensive to purchase.

  States should maintain rigorous health and safety protections for children while eliminating regulations that unnecessarily increase costs or restrict the supply of care. 1787 would offer federal incentives for states to review their child-care regulations and streamline licensing, permitting, zoning, duplicative inspections, and other requirements that cannot be justified by a meaningful health, safety, or quality benefit.

  States should also make it easier for qualified home-based providers to enter the market, expedite applications from providers with strong compliance records, and simplify the process for successful providers to expand or open additional locations.

Child Tax Credit & TANF

The American Rescue Plan – the Covid relief package passed in March 2021 – temporarily expanded the Child Tax Credit to $3,600 for children five and under and $3,000 for children ages six to 17. It also made the credit fully refundable, meaning lower-income families could receive the full benefit even if they owed little or no federal income tax.

From July through December 2021, the government distributed up to half of the credit through monthly advance payments of $300 or $250 per child, with the remainder generally claimed at tax filing. Congress allowed these enhancements to expire at the end of 2021.

The One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA) permanently extended key Child Tax Credit provisions of the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act that otherwise would have expired after 2025. The law increased the maximum credit from $2,000 to $2,200 per child beginning in 2025, retained the phase-out thresholds of $200,000 for individuals and $400,000 for married couples filing jointly, and made permanent the $500 nonrefundable credit for other dependents. Both the maximum Child Tax Credit and its refundable maximum are indexed for inflation.

The 2021 expanded Child Tax Credit was successful in combating child poverty. The Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM) child poverty rate fell to a record-low 5.2 percent in 2021, before more than doubling to 12.4 percent in 2022 following the expiration of the expanded credit and other pandemic-era assistance. The number of children in SPM poverty increased by more than 5 million. While the expiration of the expanded Child Tax Credit was an important factor, other pandemic-era tax credits and stimulus payments also ended during this period.

The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities found that the Child Tax Credit lifted approximately 4.1 million people above the poverty line in 2024, including 2.4 million children, based on the Supplemental Poverty Measure. It also provided additional financial support to

another 12.2 million people living below the poverty line, including 5.6 million children.

Combined with the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) for families with children, the two credits lifted 8.2 million people above the SPM poverty line and provided additional support to another 17.5 million people below the poverty line in 2024. Many low-income families receive little or no benefit from other child-related tax provisions, such as the nonrefundable Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit.

That said, we need to streamline the way we provide aid to American families. In 1996, Congress passed – and President Bill Clinton signed – the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, promising to "end welfare as we know it" and transform welfare into "a second chance, not a way of life."

The legislation replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Unlike AFDC, TANF was established as a block grant that gave states considerable flexibility over eligibility, benefits, and how federal welfare dollars were spent. It also established work requirements and generally limited federally funded assistance to 60 months over a recipient's lifetime.

Nearly three decades later, there are serious questions about whether the system is accomplishing what Congress intended.

The problem isn't necessarily how much we're spending – it's where the money goes. States have broad discretion over TANF dollars, and much of the money is no longer spent on either basic assistance to poor families or programs that help recipients enter the workforce.

A 2020 Stateline investigation found that states were directing only about 11 percent of TANF funds toward work-related activities, including education and training, with 17 states spending less than 5 percent. States have also used TANF dollars for an enormous range of other purposes, including child welfare, pre-K, college scholarships, drug courts, and programs serving families well above the poverty line.

Even Robert Rector of the conservative Heritage Foundation, who advised members of Congress involved with the original welfare-reform legislation, concluded: "Overall, the states have radically

abused the program." He argued that states had lost sight of one of welfare reform's central objectives: helping recipients move into employment.

1787's Plan of Action is to replace the existing Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block-grant system with simpler, more targeted programs that provide assistance directly to families, support work, and reduce administrative waste. In other words: *Simplify the safety net. Make work pay. Let assistance follow the family. And spend anti-poverty dollars on reducing poverty.*

Our plan replaces TANF but preserves the functions that actually work. Rather than continuing to funnel billions of federal dollars through a loosely structured block grant, we can divide TANF's legitimate functions among programs specifically designed to perform them.

1787 Plan of Action: Safety Net for Families

- Replace cash welfare with more direct assistance to families. Increase the Child Tax Credit for children under six, when child-care costs are generally greatest, while maintaining a connection to work. The enhanced benefit should be structured so that very low-income working families can actually receive it. Instead of assistance depending heavily on where a family lives and how its state chooses to spend TANF dollars, the benefit will follow the family.

- Consolidate child-care assistance under CCDBG (see above). TANF dollars currently used for child care should be redirected into 1787's expanded Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG). Under our proposal, child-care assistance would be portable – the money follows the child – allowing eligible parents to choose among approved private child-care centers, family child-care homes, nonprofit providers, or participating public or private pre-K programs.

- TANF programs that primarily help recipients find and keep jobs – including effective job training, placement, transportation, and other employment support – should be consolidated into existing federal and state workforce programs. This will be facilitated by U.S. Works, 1787's jobs program.
- Create a limited Family Emergency Assistance Fund. A tax credit cannot address every crisis. Families sometimes need immediate help to prevent an eviction, keep the electricity on, repair the car that gets a parent to work, or deal with another temporary emergency. States should retain a smaller, tightly controlled fund for short-term assistance, with benefits generally paid directly to landlords, utilities, child-care providers, or other vendors rather than becoming another system of indefinite cash assistance.

  Families with older children who currently depend on TANF cash assistance should also receive an appropriate transition so that restructuring the program doesn't abruptly eliminate assistance to some of the poorest households.

Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission

Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission (FEC), a 2010 Supreme Court case involving the regulation of political campaign spending by organizations, is one of the Court's worst decisions of all time.

The Court made a grave error with the Citizens United decision, and we should work hard to see it overturned.

In the decision, the Supreme Court held, in a 5–4 vote, that the Free Speech clause of the First Amendment prohibits the government from restricting independent expenditures for communications by nonprofit corporations, for-profit corporations, labor unions, and other associations – meaning these organizations can now spend unlimited amounts of money on political activities as long as they don't give

money directly to political candidates and their spending is not coordinated with any candidate (a "prohibition" that is a total joke).

This decision – together with another awful federal court decision, SpeechNow.org v. Federal Election Commission – gave rise to so-called Super PACs. Super PACs, or "independent expenditure only" committees, can raise unlimited sums of money from corporations, unions, associations and individuals, then spend unlimited amounts of money to advocate for or against political candidates.

The Citizens United decision is deeply flawed mainly for its unintended consequences, because the FEC's interpretation of it has caused even more damage than the decision itself. The Supreme Court held that independent expenditures should be "totally independent" of candidates and made it clear that corporate spending should be fully disclosed. However, neither is being properly enforced, to say the least. Because they are allowed to be shady, Super PACs – in conspiracy with their candidates – have taken political warfare to a new level.

The Supreme Court's ruling included this statement: "We now conclude that independent expenditures, including those made by corporations, do not give rise to corruption or the appearance of corruption." Let's check to see if that's actually true…

A report by Issue One, a nonpartisan nonprofit organization, found that "twelve political megadonors – at least eight of whom are billionaires – are responsible for $1 of every $13 in federal elections since Citizens United and 25 percent of all giving from the top 100 ZIP codes – a total of $3.4 billion." We don't know about you, but that sure doesn't sound right to us.

Super PACs are the perfect way for corporations, unions, and rich people to influence elections and gain political influence and access. There is no better example of this than Elon Musk, who famously spent $277 million to support Donald Trump and other Republicans in the 2024 election. Next thing you know, he's waving around chainsaws, becomes a permanent fixture at Mar-A-Lago, and was given free reign to almost destroy the framework of our entire federal government through his failed DOGE experiment.

Technically, Super PACs are legally required to report where their money comes from but, naturally, they have devised a way to

undermine any transparency by funneling money through secretly funded "dark money" groups – which are, for some strange reason, allowed to keep their donors hidden from the public.

These groups channel money to elections typically though donations given to 501(c)(4) social welfare groups or 501(c)(6) trade associations. While Super PACs do have to disclose these groups, they are only required to disclose the name of the group, not who gave money to the group – so the true source of the money remains a secret.

In total, $5.3 billion was spent on the 2024 presidential election by presidential candidates, political parties and independent interest groups. If you count Senate and House candidates, that number jumps to $14.8 billion. "Dark money" groups accounted for over $1.9 billion of that number.

Civil & Human Rights

- 1787 believes deeply in civil rights and personal liberty.
- Every adult citizen of the United States should have the freedom to make personal choices for his or her life and be responsible for those decisions. This belief does not mean that the leadership or any other member of 1787 necessarily approves or disapproves of other people's choices.
- 1787 will fight to end discrimination in all forms – including discrimination based on race, sex, ethnicity or national origin, language, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, or disability.
- 1787 believes that government should not restrict personal relationships. Sexual orientation, preference, gender, or gender identity should not be a factor in issues such as marriage and equal federal rights, child custody, adoption, immigration, or military service laws.

† 1787 supports the freedom to participate in – or abstain from – any religious activities that do not violate the rights of others. We adamantly oppose any government interaction that either promotes or attacks any specific religion.

Confederate Statues/Monuments/Bases

Removing statues that glorify the Confederacy from public places is important for many reasons, the main one being that they must feel like a slap in the face to many black people not only because of the horror of slavery, but also because most of these monuments were built during the time of Jim Crow in a clear attempt to champion white supremacy. Heck, some of them were erected as late as the 1950s and 1960s.

Many if not all these statues were built for one reason and one reason only: To make sure that even though black people were technically free, they should *never, ever forget their place*.

This is not our opinion it's a well-documented fact. Most Confederate monuments were built by organizations like the United Daughters of the Confederacy to romanticize the Lost Cause ridiculousness – a narrative that tries to rewrite history and say that the Civil War had nothing to do with the enslavement of black people at all; rather it was about the moral and just goals of gaining economic prosperity, "state's rights," and preserving the "Southern way of life" (whatever that means).

Confederate statues and monuments born out of this mentality are nothing more than monuments to ignorance. And injustice. And hate. And cruelty.

To those who try to defend the Lost Cause nonsense you can just save it. There is *zero* doubt that the reason the South fought the Civil War was to preserve slave labor. One must look no further than Confederate Vice President Alexander Hamilton Stephen's Cornerstone Speech, given in 1861, for confirmation of this: "Our new government is founded upon the great truth that the Negro is not equal

to the white man; that slavery subordination to the superior race is his natural and normal condition."

Not only were Jefferson Davis, the president of the Confederate States of America, Alexander Hamilton Stephens, his vice president, and two of the most famous Confederate generals, Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson, fighting to keep human beings in bondage, *they were traitors to the United States of America.* Full stop.

The U.S. Constitution is very clear: "Treason against the United States shall consist only in *levying war against them*, or in adhering to their enemies, giving them aid and comfort." For this reason alone, the very thought of any of them being memorialized in any public place in the United States is a joke – and should be insulting to *all* Americans.

The same logic goes for the ten Army installations that were named after senior Confederate commanders, including Fort Bragg (named after General Braxton Bragg, who was a total disaster of a general, by the way), Fort Benning (named after Brigadier General Henry Benning, who led troops against the U.S. at Antietam and Gettysburg), and Fort Hood (named after John Bell Hood, who resigned from the Unites States Army to fight against it, and who was also a total disaster of a general).

We'll say it again: As if fighting to keep human beings enslaved wasn't bad enough, *THESE PEOPLE TOOK UP ARMS AGAINST THE UNITED STATES*. Really? These people *betrayed our country,* not to mention the ancestors of our black friends and neighbors. No. Just no. No. No. No.

These guys are no-brainers, but it gets more complicated beyond that. Take men like Woodrow Wilson, Andrew Jackson, Theodore Roosevelt, Thomas Jefferson and George Washington, for example. Washington and Jefferson owned slaves – as twelve of our first eighteen presidents did –and Jackson and Roosevelt were seriously outspoken racists. In fact, Jackson (the U.S. president from 1829 – 1837) oversaw the dreadful Indian Removal Act of 1830 and instigated the Trail of Tears, which is one of the vilest episodes in American history.

Although Woodrow Wilson (the U.S. president from 1913 – 1921) championed the League of Nations, led the nation through World

War I, and helped pass the 19th Amendment – which gave women the right to vote – practically his entire government was geared toward white supremacy. His administration segregated the federal work force and forced many black Americans from positions where they had previously supervised white people. President Wilson is who started the process that led to ten military installations being named after Confederate officers.

Sure, Theodore Roosevelt (the U.S. president from 1901 – 1909) put tons of land under federal protection, but only after he stole most of it from American Indians.

As we often do, we look to our hero Frederick Douglass for advice at times like these.

The Freedmen's Memorial in Washington, D.C., also known as the Emancipation Memorial, is a monument that depicts Abraham Lincoln standing over a kneeling, shirtless slave and granting him freedom. The fist of the black man is clenched and there are broken shackles at Lincoln's feet. What many people don't know is that money to build The Freedmen's Memorial was raised almost exclusively from black Americans, many former slaves themselves.

The day of the memorial's dedication, April 14, 1876, was a day of celebration. There was a huge parade, and the day was declared a federal holiday. U.S. President Ulysses S. Grant unveiled the monument right before Frederick Douglass took the stage for one of his most powerful speeches ever.

As always, Mr. Douglass refused to sugarcoat the situation. He started cordial enough: "We are here to express, as best we may, by appropriate forms and ceremonies, our grateful sense of the vast, high, and preeminent services rendered to ourselves, to our race, to our country, and to the whole world by Abraham Lincoln." But then came this:

> "We fully comprehend the relation of Abraham Lincoln both to ourselves and to the white people of the United States. Truth is proper and beautiful at all times and in all places, and it is never more proper and beautiful in any case than when speaking of a great public man whose example is likely to be commended for honor and

imitation long after his departure to the solemn shades, the silent continents of eternity.

It must be admitted, truth compels me to admit, even here in the presence of the monument we have erected to his memory, Abraham Lincoln was not, in the fullest sense of the word, either our man or our model. In his interests, in his associations, in his habits of thought, and in his prejudices, he was a white man. He was preeminently the white man's president, entirely devoted to the welfare of white men. He was ready and willing at any time during the first years of his administration to deny, postpone, and sacrifice the rights of humanity in the colored people to promote the welfare of the white people of this country."

But at the end of his speech, however, he closed with this:

"But by a broad survey, in the light of the stern logic of great events, and in view of that divinity which shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will, we came to the conclusion *that the hour and the man of our redemption had somehow met in the person of Abraham Lincoln*. It mattered little to us what language he might employ on special occasions; it mattered little to us, when we fully knew him, whether he was swift or slow in his movements; it was enough for us that Abraham Lincoln was at the head of a great movement, and was in living and earnest sympathy with that movement, which, in the nature of things, must go on until slavery should be utterly and forever abolished in the United States."

In other words, Abraham Lincoln eventually met the moment and forever changed the lives of millions of people – however sloppy and inelegant his process may have been at times.

To us, the lesson here is that we must look at these flawed men in their entirety, not simply by their greatest sins in the limitations of their time. Yes, George Washington owned slaves, but he also was a heroic commander-in-chief, who fought heroically for the United States, saved the Union, and helped establish our country around our new Constitution.

Thomas Jefferson was a hypocrite of the highest order, but he also authored the Declaration of Independence, establishing this nation's highest ideals – and putting into words, if not always in practice, the bold and powerful truth that it is "self-evident" that "all men are created equal."

About this, it was also our brilliant hero Frederick Douglass who wrote,

> "The American Government and the American Constitution are spoken of in a manner which would naturally lead the hearer to believe that one is identical with the other; when the truth is, they are distinct in character as is a ship and a compass. The one may point right and the other steer wrong. A chart is one thing, the course of the vessel is another. The Constitution may be right, the Government is wrong. If the Government has been governed by mean, sordid, and wicked passions, it does not follow that the Constitution is mean, sordid, and wicked.
>
> It would be the wildest of absurdities, and lead to endless confusion and mischiefs, if, instead of looking to the written paper itself, for its meaning, it were attempted to make us search it out, in the secret motives, and dishonest intentions, of some of the men who took part in writing it. It was what they said that was adopted by the people, not what they were ashamed or afraid to say, and really omitted to say. Bear in mind, also, and the fact is an important one, that the framers of the Constitution sat with doors closed, and that this was done purposely, that nothing but the result of their labors should be seen, and that that result should be judged of by the people free from any of the bias shown in the debates."

Moving forward, maybe we can simply start here:

† First, it's important to acknowledge that historic preservation has a powerful role in telling the ***entire*** story of our difficult history. We certainly should not downplay or erase ***any*** of our history but

rather create an honest and accurate account of the Confederacy, for example, within museums or other nonpublic spaces.

- Second, every situation should be assessed individually. For example, a bust of Woodrow Wilson could possibly remain somewhere to acknowledge that he was the 28th president of the United States but, thanks to his segregationist policies, he probably shouldn't have a public policy school named after him – a fact that Princeton University acknowledged when they renamed theirs in 2020.
- Third, it's equally important to provide context for every situation, as well as a detailed explanation of each. For example, instead of just removing The Freedmen's Memorial, maybe tell the story of the unveiling celebration and the inspiring story of where the money for the monument came from.
- Fourth, we should erect more statues in honor of black heroes (plus others, like Indian Americans, who also suffered horribly under the fiery hell of savage racism). There are plenty to choose from –from Harriet Tubman, who worked as an Union Army spy, guided slaves to freedom via the Underground Railroad, and planned and executed raids like the one along the Combahee River in South Carolina which freed more than 700 people, to Sergeant First Class Alwyn Cashe, a black soldier who became a legend in Iraq when he saved six fellow soldiers, all while he was literally on fire, ultimately giving his life for his country.

Tinfoil Hats to Red Hats: The Conspiracy Theory Trap

One morning in Houston, David Lopez-Zuniga had just left his house for his job as an air-conditioner repairman, with the lunch his wife prepared on the seat next to him. As usual, his day was getting started before sunrise, so the lights of the SUV following way too closely behind him were obvious and glaring.

Suddenly, the SUV hit Mr. Lopez-Zuniga's small truck on the passenger side, forcing him off the highway. Mark Aguirre, the driver of the SUV – a former Houston police captain turned "private investigator" – pointed a gun at Mr. Lopez-Zuniga and ordered him to get on the ground.

Class, welcome to Conspiracy Theory 101! In the past, conspiracy theories lived largely on the fringes of society, believed only by kooks and the tinfoil hat crew who steadfastly insisted the earth was flat, the moon landing was faked, and werewolves exist. For the most part, conspiracy theories were isolated and largely harmless back then.

After the terrorist attacks on September 11th, however, things started to ratchet up. Conspiracy theorists claimed things like the U.S. federal government was behind the attacks and that the buildings were destroyed not by planes flown into them by international terrorists, but by "controlled demolition."

Next came the conspiracy theory that the deadly mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut never actually happened – a despicable lie that a jury felt was worthy of $1.5 billion in damages, which is the amount they awarded the families of the Sandy Hook victims after they sued Alex Jones, the far-right radio show host and founder of InfoWars. Then came our personal favorite, that forest fires in California were caused by Jewish space lasers (thank you for that one, Majorie Taylor Green!).

Back to our story in Houston, where we last left Mr. Lopez-Zuniga on the ground with a gun pointed at his head. Mark Aguirre, the man who had his gun pointed at a completely baffled Mr. Lopez-Zuniga, was convinced he would find in the truck 750,000 mail-in ballots from the 2020 presidential election, signed by Hispanic children with untraceable fingerprints. < This story is 100% true, we promise. It would kind of be funny if it wasn't threatening our democracy >.

What was *actually* in Mr. Lopez-Zuniga's truck and on his property – both of which he allowed the police to freely search – was air conditioning equipment. Which makes sense since Mr. Lopez-Zuniga is, after all, *an air-conditioner repairman*. Mark Aguirre was indicted and charged with aggravated assault with a deadly weapon,

plus a charge of unlawful restraint, for his assault against poor Mr. Lopez-Zuniga.

So, here's the backstory. The Liberty Center for God and Country – a nonprofit organization started by a man named Steven Hotze, a well-known anti-LBGT crusader and megadonor to the Texas Republican Party – paid almost $300,000 to 20 private investigators for a six-week undercover "investigation" into what they were certain was illegal ballot retrievals in Houston.

It is unclear exactly why members of The Liberty Center for God and Country targeted Mr. Lopez-Zuniga, but he was certainly not the only one who experienced their vigilante "justice."

Hotze – who also left a voicemail with Texas Governor Greg Abbott's chief of staff during the 2020 protests suggesting the governor "shoot to kill if any of these son-of-a-bitch people start rioting" – has been charged with unlawful restraint, aggravated assault with a deadly weapon, aggravated robbery, and engaging organized criminal activity.

Then there was Dinesh D'Souza's 2022 movie 2000 Mules that detailed how paid operatives, or "mules," allegedly trafficked ballots in the 2020 election – "typically in the middle of the night" – to mail-in drop boxes around the country. According to D'Souza, the mules picked up their ballots "at left-wing organizations called vote stash houses. That's where they get the ballots and then they go dump them in the mail-in drop boxes…. (the mules) are going, by and large to a group – they're going to NGOs, or nonprofit organizations. These are deeply nested in these inner cities. These are the people that are sort of cultivating the ballots. They're the ones that hire the mules."

The entire thesis of the film – and most of the "evidence" offered – centered around an analysis of cellphone location data in major swing states that allegedly showed suspicious patterns of behavior near ballot drop boxes. This geolocation data was given to D'Souza by a group called True the Vote, a conservative group based in Houston. True the Vote's director Gregg Phillips, a former executive with the Texas Health and Human Services Commission, was a prolific spreader of election fraud propaganda from the jump.

In the days following Donald Trump's victory in the 2016 election, for example, Phillips posted on Twitter that he had discovered that more than 3 million people who voted were not citizens, a lie that was then pushed by Alex Jones' InfoWars. Donald Trump then seemingly used the false information to compose his own Tweet: "In addition to winning the Electoral College in a landslide, I won the popular vote if you deduct the millions of people who voted illegally."

When questioned about any evidence he had regarding the claim, Phillips responded that he would soon "release all methodologies, data and analysis directly to the public" – which, of course, never happened.

After Trump's tweet, True the Vote, under Phillips' guidance, released its own statement: "We are still collecting data and will be for several months, but our intent is to publish a comprehensive study on the significant impact of illegal voting in all of its many forms and begin a national discussion on how voters, states, and the Trump administration can best address this growing problem" – which, of course, never happened.

The other pieces of "evidence" offered in 2000 Mules included surveillance footage of people putting ballots into drop boxes, as Dinesh says (in a scary voice over equally scary music), "*What you are seeing is a crime*."

Salem Media Group, the executive producer of the film, claimed that, in less than two weeks in full release, 2000 Mules had "already become the most successful political documentary in a decade," with one million viewers and $10 million in revenue.

MAGA-land was delighted! In May 2022, Donald Trump hosted a screening of 2000 Mules at his Mar-a-Lago resort, and, during that summer, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton's office screened the movie, as did Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick and three other Texas legislators, who sponsored a watch party at a church in Houston. The film was shown three separate times at the Republican Party of Texas' annual convention.

Unfortunately for Dinesh D'Souza, True the Vote, and the Salem Media Group, the entire movie was total bull, a fact they all finally admitted. Mr. D'Souza admitted in a statement in December 2024: "I now understand that the surveillance videos used in the film were

characterized on the basis of inaccurate information provided to me and my team. If I had known then that the videos were not linked to geolocation data, I would have clarified this and produced and edited the film differently."

In February 2024, attorneys for True the Vote told a Georgia judge that it didn't have evidence to support its claims of illegal ballot stuffing during the 2020 general and runoff elections.

Even more unfortunate for Dinesh D'Souza, True the Vote, and the Salem Media Group is the fact that one of the men they accused of being a drug mule, Mark Andrews, sued them all for defamation, after being cleared of any illegal voting activity by the Georgia Bureau of Investigation.

Naturally, the finger pointing among them started immediately, with Salem Media saying, "We relied on representations made to us by Dinesh D'Souza and True the Vote, Inc. that the individuals depicted in the videos provided to us by True the Vote, including Mr. Andrews, illegally deposited ballots" – right before they settled with Mr. Andrews "for a significant [confidential] amount."

For its part, True the Vote said it "did not select videos or graphics used for dramatic effect. (Mark Andrews) was not part of the geospatial study in which TTV identified 242 unique devices having visited at least 10 ballot drop boxes – a fact that was communicated to Mr. D'Souza's team. Despite this, D'Souza's team included a blurred video of this individual in their '2000 Mules' movie and book productions."

Even though Dinesh D'Souza said in his statement, "I owe this individual, Mark Andrews, an apology," his lawsuit with him is still ongoing, as is Andrews' lawsuit against True the Vote.

Other examples of conspiracy theories are just heartbreaking. In August 2021, a California father and QAnon follower killed his 2-year-old son and 10-month-old daughter because he believed they had "serpent DNA" and were "going to grow into monsters." Killing them, he said, "was the only course of action that would save the world." (To refresh your memory, QAnon is the preposterous conspiracy theory group that believes Donald Trump is saving America from a cabal of Satan worshipers and child sex traffickers.)

Sadly, the destruction caused by QAnon's demented fabrications started years before this devastating event. In early December 2016, Edgar Maddison Welch left his home in Salisbury, North Carolina and headed to Washington, D.C. He had heard Alex Jones of InfoWars – yes, the same guy who started the "Sandy Hook Elementary massacre didn't happen" conspiracy theory – say that Hillary Clinton was sexually abusing children as part of satanic rituals in the basement of a pizza restaurant there, and he was horrified.

The Alex Jones' rant he heard went something like this: "When I think about all the children Hillary Clinton has personally murdered and chopped up and raped . . . yeah, you heard me right. Hillary Clinton has personally murdered children." By the time Mr. Welch left for Washington, the clip of Alex Jones saying this trash had already been viewed on YouTube more than 427,000 times.

When Mr. Welch arrived at Comet Ping Pong – the scene of the "crime" – with an AR-15 semiautomatic rifle, a .38 handgun and a folding knife, he went through the restaurant room by room, looking for children to rescue. He never got to the basement Mr. Jones referenced because the restaurant doesn't even have one. < Edgar Maddison Welch was sentenced to four years in prison for his armed assault on Comet Ping Pong. >

This incident is now known as Pizzagate. The first Pizzagate message was posted on October 29, 2016, by a user named Carmen Katz: "My NYPD source said its much more vile and serious than classified material on Weiner's device. The email DETAIL the trips made by Weiner, Bill and Hillary on their pedophile billionaire friend's plane, the Lolita Express. Yup, Hillary has a well documented predilection for underage girls… We're talking an international child enslavement and sex ring."

From there, the lie sprinted its way through social media, getting the attention of a Twitter user named @DavidGoldbergNY, who retweeted Katz's post twice, adding: "I have been hearing the same thing from my NYPD buddies too. Next couple days will be interesting!" Just one of those tweets was retweeted 6,369 times.

Rolling Stone magazine reported that, "according to a sample of tweets with Pizzagate or related hashtags provided by Filippo Menczer,

a professor of informatics at Indiana University, Pizzagate was shared roughly 1.4 million times by more than a quarter of a million accounts in its first five weeks of life – from @DavidGoldbergNY's tweet to the day Welch showed up at Comet Ping Pong." At least "14 Russia-linked accounts had tweeted about Pizzagate" and "at least 66 Trump campaign figures followed one or more of the most prolific Pizzagate tweeters."

Not only have conspiracy theories come flooding into our lives from the fringes, but they have now made their way into the U.S. Capitol and, thanks to Donald Trump & Co., the White House.

It's bad enough when members of Congress and the president of the United States' family and closest allies spread this mess – as we saw during the Capitol rights with Antifa conspiracy theories – but to see conspiracy theories being hawked by the president of the United States directly from the White House is beyond the pale.

It cannot be denied that Donald Trump has never met a conspiracy theory he didn't like – as long as it serves his agenda, that is – because he has embraced all sorts of them for decades: the Clintons murder people and rape babies; Barack Obama was born in Africa; Ted Cruz's father was somehow involved in killing JFK; migrants in Ohio eat pets; and, of course, the grandaddy of them all, the election was rigged.

Worse, he seems to take perverted pleasure in peddling them, and sometimes even gets to engage in two of his favorite activities at once … like the time he promoted a despicable conspiracy theory while ambushing a foreign leader in the White House.

As South African President Cyril Ramaphosa sat beside Donald in the Oval Office – as a *guest* of not Donald, but the *United States of America* – to specifically discuss resetting trade relations, the U.S. president told his aide to "turn the lights down and just put this on."

He then proceeded to provide commentary for the video, which showed white crosses lining a roadside. Donald announced to his audience that they were looking at a mass grave for the white South African farmers who had been murdered in a "genocide," awkwardly repeating "dead white farmers" over and over again.

"Now, this is very bad," Donald lamented. "These are the… these are burial sites right here. Burial sites. Each one of those white things

you see is a cross, and there's approximately a thousand of them. They are all white farmers. And it's a terrible sight. I've never seen anything like it. Both sides of the road, you have crosses. Those people were all killed."

It will not come as a galloping shock to you that the words coming out of his mouth were categorically false. In truth, the crosses were part of a memorial procession that took place on September 5, 2020 for a white farming couple who had been murdered the month before. The crosses were removed after the event.

For his part, President Ramaphosa, looking utterly mystified, said, "Have they told you where that is, Mr. President? I'd like to know where that is. Because this I've never seen." To which Donald defiantly replied, "I mean, it's in South Africa, that's where!" Good grief.

Then, to ensure he was as offensive to *our* visitors as possible, Donald then showed them video clips of black men he claimed were "South African government officials" saying things like "Kill the Boer," a reference to Afrikaners (i.e., descendants of Dutch and other Northern European settlers who ruled South Africa during apartheid).

< Encyclopedia Britannica describes apartheid as a "policy that governed relations between South Africa's white minority and nonwhite majority for much of the latter half of the 20th century, sanctioning racial segregation and political/economic discrimination against non-whites." Apartheid caused massive inequality on every level, extremely high poverty and unemployment rates for non-whites, and brutal racial segregation in communities, education, and public services – all of which persist to this day. >

The South African delegation didn't let this one go. Their agriculture minister, who is white, had to explain to the U.S. president that the men in the video were actually *opponents* of the current government. One of the men, Julius Malema, is a revolutionary leftist politician who leads the Economic Freedom Fighters. The African National Congress party, which President Ramaphosa is part of, expelled Malema from its party in 2012.

As the meeting/ambush was ending, President Ramaphosa wryly said to the president of the United States, "I'm sorry I don't have a

plane to give you," referencing the Boeing 747-8 luxury jetliner the Qatari government had just gifted Donald (ironically, the Qataris were spared a lecture on morality, in case you were wondering). To which Donald replied, "I wish you did." Good grief.

Did we ever figure out who put all this nonsense about South Africa in Donald's head? But of course we did – because our president sat right in the Oval Office and told *our* South African visitors he showed them the videos because it was "what Elon wanted."

We guess Elon – who was born into a wealthy white family in South Africa during apartheid – also got what he wanted when, in May 2025, President Trump stopped the admission of all refugees into the United States – including the heroes who risked their lives for us in Afghanistan and entire families who will likely die in Sudan and Congo – but exempted wealthy white South Africans, Afrikaners no less.

As justification, President Trump said this group faces racial discrimination because of South Africa's Expropriation Act, a land redistribution law passed to correct the enormous imbalance in property ownership that still exists from over four decades of apartheid (white people make up about 7 percent of the South African population but own roughly three-quarters of its farms and agricultural assets). However, no land seizures have been carried out under that law.

His justification also included the fact that Afrikaners are "being killed" in a "genocide." However, the truth is that deaths classified as *farm murders* account for less than 1 percent of the over 27,000 murders across South Africa every year (and not all those victims are white).

In any event, Christopher Landau, our deputy secretary of state, welcomed the Afrikaners warmly: "You are really welcome here and we respect what you have had to deal with these last few years … when you have quality seeds, you can put them in foreign soil and they will blossom. They will bloom. We are excited to welcome you here to our country where we think you will bloom."

One could be forgiven for thinking the *quality seeds will blossom* crack is frighteningly reminiscent of language from the highly racist

eugenics movement, which championed selective breeding to improve the human species: "Only healthy seed must be sown!"

All this said, you live by the conspiracy theory, you die by the conspiracy theory – a lesson President Trump and his posse are learning the hard way.

Very quickly, conspiracy theories can spin out of your control and backfire spectacularly when they smash into reality, which is what happened with the sordid tale of Jeffrey Epstein and the legion of wealthy Democrats and Deep State men on his client list who murdered him in prison to protect their disgusting sexcapades.

After Donald loudly peddled these Epstein theories for years, many of his loyal followers were anxiously waiting for justice to be done during the Trump/Vance administration. They were finally going to get the dirty details of what these perverts had done… and send them straight up the river for good!

Luckily, they now had their MAGA top-tier superheroes in place between Attorney General Pam Bondi, FBI Director Kash Patel, and his deputy Dan Bongino – all MAGA mega disciples who had promised vengeance.

But, when the sands in the hourglass ran out, the three mighty crusaders admitted that, after an "exhaustive review," they found "no incriminating client list;" no "evidence that could predicate an investigation against uncharged third parties;" no "evidence that Epstein blackmailed prominent individuals;" or any credible evidence that he was murdered by the Deep State – rather, Jeffrey Epstein did, in fact, commit suicide after all.

Uh oh.

Needless to say, many Trump loyalists went ballistic. After years spent spreading conspiracy theories for his own political gain, President Trump is finally facing a base in open revolt.

And – despite The Donald's best efforts – it's not going away. His well-worn playbook is just not working this time… and that's probably not going to get any better since 1) The New York Times has identified "more than 5,300 files containing more than 38,000 references to Mr.

Trump, his wife, his Mar-a-Lago club in Florida, and other related words and phrases in the latest batch of emails, government files, videos and other records released by the Justice Department," and 2) the DOJ just published documents describing interviews with a woman who said Donald Trump sexually assaulted her when she was a teenager after she was introduced to him by Jeffrey Epstein.

We pray that the Trump/Vance administration's fate will make people in the future think twice before trading in conspiracy theories, because they are incredibly destructive and systematically erode trust in our government and institutions. Maybe this will finally do the trick because it's becoming evident that, eventually, you reap what you sow.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)

The Trump/Vance administration's attacks on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) are offensive. As with almost everything they do, they made DEI a full-on battle in their culture war – made possible because many critics on the right see DEI as liberalism and political correctness run wild. They can't seem to find *any* value in workplace diversity at all and think many DEI programs are ineffective and racist in and of themselves.

Listen, there is no question that there's substantial evidence that many DEI initiatives, while well-intentioned, have failed to produce lasting improvements in workplace diversity. (we'll circle back to this in a minute)

But, as usual, the way this administration has acted about all this has unnecessarily thrown gas on an already roaring blaze. To be perfectly blunt, their words and actions make them look like racist jerks and make the motivations behind their extreme position seem super suspicious.

For example, Navy divers hadn't even finished their search of the Potomac River for the 67 people killed in the worst air crash in America in 20 years before President Trump blamed – with zero evidence – the tragedy on DEI hiring practices. *His meaning was*

crystal clear: diversity equals incompetence. This is presidential behavior?

It doesn't help that, among the Trump/Vance administration's first 98 Senate-confirmed appointees to senior leadership positions, only two – just 2 percent – were black. Nor does it help that Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth has repeatedly intervened to block or delay the promotions of black and female military officers, including highly qualified officers recommended for advancement by their respective services. By June 2026, Hegseth had reportedly blocked the promotions of at least 40 senior officers to general or admiral, roughly half of whom were women or members of minority groups.

Meanwhile, the administration has had no difficulty finding room for people from a different kind of background: Fox News. By April 2026, President Trump had appointed 25 current or former Fox News.

Done correctly, the beauty of DEI is not to make everything a 50-50 even split between men and women, or white people and people of color. It's to create an environment where others might possibly see something in someone that would have otherwise been missed. It's not about lowering standards, it's about considering additional obstacles that someone might have faced on their journey.

Take two marathon runners. One runs the marathon on flat terrain in 55° weather with no wind and no humidity. The other runs the race in 90° heat, 100% humidity, and through occasional thunderstorms. Taking the race conditions into account when assessing the performance of these two runners is not treating them differently. It's just putting the races *into context*.

The administration's lack of leadership on this topic is unfortunate because this country would benefit greatly from calm and rationale conversations about DEI. As with most things in modern-day America, critics and proponents both have valid points but neither side will listen long enough to come up with something that could possibly work.

After George Floyd's murder in 2020, there was a renewed feeling throughout America that we were moving backward on the racial front and that it was time to address America's long history of discrimination and inequality once and for all.

In corporate America, the answer for many was an increased focus on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). Within two years, three-quarters of S&P 500 companies had a Chief Diversity Officer, and most had created targets aimed at increasing the racial diversity among their employees.

Companies chose many different ways to tackle this, from having a more diverse pool of candidates to offering better executive incentives and perks. "Unconscious bias" training programs flourished and including pronouns on email signature lines became the norm.

The federal government got in the game as well. In 2024 alone, $2.9 million was earmarked for diversity training in the U.S. State Department. During the Biden administration, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services paid Deloitte over $12 million for DEI-related consulting work.

From the jump, the backlash was fierce and lawsuits were filed. But, on the second day of his second term, President Trump sounded the death knell for DEI when he signed an executive order demanding all federal agencies end DEI programs. He even directed agencies to make lists of public companies that the federal government should investigate over their DEI policies. Claiming "radical DEI had dangerously tainted many of our critical businesses and influential institutions, including the federal government," Trump's directive reflected his campaign promise to embrace a "colorblind and competence-based workplace."

The results of early DEI initiatives were mixed. After analyzing 13 million workers at S&P 500 companies, The Wall Street Journal found that, while Asian and Hispanic employees had made modest gains in the workforces of the largest American companies, DEI initiatives hadn't significantly changed the profile of who advanced to the upper ranks. In 2023, just one in twenty senior managers was black while, together, black and Hispanic workers still filled most of America's hourly service and manual-labor jobs.

Research by professors Frank Dobbin (Harvard) and Alexandra Kalev (Tel Aviv University) found that "strategies for controlling bias – which drive most diversity efforts – have failed spectacularly since they were introduced to promote equal opportunity. Black men have

barely gained ground in corporate management since 1985. White women haven't progressed since 2000. It isn't that there aren't enough educated women and minorities out there – both groups have made huge educational gains over the past two generations. The problem is that we can't motivate people by forcing them to get with the program and punishing them if they don't."

"It shouldn't be surprising that most diversity programs aren't increasing diversity," they say. "Despite a few new bells and whistles, courtesy of big data, companies are basically doubling down on the same approaches they've used since the 1960s – which often make things worse, not better. Firms have long relied on diversity training to reduce bias on the job, hiring tests and performance ratings to limit it in recruitment and promotions, and grievance systems to give employees a way to challenge managers. Those tools are designed to preempt lawsuits by policing managers' thoughts and actions. Yet laboratory studies show that this kind of force-feeding can activate bias rather than stamp it out. As social scientists have found, people often rebel against rules to assert their autonomy. Try to coerce me to do X, Y, or Z, and I'll do the opposite just to prove that I'm my own person."

So, what's the best approach? Professors Dobbin and Kalev offer this: "It's more effective to engage managers in solving the problem, increase their on-the-job contact with female and minority workers, and promote social accountability – the desire to look fair-minded. That's why interventions such as targeted college recruitment, mentoring programs, self-managed teams, and task forces have boosted diversity in businesses. Some of the most effective solutions aren't even designed with diversity in mind."

That's solid advice. With or without executive orders and/or social pressure, diversity should remain a top priority for companies if they want to reach their full business potential. Diversity improves employee engagement, morale and performance; increases employee retention and reduces turnover; and attracts new talent – all so companies can remain competitive in a tight domestic labor market and an ever-expanding global market.

A study by McKinsey & Company found that "companies in the top quartile for gender or racial and ethnic diversity are more likely to

have financial returns above their national industry medians. Companies in the bottom quartile in these dimensions are statistically less likely to achieve above-average returns. Diversity is probably a competitive differentiator that shifts market share toward more diverse companies over time."

"While correlation does not equal causation (greater gender and ethnic diversity in corporate leadership doesn't automatically translate into more profit), the correlation does indicate that when companies commit themselves to diverse leadership, they are more successful."

Empower Society

Leveling the Playing Field, Closing the Gap

The Empower Society is a policy initiative that helps ensure long-term financial stability for families and communities by providing for their basic needs while, at the same time, offering them the knowledge and tools necessary to establish a long-term financial plan.

The cornerstone of the Empower Society are the Centers that will be located throughout the nation. These Centers provide integrated service delivery to vulnerable families and helps them maximize their financial resources. The Empower Society will also facilitate 1787's U.S.S. RocketShip program (and it's six Rocket Fuel initiatives), which we will get to in a second…

< Note: One of the recommendations in Operation Overhaul is that, now that 92 percent of American households have Internet service, federal services need to move online when at all possible. However, Empower Society Centers need to remain "brick-and-mortar," having a physical location where clients can interact and participate in person. >

The U.S. government already has something that resembles these Centers, called American Job Centers. These Centers supposedly provide a full range of assistance to job seekers, including search assistance, referrals, and placement assistance.

Unfortunately, many of the existing 2,300 American Job Centers and their programs are outdated and ineffective. That said, there is no reason they can't be reinvented and reenergized. At a minimum, the existing Centers provide an established infrastructure and framework that we can build on. As promised, no new funding is required – just a reallocation of resources – and we will leverage federal dollars with public/private partnerships, philanthropic resources, and other assets from the local communities.

The overriding goal of the Empower Society is to make sure every American has the tools and resources they need to succeed and, most importantly, that they feel valued and respected.

Fundamental to our success is that we create an environment where people feel a sense of ownership and where they are… well… *empowered*. To that end, each Center will have a Community Board of Directors elected by the clients who use that facility. Photos of the Community Board of Directors will be prominently displayed in the foyer. The Community Board will meet once a month, in a meeting open to the public, and the entire community will have the opportunity to speak.

Every Center will be a vibrant and energetic place to be! No more drab gray walls, 3-legged chairs and beat-up card tables from the 70's. A coat of paint costs practically nothing but means absolutely everything.

At the heart of the Center is technology, to include a media wall that showcases job opportunities and community events, flat screen televisions tuned to news channels, desktop computers, and interactive touch screen tables, which deliver content in a more sociable and fun way than a desktop computer.

The bottom floor of the Center will focus on financial and social services, as well as other income assistance. Partner agencies will be given free space to help clients find resources for food, health care, housing and emergency services as they transition to self-sufficiency.

The bottom floor also offers services that provide the knowledge and tools necessary to establish long-term financial plans. Highly qualified Certified Financial Advisors will offer personalized financial

counseling, to include debt management, credit counseling and budget advice.

These Financial Advisors are key. One of their most important jobs is to help develop long-term financial strategies for clients. This includes establishing long-term financial goals, implementing asset-building strategies, and periodic reviews of the client's progress.

Clients are advised of achievable investment opportunities and low-cost financial products to help them increase their savings, obtain assets, and, ultimately, build wealth. Rich people are not the only ones who need this type of advice. Even saving $1/day is a great start. It's more than the money… it's a mindset.

The first floor will also have Bank On tellers. The Cities for Financial Empowerment Fund (CFE) is a 501(c)3 corporation that "supports local coalition and financial institution efforts to connect consumers to safe, affordable bank accounts." CFE's mission is to "leverage municipal engagement to improve the financial stability of low- and moderate-income households by embedding financial empowerment strategies into local government infrastructure."

This is super important because around 4.5 percent of U.S. households (around 5.9 million adults) are "unbanked," meaning they don't have a checking or savings account; almost 14.1 percent of U.S. households (around 18.7 million adults) are underbanked, meaning they still use some fringe financial services; and nearly 29.2 percent of unbanked and 38.1 percent of underbanked households earn less than $30,000 per year. In America, 36 percent of black households and 33.4 percent of Hispanic households are unbanked or underbanked, compared to less than 12 percent of white households.

The first floor will also have high-tech classrooms. These provide financial education seminars, parenting classes, English language classes, healthy lifestyle sessions, and after-school and summer programs. Plus, a children's bank and bookstore will allow kids to make deposits into their own accounts and use checks and/or debit cards to purchase books and school supplies, which will help them learn financial skills as well as the value of a dollar.

There will be a world-class childcare facility on site, as well as a full industrial kitchen. The kitchen will offer nutrition classes for

clients and give clients the opportunity to prepare healthy meals for their families at a low cost. A Concierge Service will be available to assist clients with lifestyle management.

Because a steady source of income is the first step to financial stability, the entire top floor of the Center will be all about jobs, jobs, jobs (in partnership with 1787's U.S. Works). The top floor of the Center will provide everything necessary to have a successful job search, including help with resume creation, personalized voice mail boxes, private mailboxes, and access to a mailing address.

There will be computer terminals for job searches, newspapers, job boards and access to interview clothing. High-tech classrooms offer college and career readiness classes, GED and SAT prep courses, computer courses, personalized job skills training, goal planning sessions and interview practice sessions.

One of the most exciting programs at the Empower Society is The Co-Op. There are two parts to The Co-Op. The first part is modeled after a traditional co-op, where people join together and cooperate for their mutual social and economic benefit.

For example, when someone comes to a Center, their skills and personal characteristics are assessed. For example, it's discovered that Leonard has childcare experience, Sheldon has a Class A driver's license, Raj has extensive line cook experience and Howard has been a plumber's apprentice. Raj will help prepare a hot breakfast and sack lunches for everyone in The Co-Op; Leonard will provide childcare for Raj's son and Howard's daughter at the childcare facility; and Sheldon will drive Howard to and from work in the Center's van.

Howard will be going to a job created by the second part of The Co-Op. This part not only facilitates the jobs created by U.S. Works, but it also pursues opportunities that create value so that the Empower Society can earn money. For example, the Center can purchase homes in depressed neighborhoods, put people to work renovating them, then sell the homes for a profit. U.S. Works will engage current and retired tradesmen to oversee and train Co-Op clients for this type of work.

1787's Plan of Action: Empower Society

Read more on p. 442 of The Great American Reset.

Listen and Learn

- Conduct an evidence-based, government-wide audit of federal policies, specifically to address the racial wealth divide.
- Listen to – and learn from – experts. Closely examine success stories and find out what works.
- Seriously question conventional wisdom – and do extensive research – to ensure we get to the very best solutions.
- Create a White House Council of Social Advisers.
- Learn from past mistakes!

Empower Society Centers

- Reinvent and reenergize the existing One-Stop Centers, the cornerstone of Empower Society.
- Provide a richly cultured social curriculum and cultivate a welcoming home-like environment.
- Facilitate 1787's U.S.S. RocketShip program and it's six Rocket Fuel initiatives.
- Facilitate 1787's Let There Be Light program, an initiative that focuses on making life easier for all Americans by prioritizing lowering cost-of-living burdens and helping make living essentials – housing, food, healthcare, and utilities – affordable without unreasonable financial sacrifice or debt.
- Facilitate A Brighter Tomorrow, a program that encourages social/emotional and character development in kids.

- Using AmeriCorps Seniors as a model, facilitate a national service program that utilizes the incredible experiences and talents of Americans over 65.
- Find creative ways to connect low- and high-income people, and people who don't have easy access to opportunities with those that do.
- Have specialized Centers in high-poverty neighborhoods to address the unique and devastating challenges that exist.
- Organize and Facilitate "Empower Circles" – peer groups that encourage one another while providing accountability.
- Find other solutions that address "the poverty of isolation," and ones that establish positive human connection.
- Provide effective parenting education that focuses on both work and family.
- Assist with housing, healthcare and other transitional services for those leaving the criminal justice system.
- Assist in protecting America's foster children, many of whom have been neglected, forgotten, and are in grave danger.

One of its main priorities is to facilitate 1787's U.S.S. RocketShip program and it's six Rocket Fuel initiatives.

1787's Plan of Action
U.S.S. RocketShip

The Rocket Fuel:

- Vastly Improve Job & Skills Training
- Ignite Government Investment in Low-Wealth Americans

- Provide Guidance for Optimal Financial Inclusion
- Boost Opportunities for Wealth Creation
- Block Policies that Sabotage Advancement
- Guarantee Fair and Equitable Education

First Rocket Fuel:
Implement a Federal Jobs Program
Vastly Improve Job & Skills Training

U.S. Works
1787's Federal Jobs Program

Work is an essential piece of this puzzle. 1787's jobs program, U.S. Works, will create near-term jobs, plus help secure our long-term economic future by appropriately developing our nation's human capital. The program is a practical, straightforward way to leverage our already massive spending by not only providing Americans who face barriers work today, but also valuable training for tomorrow.

U.S. Works requires anyone who is capable of work, receives federal assistance *in any way*, and is unemployed to register with an Empower Society to actively look for a job OR be engaged in the specialized education/training programs provided there for at least 20 hours every week. The clients will be paid the federal minimum hourly wage, and the first funds earned will go toward the total amount of money the participant receives in federal government assistance. Any remaining funds go directly to the client (people who receive Medicaid benefits only are exempt from this).

We believe deeply that *not* having a work requirement attached to social service benefits does a tremendous disservice to the very people they are designed to help and perpetuates devastating cycles that we already know set people up to fail.

It's important to note that the design of U.S. Works ensures we don't make the miscalculation that President Bill Clinton's Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 did when the legislation called for a work requirement for those who received federal assistance but then didn't have the government act as employer of last resort.

There are many obvious benefits to people having well-paying, rewarding jobs – earning money and enjoying personal satisfaction being at the top of the list – but not so obvious are the real-world consequences and negative psychological impact of being unemployed.

The longer a person is out of work, for example, the more unemployable they are… and it's well documented that there is a direct correlation between how long a person is out of work to a dramatic increase in depression, domestic violence, alcohol abuse, and suicide.

That means we need to get started on this *right away*. The COVID era was a major shock to the system, and in many ways our economy made a remarkable recovery. But for those trapped at the bottom, we still have a way to go.

The official U.S. unemployment rate in March 2026 was 4.3 percent. That's still 7 million people. A more accurate measure of our employment situation is the U-6 unemployment rate, which includes the unemployed, people working part-time because they can't find full-time work, and those who have just given up. In March 2026, that number was 8 percent.

Another instructive number is the labor force participation rate, a measure of the economy's active workforce that adds the number of all workers who are employed or actively seeking employment, then divides that number by the total number of the civilian working-age population.

In March 2026, the labor force participation rate was 61.9 percent. Compare that to 2000, when that number was 81.9 percent. The labor force participation rate is an interesting number because it signals that there are possibly millions of people who still are in prime working years who may be enticed back into the work force if it was worth their while.

Although COVID put a spotlight on our jobs and wage situation, the need for a new paradigm began long before. Going forward, we need to not only create 21st century jobs, but we also need to create ones that pay better. Plus, we need to make certain that the new jobs we create don't replace middle-class jobs with low-paying ones.

The great news is that 1787's timing couldn't be better! Fact: We have a stubbornly high U-6 unemployment rate. Fact: We need to get serious about moving people from any sort of dependency to self-sufficiency. Fact: We essentially need an entirely new infrastructure. Do we not have the perfect opportunity here? 1 + 1 + 1 = Progress.

< Note: Even though Congress passed what was meant to be a comprehensive infrastructure deal in November 2021, it's an imperfect effort to say the least. Our leaders should have incorporated something like this in that legislation, but it's never too late! >

The Private Sector

Stabilizing and strengthening our work force requires an all-out blitz that will take every magic trick we've got. Therefore, since this is truly a multi-dimensional challenge, both the private sector and the federal government must be part of the solution.

The contribution of the private sector to job creation is beyond significant. U.S. venture-capital investment reached $320 billion in 2025, up 51 percent from 2024. By mid-2026, startups had already raised more than $400 billion. Research cited by the Congressional Research Service found that "high-impact" businesses – just 5 to 6 percent of firms – have historically accounted for "almost all [net] job creation in the economy." That's crazy!

Also, small businesses are a huge contributor to our economy, and we must champion, protect and fully support them. This matters because America's 36.2 million small businesses account for 43.5 percent of GDP and employ 62.3 million people – nearly 46 percent of private-sector workers. Over the long run, they have generated about 60 percent of net new jobs.

The Federal Government

The federal government must also play a significant role. We can practically hear the splash from Tea Partiers jumping into Boston Harbor. No doubt the term "federal jobs program" will completely freak some conservatives out. They will probably argue that we don't need some big government, "Socialist" program because our jobs and wage issues will eventually be fully corrected by market forces.

… which would be a strange reaction because U.S. Works is actually a very conservative-minded approach. It replaces a no-strings-attached check with actual jobs – and we all know how much Republicans hate handing out checks to people! :)

The Nuts & Bolts

Clients must be physically present at an Empower Society location to receive credit (the program will have solutions in place for childcare, transportation, and other access issues). Special arrangements will be made for participants who do not live within 30 miles of a Center.

Empower Society clients first meet with highly qualified case managers who assess their skills, then help them create an in-depth profile for potential employers. The profile includes information like work history, education and life skills, plus provides an opportunity for the client to share his or her professional goals, a personal statement, and even an introductory video.

A dedicated website, facilitated by the U.S. Department of Labor, will serve as a clearinghouse of job listings, searchable by category, skill set, and location. This already exists but needs to be modernized.

Two new categories will be added to the existing site. The first includes jobs generated by the projects funded by the newly established National Infrastructure Bank. The United States doesn't currently have a National Infrastructure Bank but should. In fact, it was a majorly lost opportunity – and, quite frankly, irresponsible – that the

Biden administration and Congress didn't create one when they passed the $1.2 trillion-dollar Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act in 2021.

The National Infrastructure Bank is a financial institution – funded with seed capital from the government, then leveraged by our capital markets – that can provide low-interest loans, issue bonds, provide insurance for the bonds of state and local governments**,** streamline the construction process, and coordinate and prioritize the rebuilding efforts**.** It's a no-brainer, which is, of course, why Congress didn't do it.

The other new category on the website is the cornerstone of *U.S. Works*. One of the main criticisms of the Civil Works Administration – a work-relief program established by President Franklin Roosevelt's *New Deal* to provide temporary jobs for over 4 million Americans – was that people were just on the government payroll and not really doing anything... just "pushing leaves around" if you will. That won't be the case here. These are *real jobs*.

Although many infrastructure projects are vast in scope and require mid-skill and/or experienced labor, this country has tons of projects that can benefit from unskilled labor as well. U.S. Works will create these jobs – construction, landscaping, street maintenance, pressure washing, litter removal, trash/recycle collection, graffiti removal, hospitality, warehousing, retail, janitorial services, etc. – and will offer these services at a discounted rate to the public, from individuals to cities to businesses.

The revenue U.S. Works receives by charging for these services will reduce the overall cost of the program, and the services offered will provide an excellent way for businesses and communities to receive low-cost, quality labor while making a positive impact in their community.

A few other things we need to do:

- Organize high-quality, highly accountable registered mentor and apprenticeship opportunities.

- Implement a federal policy that guarantees workers paid time off to care for their new babies or for a sick family member.
- Fully support new small business owners and entrepreneurs.
- Provide significant transitional assistance to workers displaced by advances in technology and/or globalization.
- Protect low-income workers from monopsony and collusion.
- Modernize labor laws through waivers from federal law to allow state experimentation.
- Call on state and local governments to dismantle unjustified barriers to upward mobility caused by occupational licensing.

Second Rocket Fuel: Government Investment in Low-Wealth Americans

Facilitate Financing

- Wholeheartedly support Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs), which play an important role in generating economic growth and opportunity in some of America's most distressed communities.
- Encourage more banks to engage in Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) lending, where financial institutions commit to help meet the credit needs of the communities in which they do business, including low- and moderate-income neighborhoods.
- Require Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to partner more with banks that conduct Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) lending.
- Create a less complicated and less-burdensome supervisory and regulatory process for community banks.

- Increase access to mortgages for "small dollar" homes (homes that are less than $150,000) that already exist. Reduce Dodd-Frank restrictions on community banks and credit unions so they will make these loans.
- Increase access to home improvement loans, especially for small dollar homes that would not pass inspection criteria to qualify for a mortgage.
- Change loan-officer compensation practices to a flat fee for every loan made rather than compensation based on a percentage of the mortgage to encourage loan officers to offer/make small-loans.
- Find a better balance between overly restrictive credit requirements and giving borrowers the opportunity for sustainable home-ownership. However, DO NOT even come close to repeating the mistakes of the 2007-2009 Financial Crisis.
- Enthusiastically support microlending impact funds, which are investment vehicles that focus on providing small loans to people or businesses in underserved communities who lack access to traditional banking. The goal is to create a positive social impact while also enjoying a financial return.
- Encourage states to start social innovation funds.
- Lobby corporations and banks to commit 2 percent of their annual profits to capitalize financial institutions that service minority-owned businesses and entrepreneurs.
- Lobby corporate America and banks to invest in banking, telecom, technology, education, and health care infrastructure to benefit minority communities.
- Extend the Federal Reserve's Term Asset-Backed Securities Loan Facility to leverage these types of loans from banks and corporate America.

Leverage the Tax Code

- Create a refundable housing credit for all homeowners that would allow more taxpayers to enjoy the housing benefits of the tax code.
- Reduce poverty by providing an enhanced minimum benefit for low-wage workers.
- Reinstate the First-Time Homebuyer Tax Credit and make it permanent.
- Overhaul the Opportunity Zone program, a program that incentivizes people to invest in distressed areas across the country. Add public reporting, terminate high-income zones, and prohibit casinos, stadiums and luxury apartments.

Promote Savings

- Reboot the My Retirement Account (myRA) to provide a safe and portable savings accounts for workers with low wages.
- Establish universal Children's Savings Accounts (a.k.a. baby bonds) for every American child at birth.
- Allow families who participate in public benefit programs to have at least three month's income in savings.
- Expand the Saver's Credit and make it refundable, which will create more accessibility for more low-wage families.

Broaden Home Ownership

- Let go of the old-school "white-picket-fence" image of what home ownership was in the past and embrace every type of housing – including everything from single-family homes to townhouses to high-rise apartments.

- Improve the FHA Rehabilitation Mortgage Insurance Program, which insures mortgages covering the purchase or refinancing and rehabilitation of a home that is at least a year old.
- Empower the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) to improve its underwriting process and make it more flexible, and address appraisal gap issues that are often found in low-cost markets.
- Champion the Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program to increase a family's earned income and reduce their dependency on government assistance and rental subsidies.
- Increase Housing Mobility-Related Services Notice of Funding Opportunity to the Community Choice Demonstration to expand housing choices for Housing Choice Voucher families by increasing their access to opportunity neighborhoods with high-performing schools, access to jobs, low crime, parks, and other amenities.
- Have the Bureau of Land Management auction off land suitable for residential development.
- Encourage cities and states to launch initiatives that invest in new housing construction, with a focus on starter homes.
- Incentivize cities and states to ease up on land use restrictions and other undue regulations, which is decimating housing affordability.
- Incentivize cities and states to provide a broader and more affordable range of housing options to alleviate tight housing market conditions.
- Incentivize cities and states to modernize zoning laws and code requirements and to streamline permitting processes.
- Recommend that city and state governments endorse smaller lot size limits for new construction.

† Urge states to look closely at state-level zoning preemption programs that have the effect of banning single-family zoning. This is a necessary step because, as of 2019, 75 percent of the residential land in America was zoned exclusively for single-family use. Zoning that does not allow for any multifamily development to this degree is unsustainable as our population continues to grow.

Not only have decades of single-family zoning regulations severely limited the housing supply and artificially raised prices, but they have made housing exclusionary, perpetuating racial and class segregation and preventing families from living in neighborhoods with better schools and job opportunities.

Third Rocket Fuel:
Provide Guidance for Optimal Financial Inclusion

† Provide personalized financial counseling to include debt management, credit counseling, and budget advice.

† Re-enforce financial literacy, a critical life skill that is the foundation for the development of financial security and independence.

† Begin a broad dialogue on the importance of personal retirement savings.

Fourth Rocket Fuel:
Boost Opportunities for Wealth Creation

* Build Assets
(see Second and Fifth Rocket Fuels)

* Partner with Banks and Corporate America

(see Second Rocket Fuel)

* Promote Savings

(see Second Rocket Fuel)

Fifth Rocket Fuel:
Block Policies That Sabotage Advancement

Reduce Bureaucracy

- Launch Operation Overhaul.

Ensure Equitable Housing

- Rebuild and protect an independent Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. Protect its Office of Fair Lending and Equal Opportunity.
- Honor the Fair Housing Act: Reinstate the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing Rule.
- Honor the Fair Housing Act: Protect the Small Area Fair Market Rent Rule
- Honor the Fair Housing Act: Protect the Discriminatory Effects Doctrine, which addresses policies that unnecessarily cause systemic inequality in housing, regardless of whether they were adopted with discriminatory intent.
- Enforce existing laws to end redlining and housing and lending discrimination once and for all.

- Put an end to unfair property assessments, which cause widespread over-taxation of the homes of minorities.
- Expand the protected classes to protect people against discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity and marital status.
- Continue to go after tech companies that restrict access to housing ads based on characteristics like race, religion, or national origin.
- Stop predatory land contract practices. Demand that all contracts for deed be appropriately recorded.

Champion Consumer Protection

Lending

- Rebuild and protect an independent Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. Protect its Office of Fair Lending and Equal Opportunity.

- Reinstitute strict restrictions on payday lenders. Reverse Donald Trump's decision to not treat them like credit card companies.
- As payday lending gains restrictions, watch the "consumer installment loan" market closely for potential predatory lending.

Financial Institutions

- Ban fixed fee overdraft programs. Banks can instead charge reasonable interest rates as they do for any small loan.
- Strictly and consistently enforce high standards and accountability for credit rating agencies and NRSROs.

Debt Collection

- Require that debt-buying companies provide proof that they own a debt before they can sue a debtor.
- Stop debt collectors from harassing consumers and collecting on "zombie" debts.

Credit Scoring

- Do everything possible to protect unscorable and credit invisible consumers.
- Demand that credit-scoring mechanisms be fair to protect consumers from abusive and harmful lending practices.

Sixth Rocket Fuel:
Ensure Fair and Equitable Education
(see America's Best Chance, p. 63)

Free Speech

The Bottom Line

- Every American must now come together to vehemently protect the First Amendment as if our democracy depends on it – because it does. Our First Amendment rights are *everything*, and our defense of them must transcend the political quagmire we have gotten ourselves into. We cannot be like that frog in the pot who, because the temperature is raised ever so slowly, doesn't realize he is getting boiled to

death until it's too late. If we allow *anyone* to weaken our rights in any way, that's the ball game. *Game over*.

† As our hero, the great abolitionist Frederick Douglass, said in his Plea for Free Speech in Boston: Free speech "of all rights, is the dread of tyrants. It is the right which they first of all strike down… Thrones, dominions, principalities and powers, founded in injustice and wrong are sure to tremble, if men are allowed to reason of righteousness, temperance, and of a judgment to come in their presence."

The Holocaust Encyclopedia paints an even clearer picture: "When the Nazis came to power in 1933, the German constitution guaranteed freedom of speech and freedom of the press. Through decrees and laws, the Nazis abolished these civil rights and destroyed German democracy. Starting in 1934, it was illegal to criticize the Nazi government. Even telling a joke about Hitler was considered treachery. People in Nazi Germany could not say or write whatever they wanted."

♦ ♦ ♦

We believe the right to freedom of speech should have very few restrictions… and the U.S. Supreme Court backs us up on this. Although the highest court has ruled that free speech isn't 100% guaranteed in America, it's pretty darn close.

The exceptions are few but important. You can't make false statements of fact that harms someone's reputation (a.k.a. defamation); you can't knowingly make false statements to gain money or material benefit (a.k.a. fraud); speech connected to illegal conduct, speech that violates intellectual property law, and commercial speech like advertising all have lesser or no protection; and there are no protections for child pornography or sexually explicit material on broadcast radio and television.

To this end, Miller v. California (1973) established "The Miller Test" to determine whether expression constitutes obscenity, which is not protected by law. For material to be deemed obscene, the work

must lack serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value; the average person must find that the work appeals to a prurient interest (i.e., a shameful or morbid interest in sex); and the work must depict sexual conduct in a patently offensive way, as defined by applicable state law.

There are additional exceptions. Cox v. New Hampshire (1941) established the "time, place, and manner" doctrine, allowing governments to impose reasonable, content-neutral restrictions on speech and assembly, and Brandenburg v. Ohio (1969) held that the government can punish speech as incitement only if it is likely to cause "imminent lawless action." This comes into play on days like those before, during and after the January 6th Capitol riots and a few of the Israeli/Palestinian protests on college campuses in 2024.

In our minds, the Supreme Court has gotten it exactly right, and that means that, in a free country like America, it's inevitable that even the vilest and most hateful speech is also protected. As Larry Flynt, the wise sage and owner of the porn magazine Hustler, once said, "No one understands that the First Amendment is only important if you are going to offend somebody. If you're not going to offend somebody, you don't need protection of the First Amendment."

The Supreme Court doubled-down on free speech in the 1989 case of Texas v. Johnson, when they ruled that burning the U.S. flag as a form of protest is a constitutionally protected form of expression under the First Amendment – a decision that, though hard to swallow at times, is also the right one.

As the late Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia wrote, "It was a five to four decision, and I made the fifth vote. Patriotic conservative that I am, I detest the burning of the nation's flag. If I were king, I would make it a crime. But as I understand the First Amendment, it guarantees the right to express contempt for the government, Congress, Supreme Court, even the nation or the nation's flag."

But here's the thing about free speech that many people seem to forget these days: *It cuts both ways*.

As the fabulous Winston Churchill once said, "Everyone is in favor of free speech. Hardly a day passes without its being extolled,

but some people's idea of it is that they are free to say what they like, but if anyone says anything back, that is an outrage."

It's true that, in America, every president, every member of the U.S. Congress, every late-night television host, and every American citizen has the right to say whatever they want to say, whenever they want to say it (if it doesn't violate the "imminent lawless action" rule, of course). BUT *everyone else* has the right to *react* to what is said in any way *they* choose.

This point always reminds us of the band The Chicks (formally Dixie Chicks). In 2003, right before the U.S. invasion of Iraq, one of the Chicks, Natalie Maines, told a London audience that the band was against the war and "ashamed" that President George W. Bush was from Texas. Her comments led to an enormous backlash from their fans, corporate boycotts, and their music being dropped from thousands of radio stations across America. Almost two decades later, Natalie said that she thought her band was "one of the first to feel that 'cancel culture.'"

We love The Chicks and, in this case, don't believe the punishment fit the crime. But the fact remains that, while *every* American has a right to say whatever they want, *everyone else* has the right to their personal reaction to it. If Natalie's fans were offended enough by her comments to stop buying her albums, then they had every right to be.

Someone yelling "Free Speech" after saying something controversial doesn't immunize them from the repercussions that may come with what they said.

†

Okay, so all that covers one aspect of free speech. But now it's time to discuss the most dangerous threat to the First Amendment this country has encountered in decades, if not ever: the Trump/Vance administration.

Even though President Trump promised to "immediately stop all government censorship and bring back free speech to America" during his second inaugural address – plus signed an Executive Order banning the government from "any conduct that would unconstitutionally abridge the free speech of any American citizen" – he has since trampled all over the First Amendment, doing everything under the sun to silence his political rivals, quash any and all dissent, and punish those he perceives to have slighted him in any way.

Now, Charlie Kirk's death has sent the Trump/Vance administration into censorship overdrive as they weaponize the tragedy, using it as an excuse to put the weight of the entire federal government behind a tyrannical crackdown on any communication they consider objectionable.

Right out of the gate – and making it all about himself, of course – President Trump threatened to revoke the licenses of broadcast television networks that are "against" him: "They give me only bad publicity, press. I mean, they're getting a license. I would think maybe their license should be taken away."

Saying that broadcasters are "entirely different than people that use other forms of communication," Federal Communications Commission Chairman Brendan Carr claimed that "(broadcasters) have a license granted by us at the FCC that comes with it an obligation to operate in the public interest. I mean, look, we can do this the easy way or the hard way." He followed this up by saying, "We at the FCC are going to enforce the public interest obligation. If there's broadcasters out there that don't like it, they can turn their license in to the FCC. But that's our job, and again we're making some progress now."

< Remember, earlier we defended the right of Corporate America to make *their own* business decisions. We would NEVER support the federal government interfering with those decisions or trying to bully companies into submission. >

At this point, practically everyone in the Trump/Vance administration piled on the anti-free speech train. U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi said, "There's free speech, and then there's hate speech. We will absolutely target you, go after you, if you are targeting anyone with hate speech" – revealing that the chief law enforcement

officer in the United States didn't understand that, in America, there is no delineation between "free" speech and "hate" speech. She also claimed she has the authority to investigate businesses that refused to print memorial vigil posters for Mr. Kirk.

Then there's Vice President JD Vance. Even though, early on, he scolded our European allies for allowing free speech to "retreat" across Europe – while, at the same time, assuring them that "under Donald Trump's leadership, we may disagree with your views, but we will fight to defend your right to offer it in the public square, agree or disagree" – Vance announced on Charlie Kirk's podcast, which he hosted days after his death, that the Trump/Vance administration would be going "after the NGO (non-governmental organization) network that foments, facilitates and engages in violence."

"We have to talk about this incredibly destructive movement of leftwing extremism that has grown up over the last few years and, I believe, is part of the reason why Charlie was killed by an assassin's bullet," the vice president said.

He then suggested that the Ford Foundation and the Open Society Foundations, the nonprofit run by George Soros, would be great places to start, lamenting the "generous tax treatment" they receive. The only evidence he offered was a report in the Nation magazine, titled "Charlie Kirk's Legacy Deserves No Mourning," that he claimed tried to justify Kirk's death and incite violence against conservatives.

Problem is, Bhaskar Sunkara, the president of the Nation, said unequivocally that the magazine had never received funds from the Open Society Foundations, and both the Open Society Foundations and the Ford Foundation said they do not currently fund the Nation.

VP Vance's allegations were an obvious nod to President Trump's earlier assertion that his "administration will find each and every one of those who contributed to this atrocity and to other political violence, including the organizations that fund it and support it, as well as those who go after our judges, law enforcement officials and everyone else who brings order to our country."

The President of the United States even threatened to target George Soros under the Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (RICO): "We're going to look into Soros because I

think it's a RICO case against him and other people because this is more than protests. This is real agitation; this is riots on the street – and we're going to look into that."

Open Society Foundations has been forced to repeatedly deny these – and worse – accusations for years, including in this statement in August 2025: "We do not pay people to protest or directly train or coordinate protestors. All Open Society grantees are required to comply with the law, and we expect our grantees to uphold our shared commitment to human rights, dignity, and nonviolence. The Open Society Foundations oppose all forms of violence, including violent protests."

In September 2025, over 100 philanthropies and institutions – including the Ford Foundation and Open Society Foundations – issued a letter condemning "acts of political violence" and denounced the recent murders of Kirk and of Melissa Hortman in Minnesota, saying such acts "have no place in our democracy."

The letter said, in part, "Our country is built on the premise that everyone has the right to express themselves, even when others don't agree with or like what they say. No one should fear for their safety simply for expressing their views… Organizations should not be attacked for carrying out their missions or expressing their values in support of the communities they serve. We reject attempts to exploit political violence to mischaracterize our good work or restrict our fundamental freedoms, like freedom of speech and the freedom to give. Attempts to silence speech, criminalize opposing viewpoints, and misrepresent and limit charitable giving undermine our democracy and harm all Americans."

THIS IS UNACCEPTABLE. Every American must now come together to vehemently protect the First Amendment as if our democracy depends on it – because it does.

Our First Amendment rights are *everything* and our defense of them must transcend the political quagmire we have gotten ourselves into. We cannot be like that frog in the pot who, because the temperature is raised ever so slowly, doesn't realize he is getting boiled to death until it's too late. If we allow *anyone* to weaken our rights in any way, that's the ball game. *Game over*.

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Gambling in Sports

The Bottom Line

- The negative consequences of sports betting are becoming difficult to ignore. Somehow, we went from Pete Rose being banned from baseball for life for betting his team would win to sports teams embedding logos and rosters into video games in exchange for millions of dollars and sports leagues now having direct financial stakes in ancillary sports betting companies to N.B.A. player Terry Rozier limping off the basketball court early due to "foot discomfort" so that allegedly his childhood friend Deniro Laster, and whoever else, could become rich.
- There are ways to mitigate the damage of sports betting without banning it. We can restrict gambling ads before, during and after games; ban bets on individual player performance; and, on gambling apps, ban VIP programs, make it harder to place bets, and crack down on "loot boxes," a form of monetization where players spend money to blindly

purchase packs of random virtual items, hoping to be rewarded with ones of great value.

♦ ♦ ♦

The indictment federal prosecutors unveiled in January 2025 charging 26 men with participating in a conspiracy to bribe and manipulate college basketball games involving then-active college athletes should be the last straw (and this came *after* the arrests of over 30 people – including an N.B.A. player and a head coach – in October 2025 over allegations involving insider bets on basketball games and poker games rigged by Mafia families).

It was one thing when sports gambling was limited to office break rooms, local bars, and college frat houses, but things rapidly changed after the 2018 U.S. Supreme Court case Murphy v. National Collegiate Athletic Association struck down a federal sports gambling ban and, as a result, states started legalizing it. Today, some form of sports betting is available in 38 states plus the District of Columbia, and placing bets by simply hitting a button on your phone is easier than ever.

Somehow, we went from Pete Rose being banned from baseball for life for betting his team would win to sports teams embedding logos and rosters into video games in exchange for millions of dollars and sports leagues now having direct financial stakes in ancillary sports betting companies to N.B.A. player Terry Rozier limping off the basketball court early due to "foot discomfort" so that allegedly his childhood friend Deniro Laster, and whoever else, could become rich.

Americans bet nearly $150 billion on sports in 2024. Thirty-seven percent (37%) of Americans who participated in a Seton Hall University survey say they have placed a bet sometime in their life and, for self-described "avid" fans, that number is 60 percent.

A Siena Research Institute poll found half of all men aged 18-49 have active online sports betting accounts. You can bet on practically anything now – including the outcome of presidential and congressional elections, whether aliens will be confirmed to exist by

the end of 2025, and even who Taylor Swift's maid-of-honor is going to be.

The negative consequences of this are becoming difficult to ignore. According to a 2025 U.S. News & World Report survey, one-quarter of sports bettors say they have been unable to pay a bill because of wagers they have made; 30 percent say they have debts because of gambling; over 15 percent say they have taken out a personal loan to pay for gambling debts; and one-quarter of them worry that they can't control their gambling.

Sports betting is also becoming increasingly damaging to – and unsafe for – athletes, 21 percent of whom have been verbally abused either in person or online by people who place bets… to the point where "we call ourselves zoo animals," Boston Red Sox pitcher Lucas Giolito has said. Giolito reports that not only have bettors threatened him, they have also told him he should commit suicide.

But perhaps the saddest thing of all is that gambling is slowly corroding the fun and carefreeness of America's favorite pastimes – at a time when we need them the most. Our enjoyment and camaraderie are being screwed with by The House. And The House always wins.

Although almost 53 percent of Americans support legalization of sports gambling nationwide – and 59 percent support it in their own state – six in ten are now concerned that legalized sports gambling could likely encourage corruption in sports.

There are ways to mitigate the damage of sports betting without banning it. We can restrict gambling ads before, during and after games; ban bets on individual player performance; and, on gambling apps, ban VIP programs, make it harder to place bets, and crack down on "loot boxes," a form of monetization where players spend money to blindly purchase packs of random virtual items, hoping to be rewarded with ones of great value.

Mental Health

The Facts

- The 2026 World Happiness Report – which analyzes data from the Gallup World Poll – ranks the United States 23rd in the world, a slight improvement from 24th in 2025, our lowest ranking ever. More disturbing is the generational divide: Americans under 30 rank just 60th in the world. And when the report measures the change in happiness among people under 25 since 2006–2010, the United States fares even worse. Along with Canada, Australia and New Zealand, it ranks between 122nd and 133rd out of 136 countries – among the steepest declines in youth happiness anywhere in the world.
- The American Psychological Association's (APA) report Stress in America 2025 reveals 62 percent of American adults cite societal division as a significant source of stress in their lives. Half of adults reported feelings of emotional disconnection, saying they have felt isolated from others (54 percent), felt left out (50 percent), or have lacked companionship (50 percent) often or some of the time, suggesting loneliness may have become a defining feature of life in America.
- This sad news came a year after the APA's Stress in America report revealed a country dealing with multiple stressors as Americans braced for the 2024 U.S. presidential election. Taken straight from the report:
  - More than 7 in 10 adults reported the future of our nation (77 percent) as a significant source of stress in their lives, making it the most common source of significant stress in this year's survey. The economy was the second most common, with percent of adults having reported it as a significant source of stress. The 2024 U.S. presidential election followed closely at 69 percent.

- Around 2 in 5 adults reported the state of the nation has made them consider moving to a different country (41 percent) and the political environment in their state has made them consider moving to a different state (39 percent). In addition, nearly two-thirds of adults (64 percent) felt as though their rights are under attack.
- A strong majority (82 percent) were worried that people may be basing their values and opinions on false or inaccurate information.
- Around a third of adults (32 percent) reported the political climate has caused strain between them and their family members, and 3 in 10 (30 percent) said they limit their time with family because they don't share the same values.

- Research from the University of Nebraska and the University of California San Francisco also found that America's political environment can have a negative impact on the mental health of Americans: "Large numbers of Americans reported politics takes a significant toll on a range of health markers – everything from stress, loss of sleep, or suicidal thoughts to an inability to stop thinking about politics and making intemperate social media posts."

- A March 2023 survey conducted by NORC (at the University of Chicago) and The Wall Street Journal found that 78 percent of respondents said they don't feel confident that life for their children's generation will be better than it has been for their own, the highest percentage since the survey began asking the question over three decades ago. Only 12 percent of respondents described themselves as "very happy," the lowest percentage of Americans in fifty years.

- The National Alliance on Mental Illness reports that over 40 million adults in America have an anxiety disorder.

- In the latest mental health survey from KFF – an independent, nonpartisan source for health policy research, polling, and journalism – **"**an overwhelming majority of the public (90 percent)

think there is a mental health crisis in the U.S. today, with most people saying the opioid epidemic, mental health issues in children and teenagers, and severe mental illness are at crisis level in the country. Taken straight from the report:

- Many adults report experiencing what may be considered a severe mental health crisis among their family members. Half of all adults (51 percent) say they or a family member have experienced a severe mental health crisis, including received in-person treatment because they were a threat to themselves or others (28 percent), engaged in cutting or self-harm behaviors (26 percent), had a drug overdose requiring an ER visit (21 percent), experienced homelessness (16 percent) or ran away from home (14 percent) due to mental health problems, died by suicide (16 percent), or had a severe eating disorder (8 percent).
- The youngest adults, ages 18-29, are both the group reporting the most concerns with their mental health and also more likely to report they are seeking mental health services, but not always able to access them. Half of young adults say they have felt anxious either "always" or "often" in the past year (compared to a third of adults overall), one-third describe their mental health or emotional well-being as "only fair" or "poor" (compared to 22 percent of adults overall).

- Suicide is the second-leading cause of death for Americans ages 10 to 34.
  - Suicide attempts were reported most frequently among girls compared to boys and among non-Hispanic American Indian or Alaska Native students.
  - Young people who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual have higher prevalence of suicidal thoughts and behavior compared to their peers who identify as heterosexual.
  - Youth and young adults have high rates of emergency room visits for self-harm. The rate of ER visits among girls in 2020 was approximately double compared to 2001.

- The number of American deaths caused by alcohol-related diseases more than doubled between 1999 and 2020. The largest increase was among those age 25 to 34, whose rate of death increased by almost four times. Although women are far less likely than men to die of an illness caused by alcohol, their rate of death has increased by two and a half times.

1787 Plan of Action: Mental Health

- Establish and implement programs that address "the poverty of isolation," and ones that establish positive human connection.
- Take a comprehensive public health approach to protect our children, focusing on school climate and mental health services.
- Develop and execute partnership and communication strategies to raise awareness and advance suicide prevention activities.
- Identify risk and protective factors and effective policies, programs, and practices for suicide prevention in populations at increased risk for suicide.
- Enforce the 2008 Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act (MHPAEA), which requires insurance coverage for mental health conditions, including substance use disorders, to be no more restrictive than insurance coverage for other medical conditions.
- Have a zero-tolerance policy toward cyberbullying. Fully prosecute abusers.
- 1787 supports "red flag" laws that temporarily confiscate guns from individuals who appear to be a danger to themselves or others.
- 1787 supports expanded screening for mental illness regarding gun purchases.

Opioids/Addiction

Mayday! Mayday! Mayday!

The cuts to Medicaid in the Republicans' One Big Beautiful Bill hit drug addicts hard. We must fight to repeal these cuts ASAP. Because almost half of non-elderly adults with an opioid addiction are on Medicaid, research by Boston University and the University of Pennsylvania estimate that the law will end access to opioid treatment for 156,000 Americans, resulting in up to 1,000 additional fatal overdoses a year. To add insult to injury, the legislation also targets many hospitals and clinics that treat addition (almost two-thirds of patients getting outpatient treatment for opioid addiction are on Medicaid.

Members of Congress included a provision in the One Big Beautiful Bill meant to help protect people with substance use disorders from losing Medicaid coverage, but the exemption requires the addict to navigate an extremely complex process, including getting a doctor's diagnosis.

♦ ♦ ♦

After years of relentless death and devastation, America has finally seen a sustained decline in drug overdose deaths. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) data show 79,384 overdose deaths in 2024, with the overdose death rate falling 26.2 percent from 2023 – the largest one-year decline ever recorded. The improvement continued in 2025, when overdose deaths fell another 14 percent, to an estimated 69,973. And the latest CDC data suggest the decline is continuing into 2026, with an estimated 67,798 deaths during the 12 months ending in March.

This is welcomed news given that, in the 12-month period ending April 2021, the CDC reported there were over 100,000 drug overdose deaths reported in America. This was the first time in history that drug-related deaths passed the six-figure mark in a 12-month period.

Experts and law enforcement officials say there are many possible explanations for the decline in deaths, including expanded treatment; increased access to Medications for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD), which uses FDA-approved medications like methadone, buprenorphine and naltrexone to manage and/or suppress opioid cravings; harm reduction techniques; the enforcement of laws; and improved educational and public health messaging campaigns.

But another reason could be a major change in the drugs themselves. In November 2024, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) announced that, for the first time since 2021, they saw a decrease in the potency of fentanyl pills. The agency reported that "the latest DEA laboratory testing indicates 5 out of 10 pills tested in 2024 contain a potentially deadly dose of fentanyl. This is down from 7 out of ten pills in 2023 and 6 out of ten pills in 2022."

The DEA attributed this diminished potency to pressure the U.S. has put on the criminal networks that supply fentanyl to the U.S. – namely the Sinaloa and Jalisco cartels – and other international supply chains.

But experts also say there may be a hidden consequence of this shift that we must watch closely. As people have become more aware of the dangers of synthetic opioids like fentanyl, they may be simply replacing them with other drugs like methamphetamine or cocaine.

For this and many more reasons, it's important to remember that we are far from being out of the woods when it comes to America's drug crisis. Unfortunately, the numbers appear to be ticking up again. The CDC reports there were more overdose deaths in January 2025 than the year before.

Even though we are seeing improvement on a national level, The Guardian found wide geographical disparities in opioid deaths throughout the nation. In some U.S. counties, drug overdose deaths rose by as much as 120 percent in 2024.

Breaking the numbers down by race has always been alarming. State-by-state data shows that black people suffer far worse outcomes than white people when it comes to overdose deaths.

Research by Georgetown University found that, while the number of fatal overdoses among white Americans often decreased between 2022 and 2023 in the 22 states that track drug overdoses by race and ethnicity, overdose deaths among black Americans generally increased.

This is a continuation of a distressing trend that has occurred for years. In Washington, D.C., "the city's medical examiner identified fentanyl in 95 percent of the 87 overdose deaths through March of 2021, a number that had risen steadily in recent years; 281 overdose deaths in 2019; and 411 in 2020." Black residents, who were then 46 percent of the city's population "were disproportionately affected." More than four out of five people who had fatal overdoses in Washington, D.C. during that time were black.

In Baltimore – where close to 6,000 people have died of drug overdoses over the past six years, far higher than any other American city – black men in their mid-50s to early 70s have been hit hard. Although this group accounts for only seven percent of Baltimore's population, they make-up almost 30 percent of its drug deaths. This is TWENTY TIMES the fatality rate of the rest of the country.

The Pew Research Center reports that "while overdose death rates have increased in every major demographic group in recent years, no group has seen a bigger increase than black men… As recently as 2015, black men were considerably less likely than both white men and American Indian or Alaska Native men to die from drug overdoses. Since then, the death rate among black men has more than tripled – rising 213 percent – while rates among men in every other major racial or ethnic group have increased at a slower pace."

Likewise, fatal overdoes among black women "rose 144 percent between 2015 and 2020, far outpacing the percentage increases among women in every other racial or ethnic group during the same period."

Dr. Allison Arwady, the director of the CDC's National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, put it this way: While the recent decline in fatal overdoses is a positive development, "it comes with the risk

that people will say, 'We're doing okay now on drug overdoses, we're making progress." However, "there are entire communities that are not seeing that progress. Many families continue to be impacted by it every day. So, it has to remain a priority for the CDC and public health across the country."

National Opioid Withdrawal (NOW)

1787 Plan of Action: Opioids/Addiction

Prevention + Treatment + Supply/Demand + Harm Reduction

Prevention

- Address the social issues that facilitate and embolden opioid addiction to not only exist but thrive.
- Establish national curriculum and standards to help preserve the use of opioids for those who suffer chronic pain and don't get addicted.
- End the pharmaceutical industry's use of misleading, aggressive marketing campaigns.
- Begin prevention education campaigns in seventh grade.
- Require all doctors, dentists, nurse practitioners and other prescribers receive training in the management of opioids and their misuse.

Treatment

- Support Medications for Opioid Use Disorder (MOUD), which uses FDA-approved medications like methadone, buprenorphine and naltrexone to manage and/or suppress opioid cravings.

- Support mandated treatment for drug addicts who pose a risk to themselves or others. In 34 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands, involuntary commitment laws can be used to involuntarily commit an individual with a primary diagnosis of substance use disorders (SUD). In the remaining 15 states, American Samoa, Guam, and the Northern Mariana Islands, individuals with a primary diagnosis of SUD cannot be involuntarily committed.
- Hire nurses/social workers to follow up regularly with overdose patients, making sure they have the support they need to get back on their feet.
- Enforce the 2008 Mental Health Parity and Addiction Equity Act (MHPAEA), which requires insurance coverage for mental health conditions, including substance use disorders, to be no more restrictive than insurance coverage for other medical conditions.
- Expand pre-trial diversion programs and incarceration alternatives that encourage treatment (i.e. rehabilitation, drug courts, etc.).
- Support programs where law enforcement agencies offer treatment for those who seek help.
- Assist with housing, healthcare and other transitional services for those leaving the criminal justice system.
- Encourage contingency management programs, which provide money and prizes for addicts who stay abstinent.

Supply/Demand

- Support the Fentanyl Sanctions Act and the Fentanyl Reduction Engrained by Economic Deterrence Act (an amendment to the original legislation) which address the origins of the fentanyl supply chain and impose sanctions on foreign individuals and entities that knowingly supply fentanyl to drug traffickers.

- Reinforce the Synthetics Trafficking and Overdose Prevention Act of 2018 (STOP Act), which facilitates international interdiction efforts.
  - Clearly define roles and responsibilities for monitoring performance across International Mail Facilities (IMFs).
  - Establish key performance metrics and targeting goals to assess the effectiveness of mail operations.
  - Improve training efforts.
  - Develop advance electronic data waivers using U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) data to assess a country's risk eligibility.
  - Enforce penalties when the U.S. Postal Service accepts mail without advance electronic data.
- Encourage states to utilize Prescription Drug Monitoring Programs (PDMPs) to improve opioid prescribing.
- Fortify the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL). Establish more effective ways to measure the agency's long-term impact and ensure there is proper oversight of its programs in foreign countries.
  - Disrupt transnational crime and enforce strong criminal penalties against transnational criminal networks.
  - Help foreign governments build effective law enforcement institutions that counter transnational crime.
  - Combat corruption by helping governments and civil society build transparent and accountable public institutions.
- Establish and implement international treaties for combating crime and provide tools for legal cooperation in criminal cases among countries.
- Work with international partners to develop effective approaches to border and maritime security.

- Disrupt and dismantle human trafficking networks before migrants reach the United States.
- Support the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA).
- Work with Canada to increase joint law enforcement efforts and fortify cross-border security operations.

Harm Reduction
(If We Can't Stop It, Make it Safer)

- Embrace harm reduction programs and techniques. Emphasize compassion and increase the opportunities peers and/or service providers have with people who use drugs.
- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) lists the following ways harm reduction can be helpful:
  - Connects individuals to overdose education, counseling, and referral to treatment for infectious diseases and substance use disorders.
  - Distributes opioid overdose reversal medications (e.g., naloxone) to individuals at risk of overdose, or to those who are likely to respond to an overdose.
  - Lessens harms associated with drug use and related behaviors that increase the risk of infectious diseases, including HIV, viral hepatitis, and bacterial and fungal infections.
  - Reduces infectious disease transmission among people who use drugs (including those who inject drugs) by equipping them with sterile supplies, accurate information and facilitating referrals to resources.
  - Reduces overdose deaths, promotes linkages to care, and facilitates co-location of services as part of a comprehensive, integrated approach.

- Reduces stigma associated with substance use and co-occurring disorders.
- Promotes a philosophy of hope and healing by employing people with living and lived experience in leadership and in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of services. People with lived experience can also model for their peers what meaningful change can look like in their lives.
- Builds community and increases protective factors for people who use drugs and their families.

Reparations

There have been many types of oppression and discrimination in our nation's history, but the experience for slaves and American Indians are unique to themselves.

At the core of the egregious moral injury heaped on slaves and American Indians is theft, often through violence. For American Indians, it is the theft of ancestral lands; theft of natural resources; theft of autonomy; theft of culture, traditions and identity. For slaves, it is the theft of family; theft of labor; theft of freedom; theft of their homeland.

Sins of this magnitude don't cause hardship, pain and suffering just for the people it's originally inflicted upon. It is a wisteria type of sorrow that twists and tangles – feeding and nurturing new injustices – until it eventually threatens to choke an entire society for generations to come.

For many modern-day American Indians and black Americans, it comes in the form of geographic segregation, dangerous neighborhoods, health and income disparities, limited social mobility, fair and affordable housing, credit access, lending discrimination, lack of financial safety nets, and massive wealth and educational gaps. For white Americans, it comes in the form of an invisible but assumed separation from their black neighbors and confusion over what their

culpability should be for evils that happened hundreds of years before they were born.

These are immoral harms that transcend time and centuries, and we finally reach a point where a national reckoning is inescapable – and a collective debt must be paid.

There is not enough money in the world to reimburse what slaves had already lost as they arrived near Point Comfort, Virginia in 1619 – and continued to lose long after President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863.

We believe the best way to rectify past wrongs is to implement policies that specifically target inequities and, working together, will level the playing field once and for all. We don't say this in the flippant, meaningless way it's been said by countless politicians in the past – which always ends in broken promises and bitter disappointment. We mean FIRST, FIGHT, FIGHT until injustices on all levels are finally conquered.

… and for the first time in our nation's history we can achieve this because 1787 has designed strategies for our social challenges that are empowering, far-reaching, and truly transformational.

1787 has seven of these policy initiatives:

American's Best Chance (education reform)
Empower Society (poverty/wealth gap)
Let There Be Light (making life easier)
National Opioid Withdrawal (NOW)
New Beginnings (criminal justice reform)
Service for School (affordable higher education)
U.S. Works (jobs and higher wages)

A Word About Direct Financial Compensation

We do not believe direct financial compensation is the way to go for multiple reasons:

- Determining financial compensation means we would have to negotiate – and try to put a price on – varying degrees of victimhood and harm, which just seems divisive and counterproductive.
- We would also have to determine who qualifies for the money which, again, feels divisive and counterproductive. Would this require DNA testing to determine genetic ancestry? What about the 3.1 million Americans who identify as "white and black or African American?" And what about the one million Americans who identify as "black or African American and some other race?"

  This process seems racist in and of itself – suggesting awful things from the past like the Three-Fifths Clause, and later concepts like the "one-drop rule" – and is loaded with complicated and sensitive social, moral and racial implications.
- It's highly likely that whatever financial compensation was ultimately agreed upon – which assumes it could possibly happen, which it probably never in a million years could – would not be enough to make significant, long-lasting changes in someone's life.

Separation of Church & State

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution – the very first one! – says "Congress shall *make no law respecting an establishment of religion* or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

But even before the First Amendment there was Article VI, Clause 3 – known as the "No Religious Test Clause" – that says, "The Senators and Representatives before mentioned, and the Members of

the several State Legislatures, and all executive and judicial Officers, both of the United States and of the several States, shall be bound by Oath or Affirmation, to support this Constitution; *but no religious Test* shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States."

These two Constitutional mandates pretty much say it all, don't they? The old dudes couldn't have been any clearer: THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA DOES NOT HAVE A NATIONAL RELIGION. PERIOD. END OF STORY.

…and every single one of us should be exceedingly grateful for this, because our freedoms are the most valuable currency we have. Please believe us when we say this is not a thread we should pull on. Our Constitution was written by men who witnessed and experienced religious tyranny and, therefore, knew there was a better way.

Despite the Constitutional clarity, the overriding narrative of many of today's Evangelicals is one that positions America as a "Christian nation." Their logic seems to be that, since the Founding Fathers were Christians, their intent was that every American should be one too. This premise is 1000% false. In fact, the intention of the Founding Fathers was exactly the *opposite*…and they were not ambiguous about it in the least.

The Treaty of Tripoli – written, negotiated and approved during the presidency of George Washington then signed by President John Adams – includes the statement, "the Government of the United States of America is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion."

In 1785, in response to Patrick Henry's bill for federal tax-supported religious instruction in Virginia, James Madison (the "Father of the Constitution") wrote Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments, in which he presented to the Virginia General Assembly specific reasons why religious liberty in America is an unalienable right and why there must be complete separation of church and state. He also shot down the idea of chaplains praying before congressional proceedings.

In 1802, President Thomas Jefferson wrote a letter to Baptists in Danbury, Connecticut that said:

> "Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man and his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legislative powers of government reach actions only and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should 'make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,' *thus building a wall of separation between church and state*."

And, not for nothing, but many of the Founding Fathers weren't even Christians in the first place. At least four of the big guys – Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison and James Monroe – were Deists. Deism is a religious philosophy that believes in a creator, but that this supreme being does not interact or intervene in the universe.

In any event, the bottom line is that the First Amendment does not say: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances – *unless those rights make you uncomfortable*. Always remember: It's all fun and games until it happens to *you* and *your* religious beliefs.

Social Media

"If you've built a chaos factory, you can't dodge responsibility for the chaos. Taking responsibility means having the courage to think things through."

– Tim Cook, Chief Executive of Apple –

For two decades, as our politics fractured and misinformation flourished, multiple social media networks emerged to provide a

lightning-fast pathway for even the most asinine propaganda to spread. *This super-spreader superhighway changed everything*.

As we saw with the false Antifa narratives that shot through social media during the protests after the murder of George Floyd and on January 6th – which proved that social media is unrelenting even on our darkest days – social media has enabled widespread deceit to infect the bloodstream of American society, poisoning our politics and enabling pathological collective delusions that are shared by millions of people on obscure conspiracy theory platforms as well as mainstream networks like TikTok, X, Instagram, Facebook and all the rest.

From the racial justice protests in 2020 to misinformation about Covid-19 during the pandemic to the tragic death of Charlie Kirk, instead of bringing the country together amid chaos and grief, social media firms enabled what is the equivalent of bomb-throwing. Instead of promoting productive public discourse, they allowed hundreds of false, inflammatory posts to metastasize.

During the racial justice protests, for example, some posts said George Floyd wasn't even dead. Others claimed that Derek Chauvin, the Minnesota police officer charged in Mr. Floyd's death, was an actor paid by the "Deep State" and that George Soros (of course) was funding the protests around the country.

The week after Mr. Floyd's death, George Soros was mentioned in 34,000 tweets. On YouTube, over 90 videos in five languages were posted detailing various Soros conspiracy theories. He was mentioned in 72,000 posts on Facebook. Together, the ten most active Facebook posts about George Soros were shared over 110,000 times.

Never has the corrosion of social media been as evident as in the days following the horrifying murder of Charlie Kirk. First came the modern-day, Zapruder-like GIF of a husband and father's assassination, played endlessly – over and over and over and over.

Then came the hateful posts, vicious finger pointing, and outright lies that we covered earlier. As usual, this domestic vitriol was helped along by our international nemeses, as China, Russia and Iran gleefully fanned the flames of the horrific tragedy.

Pro-China accounts falsely said that the alleged shooter donated to President Trump's 2020 presidential campaign, and Iran spread the bogus narrative that Israel was behind the shooting in retaliation for Kirk's "opposition" to the June American military strike on Iran.

On the messaging app Telegram, pro-Russia groups spread the lie that, before his death, Kirk had been added to Myrotvorets, a website that publishes a list of people who those behind the site consider to be enemies of Ukraine. This lie eventually made its way to the top of Google's news summary. Storm-1679, a Russian disinformation network, posted a video deceptively implying that Ukrainians broadly celebrated Kirk's killing.

The Center for Internet Security and the Institute for Strategic Dialogue – nonprofits that monitor extremism online – reported that global disinformation groups, including a pro-Russian one named Operation Overload, manufactured "phony news reports, celebrity quotes, and images to push bogus info about the Kirk killing with the intent on inflaming passions among conservative and LGBTQ+ audiences."

Next came the overzealous online sleuthing: What do the words engraved on the bullets mean? Why did the killer engrave *Hey Facist! Catch*!? What does *Notices Bulge/OwO What's This?* mean? Does any of this mean the killer is antifascist, transgender, LGBTQ, or, worse, a Democrat? But if the killer is transgender or LGBTQ, why would he inscribe *If you Read This, You Are GAY Lmao*?

What does it mean that *o bella ciao* was one of the inscriptions? Did the killer mean this as an anti-fascist reference from WWII or did he just like the song from the video game Far Cry 6? Or was it a reference to a track on a Groyper Spotify playlist? WAIT! Does this mean the killer is a Groyper (a follower of the white nationalist influencer Nick Fuentes)? OH MY GOSH! HE IS! Because there is a photo of the alleged killer riding on the back of an inflatable Donald Trump, dressed as what looks like Pepe the frog (the unofficial Groyper mascot). BUT WAIT! Is that photo even real? Or, for that matter, is the photo of him dressed up in a Trump costume for Halloween real? Is his family really MAGA? What's a "furry?" OMG!!! IT'S ALL SO CONFUSING!!!!

Naturally, all the baseless speculation led to an onslaught of conspiracy theories. What's that strange mark that appears then disappears on Charlie Kirk's T-shirt right when the bullet hits him? Why are those guys behind him making those weird hand motions? Who's that sketchy man in the crowd? WAIT! There are several. Why do the alleged killer's texts sound so scripted? What about Benjamin Netanyahu and hedge-fund billionaire Bill Ackman? Weren't they trying to intimidate Kirk lately because he was becoming disenchanted with the Jewish state over the war in Gaza?

In *The Great American Reset*, we went over several examples of how – and how fast – this poopoo spreads, but let's look at a couple more just for fun! After all, we couldn't possibly end this discussion without bringing up Plandemic, a trilogy of films that promoted misinformation about Covid-19 during the pandemic.

As we were all locked down, living the real-life consequences of Covid-19, Plandemic peddled baseless allegations and dangerous advice in the name of "experts," and falsely blamed a shady ring of scientific and political elites for manufacturing the virus to increase their power and bank accounts. The goal of the film, in the filmmaker's own words, was to "expose the scientific and political elite who run the scam that is our global health system" (think big pharma, Bill Gates, the World Health Organization – and, naturally, poor George Soros).

In the first film, released on May 4, 2020, the Plandemic narrator says (in a *very* grave and dramatic tone): "Now, as the fate of nations hang in the balance, Dr. Mikovits is naming names of those behind the plague of corruption that places all human life in danger."

Dr. Mikovits is Judy Mikovits, who the filmmaker called "one of the most accomplished scientists of her generation." In truth, Judy Mikovits is a long-discredited virologist who insisted the shadowy elite cabal was trying to bury her obviously brilliant scientific theories.

Among many fictitious assertions, Mikovits claimed that, although she was instrumental in discovering HIV, she was put in jail for her scientific research by…wait for it…the before mentioned shadowy cabal of elites. However, she was actually put in jail for stealing proprietary information from Whittemore Peterson Institute, who had since fired her < Mikovits maintained she was dragged out of her

house without a warrant; held in jail without charges; and that the lab notebooks and other material she was accused of stealing was "planted" in her house >.

Brian Vastag, a former reporter for The Washington Post who had reported on Mikovits in the past, said his "stomach sank" when he heard about her involvement in Plandemic. Vastag had covered a 2009 paper – co-authored by Mikovits and published in Science magazine – that studied myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome (ME/CFS).

The paper, which maintained ME/CFS may be caused by a mouse retrovirus, was retracted by the authors two years later. In a statement, *Science* wrote that "'multiple laboratories, including those of the original authors, have failed to reliably detect' the mouse retrovirus in chronic fatigue syndrome patients. 'In addition, there is evidence of poor quality control in a number of specific experiments in the report.'"

Among others, Science also fact-checked Plandemic and found that "none of these claims are true." The article then walks through every discredited claim – exhaustively, point by point – to prove it.

When Plandemic was first posted on May 4, 2020, it stayed on the fringes of the Internet for a few hours, circulating through conspiracy theory and anti-vaccine forums. However, it quickly crossed over into the mainstream.

New York Times investigative reporters analyzed exactly how Plandemic blasted its way across the Internet and here's what they found: In less than a day after the video's creator Mikki Willis uploaded the video, a QAnon Facebook group posted the video for its almost 25,000 members. From there, 1,660 people shared the video to their own pages.

At around the same time, Dr. Christiane Northup jumped into the fray. Northup is an OB/GYN physician who was once a "medical expert" on Oprah. During the pandemic, she encouraged her followers to look into QAnon and continued to insist that Covid-19 was nothing more than a plot by the "Deep State" to depopulate America. She said vaccines were "crimes against humanity" and called the Centers for Disease Control a "death cult." In one of her podcasts, she told her

audience that "we are, indeed, at war. It is good versus evil. Dark versus light."

After watching Northup's nightly ten-minute videos at the height of the pandemic, Jonathan Jarry – a biological scientist at McGill University, a research university in Montreal, Quebec, Canada – said, "In this parallel universe, there are Indigo children, time travelers from the future, and geomancers performing acupuncture on Mother Earth by moving rocks around. Rarely have I witnessed such a smorgasbord of gobbledygook from someone who once had an active medical license."

Northup shared the Plandemic video with her nearly 500,000 followers. From there, over 1,000 people shared the video. By the evening of May 4th, Plandemic hit the Reopen Alabama Facebook page. Reopen Alabama was a group advocating for shelter-in-place orders to be lifted and, at the time, had 36,000 members… and was linked with other Reopen America groups around the country. From there it spread like wildfire.

Soon after, the video hit the Facebook page of Nick Catone, a professional mixed martial arts fighter and vocal anti-vaccine activist. Over 2,000 of his almost 70,000 followers "liked" the video. The following day, Melissa Ackison, a candidate who ran in the Republican primary for Ohio's 26th District Senate seat (she lost), posted the video on her Facebook page for her 20,000 followers. Now the video was in the political mainstream, rapidly making its way to Republican groups around the World Wide Web.

By May 7th, YouTube, Vimeo and Facebook had removed Plandemic for violating their misinformation policies but, as usual, the damage was already done. In a little more than a week after Mikki Willis posted the video, it had been viewed over 8 million times across social media networks.

We wish we could say this was the only time during the pandemic that batshit crazy physicians gave bad advice and spread misinformation regarding Covid-19 but, alas, there were plenty of others.

For example, a group of physicians who call themselves "America's Frontline Doctors" spewed falsehoods about Covid-19

vaccines and treatments at a press conference on the steps of the U.S. Supreme Court in July 2020. The event, referred to as the "White Coat Summit," was organized by Simone Gold, the founder of America's Frontline Doctors, in coordination with the conservative Tea Party Patriots – and was broadcast on Breitbart News.

After President Trump promoted a video of the news conference on social media and Donald Trump Jr. declared it a "must watch," views of the video went through the roof.

Social media platforms finally removed the video for promoting false and misleading claims about Covid-19 but, as usual, the damage was done. By that time, versions of the video had been seen millions of times across social media platforms. One version was viewed on Facebook over 16 million times alone.

President Trump was perplexed by the removal of the video. "For some reason the Internet wanted to take them down and took them off. I think they are very respected doctors. There was a woman who was spectacular in her statements about it, that she's had tremendous success with it and they took her voice off. I don't know why they took her off. Maybe they had a good reason, maybe they didn't."

It is unclear which woman Donald thought was "spectacular in her statements," so let's take a closer look at two of the possibilities. The first, Ms. Gold, was arrested for her participation in the January 6th insurrection and eventually pleaded guilty, receiving a 60-day prison sentence and a $9,500 fine. She was subsequently fired from the hospitals she worked for. Three years later, she received a public reprimand from the Medical Board of California, along with a fine of $26,739.25. The Board also required she take educational courses in professionalism and ethics.

Stella Immanuel is a registered physician in Texas who has the distinction of writing 69,000 prescriptions for hydroxychloroquine in 2021 alone (the national average was 43).

< Note: One of the theories America's Frontline Doctors pushed during the pandemic was that the antimalarial drug hydroxychloroquine was effective in treating hospitalized Covid-19 patients – even though randomized controlled trials (the "gold standard" in determining whether treatments are effective) found that

was not the case. To this day, the only FDA-approved treatments for Covid-19 are Paxlovid (nirmatrelvir tablets and ritonavir tablets); Veklury (remdesivir); and, for certain hospitalized adults, Olumiant (baricitinib) and Actemra (tocilizumab). >

This Stella is a piece of work. The Daily Beast reported that "she has often claimed that gynecological problems like cysts and endometriosis are in fact caused by people having sex in their dreams with demons and witches… she alleges alien DNA is currently used in medical treatments, and that scientists are cooking up a vaccine to prevent people from being religious. And, she has said that the government is run in part not by humans but by 'reptilians' and other aliens." Well, that part may actually be true. :)

But wait! Thank God, there's more! "In sermons posted on YouTube and articles on her website, Immanuel claims that medical issues like endometriosis, cysts, infertility, and impotence are caused by sex with 'spirit husbands' and 'spirit wives' – a phenomenon Immanuel describes essentially as witches and demons having sex with people in a dreamworld."

Evidently, "they are responsible for serious gynecological problems. We call them all kinds of names… endometriosis, we call them molar pregnancies, we call them fibroids, we call them cysts, but most of them are evil deposits from the spirit husband. They are responsible for miscarriages, impotence – men that can't get it up." That's some church!

Spreading misinformation wasn't the only thing America's Frontline Doctors (AFLD) were up to. A TIME magazine investigation found that "hundreds of AFLD customers and donors accused the group of touting a service promising prescriptions for ivermectin, which medical authorities say should not be taken to treat or prevent Covid-19, and failing to deliver after a fee had been paid."

"Some customers described being charged for consultations that did not happen. Others said they were connected to digital pharmacies that quoted excessive prices of up to $700 for the cheap medication. In more than 3,000 messages reviewed by TIME, dozens of people described their or their family members' Covid-19 symptoms

worsening while they waited for an unproven 'wonder drug' that didn't arrive."

Dr. Irwin Redlener, the director of the National Center for Disaster Preparedness at Columbia University, put it this way, "They're the 21st century, digital version of snake-oil salesmen."

Clearly, President Trump wasn't helping matters during this time. In fact, he was the conductor of the Covid-19 misinformation train. A study by Cornell University found "that media mentions of Donald Trump within the context of Covid-19 misinformation made up by far the largest share of the 'infodemic' of misinformation. Trump mentions comprised 37.9 percent of the overall misinformation conversation, well ahead of any other topics."

The researchers concluded that President Trump "was likely the largest driver of the Covid-19 misinformation infodemic. Only 16.4 percent of the misinformation conversation was 'fact checking' in nature, suggesting that the majority of Covid-19 misinformation was conveyed by the media without question or correction."

That's impressive, but it's nothing compared to what was discovered after President Trump and several of his closest allies were booted from Twitter after the January 6th Capitol riots. Honestly, this is hard to believe but it's true.

To refresh your memories, on January 6th Twitter and Facebook announced that Donald Trump would be suspended from their platforms until at least the following day. On the 7th, Facebook banned him through January 20th (this was later extended to two years), and on the 8th Twitter permanently banned him from its platform "due to the risk of further incitement of violence."

Within two days of President Trump being banned from Facebook and Twitter, Zignal Labs found that online misinformation regarding election fraud fell 73 percent. SEVENTY-THREE PERCENT!! "Election fraud" mentions plummeted from 2.5 million to 688,000 across all social media platforms. The hashtag #FightforTrump fell 95 percent, and #HoldTheLine and the phrase "March for Trump" dropped over 95 percent. Think about that for a second… that's extraordinary!

But it comes as less of a surprise when you discover that – during the week of November 16, 2020, two weeks after the 2020 election and less than two months before January 6th – *every single one* of the twenty most-engaged Facebook posts that included the word "election" came from Donald Trump. *Every single one* of them were also slapped with a false or misleading warning by independent fact checkers.

The craziest thing is how one little post can move so dang fast! Over a four-week period beginning in mid-October 2020, Avaaz – a nonprofit organization that promotes global activism – analyzed 95,546 Facebook posts that included "voter fraud" in some way. Collectively, these posts were liked, shared or commented on almost *60 million times*. Avaaz's analysis revealed that only 33 of the 95,546 posts were responsible for over 13 million of the 60 million interactions.

In another analysis, the Election Integrity Partnership – a collaboration between the Stanford Internet Observatory, the University of Washington's Center for an Informed Public, social media intelligence firm Graphika, and the Atlantic Council's Digital Forensic Research Lab – found that "posts from just 20 users were the source for approximately 20 percent of all of the retweets in their dataset. This means that a small number of accounts was responsible for a large portion of the spread of misleading election-related information."

An ironic twist to all this is that many conservatives at the time were convinced that social media networks were drowning in political bias – against *them*. That's just downright false.

Right-wing users drove far more engagement than left-wingers in the 2020 election, a fact that a Facebook executive acknowledged in an interview with Politico weeks before November 3, 2020.

The reason the political right has higher interactions rates is simple, the Facebook executive said. Their content is better at hitting visceral trigger points: "Right-wing populism is always more engaging," the executive said, because the content triggers "an incredibly strong, primitive emotion" by engaging on such topics as "nation, protection, the other, anger, fear."

The Politico article continued, “In the final stretch of the 2020 campaign, the Facebook posts with the most engagement in the United States most days – measured by likes, comments, shares and reactions – were from conservative voices outside the mainstream media: Dan Bongino, Ben Shapiro, David Harris, Jr., Franklin Graham and ‘Blue Lives Matter,’” according to the Facebook-owned tool Crowdtangle. “Trump’s personal page also regularly made the top of the list, in effect allowing him to become a publisher in his own right and navigate around the traditional media.”

The level of this impact was greatly enhanced by people like Guo Wengui, the Chinese real estate developer whose yacht Steve Bannon was on when Bannon was arrested for fraud on August 20, 2020.

At the time, a report from Graphika called *Ants in a Web* revealed that Wengui was “at the center of a vast network of interrelated media entities which had disseminated online disinformation and promoted real-world harassment campaigns. Graphika identified thousands of mostly authentic social media accounts associated with this network which are active across platforms including Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter, Gab, Telegram, Parler, and Discord.”

Although the network primarily focuses on the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and anti-CCP dissidents, it also “acted as a prolific producer and amplifier of mis- and disinformation, including claims of voter fraud in the U.S., false information about Covid-19, and QAnon narratives.” The report revealed that “in the second half of 2020, content from the Guo media network was increasingly prevalent in the American right-wing social media environment. Activity within the Guo network spiked in the run-up to the November 2020 U.S. presidential election.”

The real-life consequences of the super-spreader superhighway that is the Internet are massive. Research conducted by the University of Virginia McIntire School of Commerce found that “the more time someone spends on Facebook, the more polarized their online news consumption becomes… What’s more, Facebook usage is five times more polarizing for conservatives than for liberals. This evidence suggests Facebook indeed serves as an echo chamber, especially for its conservative users.”

"Facebook and Reddit shape the news consumption of their conservative users in dramatically different ways. In months when a typical conservative visited Facebook more than usual, they read news that was about 30 percent more conservative than the online news they usually read. In contrast, during months when a typical conservative used Reddit more than usual, they read news that was far less conservative – about 50 percent more moderate than what they typically read."

Remember the good 'ol days, when the Internet was just a simple, innocent place to go for useful information like movie times and weather? Just a simple place where you could track down your old high school boyfriend or girlfriend to see if their life had indeed gone on without you and to make sure their significant other was not as pretty or fun as you are?

How times have changed in such a short period of time. Over the past few years we have, unfortunately, seen the Internet's dark side. We have seen intimate photos of women posted without their consent for revenge or just a cheap thrill; fake social media accounts created to harass and embarrass ex-boyfriends and girlfriends; and Americans accused of murder and other horrible crimes, with zero evidence – openly defamed, maligned and slandered with little recourse.

We have seen terrorist propaganda accounts enabled and empowered and foreign countries maliciously attack our sacred elections. We have seen social media firms shamelessly sell us out by not only failing to protect our personal information but actively pimp it out, and truth and productive discourse replaced by disinformation and hate.

Like a slow-moving car crash, we have seen the Internet mutate from an innocent, cuddly Calico kitten into an irresponsible, out-of-control Bengal tiger – weaponized for the destruction of almost

everything we hold dear, from our personal privacy to our hallowed democracy.

We must get a handle on this, and fast… especially in the age of artificial intelligence (A.I.), which is making all this so much worse.

Although most everyone has opinions on the level of A.I.'s potential impact, certain negative consequences are undeniable because they are already disturbingly evident. For example, content generated by A.I. is beginning to threaten our democratic process, particularly our elections and those around the world.

According to the International Panel on the Information Environment, an independent organization of scientists, 80 percent of the countries that held elections in 2024 had Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) "incidents," and over two-thirds (69 percent) of those incidents were determined to play a harmful role in the election.

Most of these incidents involved content creation – think audio messages, images, videos, and social media posts – including deepfakes that recreated images of real people or cloned the voices of well-known political figures, candidates and newscasters.

After an attack on Representative Ilhan Omar (D-MN) at a town hall meeting in January 2026, for example, A.I. fakes instantly shot through the Internet. One was an A.I.-generated photo showing Ms. Omar smiling and posing with her attacker – an image that helped fuel a baseless narrative that she had staged the attack (a falsehood that President Trump, of course, shared on his social media account).

In the lead-up to the 2026 midterms, Ken Paxton's Senate campaign released an AI-generated attack ad depicting his opponent, James Talarico, delivering a fictional speech about Christianity and gender. Although the ad drew on some of Talarico's real past statements, it used an AI-generated likeness and voice to combine and alter his remarks into a performance that never occurred.

After federal immigration agents shot and killed Renee Good and Alex Pretti in Minneapolis, A.I. deepfakes of the victims spread – one image showed Alex Pretti wearing a ruffled pink dress and a tiara – and Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) showed an altered image of the killing of Mr. Pretti on the Senate floor.

Unsurprisingly, the Trump/Vance administration shared several altered images during the chaos in Minneapolis. In January 2026, for instance, the White House posted a digitally altered image showing a demonstrator who was involved in interrupting a church service in St. Paul, Minnesota sobbing as she was arrested… when in fact an earlier version of the photo showed Nekima Levy Armstrong, an attorney, composed and looking forward calmly. The skin color of Ms. Levy Armstrong, who is black, also appeared to have been darkened.

In a disturbing response to the altered image, Kaelan Dorr, the White House deputy communications director, wrote, "Enforcement of the law will continue. The memes will continue."

That's not a "meme;" that's an orchestrated lie. How old are these people? Twelve?

There are tons of issues that need to be addressed involving the Internet – from cybersecurity to online influence operations to cyber bullying – but, in my mind, the accountability of social networks is at the top of the list …. and their being held accountable for their actions needs to extend beyond misinformation on their platforms to how we are treated as consumers.

Why should social networks have accountability to consumers, you may ask, because our Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and X accounts are free anyway, right? What do we care? No! No! No! Many services in the digital economy *appear* to be free, but you pay dearly for them not with money, but with your personal data. In fact, your personal information is a currency far more valuable to social media companies than if you paid them a large monthly fee.

WE are the product being sold here. Our likes and dislikes, our desires and preferences, our vulnerabilities and insecurities. What we eat, when we sleep, why we vote, what we buy, where we shop. Who we worship, who our friends are, who our enemies are…all sold to the highest bidder.

Social media companies not only have access to a mind-boggling amount of our personal data, but they also possess an unprecedented "social graph" that allows them to not only know the desires and habits of each of their members, but also how each of their members connects and interacts with their *other* members.

This goldmine is invaluable. In truth, you can't even put a value on it – but if you could, the numbers would be $44 billion, $550 billion and $1.55 trillion, the most recent valuations of X, ByteDance (TikTok) and Meta (Facebook and Instagram).

Until fairly recently, when the public finally became more aware of their behavior, these companies showed little regard for their actions, even though they knew exactly how they were manipulating their users and negatively affecting society. Their irresponsible behavior didn't stop with enabling Russian bots and fake Antifa accounts, or even the spread of disinformation, conspiracy theories and hate speech. They also punted on basic human decency.

For example, in 2018 Facebook employees created a slide presentation as part of an internal effort to understand how Facebook shapes user behavior, and how the company could possibly alleviate potential harmful effects. One of the slides said: "Our algorithms exploit the human brain's attraction to divisiveness. If left unchecked, Facebook would feed users more and more divisive content in an effort to gain user attention and increase time on the platform."

Facebook founder and chief executive Mark Zuckerberg, along with other senior members of his team, seemingly buried the results of the research. What's even more disturbing is that, according to The Wall Street Journal, "the concern was that some proposed changes would have disproportionately affected conservative users and publishers, at a time when the company faced accusations from the right of political bias." In other words, the leaders of Facebook threw us all under the bus because of potential political consequences.

The Wall Street Journal also reported that "a 2016 presentation that names as author a Facebook researcher and sociologist, Monica Lee, found extremist content thriving in more than one-third of large German political groups on the platform." Her presentation found that, "swamped with racist, conspiracy-minded and pro-Russian content, the groups were disproportionately influenced by a subset of hyperactive users. Most of them were private or secret. The high number of extremist groups was concerning, the presentation says."

The WSJ article continued, "Worse was Facebook's realization that its algorithms were responsible for their growth. The 2016

presentation stated that '64 percent of all extremist group joins were due to our recommendation tools' and that most of the activity came from the platform's *Groups You Should Join* and *Discover* algorithms: *Our recommendation systems grow the problem*.'"

So, Facebook knew *for years* before the 2020 election and the January 6th Capitol attacks that its own algorithms promoted and even encouraged extremism. That is truly beyond the pale.

In July 2020, Facebook released the results of a long-awaited audit of its civil rights policies. It wasn't good: "With each success the auditors became more hopeful that Facebook would develop a more coherent and positive plan of action that demonstrated, in word and deed, the company's commitment to civil rights. Unfortunately, in our view Facebook's approach to civil rights remains too reactive and piecemeal."

Perhaps most exasperating to the auditors was Mark Zuckerberg's stance on political speech. Using the example of Donald Trump's May 2020 Facebook post that warned protesters "when the looting starts, the shooting starts," they said:

"After the company publicly left up the looting and shooting post, more than five political and merchandise ads have run on Facebook sending the same dangerous message that 'looters' and 'Antifa terrorists' can or should be shot by armed citizens. The auditors do not believe that Facebook is sufficiently attuned to the depth of concern on the issue of polarization and the way that the algorithms used by Facebook inadvertently fuel extreme and polarizing content… When powerful politicians do not have to abide by the same rules that everyone else does, a hierarchy of speech is created that privileges certain voices over less powerful voices."

To be fair, social media firms seemed to be more disciplined right before, during and after the 2020 election. According to The Economist, Facebook removed ten times the number of hate speech posts than they had two years before. They also deactivate 17 million fake accounts every single day, double the number from three years prior.

Facebook also reinforced its security teams, conducted practice drills to plan for every possible election outcome, blocked new

political ads for certain time periods, limited the number of people and/or groups with which a message can be shared, and strengthened transparency rules for advertisers.

Before the 2024 election, Meta (Facebook and Instagram) revealed it had invested over $20 billion around safety and security issues for elections around the world since 2016. More than 40,000 employees worked on these efforts. Meta also worked with fact-checkers – including PolitiFact, Reuters and USA Today – to add fact-check labels to election content that had been discredited, amplify verified voting resources, and label AI-generated content.

In January 2024, TikTok announced its plans for election integrity for the upcoming election. Partnering with the nonprofit Democracy Works, TikTok worked with electoral commissions and fact-checking organizations, plus built Election Centers to connect people to trustworthy information about voting. The company also expressed its commitment to consistently enforce its community rules to counter misinformation, deter covert influence operations, and address misleading AI-generated content. TikTok shared an update on their election integrity plan in September, adding they expected to invest over $2 billion in trust and safety in 2024 alone.

So, given these improvements, we were beginning to feel a little better about this, thinking that these companies were finally trying – or at least *acting* like they were trying – to do better. Then, two things happened.

First, Inauguration Day 2025. There the social media guys were, bending the knee to Donald Trump as shamelessly as any of his Cabinet members, and buying access to him like the oligarchs they have now proven to be. Shou Zi Chew, the CEO of TikTok was there, as was Mark Zuckerberg and, of course, Elon (pre-bromance break up).

Because federal law prohibits foreign nationals from making donations in connection with U.S. elections, ByteDance (TikTok) did not donate directly to Donald Trump's presidential inauguration committee. But Jeff Yass, whose Susquehanna International Group owns a large stake in the company, did. He also donated $16 million to

MAGA Inc. (a super PAC that supports Donald Trump) during the 2024 election cycle.

Even though they couldn't officially bribe anyone via the actual 2024 election, ByteDance found a way in through lobbying the U.S. government, spending $10.4 million in 2024 and $8.33 million in 2025.

But that is child's play compared to Meta, which spent $24.4 million on lobbying in 2024 and $26.3 million in 2025. Two weeks after Mark Zuckerberg met with President-elect Trump privately at Mar-a-Lago in November 2024, Meta donated $1 million to his inaugural fund – but the brown-nosing started way before then. After Trump's assassination attempt in July, Zuckerberg said, "Seeing Donald Trump get up after getting shot in the face and pump his fist in the air with the American flag is one of the most badass things I've ever seen in my life."

And it just got more vomit from there. At a White House dinner in early September 2025, President Trump asked Zuckerberg – who was sitting, literally, at his right-hand – "How much are you spending, would you say, over the next few years?"

Mark, obviously unprepared for the question, stammered, "Oh gosh. Um, I mean I think it's probably going to be something, like, I don't know, at least $600 billion through '28 in the U.S. Yeah." (this mishmash answer came after Mark admitted he hadn't been listening when an earlier question was directed at him)

But that wasn't the embarrassing part. That came a few minutes later, when Zuckerberg was caught on a hot mic groveling like a … well… groveling to Trump. "I'm sorry, I wasn't ready to do our... I wasn't sure what number you wanted to go with."

As it turns out, even *that* wasn't the most embarrassing part of the evening. The truly humiliating part was the titans of tech, sitting around a huge rectangle table, fawning over The Donald, North-Korean style. (If you haven't seen video of this circle jerk, I urge you to search for it right this second. It comes off way worse when you actually experience it first-hand.)

OpenAI CEO Sam Altman: "Thank you for being such a pro-business, pro-innovation president. It's a very refreshing change. I

think it's going to set us up for a long period of leading the world, and that wouldn't be happening without your leadership."

Apple Chief Executive Tim Cook, after saying Apple is expected to invest $600 billion in the U.S: "I want to thank you for setting the tone such that we can make a major investment in the United States and have some key manufacturing here. I think it says a lot about your leadership and focus on innovation." < Google CEO Sundar Pichai and IBM CEO and Chairman Arvind Krishna were also there. >

Good grief, guys. Have a little dignity. Seriously. It's totally cool if you're Donald Trump fans – we truly mean that – but to just grovel at his feet like peasants before Caligula is a little much. Are you really that willing to trade your integrity and self-respect for a little less regulation? How much money do you need?

The second thing that dashed our newfound hope came on September 8, 2025, when The Washington Post reported on "documents from inside Meta that were recently disclosed to Congress by two current and two former employees who allege that Meta suppressed research that might have illuminated potential safety risks to children and teens on the company's virtual reality devices and apps."

The story began like this: "At her home in western Germany, a woman told a team of visiting researchers from Meta that she did not allow her sons to interact with strangers on the social media giant's virtual reality headsets. Then her teenage son interjected… he frequently encountered strangers, and adults had sexually propositioned his little brother, who was younger than ten, numerous times."

"'I felt this deep sadness watching the mother's response,' one of the researchers, Jason Sattizahn, told The Washington Post regarding the April 2023 conversation. 'Her face in real time displayed her realization that what she thought she knew of Meta's technology was completely wrong.'"

The Post continued, "Meta had publicly committed to making child safety a top priority across its platforms. But Sattizahn and a second researcher, who specializes in studying youths and technology, said that after the interview, their boss ordered the recording of the

teen's claims deleted, along with all written records of his comments. An internal Meta report on the research said that in general, German parents and teens feared grooming by strangers in virtual reality – but the report did not include the teen's assertion that his younger sibling actually had been targeted."

From the looks of it, deniability was part of Meta's strategy all along. The Washington Post, again: "After leaked Meta studies led to congressional hearings in 2021, the company deployed its legal team to screen, edit and sometimes veto internal research about youth safety in VR (virtual reality), according to a joint statement the current and former employees submitted to Congress in May. They assert Meta's legal team was seeking to 'establish plausible deniability' about negative effects of the company's products."

< Meta did not directly dispute or confirm the events in Germany, but its spokeswoman Dani Lever said that the allegation that Meta curtailed research is based on a few examples "stitched together to fit a predetermined and false narrative… "We stand by our research team's excellent work and are dismayed by these mischaracterizations of the team's efforts." >

This chronic irresponsible behavior brings to mind the famous piece of advice attributed to Maya Angelou: "When someone shows you who they are, believe them." It's clear we can't rely on these guys to self-police themselves. Because of their size and scale of impact on communication, media, and civil society overall, the stakes are just way too high.

For one, cleaning this mess up flies directly in the face of their entire profit model, which is an obvious disincentive. Social media algorithms are designed to attract as much of the user's attention as possible, then push the user to interact with others. The algorithms don't distinguish between "good" and "bad" content, they just understand that they need to push the content that gets the most comments, clicks and shares.

Given all the examples we just covered, we know that primitive emotion and extreme behavior generate more attention and interest than cats playing Pat-a-Cake, meaning these companies make more

money on the extremes – which is exactly the reason Facebook executives buried their own research.

Another reason we can't rely on self-policing alone is that the leaders of these organizations are just humans, who have their own political views, proclivities and biases. Take Elon Musk, for example, the Chairman and Chief Technology Officer of X.

According to X, the company spent most of 2024 "meeting with Secretaries of State, State Election Directors, law enforcement, civil society groups, campaigns, and committees" to brief them on their "policies and preparations (for the 2024 election), as well as to get their input on prospective threats and emerging challenges."

X's safety team "proactively monitored activity on their platform and employed advanced detection methodologies to enforce its rules related to authenticity, such as platform manipulation and spam" and "actively worked to thwart and disrupt campaigns that threaten to degrade the integrity of the platform."

From June to November 2024, X reported it had actioned over 536,000 accounts under its *Platform Manipulation and Spam* policy; suspended over 1.87 million accounts related to information operations; and actioned over 3,200 accounts under its *Misleading and Deceptive Identities* policy for impersonation of political candidates and elected officials."

X also actioned over 160,000 posts under the *Abusive Behavior, Hateful Conduct, Violent Speech, and Sensitive Media* policy. These violations included wishes of harm against candidates; abusive language; threats of violence against supporters of the main political parties; and slurs used against minority groups post-election day.

The company removed 2,000 posts that contained content that may suppress participation, mislead people about when, where, or how to participate in a civic process, or lead to offline violence during an election; 3,700 posts that violated the *Synthetic and Manipulated Media* policy; and 770 accounts under the *Violent and Hateful Entities* policy. All great stuff!

But ... (there's always a but!) … Elon Musk's political action committee created a group on X called the "Election Integrity Community" that encouraged people to report instances of "voter fraud

or irregularities." Problem is, many of the posts were unsubstantiated, misleading or completely fabricated and, because of the algorithms, gathering them all in one place only fueled their spread.

Max Read, a senior researcher at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue – a group of independent, nonprofit organizations dedicated to safeguarding human rights and reversing the rising tide of polarization, extremism and disinformation worldwide – told CBS News that this X community could become a "one stop shop" for people looking to amplify election fraud claims: It's "sort of a consolidation point of a lot of different false, unverified claims about the election process."

Even before this group, there were major issues with Musk – who, at the time, was an outspoken supporter and close friend of President Trump who had almost 3.3 billion cumulative views on X – spreading misinformation on X, including the old, tired discredited claims about Dominion voting machines and widespread election fraud.

For example, in one post in July 2024, Musk wrote, "The goal all along has been to import as many illegal voters as possible" – a falsehood that was viewed 45.8 million times. A comment Musk made in response to a thread from Speaker of the House Mike Johnson about legislation requiring proof of citizenship to vote said, "Those who oppose this are traitors. All Caps: TRAITORS. What is the penalty for traitors again?" As a reminder, the penalties for treason in the United States include death. The repost had 56.8 million views.

After reviewing thousands of Musk's posts, the CBS News Confirmed team found that 55 percent of them contained misleading or false statements, or amplified posts that did. Plus, 40 percent of the accounts Musk had replied to or reposted were accounts that had been identified as promoters of voter fraud claims. These posts each had an average of 9.3 million views.

When Musk took Twitter over in 2022, he laid off most of the department responsible for trust and safety and reversed many of the previously established norms and community guidelines – replacing it all with a model that relies on X users to fact-check *one another*.

However, Community Notes, as it's known, is not effective in providing a meaningful check on misinformation, according to the

nonprofit Center for Countering Digital Hate. Analysis from the group released in October 2024 found that "despite a dedicated group of X users producing accurate, well-sourced notes, a significant portion never reaches public view."

Their analysis found that "74 percent of accurate Community Notes on false or misleading claims about U.S. elections never got shown to users. This allowed misleading posts about voter fraud, election integrity, and political candidates to spread and be viewed millions of times. Posts without Community Notes promoting false narratives about U.S. politics garnered billions of views, outpacing the reach of their fact-checked counterparts by 13 times."

One of the gloomiest examples of the failure of Community Notes is the *Haitian migrants are eating residents' pets in Springfield, Ohio* lie. On September 9, 2024, Vice-President JD Vance posted this on X: "Months ago, I raised the issue of Haitian illegal immigrants draining social services and generally causing chaos all over Springfield, Ohio. Reports now show that people have had their pets abducted and eaten by people who shouldn't be in this country. Where is our border czar?"

Even after Springfield City Manager Bryan Heck disputed the story and blamed its ability to spread on "misinformation circulating on social media, further amplified by the political rhetoric in the current, highly charged presidential election cycle," Donald Trump repeated this ridiculousness to the 67 million people watching the September 11th presidential debate. This sparked dozens of bomb threats in Springfield, a Proud Boy march, and plenty of other anti-immigrant hatefulness. It also, according to Mayor Ron Rue, cost the city hundreds of thousands of dollars in expense.

Two days later, Erika Lee, the Springfield resident behind the first Facebook post about Haitian migrants eating pets, told NBC News that she had no firsthand knowledge of the alleged incident and only learned of it through what she called a "game of telephone." Filled with regret for her part in the ensuing upheaval, she said, "It just exploded into something I didn't mean to happen… I didn't think it would ever get past Springfield."

Even though Ms. Lee removed the Facebook post and disavowed it, The Washington Post found that it shot through conservative groups

on other social media sites after being amplified on X on September 5th by a verified, anonymous account with 3.1 million followers called End Wokeness.

The post on X went unaddressed by the Community Notes contributors for four days, until finally one contributor pointed out the Springfield police and city officials had discredited the claim. Nevertheless, even though the contributor cited five articles/posts as proof, the factcheck didn't get enough votes from the other contributors to be publicly attached to the post. By then, the post had been viewed over 5 million times and reshared 20,000 times.

Perhaps the best way to know Community Notes isn't working that great is this: On July 26, 2024, Elon shared a video that manipulated Kamala Harris' voice to make it seem like she was making derogatory comments. "This is amazing," he wrote, alongside a laughter emoji. Even though 25 Community Notes contributors said the video was not authentic, 24 others found that, since it was clearly satire, no additional context was needed. The latter group prevailed, and the fake video of Kamala Harris that already had 243,000 reshares and 136.6 million views – and that had been posted by the richest man in the world who has, by far, the most X followers – remained untouched.

So, what in the world are we going to do about this? There are 14 recommendations listed in a minute, but let's dig deeper into some of the biggies. As you will see, the federal government and the social networks both have some heavy lifting to do.

To start, the federal government should do three things. First, the U.S. Congress should pass – and properly enforce – federal data privacy legislation. The legislation must include *Purpose Limitation*, the requirement that data collected for one purpose cannot be used for another.

It's critical that we have a unified, national strategy regarding data protection as opposed to a patchwork approach across the states.

Although some states are trying to put regulations in place, it's a difficult task given that the Internet spans all fifty.

The hesitation to regulate is understandable but, in this case, we really don't have a choice. The stakes are just too high. The good news is that, if we're mindful, it's entirely possible to strike an appropriate balance between guardrails and innovation, all while protecting self-expression and free speech.

Second, Congress should pass legislation that modernizes campaign finance laws to account for online political advertising, expanding the regulation of TV and radio ads to internet ads. The legislation should also increase election advertising transparency by allowing the public to see who bought an online political ad, regardless of its origin.

Third, Congress should repeal Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act. This is harsh but necessary.

Section 230 says: "No provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider." This essentially says that social networks bear no responsibility for what their users say on their platforms.

Courts have already begun poking significant holes in Section 230's liability shield. In August 2024, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit ruled in Anderson v. TikTok that Section 230 did not immunize TikTok from claims arising from content its algorithm affirmatively recommended to a child.

Here's the background: In 2021, ten-year-old Nylah Anderson's *For You* feed on TikTok recommended a "Blackout Challenge" video demonstrating self-asphyxiation and daring viewers to choke themselves. Nylah attempted the challenge and accidentally hanged herself. The key here is that Nylah *had not searched for the video*; TikTok's algorithm *selected and recommended it to her*.

After Nylah's mother sued TikTok, the case eventually reached the Third Circuit, which held that TikTok's algorithmic recommendation was the company's own "expressive activity" and therefore its own first-party speech. Because Section 230 protects platforms from being treated as the publisher or speaker of information

supplied by someone else, it did not immunize TikTok from claims based on TikTok's own recommendation. The court distinguished this situation from one in which a user finds third-party content through a search, although it stopped short of deciding whether Section 230 would necessarily protect search results.

Then, in March 2026, a New Mexico jury went even further, finding Meta liable for 75,000 violations of the state's consumer-protection law arising from deceptive representations about the safety of its platforms and practices that endangered children. The jury handed down $375 million in civil penalties. The court entered a final judgment in August imposing another $567 million in remedies and extensive court-supervised reforms to Facebook and Instagram, bringing Meta's total financial liability to $942 million.

The significance of the New Mexico case goes well beyond the enormous judgment. Meta argued that Section 230 shielded it from liability, but the court rejected that defense where the claims targeted Meta's own conduct and product-design decisions rather than merely seeking to hold the company liable as the publisher of content created by third parties.

…. and just weeks later, the financial stakes became dramatically larger. In August 2026, Meta agreed to a nationwide settlement with 47 states, the District of Columbia and several U.S. territories worth at least $12.2 billion – and potentially as much as $17.1 billion – to resolve allegations that it had designed Facebook and Instagram with addictive features, exposed children to serious harms, improperly collected children's data and misrepresented the safety of its platforms. The agreement also requires significant changes to how Meta's platforms operate for younger users.

The multistate settlement is not another judicial ruling weakening Section 230 – Meta settled those claims rather than litigating them to a final judgment. But it underscores the same increasingly important legal distinction emerging from the TikTok and New Mexico cases: Section 230 may protect a social-media company from being held liable merely for publishing what someone else says, but that does not necessarily immunize the company for what *it* does – its own

algorithms, product designs, business practices and representations about the safety of its products.

This is a solid start. The idea that these social media enterprises are not publishers – that they only exist as naïve, innocent bystanders for nothing more than to provide a blank canvas for their highly responsible users to paint as they see fit – is absurd.

Not only is Facebook a publisher, with billions of monthly active users and content published in 112 languages, it is *the largest publisher of anything in the entire world*. Facebook does far more than passively host material. It organizes, ranks, recommends, suppresses and distributes content to an enormous global audience, using algorithms specifically designed to determine what individual users are most likely to see and engage with.

It's important to remember that Congress' original motivation to include the 230 provision was to give these companies cover *to remove or restrict* posts they deem "obscene, lewd, lascivious, filthy, excessively violent, harassing or otherwise objectionable, whether or not such material is constitutionally protected" – not to give them an excuse to ignore it.

Section 230 has allowed social media firms to build hundreds of billions of dollars-worth of value largely unencumbered, shielding them from liability and enabling bad behavior. We need to put an end to it once and for all.

It would have worked out great if, given this air-tight, blanket protection, these companies would have just done the right thing and enacted policies, processes and procedures that protected Americans and American democracy. If they had just done that, repealing Section 230 wouldn't even be necessary. But they didn't, and that's no one's fault but their own.

1787 Plan of Action: Social Media

- † Pass – and properly enforce – data privacy legislation. The legislation must include *Purpose Limitation*, the requirement that data collected for one purpose cannot be used for another.

- Repeal Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act.
- Support the new safeguards imposed under Meta's recent settlement, which includes limiting teens to two hours a day on Facebook and Instagram without parental approval; restricting overnight use and school-hour notifications, strengthening age verification and content protections; and giving parents greater control over their children's accounts.

  This approach will likely prove more effective than an outright ban. Australia prohibited children under 16 from using social media in December 2025, yet three months later more than 85 percent of under-16 participants in one study were still using the affected platforms, often circumventing restrictions with fake accounts, false ages and other workarounds.
- Back off antitrust actions against U.S. companies. In such a rapidly evolving and competitive corporate environment, there is no such thing as permanent monopolies. Even dominant companies face the risk of being weakened or displaced by new competitors.
(see p. 100)
- Support legislation that requires social media platforms to disclose to their users when hostile governments or their agents are making propaganda claims in posts.
- Modernize spectrum regulation by expanding flexible-use licenses, spectrum sharing, secondary markets, and unlicensed access; streamline the process for reallocating underused spectrum; and retain necessary interference, competition, public-safety, and anti-hoarding safeguards.
- Reinstitute the Foreign Malign Influence Center, the leading U.S. intelligence operation charged with "mitigating threats to democracy and U.S. national interests."
- Reinstitute the initiative run by the Global Engagement Centre (GEC) that coordinated cooperation with our European allies to

identify and expose disinformation operations targeting America and Americans.

- Classify broadband service as a "telecommunications," restoring net neutrality as the national standard for broadband reliability, security, and consumer protection (net neutrality is the principle that internet service providers must treat all internet traffic equally, without blocking or prioritizing certain content, applications, or services over others). Ensure that broadband services are treated as an essential resource deserving of FCC oversight under Title II authority.
- Pass legislation that modernizes campaign finance laws to account for online political advertising, expanding the regulation of TV and radio ads to internet ads. The legislation should also increase election advertising transparency by allowing the public to see who bought an online political ad, regardless of its origin.
- Expand the 1998 Children's Online Privacy Protection Act. Anything surveilling the movement of minors should never happen. Ever.
- Pressure the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to scrutinize data collection methods to see if they constitute deceptive practices under existing law.
- Demand the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) establish a data-broker clearinghouse that would function similarly to the FTC's "Do Not Call" registry. The clearinghouse would allow Americans to submit a single, one-time request to all registered data brokers to delete their data and prevent future collection.
- Have a zero-tolerance policy toward cyberbullying. Fully prosecute abusers of the law.

The U.S. Constitution

This is taken directly from *The Constitution of the United States: Is it Pro-Slavery or Anti-Slavery?* – written by Frederick Douglass in 1860. We absolutely love this point-of-view.

†

I proceed to the discussion. And first a word about the question. Much will be gained at the outset if we fully and clearly understand the real question under discussion. Indeed, nothing is or can be understood. This are often confounded and treated as the same, for no better reason than that they resemble each other, even while they are in their nature and character totally distinct and even directly opposed to each other. This jumbling up things is a sort of dust-throwing which is often indulged in by small men who argue for victory rather than for truth. Thus, for instance, the American Government and the American Constitution are spoken of in a manner which would naturally lead the hearer to believe that one is identical with the other; when the truth is, they are distinct in character as is a ship and a compass. The one may point right and the other steer wrong. A chart is one thing, the course of the vessel is another. The Constitution may be right, the Government is wrong. If the Government has been governed by mean, sordid, and wicked passions, it does not follow that the Constitution is mean, sordid, and wicked. *What, then, is the question? I will state it. But first let me state what is not the question. It is not whether slavery existed in the United States at the time of the adoption of the Constitution; it is not whether slaveholders took part in the framing of the Constitution; it is not whether those slaveholders, in their hearts, intended to secure certain advantages in that instrument for slavery; it is not whether the American Government*

has been wielded during seventy-two years in favour of the propagation and permanence of slavery; it is not whether a pro-slavery interpretation has been put upon the Constitution by the American Courts — all these points may be true or they may be false, they may be accepted or they may be rejected, without in any wise affecting the real question in debate. The real and exact question between myself and the class of persons represented by the speech at the City Hall may be fairly stated thus: — 1st, Does the United States Constitution guarantee to any class or description of people in that country the right to enslave, or hold as property, any other class or description of people in that country? 2nd, Is the dissolution of the union between the slave and free States required by fidelity to the slaves, or by the just demands of conscience? Or, in other words, is the refusal to exercise the elective franchise, and to hold office in America, the surest, wisest, and best way to abolish slavery in America? To these questions the Garrisonians say Yes. They hold the Constitution to be a slaveholding instrument, and will not cast a vote or hold office, and denounce all who vote or hold office, no matter how faithfully such persons labour to promote the abolition of slavery. I, on the other hand, deny that the Constitution guarantees the right to hold property in man, and believe that the way to abolish slavery in America is to vote such men into power as well use their powers for the abolition of slavery. This is the issue plainly stated, and you shall judge between us. Before we examine into the disposition, tendency, and character of the Constitution, I think we had better ascertain what the Constitution itself is. Before looking for what it means, let us see what it is. Here, too, there is much dust to be cleared away. What, then, is the Constitution? I will tell you. It is not even like the British Constitution, which is made up of enactments of Parliament, decisions of Courts, and the established usages of the Government. The American Constitution is a written instrument full and complete in itself. No Court in America, no Congress, no President, can add a single word thereto, or take a single word threreto. It is a great national enactment done by the people, and can only be altered, amended, or added to by the people. I am careful to make this statement here; in America it would not be necessary. It would not be necessary here if my assailant had shown the same desire to be set before you the simple truth, which he manifested to make out a good case for himself and friends. Again, it should be borne in mind that the mere text, and only the text, and not any commentaries or creeds written by those who wished to give the text a meaning apart from its plain reading, was adopted as the Constitution of the United States. It should also be borne in mind that the intentions of those who framed the Constitution, be they good or bad, for slavery or against slavery, are so respected so far, and so far only, as we find those intentions plainly stated in the Constitution. It would be the wildest of absurdities, and

lead to endless confusion and mischiefs, if, instead of looking to the written paper itself, for its meaning, it were attempted to make us search it out, in the secret motives, and dishonest intentions, of some of the men who took part in writing it. It was what they said that was adopted by the people, not what they were ashamed or afraid to say, and really omitted to say. Bear in mind, also, and the fact is an important one, that the framers of the Constitution sat with doors closed, and that this was done purposely, that nothing but the result of their labours should be seen, and that that result should be judged of by the people free from any of the bias shown in the debates. It should also be borne in mind, and the fact is still more important, that the debates in the convention that framed the Constitution, and by means of which a pro-slavery interpretation is now attempted to be forced upon that instrument, were not published till more than a quarter of a century after the presentation and the adoption of the Constitution. These debates were purposely kept out of view, in order that the people should adopt, not the secret motives or unexpressed intentions of any body, but the simple text of the paper itself. Those debates form no part of the original agreement. I repeat, the paper itself, and only the paper itself, with its own plainly written purposes, is the Constitution. It must stand or fall, flourish or fade, on its own individual and self-declared character and objects. Again, where would be the advantage of a written Constitution, if, instead of seeking its meaning in its words, we had to seek them in the secret intentions of individuals who may have had something to do with writing the paper? What will the people of America a hundred years hence care about the intentions of the scriveners who wrote the Constitution? These men are already gone from us, and in the course of nature were expected to go from us. They were for a generation, but the Constitution is for ages.

U.S. Territories

1787 rejects the unequal treatment of residents of Puerto Rico and the U.S. territories – U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, and American Samoa – and fully support their self-determination.

Violence Against Women

The Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), originally passed in 1994, creates and supports comprehensive, cost-effective responses to domestic violence, sexual assault, dating violence, and stalking.

The VAWA Reauthorization Act of 2022 included groundbreaking provisions to strengthen and modernize the law. The law now provides survivors and their families and communities – along with the local programs that serve them – with critical resources for housing, legal assistance, and prevention programming.

The VAWA also improves existing housing protections; expands access to emergency and short-term housing; creates unique investments for minority survivors; and restores tribal jurisdiction, which allows tribes to hold non-Native perpetrators accountable for crimes.

The VAWA is up for renewal every five years. It is *imperative* that it is not only renewed, but that it continues to build on existing protections and programs to better meet survivor's needs. Shockingly the VAWA was not reauthorized while Donald Trump was president the first time – which is absolutely despicable.

Washington, DC

1787 supports statehood for Washington, D.C.

Defense/Security Issues

Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF)

The Congress Shall Have Power... "To make Rules for the Government and Regulation of the land and naval Forces; To provide for calling forth the Militia to execute the Laws of the Union, suppress Insurrections and repel Invasions."

– U.S. Constitution, Article I, Section 8, Clauses 14-15 –

The Bottom Line

- We must protect civilian control of the U.S. military by restoring – and then safeguarding – congressional war powers, because this is the slipperiest of slopes.
- For decades, the U.S. Congress has taken the coward's way out, purposely avoiding tough votes on military action. This irresponsible inaction has given the president unlimited power to unilaterally make military decisions, which is unacceptable – and UNCONSTITUTIONAL.
- In December 2025, Congress finally repealed the outdated 1991 and 2002 Iraq AUMFs through the FY2026 National Defense Authorization Act. Now, the 2001 AUMF, enacted in the aftermath of 9/11, must also be repealed. Twenty-five years later, it remains in force and has been repeatedly invoked to justify military operations far beyond the circumstances for which it was originally enacted.
- Moving forward, there should be a two-year sunset provision in EVERY SINGLE AUMF, meaning the authorization should automatically terminate every two years unless renewed by the U.S. Congress. This

will force Congress to reexamine whether the authority is still appropriate and, therefore, whether it should remain in place – in other words, force them to do THEIR JOBS since they obviously won't on their own.

† These steps are critical not only to protect our rule of law, but also to ensure that the United States has solid national security objectives and a smart, thoughtful foreign policy strategy. Most importantly, our troops must be certain that the dangerous missions we ask them to engage in are fully warranted and vetted.

♦ ♦ ♦

For some insane reason, we have continued to allow our leaders to use a two-decades old congressional authorization – the longest-running authorization for the use of military force in United States history – to justify military actions that clearly fall outside the parameters of the original mandate. This violates the U.S. Constitution and deprives Americans the opportunity for vigorous debate and appropriate oversight.

Moving forward, every Authorization of Use of Military Force (AUMF) should appropriately balance stringent oversight with rapid response and operational flexibility. All AUMFs should be unambiguous and include key provisions that address specific targets, specific geographic areas, the role of U.S. special forces, detailed reporting requirements, and an end date for continuing, modifying or repealing it (i.e., a sunset provision). Additionally, it should be crystal clear that any military action against a sovereign nation requires separate congressional approval unless the United States is under imminent attack.

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On September 18, 2001, the U.S. Congress passed an Authorization of Use of Military Force (AUMF) to allow the U.S. president to "use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determines planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons, in order to prevent any future acts of international terrorism against the United States by such nations, organizations or persons."

In October 2002, Congress passed a second AUMF which gave the U.S. president the authority to "use the Armed Forces of the United States as he determines to be necessary and appropriate in order to (1) defend the national security of the United States against the continuing threat posed by Iraq; and (2) enforce all relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions regarding Iraq)." This authorization very specifically referred to Iraq.

Between 2018 and 2020, the United States engaged in what was characterized as "counterterrorism operations" in 85 countries. The Bush, Obama, Trump I, and Biden administrations all argued that the 2001 AUMF gave the sitting U.S. president a green light to fight terrorism in places that are so obviously beyond the original mandate that it would be funny – that is, if it wasn't so incredibly dangerous.

According to a 2021 report by the Costs of War project at Brown University, these four presidents cited the 2001 AUMF to "justify an unknown number of military operations, including airstrikes, combat, detention, and supporting partner militaries, in at least 22 countries."

These included airstrikes and operations in Djibouti, Libya, Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen, plus "support of counterterrorism partners" that included Cameroon, Chad, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Georgia, Kenya, Kosovo, Jordan, Lebanon, Niger, Nigeria, the Philippines, and Turkey.

The report also found that the executive branch:

- Consistently used vague language to describe the locations of operations, failed to accurately describe the full scope of activities

in many places, and in some cases simply failed to report on counterterrorism hostilities.

- Failed to specify the number of operations conducted in each of the 22 countries involved when reporting to Congress in reference to the 2001 AUMF. In many locations of U.S. military activities, the executive branch has inadequately described the full scope of U.S. actions.
- Reported on "support for CT (counterterrorism) operations," but did not acknowledge that troops were or could be involved in direct combat with militants, as in Niger in 2017, when four U.S. service members were killed in an ambush as they attempted to carry out a raid on a militant compound (the AUMF was cited only after this incident came to light).

AMERICA! *THIS IS BLATANTLY UNCONSTITUTIONAL*! There is ZERO evidence that any of these countries "planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons" – the very things that must exist to have authorization under the 2001 AUMF.

To make matters more absurd, absent an updated authorization, Congress has been having to explicitly say what military interventions are *not* authorized under the current AUMFs, which is exactly backward.

For example, in November 2017, the U.S. House issued a non-binding resolution to let everyone know that America's military assistance to Saudi Arabia in Yemen was not authorized by Congress: "Congress has not enacted specific legislation authorizing the use of military force against parties participating in the Yemeni civil war that are not otherwise subject to the Authorization of Use of Military Force or the Authorization of Use of Military Force in Iraq."

Congress has also developed the asinine habit of using its authority under the 1973 War Powers Resolution to block presidents (namely Donald Trump, the first time around) from using military force abroad.

The first time they did this was in late 2018, when the U.S. Senate ordered an end to American military operations in Saudi Arabia's war in Yemen, which had essentially become a bombing campaign against Yemen's Houthi rebels.

The second time they did this was the following year, when both the U.S. House and Senate agreed to curtail American military involvement in Yemen – a measure vetoed by Donald Trump – and a third time was in February 2020, in response to the drone attack that killed Iranian Commander Maj. Gen. Qassim Suleimani, a senior official of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the commander of the Quds Force (the agency that is part of Iran's formal military structure that is responsible for Iran's covert military operations).

Another great example comes from April 2018, when Donald Trump ordered airstrikes against Syrian forces to supposedly disrupt Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's ability to use chemical weapons – and he did so without permission from the U.S. Congress.

The administration's claim was that "the president's direction was consistent with many others taken by prior presidents." It was further explained that, before the attack, "(Trump) reasonably determined that the use of force would be in the national interest and that the anticipated hostilities would not rise to the level of a war in the constitutional sense."

Although we particularly appreciate the first part of the response – it's the same one we used in high school to explain that "everyone else" also got drunk at the lake and blew curfew – these unilateral actions are 100% unlawful under the United States Constitution… yet there were zero repercussions.

Where this has all led was entirely predictable and should be no surprise. Because the U.S. Congress has completely surrendered its backbone to the Executive Branch, the Trump/Vance administration has now done everything from blow boats out of the water in the southern Caribbean – conducting deadly military strikes against a target that posed no direct threat to the United States – to starting an all-out war with Iran… and is doing so without congressional authorization… all of which is – say it with us class – STRAIGHT-UP UNCONSTITUTIONAL.

The Lone Wolf mentality of the executive branch is clearly out of control. If we allow missile strikes against Syria or in the Caribbean or in Iran to happen without authorization from Congress, what is to stop any U.S. president from... oh... let's say unilaterally attacking a nuclear North Korea?

Let that sink in America.

Biological Warfare

Biological weapons present an increasingly significant national security threat to the United States. We must look no further than the social disruption, economic devastation, and millions of deaths caused by the 2019 outbreak of Covid-19 in Wuhan, China to understand just how serious this is… and Covid-19 is nothing compared to the microbes and pathogens Russia and China are actively exploring.

Biological weapons deliver toxins and microorganisms (i.e., viruses and bacteria) to intentionally inflict disease, and they typically consist of two parts – a weaponized agent and a delivery mechanism (think missiles, bombs, hand grenades, spray-tanks). The threat extends to humans, animals and agriculture.

The Annual Threat Assessment from the U.S. Director of National Intelligence, released on February 5, 2024, warned that "current biological agents and rapidly advancing biotechnology underscore the diverse and dynamic nature of deliberate biological threats. Rapid advances in dual-use technology, including bioinformatics, synthetic biology, nanotechnology, and genomic editing, could enable development of novel biological threats."

The report goes on to say that "Russia, China, Iran and North Korea probably maintain the capability to produce and use pathogens and toxins, and China and Russia have proven adept at manipulating the information space to reduce trust and confidence in countermeasures and U.S. biotechnology and research."

The Washington Post reports that recent satellite images reveal Russia has reopened Sergiev Posad-6, a center used for viral biological

weapons research during the Cold War. Back then, the facility conducted experiments using viruses that cause smallpox, Ebola and hemorrhagic fevers. Russia is now expanding the compound, building labs that appear consistent with top-secret, high-containment biological facilities designed to handle hazardous pathogens (Russia has publicly confirmed they will use the labs to study deadly microbes to prevent future pandemics and for national security purposes).

Meanwhile, China has hyped the benefits of offensive biological warfare for decades. Colonel Guo Ji-wei of the People's Liberation Army once wrote that "the increased pace of development of modern biotechnology tells us that the day on which we will begin to make full military use of its advantages is not too far off." He continued, "In the near future, when military biotechnology is highly developed, modern biotechnology will have a revolutionary influence on the organization of military power with its more direct effects on the main entity of war – human beings. Modern biotechnology offers an enormous potential military advantage" And he wrote that in 2005!

More recently, the 2017 edition of Science of Military Strategy, a textbook published by the People's Liberation Army National Defense University, expanded the use of biological warfare to include "specific ethnic genetic attacks."

The Pentagon's 2023 Biodefense Posture Review (BPR) outlines broad reform initiatives and details specific initiatives and organizational efforts necessary to implement them. The proposed reforms are meant to "strengthen the posture necessary to address the evolving biothreat landscape, prepare the Department of Defense (DoD) to operate in a biothreat environment, and support the national biodefense enterprise at home and abroad." The top priorities of the BPR are to:

- Fully assess the biothreat landscape through 2035.
- Clarify biodefense missions, priorities, roles, responsibilities, authorities, and the capabilities needed to enable biodefense.
- Position DoD to address future biothreats in alignment with the National Defense Strategy.

- Examine DoD's role in the National Biodefense Strategy and provide appropriate support to other departments and agencies.
- Align policies; authorities; research, development, and acquisition (RDA) responsibilities; investments; and force structure to meet DoD's biodefense requirements.
- Ensure biodefense is routinely included in DoD training, exercises, and doctrine.

The DoD's most important activities to improve biodefense include:

- Expanding threat understanding and biothreat awareness.
- Innovating and modernizing biodefense capabilities against the threats DoD will face through 2035 to maintain a ready and resilient force in support of the National Defense Strategy.
- Improving readiness through training and exercising to identify and report shortfalls aiding the prioritization of modernization efforts.
- Establishing the Biodefense Council to synchronize, coordinate, and integrate authorities and responsibilities to provide an empowered and collaborative approach to sustained biodefense.

The Bipartisan Commission on Biodefense, a privately funded entity established in 2014 to assess U.S. biodefense efforts, released a report in May 2024 that included 36 recommendations and 185 associated action items. The Executive Summary highlights the following six:

- Strong national biodefense requires sustained leadership from the White House. The report recommends reinforcing White House leadership of the national biodefense enterprise. Congress should amend the National Security Act of 1947 to codify the role of the National Security Advisor as the leader of national biodefense.

Further, Congress should establish a Deputy National Security Advisor to perform the day-to-day duties and responsibilities of national biodefense and global health security. This is the bottom line: 15 federal departments, 9 independent agencies, and 1 independent institution currently have biodefense responsibilities. One federal department cannot tell other departments and agencies what to do. Only the White House has that authority.

† A comprehensive National Biodefense Strategy is critical to success. Every future Administration must ensure that the National Biodefense Strategy keeps pace with the rapidly evolving and increasing biological threat.

That is why the report calls for a quadrennial biodefense review that would culminate in an updated National Biodefense Strategy and Implementation Plan submitted to Congress by the White House. The threats change. Technology changes. Our biodefense must also change. It is critical that the federal government engage in both biodefense policy and technology development to permanently eliminate pandemics as a national security threat. As such, the Strategy must address science and technology needs for biodefense, as outlined in the Commission's 2021 report on The Apollo Program for Biodefense.

† Much has been learned about the Nation's response to the Covid-19 pandemic. At the top of the list is the need to reduce pathogen transmission indoors. Built environments such as offices, healthcare facilities, schools, and airplanes allow for easier transmission of dangerous pathogens, particularly those communicated most effectively via respiratory pathways.

While the U.S. exerts significant effort to engineer and defend such indoor environments against fires, earthquakes, and floods, far less effort is put into engineering and protecting indoor environments against pathogens. That gap likely resulted in significant loss of life during the Covid-19 pandemic. New technologies to reduce transmission on surfaces (including self-sterilizing and fomite-neutralizing materials) are available now. However, the most promising public health interventions involve

improving indoor air quality. Accordingly, Congress should amend the Public Health Service Act to produce a research and development plan for reducing pathogen transmission in built environments. Among other things, this plan should address the integration of indoor biological detection technologies.

- U.S. investment in medical countermeasure development is dangerously insufficient and requires emergency funding from Congress each time America faces a biological event affecting national security. This panic-and-neglect cycle is a bad approach that results in needless loss of life. Each time a crisis emerges (be it H1N1, Zika, Ebola, or Covid-19), Congress eventually appropriates emergency supplemental funding to enable the rapid development of drugs and vaccines and shore up our country's declining public health infrastructure.

  The devastating impact of this myopic strategy was made clear in the early months of the Covid-19 pandemic. Emergency funding came only after nearly two months of disagreement between Congress and the White House about precise needs and funding levels. Moreover, failure to follow this funding with sustainable annual appropriations threatens to undo much of the progress made during the pandemic.

  That is why we must prioritize, fund, incentivize, and align investments in medical countermeasures across all stakeholders before the next pandemic or biological attack occurs. The list of action items needed to accomplish this goal is long. It begins with a requirement that the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases create a specific biodefense budget plan that is responsive to priority national requirements and includes ways to transition medical countermeasures more easily from early-stage development to advanced research and development. Time saved equals lives saved.

- Biological events (either naturally or human-generated) affect critical infrastructure and immediately place our national, economic, and public health security in great jeopardy. Imagine waking up to the news that you cannot drink the water in your

home because a deadly pathogen was intentionally released into your water system, survived water treatment, and propagated despite the volume of water. Now expand that to include your entire city, state, or region, and that you and millions of others will not be able to use the water in our homes for months, perhaps longer.

Our lives will immediately be turned upside down. Moreover, it is highly unlikely that a biological event will affect just one critical infrastructure sector. An event might affect several (if not many) sectors directly, with cascading impacts on others. Remember that the anthrax events of 2001 affected or involved 11 sectors. This is why we must prioritize the protection of critical infrastructure against biological threats.

- Replacing BioWatch with a national biological detection system that actually works. The Commission has argued, and continues to argue, that 20 years after its implementation, the potential of BioWatch remains unrealized. Put simply, BioWatch is a waste of money that hinders the ability of first responders in our Nation's largest cities to detect biological events before they produce illness or death in humans, animals, and plants.

  Congress should amend the Homeland Security Act of 2002 to direct the Secretary of Homeland Security to replace ineffectual BioWatch technology, using other technologies that are already known to work. We cannot afford to be caught flat-footed by an airborne pathogen released in huge population centers.

Additional Recommendations for Biological Warfare

- Rehire the dozens of analysts from the Administration for Strategic Preparedness and Response who were fired by the Trump/Vance administration. These analysts, many of whom have top-secret clearance, worked with intelligence agencies on biodefense issues such as weaponized pathogens, and were responsible for monitoring and protecting the U.S. from biological, chemical and nuclear threats.

- Invest heavily in biological intelligence (BIOINT) to ensure we have the biological surveillance, detection and attribution necessary to track and eliminate dangerous, emerging threats. Target high-risk scientific research.
- Ensure shared situational awareness. Demand coordination between all relevant agencies.
- Ensure that the National Institutes of Health is properly funded and supported.
- Increase funding to fight Biological Warfare agents (microorganisms like virus, bacteria, fungi, protozoa or toxins).
- Completely overhaul how the Strategic National Stockpile is operated and maintained.
- Shift the stockpile's formula for distributing supplies from population-based to need-based.
- Stop substituting "just-in-time" supply chains for the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS)…which is the entire point of the SNS in the first place.
- Demand strict checks and balances on lobbying to prevent frivolous spending on unnecessary, expensive drugs.
- Address the massive shortage we face in specialists who can diagnosis and treat Superbugs (antibiotic-resistant microbes).
- Champion highly knowledgeable, innovative health care providers, hospitals and public health agencies.
- Support public-private initiatives that develop superior drugs, vaccines and diagnostic tests.
- Massively lower the risk of harm from future viral outbreaks by supporting initiatives like the Global Virome Project.

CIA

We recognize that our national intelligence agencies have made serious misjudgments in the past. However, Abraham Lincoln said it best: "Human nature will not change. In any future great national trial, compared with the men of this, we shall have as weak, and as strong; as silly and as wise; as bad and good. Let us, therefore, study the incidents of this, as philosophy to learn wisdom from, and none of them as wrongs to be revenged."

Our national intelligence agencies are incredible. The players are not perfect – no organization made up of humans is – but our intelligence community is filled with committed patriots who sacrifice so much of themselves to keep this country safe.

We have the utmost trust, respect and appreciation for each of these agencies. Every single one of us owes these men and women an enormous debt of gratitude.

Cluster Munitions

The Biden administration should not have agreed to send American-made cluster munitions to Ukraine in July 2023. Thanks to the Convention on Cluster Munitions, 123 nations have agreed to never use, transfer, produce or stockpile cluster munitions (the United States, Russia and Ukraine still allow their use). Further, Germany, France, Canada, the Netherlands and several other of our NATO allies opposed President Biden's decision.

Because cluster bombs explode in midair above targets – releasing dozens to hundreds of "bomblets" across an exceptionally wide area – there is a significant increase in the chance innocent civilians will be injured or killed. Children are especially at-risk because the submunitions that are initially released can fail to explode… that is, until a child picks them up years later.

Not only should the Biden administration have not sent these unacceptable weapons, but the United States should join the landmark treaty banning them without delay.

Counter-Ideological Warfare

The Bottom Line

- The United States should launch a massive, global counter-ideology campaign to fight against the propagation of radical ideologies and false American narratives that help drive terrorist recruitment.
- Authoritarian regimes understand the alluring power of democratic values. That's the reason they fight so hard – through censorship and other means of suppression – to keep classical liberalism far away from the people they repress. Terrorists also understand this and recognize that these ideals are a potent antidote to extremism. It's way past time to challenge them to a competition of ideals.

♦ ♦ ♦

For decades, the United States has allowed terrorist organizations to frame our image for a vulnerable portion of the Muslim world. These terrorists have done a masterful job of making sure their audience knows all about the "evil" that is America: The brutal, wealthy bully that uses power, might and military strength to repress Muslims on a global scale. Naturally, the terrorists are the good guys who fight bravely and unselfishly to protect Islam and Muslims around the world.

Terrorists have achieved great success with their *America is Evil* narrative using Information Warfare, or "using truth, intelligence, propaganda, psychological warfare, and media in a unified effort to control the way an enemy's own ideology or policies are perceived by the global public." They base their storylines on half-truths or outright lies, then fill in the blanks with America's actual failures – like the

catastrophes of U.S. waterboarding and the treatment of prisoners at Guantánamo and Abu Ghraib.

Conspiracy theories like *The Protocols of the Meetings of the Learned Elders of Zion* (a fraudulent document that served as a pretext and rationale for anti-Semitism in the early 20th century) and the 9/11 Truth movement (a conspiracy theory that disputes the conventional wisdom of the 9/11 accounts, specifically the part where al-Qaeda terrorists hijacked four airliners and crashed them into the Pentagon and Twin Towers) are exploited mightily.

Terrorists wage their propaganda war by using everything from CDs to television to radio. Now they have the enormous benefit of the Internet, which gives them the opportunity to reach into unlimited parts of the world. It's imperative we fight back – in real time – and reframe this highly damaging, globally destructive narrative.

Plan of Attack for Counter-Ideological Warfare

A smart counter-ideological warfare strategy goes way beyond the standard "winning hearts and minds" campaign. We should take the advice of Abu Yahya al-Libi, a once senior al-Qaeda leader and scholar – plus, add six additional ideas:

- Start a social epidemic of rejection. Create a social epidemic of personal revulsion against terrorist "cults."
- Identify the criminality of terrorism to the terrorist's target audience. Appeal to the universal value placed on stability, law and order, and justice.
- Make terrorist groups answer publicly for killing innocents, particularly children.
- Make the terrorists' community and families fear for the spiritual safety of recruits.
- Make people remember they can't depend on terrorists.
- Reframe terrorist groups as political opportunists.

- Encourage positive ideological fitna (civil war). Support and amplify former militants who recant terror and speak out against it.
- Demand that terrorist groups pay blood debts (i.e., wrongful deaths they have caused) to Muslims and non-Muslims, as proscribed in the Qur'an.
- Use the same viral media techniques they do.
- Organize counter-extremist message "swarming," where an online location is struck by thousands of like-minded posts at once.
- Help stand up and support de-radicalization programs and plans.
- Be more responsive and sympathetic to foreign civilian deaths after air strikes and other terrorist attacks.

A Perfect Example of When This Approach Could Have Been Helpful: The Proposed Islamic Cultural Center to Be Built in Lower Manhattan

In August 2010, a highly emotional and impassioned debate erupted over plans to build an Islamic cultural center in Lower Manhattan. Cordoba House, as it was known, was a proposed Islamic community center intended to promote interfaith dialogue.

Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, the founder of the project, described his intentions this way: "My ambition was to create a Muslim version of the 92nd Street Y in New York that would have cultural and educational programs, a prayer space, and a community center to promote a distinctively American Muslim identity, as well as a welcoming space for people of other faiths to build bridges and engage with each other."

His vision was for the center to be "a beacon of transformative spirituality for the American Muslim community in New York and beyond. Grounded in the authentic essence of faith through worship of the One God, the purpose of the Cordoba House is to establish a compassionate forward thinking, moderate, pluralistic and inclusive

Muslim community that applies a holistic approach to education, social services and activities, interfaith relations and cultural events."

Sounds kind of cool, right? Possibly, but Cordoba House had one major lightning-rod issue: the location. Because the center was going to be built two blocks from the World Trade Center it became super controversial, with many opponents of the project referring to it as the "Ground Zero Mosque."

Without question, for many of the Americans old enough to remember that horrific day, the sorrow of 9/11 is still as heartbreaking as it was the day it happened. It's perfectly understandable that many Americans had strong feelings about an Islamic cultural center being built close to Ground Zero, especially at a time when our soldiers still fought overseas and acts of terror continued in the name of Islam.

That said, this could have been an excellent opportunity for our president, members of Congress, and local leaders to demonstrate domestic and international leadership. After all, the Pew Research Center estimated there were 3.45 million Muslims of all ages living in America at the time. Promoting trust between Muslims and non-Muslims was super important as we fought homegrown violent extremists and terrorists abroad, and Muslims were helping greatly with that effort every day.

Many Afghan- and Iraqi Americans, for example, were assisting our military by providing cultural knowledge of the region and by graciously helping with language translation skills. Plus, there were almost 6,000 self-identified Muslims serving in the military (this number was probably higher since 400,000 service members elected to not report their faith).

It would have been extraordinary to have had brave leaders who possessed the fortitude and courage to do what was right, even if it happened to be unpopular at the time. The Cordoba House controversy was the perfect opportunity for our leaders to challenge Americans to 1) acknowledge the pain of the past but, at the same time, move forward with greater understanding and tolerance; 2) remember that the War on Terror was <u>not</u> a war against Islam; and 3) attempt to reconcile the American way of life with the peaceful believers of the world's second-largest religion.

But, unfortunately, with very few exceptions – then New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg being one – most of our leaders chose to be puppets of politics and polls instead of exhibiting true leadership.

This is a true shame. In the face of terror, it's imperative we not lose the very essence of who we are. We are the country that celebrates life, liberty, and justice for all. We are the country that perfected the right to peaceful assembly, freedom of speech, and the free exercise of religion.

Beyond anything, the core question in this situation is: Do we really want to live in a country that prohibits private citizens from building places to worship and celebrating their religion?

Regardless of your answer to that question, it's not really our choice to make, because the question was answered definitively on December 15, 1791. The First Amendment does not say: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances – *unless those rights make us uncomfortable*.

Here's where Counter-Ideological Warfare comes in. Critics of the mosque suggested that Osama bin Laden and the hijackers' greatest triumph would be to see a mosque built as a monument to their "victory." However, in truth, Osama bin Laden's reaction would have likely been the exact opposite. Imams like Feisal Abdul Rauf were bin Laden's worst enemies because he deeply resented, and was openly hostile, to Muslims with moderate Islamist orientations. And besides, the construction of a building pales in comparison to the terrorists' victory if we allow them to deconstruct the entire moral code of this country.

Enlightenment on issues like these is not needed just to enhance diplomacy or soothe hurt feelings. At times, it's a matter of life and death. If President George W. Bush had been more knowledgeable of the enormous disparities between the Salafist jihadists of al-Qaeda and the secular Baathists of Iraq, for example, his war plans may have looked far different in the first place.

Well over three decades have passed since the First Gulf War and *still* most of our leaders have a dangerously inadequate knowledge of the many divisions, complexities and nuances within the Islamic world. The tendency is to view the Muslim world as a single terrifying entity, which is just wrong.

Many of the words, concepts and traditions prevalent in the Middle East were then – and to this day remain – unfamiliar to most our leaders. …but don't you think it's important for them to have at least basic knowledge and understanding of the terrorists we are fighting against?

To be clear, we're not saying our leaders necessarily failed us by not demanding the Cordoba House be built near Ground Zero. We're simply saying that, at the time, a new narrative was of the greatest consequence in both domestic issues and in our broader struggle against Islamic extremists and that we needed leaders with the guts to tell us so – despite its lack of popularity.

According to a Time magazine poll taken at the time, 61 percent of Americans opposed the construction of the Cordoba House project, and over 70 percent felt that continuing with the plan would be an insult to the victims of the attacks on the World Trade Center.

Predictably, many politicians read this and decided the smartest thing for them to do politically was to make things far worse by inciting their audience through fear and hate-filled rhetoric. So, naturally, the conversation metastasized into an opportunity for them and their buddies to exhibit despicable behavior.

Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich seemed to speak for many on the right when he proclaimed: "Nazis don't have the right to put up a sign next to the Holocaust museum in Washington" and "we would never accept the Japanese putting up a site next to Pearl Harbor" and "there should be no mosque near Ground Zero in New York so long as there are no churches or synagogues in Saudi Arabia." That's just great…now we've lowered the bar for America to Saudi Arabian standards?

Martin Peretz, then editor-in-chief of The New Republic, wrote, "I wonder whether I need honor these people and pretend they are worthy of the privileges of the First Amendment, which I have in my gut the

sense that they will abuse." … and so now some guy named Martin Peretz is the decider on which Americans are worthy of the protections of the First Amendment?

Sadly, there was only one big winner in this controversy: al-Qaeda, who mocked us while we essentially did their recruiting for them. Once again, we gave terrorists a golden opportunity to negatively frame America's image for their potential followers.

As former FBI terrorist interrogator Ali Soufan put it, Osama bin Laden's "next video script has just written itself." Zabihullah, a Taliban operative, told Newsweek, "By preventing this mosque from being built, America is doing us a big favor. It's providing us with more recruits, donations, and popular support. The more mosques you stop, the more jihadis we will get."

Zabihullah went on to explain that this was such a huge boost for their cause, in fact, that it had made its way to the very top of the agenda in Taliban meetings with existing members and potential recruits.

"We talk about how America tortures with waterboarding, about the cruel confinement of Muslims in wire cages in Guantánamo, about the killing of innocent women and children in air attacks – and now America gives us another gift with its street protests to prevent a mosque from being built in New York," he said. "Showing reality always makes the best propaganda."

The most heartbreaking consequence of the Cordoba House debate was the damage the rhetoric undoubtedly did to our troops who were fighting so honorably for freedom. One can only imagine their dismay and bewilderment as they watched this madness play out stateside, while they endured sandstorms and gunfire to be our faithful ambassadors of democracy and freedom.

Cybersecurity

The Bottom Line

- Cyberattacks, cyber-terrorism and cyber-espionage pose an increasingly significant risk to the United States. It's critical that we have a comprehensive national cybersecurity strategy that thoroughly protects everything from our infrastructure to our intelligence databases.
- Cyber threats are more ominous now that we have become increasingly reliant on technology, and information technology and physical infrastructure have become more interconnected. Malicious cyber actors, nation-states and just plain bad people use cyberspace to do everything from steal information to disrupt the delivery of basic services to interfere in our elections, not to mention other crimes such as child pornography, financial fraud, and intellectual property theft.
- Cyber warfare creates an entirely new battlefield, and it's going to take all our current cyber capabilities plus many new resources to identify our vulnerabilities and prepare our defense.

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The "worst telecom hack in our nation's history – by far," according to U.S. Senator Mark Warner (D-VA), transpired between 2020 and 2024 when Chinese government-affiliated actors launched an espionage campaign that compromised over a dozen telecommunications companies, including AT&T, Verizon, T-Mobile, and Lumen Technologies. Targeting U.S. wiretap systems, the hack

gave the Chinese unparalleled access to our foreign-intelligence surveillance systems.

Salt Typhoon, as the group is referred to by investigators, hacked mainly the phones of people involved in government or political activity – including Donald Trump, JD Vance and Kamala Harris – as well as highly sensitive electronic communications that internet service providers collect based on U.S. law enforcement requests pursuant to court orders.

In September 2025, a joint statement from the United States, Britian, Canada, Finland, Germany, Italy, Japan and Spain, among other countries, said the "unrestrained" and "indiscriminate" Salt Typhoon attack targeted over 80 countries and may have stolen information from almost every American.

Other Chinese "typhoon" threats include Volt Typhoon, which targets U.S. infrastructure, and Flax Typhoon, which targets routers, cameras and other internet-connected consumer devices ("typhoon" is the name used by Microsoft to differentiate between various Chinese-backed cyber campaigns/threats).

In 2024, incidents by hackers suspected to be Chinese government actors more than doubled from the year prior – and continue to escalate in 2025.

Not to be outdone, Russia's guerilla-style brand of cyber asymmetric-warfare has been targeting the United States for decades. Moonlight Maze, Russia's three-year covert operation to hack into U.S. governmental agencies, started in 1996 and penetrated both NASA and the Pentagon. In fact, Moonlight Maze is the reason the U.S. Cyber Command center was created in the first place.

James Andrew Lewis, the Senior Vice President and Director of the Technology and Public Policy Program at the of the Center for Strategic and International Studies, explains that "Russia is a haven for the most advanced cybercrime groups and no clear line delineates the criminal world from the government."

"The Kremlin sees Russian cybercriminals as a strategic asset, and one of the most difficult problems for reducing cybercrime is that Russia, along with North Korea, will not cooperate with Western law enforcement," he continued. "High-end cybercriminal groups in Russia

have hacking capabilities that are better than most nations for both criminal and intelligence purposes."

Unfortunately, Russia has just gotten better and better at hacking since Moonlight Maze, so much so that we now are engaged in an ongoing and unrelenting cyberconflict.

In early 2020, as Americans were settling into Covid lockdowns and the U.S. cyber-defense agencies were obsessively focused on protecting the upcoming presidential election, Russian hackers known as APT29 and Cozy Bear – the pride of the Foreign Intelligence Service of the Russia Federation (SVR) – launched a massive cyber hack against the United States. Thousands of people, both inside and outside of the U.S. government, downloaded corrupted software, giving the Russians a pathway to create hidden back doors to access each user's network.

This went way beyond spying, which most every country does to some degree. Instead, this was a global espionage supply chain attack that compromised U.S. intelligence agencies; nuclear laboratories; Fortune 500 companies; companies that monitor and protect critical domestic infrastructure; the National Institutes of Health; and the U.S. departments of State, Treasury, Commerce and Energy. The hack is believed to have reached at least 250 United States federal agencies and American corporations of all sizes, including Microsoft and Amazon.

The National Nuclear Security Administration, which oversees our nuclear stockpile, was breached, as was the Los Alamos National Laboratory, where most of our nuclear weapons are designed.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) was compromised, which may not seem like a big deal until you find out that FERC is responsible for Black Start, the United States' strategy for restoring power if we ever experience a disastrous national blackout. The Department of Homeland Security and Pentagon were also hit, which is ironic given they are the departments tasked with protecting our networks.

A large part of the 2020 Russian hack was facilitated by malware embedded in the updates of software called Orion. Orion was made by SolarWinds, a company that makes network monitoring software that

at the time was used by at least 425 of the Fortune 500 companies, plus media companies and most of our governmental agencies. In the years leading to the attack, SolarWinds had been accused of having insufficient security for its products, but corporations and the U.S. government kept using them anyway.

SolarWinds is still in business – with a market capitalization of $2 billion – but was not let off the hook for the hack. In November 2022, the company agreed to settle a securities class action lawsuit with investors for $26 million for misleading them and the public about the effectiveness of its digital security products and failing to adhere to publicly stated internal security procedures.

On October 30, 2023, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) charged SolarWinds and Timothy G. Brown, its former Chief Information Security Officer, with "fraud and internal control failures relating to allegedly known cybersecurity risks and vulnerabilities" – the first ever SEC charges brought in connection with a cybersecurity case.

Another major threat to the American public is ransomware, a malware that encrypts, steals or deletes data on a computer, or locks the computer entirely. The criminal hackers then demand a ransom in exchange for decrypting the computer and/or data.

In early May 2021, Colonial Pipeline, a private company, announced it had been the victim of a ransomware attack. A Russian-speaking criminal extortion ring called DarkSide had taken control of a 5,500-mile pipeline operated by Colonial, then sent the company a ransom note that said, "Your computers and servers are encrypted, backups are deleted. We use strong encryption algorithms, so you cannot decrypt your data…you can restore everything by purchasing a special program from us" which "will restore all your network." DarkSide also stole over 6 million pages of Colonial's proprietary data, threatening that the information would be automatically published online if the ransom was not paid.

Colonial Pipeline provides 45 percent of the East Coast's fuel supplies (gasoline, jet fuel and diesel), so the disruption the incident caused in the Northeast was massive. In the end, Colonial paid

DarkSide $2.3 million bitcoin ransom which, remarkably, the U.S. Department of Justice recovered within a month.

Three weeks later, multiple meat processing plants operated by JBS – the world's largest meat supplier – were the target of a massive cyberattack, as was Kaseya, an IT company, a few weeks after that. U.S. intelligence officials confirmed the perpetrator of both attacks to be REvil, a cybercriminal, "ransom for service" organization based in Russia that allows other criminal groups to use its software for a fee.

The Annual Threat Assessment from the U.S. Director of National Intelligence, released on February 5, 2024, warns:

- People's Republic of China (PRC) remains the most active and persistent cyber threat to U.S. Government, private-sector, and critical infrastructure networks. Beijing's cyber espionage pursuits and its industry's export of surveillance, information, and communications technologies increase the threats of aggressive cyber operations against the United States and the suppression of the free flow of information in cyberspace.
- PRC operations discovered by the U.S. private sector probably were intended to pre-position cyber-attacks against infrastructure in Guam and to enable disrupting communications between the United States and Asia.
- If Beijing believed that a major conflict with the United States were imminent, it would consider aggressive cyber operations against U.S. critical infrastructure and military assets. Such a strike would be designed to deter U.S. military action by impeding U.S. decision-making, inducing societal panic, and interfering with the deployment of U.S. forces.
- China leads the world in applying surveillance and censorship to monitor its population and repress dissent. Beijing conducts cyber intrusions targeted to affect U.S. and non-U.S. citizens beyond its borders – including journalists, dissidents, and individuals it views as threats – to counter views it considers

critical of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) narratives, policies, and actions.

The Cyberspace Solarium Commission (CSC) – a bicameral, bipartisan commission chaired by Senator Angus King (I-ME) and Representative Mike Gallagher (R-WI) – includes four legislators and five nationally recognized experts from outside of government. Established in the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2019, the mission of CSC is to "develop a consensus on a strategic approach to defending the United States in cyberspace against cyber-attacks of significant consequences."

In March 2020, CSC released 82 recommendations to reform the U.S. Government's Structure and Organization for Cyberspace; strengthen norms and non-military tools; promote national resilience; reshape the cyber ecosystem; operationalize cybersecurity collaboration with the private sector; and preserve and employ the military instrument of national power.

In its 2024 report, CSC reported that 80 percent of its original recommendations have been fully implemented, or are nearing implementation, and an additional 12 percent are on track to be fulfilled. Great work!

1787's Recommendations for Cybersecurity

- Rehire the nearly 1,000 employees of the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) who were fired by the Trump/Vance administration. Reverse the Trump/Vance administration's dismantling of election security programs and its retreat from supporting state and local governments in protecting against cyber threats.
- Further fortify CISA, which is tasked with coordinating between the public and private sectors.
- Restore funding for the Multi-State Information Sharing and Analysis Center, a core cyber threat sharing service that improves

the overall cybersecurity posture of state, local, tribal, and territorial government organizations through coordination, collaboration, cooperation, and increased communication.

- Continue to support the Cyberspace Solarium Commission (CSC)'s recommendations.
- Support the National Security Telecommunications Advisory Committee's (NSTAC) cybersecurity "moonshot" approach.
- Make sure the National Cybersecurity Protection System is foolproof.
- Fortify all federal information systems, cyber critical infrastructure, and protect the privacy of personally identifiable information (PII).
- Establish better cooperation among all emergency agencies involved and make certain they are prepared to respond to a cyberattack.
- Establish a federal agency to investigate cyber security attacks and make recommendations on how to prevent future security breaches.
- Initiate global conversation with our cyber adversaries, specifically about security. A comprehensive agreement will be difficult to achieve, but we can start with coming to an agreement on domestic nuclear facilities and international financial systems.
- Support the Cyber Threat Intelligence Integration Center's mission to build awareness, integrate analysis and identify opportunities.
- Pass a law that requires companies to disclose data breaches faster, much like they do in the European Union.
- Harshly punish those who use cyber tools for malicious purposes. Focus on defense-oriented – not offense-oriented – cyber-operations.

- Share information with stakeholders who own and operate critical infrastructure – both cyber and physical – across a variety of sectors.
- Convert every U.S. Military base to independent microgrids, a local system of distributed energy resources and electrical loads.
- Support electric grid security through strategies that include mandatory standards, information sharing, and strategic partnerships.

FBI

We recognize that our national intelligence and law enforcement agencies have made serious misjudgments in the past. However, Abraham Lincoln said it best: "Human nature will not change. In any future great national trial, compared with the men of this, we shall have as weak, and as strong; as silly and as wise; as bad and good. Let us, therefore, study the incidents of this, as philosophy to learn wisdom from, and none of them as wrongs to be revenged."

Our national intelligence and law enforcement agencies are incredible. The players are not perfect – no organization made up of humans is – but these communities are filled with committed patriots who sacrifice so much of themselves to keep this country safe.

We have the utmost trust, respect and appreciation for each of these agencies. Every single one of us owes these men and women an enormous debt of gratitude.

Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (FISC)
Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act of 1978 (FISA)

The Bottom Line

- In April 2024, President Biden signed the Reforming Intelligence and Securing America Act (RISAA), reauthorizing and expanding aspects of Section 702 of FISA for two years. In June 2026, Congress allowed Section 702 to expire, but existing authorizations permit surveillance to continue into 2027.
- Law enforcement agencies should be required to obtain warrants before being able to search through the National Security Agency (NSA)'s records database.
- A warrant should be obtained *every time* a U.S. citizen is targeted and monitored, even if the U.S. citizen is deemed an "associate" of a targeted foreigner.
- As required by the 2015 U.S.A. Freedom Act, FISC opinions should eventually be published.
- The Chief Justice of the United States should continue to designate FISC judges, but the appointments should be subject to U.S. Senate approval.

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The Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act of 1978 (FISA) "sets out procedures for physical and electronic surveillance and collection of foreign intelligence information." FISA also established the U.S. Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (FISC), a special U.S. federal court that considers issuing search warrants under FISA. Proceedings

before the FISC are *ex parte*, meaning the government is the only party present.

After the September 11th terrorist attacks, the U.S. Congress passed sweeping legislation designed to enhance American counterterrorism efforts. This included the USA PATRIOT Act, which significantly increased the federal government's authority to gather, analyze and investigate private information related to U.S. citizens.

Section 215 of the PATRIOT Act amended Sections 501-503 of FISA and allowed the collection of "any tangible things (including books, records, papers, documents, and other items) for an investigation to obtain foreign intelligence information not concerning a United States person or to protect against international terrorism or clandestine intelligence activities, provided that such investigation of a United States person is not conducted solely upon the basis of activities protected by the first amendment to the U.S. Constitution."

After Edward Snowden's massive stolen document dump (you can read more about this in the Whistleblowers section of this book), it was discovered that Section 215 had been used as a rationale to collect the telephone records of ***Americans*** in bulk, which didn't go down well with *We the People*.

So, in 2015 Congress passed the USA Freedom Act to supposedly end the National Security Agency (NSA)'s bulk collection program. This didn't so-much end the bulk surveillance of Americans but replaced it with a narrower authority, requiring that a "specific selection term" must be used to collect metadata.

Meanwhile, in 2008 another piece of legislation passed. Section 702 of FISA removed the requirement that the U.S. government had to obtain a warrant from the FISC when seeking to wiretap communications between a foreign target and an American that was communicating from inside the United States. Section 702 also significantly broadened the parameters of targeting foreign targets, which included those not suspected of nefarious behavior.

Problem here is that, although the *target* must be a non-American located overseas, Section 702 surveillance inevitably picks up *the other side* of the conversations as well – which is known as "incidental

collection." As a result, Section 702 surveillance also hears conversations from Americans who are stateside.

Although Section 702 requires intelligence agencies to "minimize the retention and prohibit the dissemination of non-publicly available information concerning unconsenting United States persons," this doesn't always happen, as you can imagine. For example, agencies are allowed to search through Section 702 data – without a warrant – for information to use against Americans in ordinary criminal cases. That's outrageous. And unconstitutional.

Law enforcement agencies should be required to obtain warrants before being able to search through the NSA's records database, and a warrant should be obtained every time a U.S. citizen is targeted and monitored, even if the U.S. citizen is deemed an "associate" of a targeted foreigner.

The Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court (FISC) relies on secrecy and, given the sensitive decisions they make, that is understandable to a certain degree – mainly because of the way the judges interact with the government to get to the bottom of weaknesses in FISA applications, and concerns regarding the legal requirements involved.

However, as required by the 2015 U.S.A. Freedom Act – which requires the Director of National Intelligence and U.S. Attorney General to conduct declassification reviews of FISC opinions – FISC's decisions, orders and opinions should eventually be published.

Let's get real here. Courts that met *ex parte* – or where only the judge and the government are present – is not exactly the American way. As the U.S. Supreme Court observed in Richmond Newspapers, Inc. v Virginia, "people in an open society do not demand infallibility from their institutions, but it is difficult for them to accept what they are prohibited from observing."

Additionally, we need to demand as many safeguards as possible to promote diversity and discourage group think and bias within the FISC. The current process does not ensure against these.

Currently, "the Court sits in Washington D.C. and is composed of eleven federal district court judges who are designated by the Chief Justice of the United States. Each judge serves for a maximum of seven years and their terms are staggered to ensure continuity on the Court. By statute, the judges must be drawn from at least seven of the United States judicial circuits, and three of the judges must reside within 20 miles of the District of Columbia. Judges typically sit for one week at a time, on a rotating basis."

Problem here is that if you only have one person choosing every single judge, they are more likely than not to have a singular thought process. Bad idea. The Chief Justice of the United States should continue to designate FISC judges, but the appointments should be subject to U.S. Senate approval.

Martial Law & Deploying Troops Domestically

Deploying federal troops to U.S. cities for civilian law enforcement in response to completely fabricated "emergencies" is an outrageous violation of American democracy and the rule of law.

On September 27, 2025, the Trump/Vance administration declared they were ordering troops to Portland – calling the Oregon city "war ravaged" – and named Baltimore, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Oakland and Philadelphia as cities they also intended to target.

They did this even though violent crime in Portland decreased during the first half of 2025, including a 51 percent drop in homicides compared with the same period in 2024; Baltimore had the fewest homicides in the first half of 2025 than in any year since 1975; in August 2025 the Chicago Police Department reported a 23 percent decline in violent crime compared with the year before; homicides were down 32 percent last year in Oakland and dropped 21 percent in

the first half of 2025 (equaling a 29 percent decrease in violent crime overall); Philadelphia is on track to have the fewest homicides it has had in almost 60 years; and the murder rate in Louisiana is almost four times higher than that of California (Louisiana had 19.3 homicide deaths per 100,000 people to California's 5.1).

Why are they doing this? Well, unfortunately in this case, it has nothing to do with reducing crime or making our streets safer. It's about scaring people so they can control them.

Crime and violence are scary, no doubt. Although the homicide rate was 17 percent lower in the first half of 2025 than the year before in 30 major cities, crime persists in many areas, causing plenty of Americans to feel unsafe.

Because people already feel vulnerable and afraid, crime and violence are the perfect topics to weaponize – a tactic the Trump/Vance administration has taken to an artform, portraying predominately Democratic cities and states as lawless, depraved, and out-of-control… expertly exploiting anger and fear to intensify the growing divide between progressives and conservatives.

Don't believe us? Then why did President Trump (who said "our once-great cities" have "blood-soaked streets" and that our "cities are rotting" and are "cesspools of blood") deploy National Guard troops from the red-states of Louisiana, Mississippi, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee and West Virginia to patrol perfectly safe areas of Washington, D.C. (a place he characterizes as a "rat-infested, graffiti-infested shithole"), even though Memphis, Tennessee has a murder rate roughly twice as high as our nation's capital and cities in Texas, Ohio and Missouri also have higher rates of violent crime than Washington?

< Note: After many people made this exact point, President Trump announced that he would be sending the National Guard to Memphis after all. We guess he figured out that Memphis is actually the ideal place for him to stage the next act of his political fake drama since it has all the necessary ingredients: a majority black population, a black Democratic mayor, and is a blue city in a dark red state. >

The actions of the Trump/Vance administration – which are being done against the wishes of state governors and without congressional

authorization – corrodes civil liberties, destabilizes communities, stokes instability, escalates tensions, and erodes public trust. It is also highly damaging to our military, which has a long-standing history of being non-political and certainly non-partisan. Using the military as pawns in political games hurts morale and drives out experienced service members.

THIS CAN NOT BE NORMALIZED. Police states aren't created overnight. They are created by citizens almost sleepwalking into them by slowly and quietly conceding their freedoms.

Judges around the nation obviously get this. In a harsh ruling against the Trump/Vance administration, U.S. District Court Judge Charles Breyer pointed out that they are using "a top-down, systemic effort" to "create a national police force with the president as its chief."

Judge Breyer didn't stop there. He also said that Trump/Vance officials "knowingly" and "willingly" violated the Posse Comitatus Act when they sent National Guard troops and Marines to Los Angeles in June 2025.

Although the Trump/Vance administration claimed they federalized the California National Guard to "ostensibly quell a rebellion and ensure that federal immigration law was enforced," Judge Breyer made clear the evidence didn't support those claims in any way. After carefully reviewing the *evidence*, he concluded that "there was no rebellion, nor was civilian law enforcement unable to respond to the protests and enforce the law."

In Oregon, Judge Karin Immergut saw it much the same way. Judge Immergut eviscerated the Trump/Vance administration's claims, saying that there was "substantial evidence that protests at the Portland ICE facility were not significantly violent or disruptive in the days – or even weeks – leading up to the president's directive." She continued, "The President's determination was simply untethered to the facts."

Judge Immergut concluded with this: "This country has a long-standing and foundational tradition of resistance to government overreach, especially in the form of military intrusion into civil affairs. … This historical tradition boils down to a simple proposition: This is a nation of Constitutional law, not martial law."

Over in Illinois, Judge April Perry made clear that the Trump/Vance administration had a "credibility" problem, as their "perception of events are simply unreliable."

"I have seen no credible evidence that there is danger of rebellion in the state of Illinois. Deportations are up. Arrests are up… the courthouse remains open and always has. Federal laws are being executed… there is no evidence that the president is unable, with the regular forces, to execute the laws of the United States."

Creating crises out of thin air and abusing emergency powers in the name of cracking down on crime is not what healthy democracies do. It's what authoritarian autocrats like President Trump's new buddy president of El Salvador Nayib Bukele do. These guys turn the military on its own people to suppress dissent, empower corruption, and violate civil liberties in egregious ways.

That's why one of the most fundamental – and critical – hallmarks of American democracy is that the United States military cannot, except under very narrow exceptions, be deployed on our own soil.

Under the power of the U.S. Constitution, the president is the commander-in-chief of America's armed forces, but the U.S. Congress is the branch of government in control of the military's domestic activities (thank God once again for the separation of powers!).

Martial Law

Martial law is the temporary suspension of ordinary law and civilian government in favor of military rule and control, typically enacted during a crisis like war, insurrection, widespread civil unrest, or emergencies like natural disasters. Martial law may also be declared in instances of military coups d'état.

It's extremely important that every American understand that, under martial law, civilian legal processes and civil liberties can be

suspended in deference to military powers. A key hallmark of marital law is that the military enforces the law, sometimes trying civilians in military tribunals (but only if civilian courts are not functional) and potentially suspending rights like habeas corpus (i.e., your right to demand that a judge review the legality of your detention, forcing whoever is detaining you to provide a valid reason for your arrest) – and this can either continue for a specified amount of time, or *indefinitely*.

Martial law has been declared at least 68 times in the United States. In the nine times it's been declared since World War II, five of those were designed to counter resistance to federal desegregation decrees in the South.

There is a ton of confusion around martial law, mainly because the U.S. Constitution doesn't explicitly mention it and no act of Congress defines it.

The authority surrounding marital law is complex, with limitations based on U.S. Supreme Court rulings that require it to be an absolute ***last resort*** where civilian courts are unable to function. The last time the Supreme Court addressed it was the case Duncan v. Kahanamoku (1946) and even in that case the decision was vague.

1787's interpretation is that under current law, the president lacks the authority to unilaterally declare martial law. Congress *may* be able to authorize a presidential declaration of martial law, but this seems to be inconclusive. State officials *do* have the power to declare martial law, but their actions and decisions must adhere to the U.S. Constitution and are subject to review in federal court.

The Posse Comitatus Act

In 1878, Congress passed the Posse Comitatus Act (PCA), which prevents members of the federal armed forces from participating in civilian law enforcement activities unless they have been "expressly authorized" by Congress. However, there are two exceptions to this: the Insurrection Act and the president's authority over the National Guard.

- Insurrection Act

  The Insurrection Act authorizes the U.S. president to use the military domestically to suppress "any insurrection, domestic violence, unlawful combination, or conspiracy." These terms are not defined in the statute, unfortunately, which leaves them far too ambiguous – and open to far too broad interpretations.

  In the 1827 U.S. Supreme Court case Martin v. Mott, the Court held that the president alone decides when to invoke the Insurrection Act because he is "presumed to act in obedience to his duty." Because the president is the final decision on whether an emergency has arisen domestically, Congress is given no formal role in this process and there are no time restrictions on the deployments.

- The National Guard

  The National Guard is the only branch of the U.S. military that has both state and federal responsibilities. Therefore, the Guard can be controlled by either state or federal leaders, depending upon their deployment status.

  In the District of Columbia, the National Guard is always under the command and control of the president. Therefore, the president can deploy the D.C. Guard for law enforcement purposes anytime.

The National Guard has three deployment types:

- State Active Duty (SAD) status: The National Guard carries out state-defined missions at the state's expense and serves under the command and control of the state or territory's chief executive. With SAD, governors are given broad authority to use the Guard forces as they see fit, and they are generally used in the case of emergencies and civil disturbances.
- Title 32 (i.e., "hybrid") status: This status is generally used for training exercises. Examples of Title 32 being used in non-

training activities include post-9/11 airport security, conducting relief operations after Hurricane Katrina, and providing support to U.S. Customs and Border Protection at the U.S.-Mexico border.

- Title 10 status: Under Title 10 status, National Guard units are called into federal service, or "federalized," by the U.S. president and placed under federal command and control just as if the Guard personnel were members of the regular armed forces. As such, federalized National Guard personnel are governed by the Posse Comitatus Act.

Military Families

The Home of the Brave Program

OUR ***NUMBER ONE PRIORITY*** WHEN IT COMES TO THE MILITARY ARE OUR VETERANS AND TROOPS.

NOTHING ELSE COMES CLOSE!

NO WAR GETS FOUGHT NO BOMB GETS BUILT UNLESS & UNTIL OUR VETERANS AND TROOPS HAVE EVERY SINGLE THING THEY NEED TO NOT ONLY SURVIVE BUT THRIVE.

- Honor -

You are selfless. You are brave. You are the very best of America. Everything we have, you have secured for us. Everything we hope to be, you protect. Thank you, from the bottom of our hearts.

Here is our sacred vow: We will also do everything in our power to protect YOU.

- We will make sure that your compensation and benefits reflect your high-level of dedication and service. We will also ferociously protect your hard-earned benefits.
- We will work hard to ensure that all military children have access to high-quality education, from pre-k though college.
- We will expand the "Iraq and Afghanistan Service Grant" to include students whose parent or guardian died because of military service *anywhere*.
- We will make sure you and your family receive the highest quality of health care and mental health support in the world.
- We will make sure there are gender-specific health care and services to protect and honor women veterans.
- We will make sure that all veterans and service members receive adequate, discreet care in the aftermath of military sexual trauma, and that these heinous crimes are fully prosecuted.

– Respect –

Martin Luther King, Jr. said, "Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable. Even a superficial look at history reveals that no social advance rolls in on the wheels of inevitability. Every step towards the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering, and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals."

You and your families have sacrificed unimaginably for our freedom. You have suffered unspeakable sorrow in the service of our safety. You have struggled greatly for the rest of our comfort.

Here are our promises to you and your family:

- We will work hard to boost your morale and make sure our country is one you are proud to fight for.
- We will make sure you have rewarding employment opportunities when you leave the service.
- We will fight to eliminate the funding fee associated with the Home Loan Guaranty program.
- We will mandate that a certain number of federal contracts be awarded to businesses owned by service-disabled veterans.
- We will encourage the acceptance of military training and experience be acceptable for licenses and credentials in specialized fields.
- We will allow certain GI Bill funds to be used for small-business capitalization.

- Gratitude -

The extraordinarily brave women and men who sacrifice so much to keep America safe are our heroes. We are deeply grateful to every person that serves our country with such courage and integrity.

Likewise, we owe a debt of profound gratitude to the families of these remarkable Americans. Most of us can only imagine the sacrifices you make, and we promise to do everything possible to honor *every* member of your family.

Here are our promises to you and your family:

- We will make sure that, to any extent possible, there will be more flexibility in military life, including more reasonable extended leave policies.
- We will offer better support to military spouses and partners, including appropriate education and employment.

- We will make sure you and your family have access to safe childcare, free of charge. We will fight to make the Child Development Centers (CDC), Family Child Care (FCC) and School-age Care Programs (SAC) completely free for military families.
- We will work hard to make the military-to-civilian transition as seamless as possible for every member of the family.

1787 Plan of Action: Military Families

Health Care

- Guarantee that our military heroes and their families have access to timely, high quality health care.
- Provide gender-specific health care and services to protect and honor our women heroes.
- Aggressively improve the mental health services provided to our service members, veterans, and their families.
- Fully research and understand "moral injury" and discover better ways to help those who struggle.
- Utilize complementary and alternative therapies to combat PTSD.
- Utilize complementary and alternative therapies to prevent suicides.
- Launch National Opioid Withdrawal (NOW), 1787's program that targets the opioid public health emergency.
- Ensure that our military heroes receive adequate, discreet care in the aftermath of military sexual trauma (and that these heinous crimes are fully prosecuted).

Employment

- Offer better support to military spouses and partners, including appropriate education and employment.
- Make sure every military hero has rewarding employment opportunities when they leave the service.
- Encourage the acceptance of military training and experience to be acceptable for licenses and credentials in specialized fields.
- Allow certain GI Bill funds to be used for small-business capitalization.
- Mandate that a certain number of federal contracts be awarded to businesses owned by service-disabled veterans.

Education

- Our military heroes earn their education benefits in the most difficult way possible. Protect these benefits at all costs.
- Guarantee that all military children have access to high-quality education, from pre-k through college.
- Offer better support to military spouses and partners, including appropriate education and employment.
- Expand the "Iraq and Afghanistan Service Grant" to include students whose parent/guardian died because of military service anywhere.

We Got You!

- Welcome women to compete for all military positions.
- Work hard to boost the morale of our troops and make certain our country is one they are proud to fight for.

- Make certain compensation and benefits reflect the high-level of dedication and service of our service members. Ferociously protect their hard-earned benefits. Do not ever, ever allow sequestration to reduce our service member's hard-earned benefits.
- Immediately address the racial disparities that plague our military.
- Allow transgender Americans to serve openly in the military.
- Allow troops to wear beards for religious purposes.
- Maintain a ZERO TOLERANCE policy regarding sexual assault and sexual harassment. Remove the investigation and prosecution of these cases to special victims' prosecutors, outside of the chain of command.
- To any extent possible, commit to more flexibility in military life, including more reasonable extended leave policies.
- Make the Child Development Centers (CDC), Family Child Care (FCC) and School-age Care Programs (SAC) free for military families.
- Make the military-to-civilian transition as seamless as possible for every member of the family.
- Eliminate the funding fee associated with the Home Loan Guaranty program.
- Reinstitute strict restrictions on payday lenders and ferociously protect the Military Lending Act.

National Intelligence

We recognize that our national intelligence agencies have made serious misjudgments in the past. However, Abraham Lincoln said it best: "Human nature will not change. In any future great national trial, compared with the men of this, we shall have as weak, and as strong;

as silly and as wise; as bad and good. Let us, therefore, study the incidents of this, as philosophy to learn wisdom from, and none of them as wrongs to be revenged."

Our national intelligence agencies are incredible. The players are not perfect – no organization made up of humans is – but our intelligence community is filled with committed patriots who sacrifice so much of themselves to keep this country safe.

We have the utmost trust, respect and appreciation for each of these agencies. Every single one of us owes these men and women an enormous debt of gratitude.

It's incredibly important we always ensure a seamless process of information-sharing among our intelligence agencies and other law enforcement. We must also stop over-classifying information and significantly improve the system that makes, safeguards, and discloses secrets – as always, being vigilant about maintaining an appropriate balance between security and liberty.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Read more on p. 15 of The Great American Reset.

The Bottom Line

- U.S.-European military cooperation is fundamental to the peace and security of the United States and provides valuable partnerships that fortify our defense, security, and crisis-management capabilities around the world.

- It is highly beneficial for the United States to be a leading member of the transatlantic alliance. Make no mistake, we need NATO now as much as we did in 1949, when the group was formed as a defense against Soviet aggression.
- The coolest thing about NATO is the Principle of Collective Defense, which is the idea that an attack against one of its members is considered as an attack against all (this principle is commonly known as Article 5). Article 5 has been invoked only once, in response to the 9/11 U.S. terrorist attacks. On one of the worst days in our nation's history, our faithful allies didn't blink and had our back 1000%.
- We must insist that other member countries live up to their end of the bargain and be held accountable for their part of the funding to advance global security.

  While it's true that many NATO members fell short of their defense-spending commitments for years, those days are over. In 2025, all 32 members of the alliance met or exceeded the benchmark of spending two percent of GDP on defense – the first time that has happened since NATO adopted the target in 2014.

  There is an argument to be made that this percentage should be increased. However, the "5 percent of GDP by 2035" that was agreed to at the 2025 NATO Summit – a figure that sets a goal of spending 3.5 percent of GDP on core defense requirements to meet NATO capability goals, with the remainder allocated to other defense and security-related spending – is too much for the United States to consistently be spending on defense (see p. 106 of *The Great American Reset*).

♦ ♦ ♦

NATO must be protected at all costs, and we must make sure the alliance survives the Trump/Vance administration.

On the 2016 campaign trail, candidate Trump made several references to NATO's waning effectiveness, even calling it "obsolete" at one point (he backtracked on this characterization in 2019, saying NATO has "a great purpose, especially with the fact that NATO is becoming much more flexible, in terms of what it looks at," whatever that means).

On the 2024 campaign trail, Trump continued to say he would not defend NATO members if they didn't meet their defense spending targets. This obviously alarmed many of our European allies all over again, whose anxiety has also been heightened by President Trump's selection of Pete Hegseth as his second administration's Defense Secretary.

In Hegseth's book, The War on Warriors: Behind the Betrayal of the Men Who Keep Us Free, he wrote: "Why should America, the European 'emergency contact number' for the past century, listen to self-righteous and impotent nations asking us to honor outdated and one-sided defense arrangements they no longer live up to? Maybe if NATO countries actually ponied up for their own defense – but they don't. They just yell about the rules while gutting their militaries and yelling at America for help."

Donald Trump's bombastic campaign rhetoric and Pete Hegseth's insulting words highlight their belief that, for decades, our European allies have taken advantage of our military protection without paying their fair share financially.

While it's true that many NATO members fell short of their defense-spending commitments for years, those days are over. In 2025, all 32 members of the alliance met or exceeded the benchmark of spending two percent of GDP on defense – the first time that has happened since NATO adopted the target in 2014.

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security-related spending – is too much for the United States to consistently be spending on defense (see p. 106 of *The Great American Reset*).

Nuclear War & WMD Proliferation

Read more about Nuclear War on p. 15 of The Great American Reset.

1787 Plan of Action: Nuclear War & WMD Proliferation

- Put restraints on presidential power: Require congressional approval for a nuclear first strike.
- Do not resume nuclear explosive testing under any circumstance.
- Do not allow the U.S. military to use fully autonomous weapons under any circumstance.
- Lead the way in negotiating treaties to limit how and where autonomous weapons systems are used. This should include limits on the types of targets, such as outlawing their use in situations where civilians or civilian objects are present; requirements for human-machine interaction, notably to ensure effective human supervision, and timely intervention and deactivation; and comprehensive requirements that companies that sell equipment used to make biological agents adopt rules to verify who their customers are and the nature of their work.
- Nurture strong global alliances that can help us prevent the threat of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapon attacks by rogue nations, proliferation, and terrorist organizations. Lead international efforts to mitigate the danger of nuclear use and proliferation.

- Call for the Biological Weapons Convention – a 50-year-old treaty with about 190 states participating – to be amended to address the technological advancements underway.
- Extend the New START Treaty that expired in February 2026. At a minimum, commit to a one-year mutual adherence to New START limits with Russia, even in the absence of a treaty.
- Re-engage in – and ratify – the United Nations Arms Trade Treaty (ATT).
- Ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT).
- Encourage China, Egypt, India, Iran, Israel, North Korea, and Pakistan to sign and/or ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty.
- Stop global production of fissile material (i.e., plutonium and highly enriched uranium). Champion the Fissile Material Cut-off Treaty.
- Fully support the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Low Enriched Uranium (LEU) Bank.

Online Influence Operations & The Russian "Hoax"

"(Political partisanship) opens the door to foreign influence and corruption, which finds a facilitated access to the government itself through the channels of party passions. Thus, the policy and the will of one country are subjected to the policy and will of another."

– President George Washington, Farewell Address (1796) –

Our vulnerability to bad people manipulating us doesn't stop at our border. America's foreign adversaries have been persistent in their sabotage efforts – proving that gaslighting is not just a threat to our democracy but a national security issue as well.

Russian President Vladimir Putin, for example, didn't cause our national division but, as any good KGB agent would, masterfully leveraged and deepened it by masterminding a stunningly successful influence campaign during the 2016 presidential election.

Two studies show how Russia exploited our social media data in 2016. The first, a study by the University of Oxford and Graphika – a company that analyzes complex online networks – describes Russia's Internet Research Agency (IRA) assault between 2012-2018 this way:

"IRA activities were designed to polarize the U.S. public and interfere in elections by: campaigning for African American voters to boycott elections or follow the wrong voting procedures in 2016, and more recently for Mexican American and Hispanic voters to distrust U.S. institutions; encouraging extreme right-wing voters to be more confrontational; and spreading sensationalist, conspiratorial, and other forms of junk political news and misinformation to voters across the political spectrum.

The analysis found that between 2013 and 2018, the Russian Internet Research Agency's Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter campaigns reached tens of millions of users in the United States; *over 30 million users*, between 2015 and 2017, shared the IRA's Facebook and Instagram posts with their friends and family, liking, reacting to, and commenting on them along the way; peaks in advertising and organic activity often correspond to important dates in the U.S. political calendar, crises, and international events; IRA activities focused on the U.S. began on Twitter in 2013 but quickly evolved into a multi-platform strategy involving Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube among other platforms; and the most far reaching IRA activity is in organic posting, not advertisements."

They also warned these assaults were not going to stop any time soon:

"Surprisingly, these campaigns did not stop once Russia's IRA was caught interfering in the 2016 election. Engagement rates increased and covered a widening range of public policy issues, national security issues, and issues pertinent to younger voters.

The highest peak of IRA ad volume on Facebook is in April 2017 – the month of the Syrian missile strike, the use of the Mother of All Bombs on ISIS tunnels in eastern Afghanistan, and the release of the tax reform plan; IRA posts on Instagram and Facebook increased substantially after the election, with Instagram seeing the greatest increase in IRA activity; the IRA accounts actively engaged with disinformation and practices common to Russian 'trolling.'"

The second study, from New Knowledge (now Yonder) – a company that specializes in information integrity – explains the IRA's efforts to target and divide Americans by race:

"The most prolific IRA efforts on Facebook and Instagram specifically targeted black American communities and appear to have been focused on developing black audiences and recruiting black Americans as assets; the IRA created an expansive cross-platform media mirage targeting the black community, which shared and cross-promoted authentic black media to create an immersive influence ecosystem; the IRA exploited the trust of their Page audiences to develop human assets, at least some of whom were not aware of the role they played…This tactic was substantially more pronounced on black-targeted accounts; the degree of integration into authentic black community media was not replicated in the otherwise right-leaning or otherwise left-leaning content."

Election interference is a key part of Putin's asymmetric-warfare strategy. Asymmetric warfare is essentially a conflict between two countries that have significantly uneven military capabilities, like the United States versus Russia. These hybrid warfare tactics are designed to significantly raise the risk and cost of retaliation and to keep

potential adversaries guessing. This creates a kind of gray zone between war and peace – where things don't escalate into overt military conflict, but where adversaries know the threat is always there.

It's incredibly important we understand exactly how foreign actors interfered in our 2016, 2020 and 2024 elections so we can make certain we ***never*** let this happen again.

It's also incredibly important that we understand how our quest to find the truth about Russia's 2016 interference was railroaded by gaslighting and partisan politics by the Republican Party. Even though Russia's transgressions in 2016 are undeniable, a disturbingly large group of Americans still think the whole thing was a "hoax" because Donald Trump and his parrots still insist that it was.

Because the Trump campaign was included in the Robert Mueller special counsel investigation that examined Russian interference in the 2016 election – together with the discredited Steele Dossier, which wasn't the impetus for the Russian investigation but gave Trump an excuse to trash the entire thing – the fact that Russia interfered in the 2016 election got all tangled up with whether Russia interfered *to help Donald Trump win*. This was insulting to Donald – who wanted *EVERYONE* to know that *HE* won all by *HIMSELF* – so the deadly combination of his gaslighting and big mouth went into overdrive:

- "Uranium is a big subject. If the mainstream media would cover the uranium scandal and that Russia has 20 percent of uranium for whatever reason – and a lot of people understand what those reasons may be – I think that's your Russia story. That's your real Russia story. Not a story where they talk about collusion, and there was none. It was a hoax." (in the Oval Office on October 19, 2017)
- "Why isn't the House Intelligence Committee looking into the Bill & Hillary deal that allowed big Uranium to go to Russia, Russian speech money to Bill, the Hillary Russian "reset," praise of Russia by Hillary, or Podesta Russian Company.

Trump Russia story is a hoax. #MAGA!" (Tweet on March 28, 2017)

- "The Russia story is a total hoax. There has been absolutely nothing coming out of that." (to The New York Times on April 5, 2017)
- "The Russia-Trump collusion story is a total hoax, when will this taxpayer funded charade end?" (Tweet on May 8, 2017)
- "Stock Market hit another all-time high yesterday – despite the Russian hoax story! Also, jobs numbers are starting to look very good!" (Tweet on July 15, 2017)
- "They can continue their obsession with the Russian hoax, or they can serve the interests of the American people." (at a rally in West Virginia on August 3, 2017)
- "Russia. I call it the Russian hoax, one of the great hoaxes." (at a rally in Alabama on September 22, 2017)
- "The Russia hoax continues, now it's ads on Facebook. What about the totally biased and dishonest Media coverage in favor of Crooked Hillary?" (Tweet on September 22, 2017)

This tangled narrative continued right through the 2020 and 2024 elections. In December 2024, almost two months after he won a second term as president, Donald was still at it: "Russia, Russia, Russia,' 'Ukraine, Ukraine, Ukraine,' all the different hoaxes."

When asked by TIME magazine about foreign officials having concerns about sharing intelligence with his choice for Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard – given her suspected support of Russia and Syria – Trump responded, "I think she's a great American… I've watched her for years, and she has nothing to do with Russia… this is another, you know, a mini-Russia, Russia, Russia scam."

But let's be clear. The fact that Russia interfered in the 2016 election is a completely separate conversation from whether Russia interfered to *help Donald Trump win*. It's entirely beside the point

whose Russia's interference helped or didn't help. Acknowledging that Russia interfered in our 2016 presidential election *in no way* undermines Donald Trump's victory. He won, fair and square.

The only relevant point here is that a foreign leader significantly interfered in American democracy, and the President of the United States should have publicly held him accountable for it harshly and immediately.

That didn't happen, to say the least. At a news conference during the 2018 Russia–United States summit in Helsinki, Finland – with Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin standing behind podiums right beside one another – an American reporter asked Donald Trump if, regarding 2016 election interference, he believed U.S. intelligence agencies or Putin. Donald Trump replied, "President Putin says it's not Russia. I don't see any reason why it would be."

Say whaaaaaatttt?????

This is bad. Even though the Mueller Report – finally released to the public in April 2019 with tons of solid evidence – made clear the Russian government "interfered in the 2016 presidential election in sweeping and systematic fashion," news of the investigation and its findings were fairly limited in scope and audience, both domestically and internationally. Even severe U.S. sanctions imposed on Russian entities and individuals for their role in 2016 election interference got little airtime.

On the other hand, the President of the United States standing on a stage in another country with the head Russian, siding with *him* over U.S. intelligence agencies? That's a viral video clip shown on repeat in every country around the world – including our own – forever, and a huge long-term blow to our national security apparatus.

Look, we're not naïve. We understand the United States also does this asymmetric warfare stuff. That's just the nature of the world we live in today. But that in no way means we should just sit back and let other nation states attack us with no consequence. Whose side are you on, Donald?

Here is *the truth*: There is *zero* doubt that Vladimir Putin of Russia significantly intervened in the 2016 American election, threatening our democratic institutions and one of our most sacred constitutional rights. There is *zero* doubt that Vladimir Putin purposefully and meticulously perpetrated these malicious acts with the intention of harming our democracy and polarizing the American public by sowing seeds of discord among us.

There is *zero* doubt that this *IS NOT A HOAX*. In the words of retired U.S. Army lieutenant general and Trump's National Security Adviser H.R. McMaster, the evidence of Russian interference in the 2016 election is "incontrovertible."

On January 6, 2017, the U.S. intelligence agencies released a report called *Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent U.S. Elections*. The report included analytic assessments drafted by the CIA, FBI, and NSA regarding "the motivation and scope of Moscow's intentions regarding U.S. elections and Moscow's use of cyber tools and media campaigns to influence U.S. public opinion." Here are their key judgements:

- Russian efforts to influence the 2016 U.S. presidential election represent the most recent expression of Moscow's long-standing desire to undermine the U.S.-led liberal democratic order, but these activities demonstrated a significant escalation in directness, level of activity, and scope of effort compared to previous operations.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered an influence campaign in 2016 aimed at the U.S. presidential election. Russia's goals were to undermine public faith in the U.S. democratic process, denigrate Secretary Clinton, and harm her electability and potential presidency. Putin and the Russian Government developed a clear preference for President-elect Trump.
- Putin and the Russian government aspired to help President-elect Trump's election chances whenever possible by

discrediting Secretary Clinton and publicly contrasting her unfavorably to him.

- Moscow's influence campaign followed a Russian messaging strategy that blends covert intelligence operations – such as cyber activity – with overt efforts by Russian government agencies, state-funded media, third-party intermediaries, and paid social media users or "trolls."

A year later, Director of National Intelligence – and, as such, the leader of America's 17 intelligence agencies – Dan Coats confirmed to the Senate Intelligence Committee that "the United States is under attack" and that Russia is attempting to "degrade our democratic values and weaken our alliances."

Coats also warned that the U.S. intelligence agencies "expect Russia to continue using propaganda, social media, false-flag personas, sympathetic spokespeople and other means of influence to try to exacerbate social and political fissures in the United States." Months later, Coats continued to warn that "the warning lights are blinking red again. Today, the digital infrastructure that serves this country is literally under attack."

According to the Mueller report, "Russia's Internet Research Agency (IRA) carried out the earliest Russian interference operations identified by the investigation, a social media campaign designed to provoke and amplify political and social discord in the United States… Russia's two principal interference operations in the 2016 U.S. presidential election – the social media campaign and the hacking-and-dumping operations – violated U.S. criminal law."

A 37-page federal indictment of thirteen Russian nationals issued by Mueller revealed they had stolen Americans' identities; created fake drivers' licenses, bank accounts, and PayPal accounts in the names of fictitious Americans; faked social media accounts; created and distributed inflammatory digital ads and images; organized political rallies on U.S. soil; and even had at least two operatives on the ground in America. One pair traveled to at least nine states posing as tourists to gather information for their bosses back in Russia.

The indictment mentions Facebook and Instagram 41 times. Facebook finally admitted that divisive content generated by Russia reached *146 million Americans on their platform alone*. (more on this in a minute)

In July 2019, the Republican-controlled Senate Intelligence Committee released its first of five reports regarding 2016 Russian election interference. The first report revealed that all fifty states were targeted by Russia in 2016.

In August 2020, the Committee released its final report, which totaled almost 1,000 pages and included information from over a million documents and 200 interviews. The report confirmed that "the Russian government engaged in an aggressive, multi-faceted effort to influence, or attempt to influence, the outcome of the 2016 presidential election… Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered the Russian effort to hack computer networks and accounts affiliated with the Democratic Party and leak information damaging to Hillary Clinton and her campaign for president."

The report also confirmed that Konstantin Kilimnik – a close business associate of Paul Manafort, Donald Trump's original 2016 campaign chairman – was a Russian intelligence officer, and that Donald Trump's campaign accepted help from Russians who were trying to get him elected. To that end, the campaign provided Russians with polling data and coordinated the leak of stolen internal emails from the Democratic National Committee.

Weeks after the Mueller investigation was completed – an effort that generated over two dozen criminal cases, including six against Trump associates – Bill Barr, the Attorney General during the second half of the first Trump administration, appointed a special counsel to investigate the origins of the FBI's "Crossfire Hurricane" investigation of links between Russia and the Trump 2016 presidential campaign, to include any misconduct by U.S. government officials that might have taken place.

To Donald Trump's dismay, after a four-year investigation, Special Counsel John Durham found very little ammunition. Although he offered a contemptuous critique of the Justice Department and FBI – saying the agencies "failed to uphold their important mission of strict

fidelity to the law" – the investigation culminated in just one guilty plea and two acquittals (Durham lost both cases that went to trial). Former FBI lawyer Kevin Clinesmith, the subject of the third case, pled guilty to altering an email that was used to support a surveillance application. He was given probation.

By failing to challenge Putin, President Trump enabled him to do even more damage. As former Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats said after the 2016 election, "Russia perceives its past efforts as successful" and views future elections "as a potential target for Russian influence operations."

…which was made clear in the 2020 and 2024 elections when Russia meddled yet again. And they just got better at it over time. Before the 2024 election, U.S. intelligence officials warned that Russia's interference efforts were "more sophisticated than in prior election cycles." They warned that Russia was now using "authentic U.S. voices" to "launder" propaganda and misinformation.

Russia is "at the top of the list" of foreign governments trying to influence the election, because 1) "they're fairly robust and quite practiced at doing this type of activity" 2) the "scope and the scale of their activities are quite significant" 3) they "work up- and down-ballot races" 4) they use artificial intelligence "to more quickly and convincingly create synthetic content" and 5) they use "influence-for-hire firms that leverage marketing, public relations and other expertise to complicate attribution." Here's just a sampling of their work:

John Mark Dougan, a former U.S. Marine who relocated to Russia and turned into one of the Kremlin's most talented propagandists, was paid by Russia's military intelligence service to create deepfakes and spread misinformation about Kamala Harris and her campaign.

One of Dougan's videos – a four-minute video that featured a "former student" making fabricated allegations against vice-presidential nominee Tim Walz – was viewed more than 5.4 million

times on X in less than a day. The video gained little attention until it was shared by an X account associated with QAnon. Another of Dougan's deepfake videos showed a fake Barack Obama suggesting Democrats orchestrated the July 2024 assassination attempt against Donald Trump.

According to NewsGuard – a company that tracks disinformation online – posts, articles and videos created by Dougan and his team have been viewed 64 million times since September 2023.

In a post on X five days before the 2024 election, Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger was forced to issue a statement denouncing a fake 20-second video that showed Haitians saying "We're voting Kamala Harris. Yesterday, we voted in Gwinnett County, and today we're voting in Fulton County…We have all our documents, driver's license. We invite all Haitians to come to America and bring families."

Commenting on a post that shared the video – along with the caption: "Illegal Haitians flown into the U.S. claim they received all necessary documents and driver's licenses within just six months of arriving in the U.S. and are able to vote!! They show several Georgia driver's licenses featuring the same photo and claim to have voted for Kamala Harris in two different counties so far: Gwinnett and Fulton" – Raffensperger wrote, "We have discussed this with State and Federal Authorities. This is obviously fake, and likely it is a production of Russian troll farms."

Unfortunately, an emboldened Putin is just one of the severe consequences of Donald Trump not calling him out for his 2016 shenanigans. After all, what kind of message did that spectacle send to China, Iran, North Korea, and other potential cyber attackers?

Let us save you some time… they all got the message loud and clear… which the 2024 Annual Threat Assessment from the U.S. Director of National Intelligence proved when it warned, "the People's Republic of China (PRC) remains the most active and persistent cyber threat to U.S. government, private-sector, and critical infrastructure networks. Beijing's cyber espionage pursuits and its industry's export of surveillance, information, and communications technologies increase the threats of aggressive cyber operations against the United

States and the suppression of the free flow of information in cyberspace."

Remember when we mentioned in the Cybersecurity section that, between 2020 and 2024, the Chinese government-affiliated hacking group Salt-Typhoon launched an unprecedented espionage campaign compromising over a dozen telecommunications companies, including Lumen Technologies, AT&T, T-Mobile and Verizon – giving the Chinese unparalleled access to our foreign-intelligence surveillance systems?

Or when we mentioned that Russia's guerilla-style brand of cyber asymmetric-warfare has been targeting the United States for decades with attacks like Moonlight Maze, Russia's three-year covert operation to hack into U.S. governmental agencies that penetrated both NASA and the Pentagon?

Ноах? Я так не думаю
(that's *We don't think so*, in Russian)

1787 Plan of Action: Online Influence Operations

- Heal the deep partisan divide in this country that makes us vulnerable to these types of attacks.
- Impose and enforce crushing sanctions on any foreign country that interferes in American elections.
- Pass a law that requires the U.S. government to automatically retaliate against any foreign attack on our democracy.
- Stop large-scale anonymous ownership by creating public registries of the real owners of companies and/or trusts.

Secure Borders

Read about 1787's Plan of Action for comprehensive immigration reform on p. 662 of The Great American Reset.

1787 Plan of Action: Secure Borders

- Build fencing and barriers BUT *only* where it can be truly effective. We do not need to waste money just so we can say we "built a wall!"
- After assessing and correcting for past mistakes, utilize cutting-edge technology to fortify border security and infrastructure.
- Implement a biometric entry-exit tracking system.
- Pass a federal mandate requiring all states to use E-Verify.
- Reinforce the Synthetics Trafficking and Overdose Prevention Act of 2018 (STOP Act), which facilitates international interdiction efforts.
  - Clearly define roles and responsibilities for monitoring performance across International Mail Facilities (IMFs).
  - Establish key performance metrics and targeting goals to assess the effectiveness of mail operations.
  - Improve training efforts.
  - Develop advance electronic data waivers using U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) data to assess a country's risk eligibility.
  - Enforce penalties when the U.S. Postal Service accepts mail without advance electronic data.
- Support the Fentanyl Sanctions Act and the Fentanyl Reduction Engrained by Economic Deterrence Act (an amendment to the

original legislation) which address the origins of the fentanyl supply chain and impose sanctions on foreign individuals and entities that knowingly supply fentanyl to drug traffickers.

- Help Mexico secure its porous 570-mile border with Guatemala.
- Secure and reinforce bilateral partnerships between Mexican and U.S. law enforcement agencies.
- Continue to ensure a seamless process of sharing information between our intelligence agencies and other law enforcement.
- Fortify the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL). Establish more effective ways to measure the agency's long-term impact and ensure there is proper oversight of its programs in foreign countries.
  - Disrupt transnational crime and enforce strong criminal penalties against transnational criminal networks.
  - Help foreign governments build effective law enforcement institutions that counter transnational crime.
  - Combat corruption by helping governments and civil society build transparent and accountable public institutions.
  - Establish and implement international treaties for combating crime and provide tools for legal cooperation in criminal cases among countries.
  - Work with international partners to develop effective approaches to border and maritime security.
  - Disrupt and dismantle human trafficking networks before migrants reach the United States.
  - Support the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA).
  - Work with Canada to increase joint law enforcement efforts and fortify cross-border security operations.

Space

Read about 1787's Plan of Action for maintaining U.S. global dominance in Space on p. 15 of The Great American Reset.

Even though most of us probably don't think about it often, space has become increasingly significant in our everyday lives, helping us find answers to some of the world's most pressing challenges.

For over two decades, the International Space Station, for example, has provided a laboratory for space operations and scientific breakthroughs. Thanks to the space station, researchers from around the world can utilize the distinctive environmental conditions of low Earth orbit (LEO) to advance technological innovation and facilitate scientific research in unique environments like microgravity.

Over 3,300 experiments have been conducted aboard the space station, including ones that have improved X-ray technologies and other medical devices; developed drugs, cancer treatment strategies, and new types of artificial blood grown from protein crystals; found ways to reduce heat absorbed by city surfaces, reduce fire risk, and help farmers more efficiently utilize water; and advanced DNA sequencing, robotics, satellites, and 3D manufacturing.

The final frontier not only cultivates groundbreaking research, but the growing commercial space economy and marketplace is expected to be extremely profitable.

The consulting firm McKinsey & Company estimates the global space economy will be "worth $1.8 trillion by 2035 (accounting for inflation), up from $630 billion in 2023. This figure includes both 'backbone' applications – such as those for satellites, launchers, and services like broadcast television or GPS – and what they term 'reach applications' – those for which space technology helps companies across industries generate revenues."

Naturally, there are a ton of issues to work through as we navigate space. Since it was created on December 20, 2019 – making it the newest branch of the U.S. armed forces and the first new military service to be created in over 70 years – the U.S. Space Force (USSF) is now responsible for everything from our operating missile detection

networks to monitoring the 13,000+ active satellites in space to the Geographic Positioning System (GPS) constellation that helps you send a pin to your friends or find your way to that new restaurant you've been wanting to try.

Space Force is a great step into the future but, because there are so many issues to address – and so many players involved around the world – a top priority must be that the United States take a leadership role in establishing a modern set of global laws to govern space.

The current governing law, the Outer Space Treaty of 1967, is far too broad and outdated to deal with the challenges we face today – issues like the commercialization of space, space tourism, vulnerable satellites, increasing traffic, space mining, space junk, and liability laws. As The Economist warns:

> "The next 50 years will look very different. Falling costs, new technologies, Chinese and Indian ambitions, and a new generation of entrepreneurs promise a bold era of space development.
>
> It will almost certainly involve tourism for the rich and better communications networks for all; in the long run it might involve mineral exploitation and even mass transportation. Space will become ever more like an extension of Earth – an arena for firms and private individuals, not just governments. But for this promise to be fulfilled, the world needs to create a system of laws to govern the heavens – both in peacetime and, should it come to that, in war."

"Space junk" is a great example. Countries around the world have put thousands and thousands of objects into the Earth's orbit since the Soviet Union put the first satellite in space in 1957 (note: although many countries have put things into space, the United States, Russia and China are collectively responsible for 92 percent of all the space junk).

As a result, outdated satellites, random rocket parts, and space debris is literally starting to fall from the sky. Currently, Space Force monitors about 29,000 pieces of orbital debris in low Earth orbit (which is 100 miles to 1,250 miles from the Earth's surface), but only things that are at least 10 centimeters are being tracked. This is a

problem because in low Earth orbit, objects can move up to 17,000 miles an hour.

During the first Trump administration, a "space situational awareness" program called TraCSS was kicked off to help keep track of objects in orbit and predict where they will be at any given time to minimize the risk of collisions.

TraCSS was a worthwhile endeavor, but now there are several private sector companies offering space-tracking services, and some of their capabilities already surpass the federal government's. Moving forward, we should let the private sector handle this and focus federal resources on continuing innovative space exploration.

National Security

The national security implications of space are taking place in a rapidly shifting geopolitical landscape.

Back in 2019, the Annual Threat Assessment from the U.S. Director of National Intelligence predicted that "commercial space services would continue to expand; countries – including U.S. adversaries and strategic competitors – would become more reliant on space services for civil and military needs, and China and Russia would field new counterspace weapons intended to target U.S. and allied space capabilities."

Here are other highlights from the 2019 assessment:

Adversary Use of Space

- We expect foreign governments will continue efforts to expand their use of space-based reconnaissance, communications, and navigation systems –including by increasing the number of satellites, quality of capabilities, and applications for use. China and Russia are seeking to expand the full spectrum of their space capabilities, as exemplified by China's launch of its highest-resolution imagery satellite, Gaofen-11, in July 2018.

Space Warfare and Counterspace Weapons

- We assess that China and Russia are training and equipping their military space forces and fielding new anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons to hold U.S. and allied space services at risk, even as they push for international agreements on the non-weaponization of space.
- Both countries recognize the world's growing reliance on space and view the capability to attack space services as a part of their broader efforts to deter an adversary from or defeat one in combat.
- The People's Liberation Army (PLA) has an operational ground-based ASAT missile intended to target low-Earth-orbit satellites, and China probably intends to pursue additional ASAT weapons capable of destroying satellites up to geosynchronous Earth orbit.
- Russia is developing a similar ground-launched ASAT missile system for targeting low-Earth orbit that is likely to be operational within the next several years. It has fielded a ground-based laser weapon, probably intended to blind or damage sensitive space-based optical sensors, such as those used for remote sensing.
- China's and Russia's proposals for international agreements on the non-weaponization of space do not cover multiple issues connected to the ASAT weapons they are developing and deploying, which has allowed them to pursue space warfare capabilities while maintaining the position that space must remain weapons free.

The 2025 Annual Threat Assessment, release in March 2025, confirmed China's advancements:

- China has eclipsed Russia as a space leader and is poised to compete with the United States as the world's leader in space by deploying increasingly capable interconnected multi-sensor systems and working toward ambitious scientific and strategic

goals. China has achieved global coverage in some of its intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) constellations and world-class status in all but a few space technologies.

- China's Beidou constellation is a world-class position, navigation, and timing capability that competes with U.S. GPS and Europe's Galileo service. The PLA ISR architecture and satellite communications are areas the PLA continues to improve upon to close the perceived gap between itself and the U.S. military.
- China's successful lunar sample return mission in June 2024 contributes to Beijing's technological prowess and national prestige while supporting its effort to land astronauts on the Moon by 2030 and establish the first lunar base by 2035.
- China's commercial space sector is growing quickly with aspiration to be a major global competitor to U.S. and European space companies. For example, China launched the first set of satellites in its low Earth orbit (LEO) proliferated constellation last year for its own satellite Internet service to compete with Western commercial satellite Internet services.

- Counterspace operations will be integral to the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) military campaigns, and China has counterspace-weapons capabilities intended to target U.S. and allied satellites. China already has fielded ground-based counterspace capabilities, including EW systems, directed energy weapons (DEWs), and antisatellite (ASAT) missiles intended to disrupt, damage, and destroy target satellites.
  - China also has conducted orbital technology demonstrations, which, while not counterspace weapons tests, prove its ability to operate future space-based counterspace weapons. China has also conducted on-orbit satellite inspections of other satellites, which probably would be representative of the tactics required for some counterspace attacks.

Terrorism (Domestic)

Read more about Domestic Terrorism
on p. 301 of The Great American Reset.

1787 Plan of Action: Domestic Terrorism

- Diligently enforce the 50+ terrorism-related charges already in federal law.
- Prioritize domestic terrorism-related investigations and prosecutions at the national, state, and local levels.
- Increase support for state, local, tribal and territorial partners investigating and prosecuting domestic terrorists.
- Closely watch ISIS-related mobilization in the United States – and take it extremely seriously.
- Promote trusted partnerships between American law enforcement and Muslim communities in America to counter violent extremism.
- Improve information-sharing on domestic terrorism threats across the federal government and with state, local, tribal, and territorial law enforcement partners.
- Engage and partner with the private sector to enlist their help in the federal government's response to the threat posed by domestic terrorists.
- Increase financial, technical and educational resources for state, local, tribal, and territorial law enforcement partners, as well as the American public. Increase training opportunities to support local prevention efforts.
- Promote resources that address antisemitism, Islamophobia and other forms of bias and discrimination.

- Expand community-based diversion programs that help identify individuals at risk of committing targeted violence or terrorism.
- Encourage nongovernmental and multilateral efforts to understand and respond to terrorist content and activities online.

Terrorism (Global)

Make no mistake, the threat of global terrorism is as real and dangerous as ever. Over the past decade, there has been an unprecedented cycle of jihadist mobilization as Islamist violent extremist groups leverage new technologies, social media, and sophisticated messaging to recruit foreign fighters to their cause.

The Taliban's breathtakingly fast takeover of Afghanistan infused a renewed enthusiasm into the jihadist narrative and inspired increased violence by the Taliban and other Islamist militant groups in Pakistan. Meanwhile, as Israel advanced into southern Lebanon, its troops found large stashes of Russian weapons in Hezbollah-controlled areas.

ISIS-K, which is active primarily in Afghanistan and Pakistan, recently claimed responsibility for a major attack in Russia and is thought to be behind another in Iran. Although the ISIS caliphate is gone, the group still has cells and affiliates scattered across Africa and Southeast Asia. The fall of the Assad regime in Syria has raised serious concerns about a potential resurgence there.

Before his death by an American drone, Ayman al-Zawahiri significantly empowered local franchises of al-Qaeda, encouraging them to participate in acts of governance and build their very own civic society.

The 2024 Annual Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community, released on February 5, 2024, warned:

> "U.S. persons and interests at home and abroad will face an ideologically diverse threat from terrorism. This threat is mostly likely to manifest in small cells or individuals inspired by foreign

terrorist organizations and violent extremist ideologies to conduct attacks.

While Al-Qaeda has reached an operational nadir in Afghanistan and Pakistan and ISIS has suffered cascading leadership losses in Iraq and Syria, regional affiliates will continue to expand. These gains symbolize the shift of the center of gravity in the Sunni global jihad to Africa.

Terrorists will maintain an interest in conducting attacks using chemical, biological and radioactive materials against U.S. persons, allies, and interests worldwide. Terrorists from diverse ideological backgrounds continue to circulate instructions of varied credibility for the procurement or production of toxic or radioactive weapons using widely available materials in social media and online fora."

† ISIS

ISIS will remain a centralized global organization even as it has been forced to rely on regional branches in response to successive leadership losses during the past few years. External capabilities vary across ISIS's global branches, but the group will remain focused on attempting to conduct and inspire global attacks against the West and Western interests.

- † ISIS–Greater Sahara and ISIS–West Africa contribute to and capitalize on government instability, communal conflict, and anti-government grievances to make gains in Nigeria and the Sahel.
- † ISIS-Khorasan is trying to conduct attacks that undermine the legitimacy of the Taliban regime by expanding attacks against foreign interests in Afghanistan.

† Al-Qaeda

Al-Qaeda regional affiliates on the African continent and Yemen will sustain the global network as the group maintains its strategic intent to target the United States and U.S. citizens. Al-Qaeda senior leadership has not yet announced the replacement for the former emir, Ayman al-Zawahiri, reflecting the regionally focused and decentralized nature of the organization.

- † Al-Shabaab continues to advance its attack capabilities by acquiring weapons systems while countering a multinational CT campaign, presenting a risk to U.S. personnel. In 2023, al-Shabaab also expanded its operations in Northeast Kenya.

† Hizballah

Lebanese Hizballah will continue to develop its global terrorist capabilities as a complement to the group's growing conventional military capabilities in the region. Since October 2023, Hizballah has conducted attacks along Israel's northern border to tie down Israeli forces as they seek to eliminate Hamas in Gaza. Hizballah probably will continue to conduct provocative actions such as rocket launches against Israel throughout the conflict.

- † Hizballah seeks to limit U.S. influence in Lebanon and the broader Middle East and maintains the capability to target U.S. persons and interests in the region, worldwide, and, to a lesser extent, in the United States.

† Transnational Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremists

The transnational racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists (RMVE) movement, in particular motivated by white supremacy, will continue to foment violence across Europe, South America, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand inspiring the lone actor or small-cell attacks that pose a significant threat to U.S. persons. The loose structure of transnational RMVE organizations and networks, which encourage or inspire but do not typically direct attacks, will challenge local security services and creates resilience against disruptions.

- Lone actors are difficult to detect and disrupt because of their lack of affiliation. While these violent extremists tend to leverage simple attack methods, they can have devastating, outsized consequences.
- RMVE publications and manifestoes from previous attackers feed the RMVE movement with violent propaganda, targets, and tactics. The Terrorgram Collective, a loosely connected network of online channels and chatrooms, has a global reach and with its sophisticated online publications seek to inspire violence.
- Since early 2022, we have identified five RMVE attacks and five suspected RMVE attacks, killing a total of 27 people, by apparent lone actors in the United States and abroad. During the same period, there have been disrupted RMVE plots, arrests, and threats reported in several European countries.

The 2025 Annual Threat Assessment warned:

- ISIS

ISIS's most aggressive branches, including ISIS-Khorasan (ISIS-K), and its entrepreneurial plotters will continue to seek to attack the West, including the United States, via online outreach and

propaganda aimed at directing, enabling, or inspiring attacks, and could exploit vulnerable travel routes.

ISIS has suffered major setbacks and is incapable of holding ground in Iraq and Syria. In recent years, ISIS saw the U.S. defeat of its physical caliphate in 2019, the loss of three overall leaders in 2022, 2023, and 2025, and renewed counterterrorism efforts this year removing leaders driving global operations. Nevertheless, ISIS remains the world's largest Islamic terrorist organization, has sought to gain momentum from high-profile attacks, and continues to rely on its most capable branches and globally dispersed leadership to weather degradation.

- The New Year's Day attacker in New Orleans was influenced by ISIS propaganda, and separately, an Afghan national was arrested in October for planning an election day attack in the name of ISIS, highlighting ISIS's ability to reach into the Homeland to both inspire and enable attacks.
- ISIS-K in South Asia is the group's branch most capable of carrying out external terrorist attacks and maintains the intent to conduct attacks in South and Central Asia, and globally, although its capabilities vary. ISIS-K's mass casualty attacks in Russia and Iran in 2024, as well as arrests of ISIS-K supporters in Europe and the United States, highlight the group's expanding capability beyond South Asia and ability to inspire individuals to conduct attacks abroad.
- ISIS will seek to exploit the end of the Asad regime in Syria to reconstitute its attack capabilities, including external plotting, and to free prisoners to rebuild their ranks.
- In 2024, the ISIS spokesman publicly hailed the group's Africa expansion, highlighting the growing importance of the continent to the group. ISIS-Somalia has doubled in size during the past year, ISISWest Africa remains the largest branch and leads in numbers of claimed attacks, and ISIS-Sahel is expanding into coastal West Africa.

Al-Qaeda

Al-Qaeda maintains its intent to target the United States and U.S. citizens across its global affiliates. Its leaders, some of whom remain in Iran, have tried to exploit anti-Israeli sentiment over the war in Gaza to unite Muslims and encourage attacks against Israel and the United States. Al-Qaeda's media apparatus issued statements from leaders and the group's affiliates supporting Hamas and encouraging attacks against Israeli and U.S. targets.

- Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) relaunched its Inspire guide with videos and tweets that encouraged attacks against Jewish targets, the United States, and Europe. Inspire provided instructions for making bombs and placing explosive devices on civilian airliners and gave religious, ideological, historical, and moral justification for such attacks. In addition to trying to inspire attacks worldwide and in the United States, AQAP has the intent to conduct operations in the region and beyond.
- Al-Shabaab – Al-Qaeda's largest and wealthiest affiliate – remains focused on attacks in Somalia that further its regional objectives, provides funding to Al-Qaeda efforts outside of Somalia, and has a burgeoning relationship with the Huthis that could provide access to a new source of more sophisticated weapons, increasing the threat to U.S. interests in the region.
- In West Africa, Al-Qaeda is expanding its territorial control by gaining inroads with civilians through the provision of services and intimidation, and is threatening urban centers in Burkina Faso and Mali, where U.S. personnel are located.
- Al-Qaeda's affiliate in Syria, Hurras al-Din, probably is exploiting the end of the Asad regime in Syria to strengthen its position. Despite its public announcement that the group

was ordered dissolved by Al-Qaeda's senior leaders in Iran, Hurras al-Din members were advised not to disarm and instead to prepare for a future conflict, noting their continued fight against the Jews and their supporters.

Other Groups

Other Islamic terrorist groups – including some with historical ties to Al-Qaeda – continue to pose a threat to the United States primarily in the regions where they operate. Most of these groups generally have targeted local governments in recent years, while Lebanese Hizballah has continued to pursue limited targeting of primarily Israeli and Jewish individuals in and outside of the Middle East. The U.S. government works with partners worldwide to prevent attacks against U.S. citizens, while watching for indications that these groups may shift intent and build capabilities to pursue transnational attacks.

- In South Asia, Tehrik-e-Taliban (TTP) operations in recent years have focused exclusively on targeting the Government of Pakistan, probably to avoid drawing more counterterrorism pressure. However, TTP's capabilities, historical ties to Al-Qaeda, and previous support to operations targeting the United States keep us concerned about the potential future threat. Anti-India groups, including Lashkar-e Tayyiba, similarly concern us in part because of their historical links with Al-Qaeda.

1787's Mission

The total defeat of jihadist terrorism, both militarily and culturally.

1787 Plan of Action: Global Terrorism

- Don't get cocky and underestimate terrorists – ever!
- Expand and strengthen America's cooperation with international partners to better target global extremism. (see p. 335)
- Cultivate light-footprint, low-cost operations.
- Fully understand exactly who – and what – we are dealing with.
- *Listen* to people who have first-hand knowledge of how jihadist terrorism works.
- Build productive relationships with the Muslim World. Ensure that American Muslims are protected and respected.
- Use Counter-Ideological Operations/Warfare to reframe America's image and fight against extremist propaganda. (see p. 260)
- Work hard to improve the factors around the world that enable violent extremism such as poverty, inequality and repression.

Broader Steps That 1787 Will Take to Fight Terrorism, both Foreign & Domestic:

- 1787 will do whatever it takes to protect the United States of America against 21st century threats, and we will do so with a strategy that honors our nation's values and ideals.

- The U.S. Intelligence community is incredible. The players are not perfect – no organization made up of humans is – but our intelligence community is filled with committed patriots who sacrifice so much of themselves to keep this country safe. We owe every member of these organizations an enormous debt of gratitude.

  In that spirit, we must increase our commitment to superior intelligence collection, information sharing, and surveillance. A seamless process of gathering, analyzing and sharing intelligence is critical to our national security. We must strengthen our analytic capabilities, and our agencies must be highly cooperative in sharing valuable information.

- In our fight against global terrorism, we must continue to actively pursue and destroy terrorist cells before they can attack. (see p. 733 of *The Great American Reset*)

- It's imperative we actively combat the threat of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapon attacks by proliferation, rogue nations and terrorist organizations. (see p. 253)

- Cyber-attacks, cyber-terrorism and cyber-espionage pose an increasingly significant risk to the U.S. This threat is more ominous now that we have become increasingly reliant on technology, and information technology and physical infrastructure have become so interconnected.

  We must have a comprehensive national cybersecurity strategy that thoroughly protects everything from our infrastructure to our intelligence databases. (see p. 267)

- The U.S. must take a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach to securing our borders. (see p. 294)

- The U.S. must make smart decisions about protecting our physical infrastructure. (see p. 603 of *The Great American Reset*)

- The U.S. must strengthen our public health infrastructure and be certain that our public health system has the wherewithal to cope with the physical and psychological (emotional, behavioral and

cognitive) consequences of a conventional, biological, chemical or radiological attack on the United States. (see p. 651 of *The Great American Reset*)

† For decades, the United States has allowed terrorist organizations to negatively frame America for the Muslim world. We must reframe this highly damaging, globally destructive narrative immediately. (see p. 260)

† Although most terrorist activities are not existential threats, attacks can be extremely disruptive, can kill American citizens in small numbers, and can take a tremendous physical and psychological toll on our society.

Therefore, the most important thing we as citizens can do is to continue to strengthen our resilience. Bad things will happen on occasion and, as a society, we need to have the capacity to quickly absorb the event, recover from it and move forward.

† It's imperative we create public registries of the real owners of companies and/or trusts to bring transparency to the complex world of global finance.

Terror/Resilience

resilience

noun re·sil·ience \ri-ˈzil-yən(t)s\

: the ability to become strong, healthy or successful again after something bad happens

terrorism

noun ter·ror·ism \ˈter-ər-i-zəm\

: the use of violent acts to frighten the people in an area as a way of trying to achieve a political goal

LET'S NEVER FORGET WHAT TERRORISM IS & WHAT IT IS NOT.
RESILIENCE IS ONE OF OUR GREATEST NATIONAL STRENGTHS.
WE MUST NOT LET FEAR PARALYZE US. EVER.

Terrorist organizations are far more interested in the *reaction* a terrorist attack evokes than with the actual physical destruction caused by the attack itself. It is critical we keep terrorism in perspective, so we don't overcompensate and over-reach like we did after the September 11th terrorist attacks, when our leaders charted a course in foreign policy that cost trillions of dollars and thousands of American lives.

Back then, several policies were enacted that challenged our core values. In addition to "enhanced interrogation techniques" – what we believe to be torture – President George W. Bush and Congress authorized several activities that went far beyond the parameters of traditional law enforcement, including things like the USA PATRIOT Act, which significantly increased the federal government's authority to gather, analyze and investigate private information related to U.S. citizens.

†

Although most terrorist activity is not an existential threat to the United States, attacks can be extremely disruptive, can kill American citizens in small numbers, and can take a tremendous physical and psychological toll on our society.

Therefore, the most important thing we as citizens can do – by far – is to continue to reinforce our *resilience*. Bad things will happen on occasion and, as a society, we need to have the capacity to quickly absorb the event, recover, then move forward.

Although terrorists do not have the power to eliminate the United States, they do possess the capacity to fundamentally change who we are as a nation if we are not very careful.

Terror Suspects

The Bottom Line

† U.S. federal courts, established under Article III of the U.S. Constitution, should hear cases in which terrorists are caught by domestic law enforcement.

However, terrorists who are caught by members of the U.S. military overseas should be tried by military commissions or military tribunals since the evidentiary rules applied by U.S. federal courts – things like chain-of-custody requirements, and hearsay, privilege and *Miranda* rules – were written to govern domestic apprehensions. American soldiers are not trained in constitutional or criminal law, or domestic arrest techniques, nor should they be.

† Those who believe military commissions and military tribunals are unfair and/or violate our rule of law should take comfort in two things. First, the Military Commissions Act of 2009 gives those being tried by military commissions and tribunals practically all the same procedural rights as those charged in federal court, and in some respects even more rights.

Second, in the Supreme Court case Boumediene v. Bush, the Court ruled that, for prisoners at Guantánamo Bay, "habeas privilege entitles the prisoner to a meaningful opportunity to demonstrate that he is being held pursuant to 'the erroneous application or interpretation' of relevant law, and the habeas court must have the power to order the conditional release of an individual unlawfully detained" – which means that federal courts have the power to review these cases and grant relief anyway.

Torture

The Bottom Line

The use of torture should be unequivocally and unapologetically rejected in any form. Our core national values are the most valuable currency we have. We must always strive to be champions of human rights, justice, and the rule of law.

♦ ♦ ♦

Six Reasons Torture Should Be Rejected

† The Use of Torture Goes Against Every Single Thing This Country Stands For

If we believe ourselves to be truly exceptional – and hold ourselves as a model for the world to follow – we simply cannot tolerate any activity that erodes our national values. Torture is egregious and a brutal violation of human rights, even in time of war. Torture not only corrupts our military, but it also badly damages our global prestige and threatens our international power.

After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, reckless decisions made in the name of U.S. national security proved to have long-term ramifications – legally, politically, and in our relationships with allies abroad.

The egregious overreach of the George W. Bush administration – which enabled severe and unacceptable mistakes (i.e., torture, Guantánamo, Abu Ghraib) – sowed distrust and division within our citizenship, called into question our national core values, and threatened our global image as a world leader. Quite simply, this episode in our history made us look like complete hypocrites.

† The Use of Torture Violates the Geneva Conventions

The Geneva Conventions are four treaties and three additional protocols that establish the indisputable standard of international law for humanitarian treatment in war. Together, they regulate the conduct of armed conflict, setting forth protections for civilians, humanitarian workers, prisoners of war, and others directly involved with conflict such as wounded and sick soldiers.

The first ten articles of the First Geneva Convention, the original one, were created in 1864. The U.S. ratified this in 1882, then Geneva Conventions I - IV in 1955. Protocols I and II have been signed but not ratified and Protocol III was ratified in 2007.

† The Use of Torture Violates the United Nations Convention Against Torture

The United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment says:

> "Each State Party shall take effective legislative, administrative, judicial or other measures to prevent acts of torture in any territory under its jurisdiction. No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture. An order from a superior officer or a public authority may not be invoked as a justification of torture."

† The Use of Torture Violates the Uniform Code of Military Justice and the Detainee Treatment Act of 2005

Article 93 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice – the foundation of military law in the United States – says "any person subject to this chapter who is guilty of cruelty toward, or oppression or

maltreatment of, any person subject to his orders shall be punished as a court-martial may direct."

In 2006, the Supreme Court ruled in Hamdan v. Rumsfeld that this Article did in fact apply to top terror suspects detained by the United States. The Court held that the Guantánamo Bay military commission established by the Bush administration to try detainees "lacked power to proceed because its structures and procedures violate both the Uniform Code of Military Justice and the Geneva Conventions."

Moreover, on October 11, 2012 the Department of Defense issued Directive Number 3115.09 which said: "No person in DoD custody or physical control, detained in a DoD facility, or otherwise interrogated, debriefed, or questioned by DoD military personnel, civilian employees, or DoD contractor personnel shall be subject to cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment as defined in title XIV of Public Law 109-163, also known as The Detainee Treatment Act of 2005."

"All intelligence interrogations, detainee debriefings, or tactical questioning by DoD military personnel, civilian employees, or DoD contractor personnel to gain intelligence from individuals in U.S. or foreign custody shall be conducted humanely in accordance with applicable law and policy."

† Every Time We Abandon Our Values and Violate Our Code of Honor, We Essentially Recruit New Followers for Our Enemies.

† Not That This Matters – Because We Wouldn't Support Its Use Either Way – But Torture Isn't Even Effective:

After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, President George W. Bush launched an aggressive campaign to "secure" this nation, authorizing activities that went far beyond the accepted parameters of traditional law enforcement.

As such, the Rendition, Detention, and Interrogation Program implemented by the CIA was a global counter-terrorism effort tasked with disrupting al-Qaeda and protecting the United States against another large-scale domestic attack.

In 2014, the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence released a 528-page executive summary of its study of this program (the entire classified report, approved in 2012, is over 6,700 pages). In part, the Committee found that the interrogations of CIA detainees were brutal and far worse than the CIA represented to policymakers, and that the conditions of confinement for CIA detainees were harsher than the CIA had represented.

The report described detainees who were "stripped and shackled nude, placed in the standing position for sleep deprivation, or subjected to other CIA enhanced interrogation techniques prior to being questioned by an interrogator." One detainee, alleged Afghan fighter Gul Rahman, was taken to detention site Cobalt (a.k.a. The Salt Pit), a CIA facility located north of Kabul. There he was "shackled to the wall of his cell in a position that required the detainee to rest on the bare concrete floor."

His dead body was found the next day. "An internal CIA review and autopsy assessed that Rahman likely died from hypothermia – in part from having been forced to sit on the bare concrete floor without pants."

Waterboarding is also detailed in the Senate report. Abu Zubaydah, another detainee, was waterboarded to the point that he became "completely unresponsive, with bubbles rising through his open, full mouth… Internal CIA records describe the waterboarding of Khalid Shaykh Mohammad (KSM) as evolving into a 'series of near drownings.'" The report also found that the CIA waterboarded KSM at least 183 times, and that KSM's reporting included "significant fabricated information."

The most damaging – and devastating – part of the Senate report came under the very long heading: "The CIA did not conduct a comprehensive or accurate accounting of the number of individuals it detained and held individuals who did not meet the legal standard for detention. The CIA's claims about the number of detainees held and

subjected to its enhanced Interrogation techniques were inaccurate." This section included this:

> "The CIA never conducted a comprehensive audit or developed a complete and accurate list of the individuals it had detained or subjected to its enhanced interrogation techniques. CIA statements to the Committee and later to the public that the CIA detained fewer than 100 individuals, and that less than a third of those 100 detainees were subjected to the CIA's enhanced interrogation techniques, were inaccurate. The Committee's review of CIA records determined that the CIA detained at least 119 individuals, of whom at least 39 were subjected to the CIA's enhanced interrogation techniques. Of the 119 known detainees, at least 26 were wrongfully held and did not meet the detention standard in the September 2001 Memorandum of Notification."

In response to the Senate report, the CIA admitted mistakes and acknowledged that the Agency "was unprepared and lacked core competencies to respond effectively to the decision made in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks that the Agency undertake what would be an unprecedented program of detaining and interrogating suspected al-Qaeda and affiliated terrorists. This lack of preparation and competencies resulted in significant lapses in the Agency's ability to develop and monitor its initial detention and interrogation activities."

They also acknowledged that the agency "failed to perform a comprehensive and independent analysis on the effectiveness of enhanced interrogation techniques."

But they pushed back on other findings: "The Agency disagrees with the study's unqualified assertions that the overall detention and interrogation program did not produce unique intelligence that led terrorist plots to be disrupted, terrorists to be captured, or lives to be saved."

Maybe torture did produce some "unique intelligence" but certainly not every time. In fact, the most useful intel was gained when detainees were questioned using non-coercive techniques. < Note: Just to warn you, some of this is rough reading. >

"Foreign authorities captured Hassan Ghul in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. After his identity was confirmed in January 2004, Ghul was rendered from U.S. military custody to CIA custody at Detention Site COBALT. The detention site interrogators, who, according to CIA records, did not use the CIA's enhanced interrogation techniques on Ghul, sent at least 21 intelligence reports to CIA Headquarters based on their debriefings of Hassan Ghul from the two days he spent at the facility. CIA records indicate that the most accurate CIA detainee reporting on the facilitator who led to Usama bin Laden (UBL) was acquired from Hassan Ghul – prior to the use of the CIA's enhanced interrogation techniques.

During this same period, prior to the use of the CIA's enhanced interrogation techniques, Ghul provided information related to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, Abu Faraj al-Libi (including his role in delivering messages from UBL), Jaffar al-Tayyar, 'Abd al-Hadi al-Iraqi, Hamza Rabi'a, Shaik Sa'id al-Masri, Sharif al-Masri, Abu 'Abd al-Rahman al-Najdi, Abu Talha al-Pakistani, and numerous other al-Qaeda operatives. He also provided information on the locations, movements, operational security, and training of al-Qaeda leaders living in Shkai, Pakistan, as well as on the visits of other leaders and operatives to Shkai. Ghul's reporting on Shkai, which was included in at least 16 of the 21 intelligence reports, confirmed earlier reporting that the Shkai valley served as al-Qaeda command and control center after the group's 2001 exodus from Afghanistan.

Notwithstanding these facts, in March 2005, the CIA represented to the Department of Justice that Hassan Ghul's reporting on Shkai was acquired 'after' the use of the CIA's enhanced interrogation techniques. After two days of questioning at Detention Site COBALT and the dissemination of 21 intelligence reports, Ghul was transferred to Detention Site BLACK. According to CIA records, upon arrival, Ghul was 'shaved and barbered, stripped, and placed in the standing position against the wall' with 'his hands above his head' with plans to lower his hands after two hours. The CIA interrogators at the detention site then requested to use the CIA's enhanced interrogation techniques on Ghul,

writing: '[the] interrogation team believes, based on [Hassan Ghul's] reaction to the initial contact, that his al-Qaeda briefings and his earlier experiences with U.S. military interrogators have convinced him there are limits to the physical contact interrogators can have with him. The interrogation team believes the approval and employment of enhanced measures should sufficiently shift [Hassan Ghul's] paradigm of what he expects to happen. The lack of these increased [sic] measures may limit the team's capability to collect critical and reliable information in a timely manner.'

CIA Headquarters approved the request the same day. Following 59 hours of sleep deprivation, Hassan Ghul experienced hallucinations, but was told by a psychologist that his reactions were 'consistent with what many others experience in his condition,' and that he should calm himself by telling himself his experiences are normal and will subside when he decides to be truthful. The sleep deprivation, as well as other enhanced interrogations, continued, as did Ghul's hallucinations.'"

Ghul also complained of back pain and asked to see a doctor, but interrogators responded that the 'pain was normal and would stop when [Ghul] was confirmed as telling the truth.'

A cable states that 'interrogators told [Ghul] they did not care if he was in pain, but cared only if he provided complete and truthful information.' A CIA physician assistant later observed that Hassan Ghul was experiencing 'notable physiological fatigue,' including 'abdominal and back muscle pain/spasm, heaviness and mild paralysis of arms, legs and feet [that] are secondary to his hanging position and extreme degree of sleep deprivation,' but that Ghul was clinically stable and had 'essentially normal vital signs,' despite an 'occasional premature heart beat' that the cable linked to Ghul's fatigue.

Throughout this period, Ghul provided no actionable threat information, and much of his reporting on the al-Qaeda presence in Shkai was repetitive of his reporting prior to the use of the CIA's enhanced interrogation techniques. Ghul also provided no other

information of substance on UBL facilitator Abu Ahmad al-Kuwaiti.'"

Other detainees, including Khalid Shaykh Mohammad, provided false information after tortuous interrogation. "Internal CIA records describe the waterboarding of Khalid Shaykh Mohammad (KSM) as evolving into a 'series of near drownings.'" The report also found that the CIA waterboarded KSM at least 183 times, and that KSM's reporting included "significant fabricated information."

In a staggering disconnect, in his book Playing to the Edge, Michael Hayden (CIA Director from May 30, 2006 – February 12, 2009) recounts a story of a professional relationship he had with a CIA interrogator who interrogated Khalid Shaykh Mohammad.

In his account, this interrogator had "built up a personal relationship with KSM." According to this interrogator, "KSM referred to him as Amir, a term of respect for the man who had waterboarded him and made him feel, over and over again, as though he was drowning. The interrogation techniques – in KSM's case, especially sleep deprivation –had pushed him into what the interrogators called a zone of cooperation from his previous zone of defiance and after that, KSM's questioning resembled more an interview than an interrogation. The information we got from him and others was incredibly valuable."

Wow! It sounds like KSM was at Disney World hanging out with his buddies!

General Hayden should be commended for his four-plus decades of service to this country. But, if *anyone* is going to defend these techniques, they need to at least have the guts to be honest about what they truly are, and how and why they were used.

There are two other highly concerning parts of General Hayden's book. Predictably, he was aghast that the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence was going to release a report on the CIA's detention and interrogation program, which is understandable because he would certainly be right in the thick of things. However, what deeply disturbs us are two specific passages:

The first: "I've since reflected on the Feinstein report and what lessons to draw from it. One positive take-away was the clear need to brief Congress fully and contemporaneously on sensitive activity...I'm close to drawing a second, darker conclusion too. Be careful what you tell these people. Some are less interested in honest dialogue than listening to rebut and accuse and discredit."

General Hayden, with all due respect, regardless of what you think of members of Congress, it is not up to you – or *anyone*, for that matter – to decide what the CIA *does* and *does not* get to tell them. In fact, that attitude is what got you all into this mess in the first place. Even though the U.S. Constitution grants no formal congressional oversight power, it is implied in Congress's vast breadth of enumerated powers, and checks and balances are vital to our democracy.

The second worrisome passage in his book is this: "Why the report? CIA was out of the interrogation business. It wasn't going back."

Sir, again with all due respect, that is a shockingly naïve statement for a retired United States Air Force four-star general and former Director of the National Security Agency. Those who cannot remember the past, or are content to sweep it under the rug, *are condemned to repeat it.*

Thankfully, the CIA did not use enhanced interrogation techniques after November 8, 2007, and no detainee was held by the CIA after April 2008. In January 2009, President Obama signed executive orders to end CIA secret prisons, and to declare that all interrogations must follow the non-coercive methods of the Army Field Manual.

In the CIA's response to the Senate report, CIA Director John Brennan – who was Director from March 8, 2013 – January 20, 2017 – wrote:

> "The Agency takes no position on whether intelligence obtained from detainees who were subjected to enhanced interrogation techniques could have been obtained through other means or from other individuals. The answer to this question is and will forever remain unknowable.

After reviewing the Committee Study and the comments of the Agency review team, and as I indicated at the outset of this memorandum, I personally remain firm in my belief that enhanced interrogation techniques are an inappropriate method for obtaining intelligence. Moreover, it is my resolute intention never to allow any Agency officer to participate in any interrogation activity in which enhanced interrogation techniques would be employed."

He's hardly alone. In September 2015, 42 retired generals and admirals of the U.S. Armed Forces sent a letter to the 2016 presidential candidates. Much of the letter reflected on our nation's values:

"We know from experience that U.S. national security policies are most effective when they uphold our nation's core ideals...Torture violates our core values as a nation. Our greatest strength is our commitment to the rule of law and to the principles embedded in our Constitution.

Our servicemen and women need to know that our leaders do not condone torture of any kind...George Washington admonished his soldiers that anyone engaging in torture 'bring[s] shame, disgrace and ruin to themselves and their country.' Ronald Reagan pressed the Senate to ratify the Convention Against Torture, stating that the United States must clearly express her will to 'bring an end to the abhorrent practice of torture.'"

But the generals and admirals went a step further:

"Torture is unnecessary. Based on our experience – and that of our nation's top interrogators, backed by countless studies – we know that lawful, rapport-based interrogation techniques are the most effective way to elicit actionable intelligence. But torture is actually worse than unnecessary; it is counterproductive and undermines our national security.

It increases the risks to our troops, hinders cooperation with allies, alienates populations whose support the United States needs

in the struggle against terrorism, and provides a propaganda tool for extremists who wish to do us harm."

The following year, 58 retired generals and admirals wrote to the Republican and Democratic national committees to ask they include the rejection of torture into their party platforms: "We have diverse political affiliations and opinions, but we are in firm and unanimous agreement that the United States is strongest when it remains faithful to its core values."

"We are asking the platform committees of both major parties to send a clear message that the next President of the United States will uphold our obligations under international and domestic law, and reaffirm the United States' long-standing and proper role as a world leader on human rights."

After a December 2021 hearing in Guantánamo for a Pakistani man named Majid Khan – which detailed inhuman treatment during interrogations by American officials, including beatings, forced sodomy, and tubes covered with hot sauce being shoved up his nose – seven horrified members of the jury, all senior military officers, called Mr. Khan's treatment a "stain on the moral fiber of America." They went on to say that his treatment was the same as the "torture performed by the most abusive regimes in modern history."

"Mr. Khan was subjected to physical and psychological abuse well beyond approved enhanced interrogation techniques. This abuse was of no practical value in terms of intelligence, or any other tangible benefit to U.S. interests…The treatment of Mr. Khan in the hands of U.S. personnel should be a source of shame for the U.S. government."

Transnational Crime

The Annual Threat Assessment from the U.S. Director of National Intelligence, released on February 5, 2024, warned that "transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) threaten U.S. and allied public health systems, exploit the international financial system, and degrade the safety and security of the United States and partner nations."

"TCOs incite instability and violence, drive migration, and provide some U.S. adversaries with additional avenues to advance their geopolitical interests."

The following year, the 2025 Annual Threat Assessment warned:

- Profit-motivated transnational criminals are using corruption, intimidation, and enabling technologies to expand their illegal activities into new markets and to diversify their sources of income, which increase their resiliency to U.S. and international law enforcement and financial regulatory efforts. TCOs are defrauding U.S. citizens, businesses, and government programs, while laundering billions of dollars of illicit proceeds through U.S. and international financial institutions. TCOs sometimes outsource money laundering operations and investments to individuals and networks with legal and banking expertise to circumvent financial regulations.

  TCOs and their financial facilitators use a myriad of methods to launder and repatriate illicit proceeds and to evade law enforcement and regulatory pressures. Some TCOs use digital currencies for money laundering and sanctions evasion activities because of its perceived anonymity and weaker international regulations compared to fiat currencies.

- Financially motivated cyber criminals continue to prey on inadequately defended U.S. targets, such as healthcare systems and municipal governments, that could have broad impact on the U.S. populace and economy. Others have conducted attacks on critical infrastructure, disrupting utility company business networks or manipulating poorly secured control systems.

  Ransomware actors in mid-2024 attacked the largest payment processor for U.S. healthcare transactions, hampering prescriptions and causing extended delays in accessing electronic health records, patient communications, and medication ordering systems, and forcing some ambulances to divert patients to other hospitals.

U.S. water infrastructure has become a more common target. In October 2024, criminal actors conducted cyber-attacks against both large and small water utilities in the United States, possibly inspired by attacks against water infrastructure by Russian hacktivists and Iranian cyber actors in 2023 that had little effect but drew substantial publicity.

- Foreign and U.S.-based human traffickers exploit vulnerable individuals and groups by promising well-paying jobs, confiscating identification documents, coercing victims to engage in risky behaviors and to work in inhumane conditions. TCOs that engage in human trafficking may also engage in other criminal activity threatening the United States, including fraud scams, drug trafficking, and weapons and human smuggling.

  Criminal actors, including Mexico-based TCOs, exploit migrants transiting the Western Hemisphere to the United States through kidnapping for ransom, forced labor, and sex trafficking operations. For example, some victims are forced to repay their smuggling fees through debt bondage once they arrive in the United States. These migrants are typically forced to become domestic servants, to work in the fishing, agriculture, and meat processing industries for low wages, or to work in illegal marijuana grow houses.

1787 Plan of Action: Transnational Crime

- Improve and reinforce bilateral partnerships between Mexican and U.S. law enforcement agencies.
- Fortify the Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL). Establish more effective ways to measure the agency's long-term impact and ensure there is proper oversight of its programs in foreign countries.
- Disrupt transnational crime and enforce strong criminal penalties against transnational criminal networks.

- Help foreign governments build effective law enforcement institutions that counter transnational crime.
- Combat corruption by helping governments and civil society build transparent and accountable public institutions.
- Establish and implement international treaties for combating crime and provide tools for legal cooperation in criminal cases among countries.
- Work with international partners to develop effective approaches to border and maritime security.
- Disrupt and dismantle human trafficking networks before migrants reach the United States.
- Support the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA).
- Work with Canada to increase joint law enforcement efforts and fortify cross-border security operations.

Veterans

You are selfless. You are brave. You are the very best of America. Everything we have, you have secured for us. Everything we hope to be, you protect. Thank you, from the bottom of our hearts.

Here is our sacred vow: We will also do everything in our power to protect YOU.

1787 Plan of Action: Veterans

Health Care

- Guarantee that our veterans have access to timely, high quality health care.
- Hold the VA and VHA fully accountable.
- No more shifting a backlog of undecided claims into an overwhelmed appeals system. Fast, accurate benefits decisions now!
- Create fully exchangeable electronic medical records that connect the Department of Defense and VA.
- Aggressively improve the mental health services provided to our service members, veterans, and their families.
- Fully research and understand "moral injury" and discover better ways to help those who struggle.
- Utilize complementary and alternative therapies to combat PTSD.
- Utilize complementary and alternative therapies to prevent suicides.
- Provide gender-specific health care and services to protect and honor women veterans.
- Launch National Opioid Withdrawal (NOW), 1787's program that targets the opioid public health emergency.
- Ensure that our military heroes receive adequate, discreet care in the aftermath of military sexual trauma (and that these heinous crimes are fully prosecuted).

Employment

- Ensure every veteran has rewarding employment opportunities.
- Encourage the acceptance of military training and experience to be acceptable for licenses and credentials in specialized fields.
- Allow certain GI Bill funds to be used for small-business capitalization.
- Mandate that a certain number of federal contracts be awarded to businesses owned by service-disabled veterans.

Education

- Veterans earn their education benefits in the most difficult way possible. Protect these benefits at all costs.
- Guarantee that all military children have access to high-quality education, from pre-k through college.
- Offer better support to military spouses and partners, including appropriate education and employment.
- Expand the "Iraq and Afghanistan Service Grant" to include students whose parent/guardian died because of military service anywhere.

We Got You!

- Noncitizen veterans should never be removed from this country without careful, extensive review.
- Support permanent supportive housing through the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH).
- Fully fund the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program

- Support the Homeless Providers Grant and Per Diem (GPD) transitional housing program.
- Eliminate the funding fee associated with the Home Loan Guaranty program.
- Reinstitute strict restrictions on payday lenders and ferociously protect the Military Lending Act.

Whistleblowers

The Bottom Line

- The clearest way to illustrate 1787's position on the appropriate balance between the right of the public to *know* versus *national security* is to compare the leaking of the Pentagon Papers with Chelsea Manning, Edward Snowden and Julian Assange.

  In 1971, Daniel Ellsberg released, without authorization, the *Report of the Office of the Secretary of Defense Vietnam Task Force* – otherwise known as the Pentagon Papers – a top-secret, seven-thousand-page Pentagon study of the U.S. government's decision-making process during the Vietnam War. The documents detailed massive policy and leadership failures, and the revelations proved that the Johnson Administration lied to the public and the U.S. Congress about the scope of activity in Vietnam.

  In our assessment, Ellsberg disclosed only information that the American people *needed* to know. To us, this is where the line should be drawn: *appropriate discretion*. Ellsberg's leak didn't include everything in the Vietnam report. He purposefully omitted, for example, everything

concerning ongoing diplomatic efforts, including those underway to negotiate the safe release of prisoners of war.

In contrast, Chelsea Manning, Edward Snowden and Julian Assange spectacularly failed to use such discretion, and that is when they ***all*** crossed a bright line.

♦ ♦ ♦

When it comes to "whistleblowing," we are dealing with a wide spectrum of activities, so let's distinguish between the different levels.

There is, of course, straightforward whistleblowing – much of which is protected by federal law. For example, the False Claims Act (the "Lincoln Law") is a law that targets individuals and/or companies who defraud governmental programs. The law includes something called a *qui tam* provision, which allows private individuals to file suit on behalf of the government. Under the False Claims Act, the U.S. Department of Justice collected over $2.68 billion in settlements/judgments in FY2023 alone, bringing the total collected to over $75 billion since 1986.

Another example, the Occupational Safety & Health Administration's (OSHA) Whistleblower Protection Program, protects "employees who report violations of various workplace safety and health, airline, commercial motor carrier, consumer product, environmental, financial reform, food safety, health insurance reform, motor vehicle safety, nuclear, pipeline, public transportation agency, railroad, maritime, and securities laws."

For its part, the U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) believes that people "who know of possible securities law violations can be among the most powerful weapons in the law enforcement arsenal of the Securities and Exchange Commission."

"Through their knowledge of the circumstances and individuals involved, whistleblowers can help the Commission identify possible fraud and other violations much earlier than might otherwise have been possible. That allows the Commission to minimize the harm to investors, better preserve the integrity of the United States' capital

markets, and more swiftly hold accountable those responsible for unlawful conduct."

This can be super lucrative for whistleblowers. The SEC is authorized by Congress "to provide monetary awards to eligible individuals who come forward with high-quality original information that leads to a Commission enforcement action in which over $1,000,000 in sanctions is ordered. The range for awards is between 10 percent and 30 percent of the money collected."

Another type of whistleblowing involves ordinary people blowing extraordinary whistles. The most famous of these, Mark Felt (a.k.a. "Deep Throat"), brought the Watergate scandal to the public consciousness and ended Richard Nixon's presidency.

Other examples include Sherron Watkins, whose infamous memo to Enron founder Ken Lay warned of the company's nefarious accounting practices and the ultimate destruction of the company, and Jeffrey Wigand, an American biochemist and former vice-president of research and development at tobacco company Brown & Williamson, who blew the whistle on the tobacco industry and its attempts to cover-up the documented link between cigarettes and lung cancer.

In 2015, an anonymous source leaked what are known as the Panama Papers – 11.5 million documents that disclosed the financial information for over 214,000 offshore entities. The documents were taken from Mossack Fonseca & Co. which, at the time, was the fourth largest offshore financial services provider in the world.

The leaked documents – which reveal how wealthy clients of Mossack Fonseca hid billions of dollars in tax havens – were originally given to the German newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung but eventually ended up in the hands of the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, which said of the papers:

> "The Panama Papers is one of the biggest leaks and largest collaborative investigations in journalism history. The Papers are a massive leak of documents that exposes the offshore holdings of 12 current and former world leaders and reveals how associates of

Russian President Vladimir Putin secretly shuffled as much as $2 billion through banks and shadow companies.

The records reveal a pattern of covert maneuvers by banks, companies and people tied to Russian leader Putin. The records show offshore companies linked to this network moving money in transactions as large as $200 million at a time. Putin associates disguised payments, backdated documents and gained hidden influence within the country's media and automotive industries."

So, these whistleblowers sound defendable, right?!? BUT *here* is where it gets way more complicated:

The Right of the Public to *Know* Versus *National Security*.

The clearest way to illustrate our position on the appropriate balance to this is to compare the leaking of the Pentagon Papers with Chelsea Manning, Edward Snowden and Julian Assange.

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After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, President George W. Bush launched an aggressive campaign to "secure" the nation, authorizing

activities that went far beyond the parameters of traditional law enforcement.

At the same time, Congress passed sweeping legislation designed to enhance American counterterrorism efforts. This included the USA PATRIOT Act, which significantly increased the federal government's authority to gather, analyze and investigate private information related to U.S. citizens.

However, the American public did not know any of this.... until Edward Snowden took top-secret documents from the National Security Agency (NSA). Working as an intelligence contractor for Booz Allen Hamilton in Hawaii, Snowden "touched" up to 1.5 million NSA files. In 2013, the Guardian began to publish the stolen material, the first of over 7,000 top-secret documents that journalists have since released.

Through these documents, American citizens learned that the NSA: collected millions of telephone records from Verizon customers; had a program named EvilOlive that collected and stored large quantities of Americans' Internet metadata; and gathered the private communications of the users of nine popular Internet services, including Microsoft, Yahoo, Apple, Google and Facebook.

We also discovered that the Obama administration continued to allow the NSA to collect vast amounts of our email and Internet metadata under a Bush-era program called Stellar Wind until 2011 – all, of course, without a warrant.

Edward Snowden's actions sparked a heated debate about domestic surveillance that eventually forced the U.S. government to pass laws to better protect the American public's privacy, which was a very positive development. In fact, had Snowden just left it there we would probably consider him a hero.

But unfortunately, Snowden crossed the line. Unlike Daniel Ellsberg, Snowden also released classified information that greatly jeopardized our national security, compromising our foreign intelligence operations, handing valuable information to our enemies, and harming relationships with many of our allies.

Below are just a few juicy tidbits of the damaging information he released, compiled by Paul Szoldra for The Business Insider:

"An 18-page presidential memo showing President Obama ordered intelligence officials to draw up a list of overseas targets for cyber-attacks; that the U.S. carried out 231 offensive cyber-attacks in 2011; that the NSA hacked into Qatar-based media network Al Jazeera's internal communications system; that NSA surveillance played a key role in the targeting for overseas drone strikes; and that the NSA stationed surveillance teams at 80 locations around the world.

That Britain's GCHQ (its intelligence agency) and other European spy agencies worked together to conduct mass surveillance; strategic missions of the NSA, which include combatting terrorism and nuclear proliferation as well as pursuing U.S. diplomatic and economic advantage; and that the NSA infected more than 50,000 computer networks worldwide with malware designed to steal sensitive information.

That the NSA gathered evidence of visits to pornographic websites as part of a plan to discredit Muslim jihadists; that Intelligence operatives with NSA and GCHQ infiltrated online video games such as World of Warcraft in an effort to catch and stop terrorist plots; that the NSA had the ability to decrypt the common A5/1 cellphone encryption cipher; and that, with a $79.7 million research program, the NSA was working on a quantum computer that would be able to crack most types of encryption.

That, using radio transmitters on tiny circuit boards or USB drives, the NSA could gain access to computers not connected to the Internet; that the U.S. 'targeted killing' program of drone strikes relied mostly on cellphone metadata and geolocation rather than on-the-ground human intelligence; and that the NSA developed sophisticated malware 'implants' to infect millions of computers worldwide."

But wait! There's more! (and we're fairly certain our allies did not appreciate this information getting out on our watch)…

"Britain intercepted phone and Internet communications of foreign politicians attending two G-20 meetings in London in

2009; Britain's GCHQ tapped fiber-optic cables to collect and store global email messages, Facebook posts, Internet histories, and calls, and then shared the data with the NSA; seven of the world's leading tele-communications companies provided GCHQ with secret, unlimited access to their network of undersea cables; Britain ran a secret Internet-monitoring station in the Middle East to intercept emails, phone calls, and web traffic; and Britain's GCHQ launched a cyber-attack against Belgacom, a partly state-owned Belgian tele-communications company.

Canada's signals intelligence agency, CSEC, spied on phone and computer networks of Brazil's Ministry of Mines and Energy and shared the information with the Five Eyes intelligence services of the U.S., Canada, Britain, Australia, and New Zealand; Australia's DSD spied on the cellphones of top Indonesian officials, including the president, first lady, and several cabinet ministers; the British government struck a secret deal with the NSA to share phone, Internet, and email records of UK citizens; working with Canadian intelligence, the NSA spied on foreign diplomats at the G-8 and G-20 summits in Toronto in 2010; and a draft document revealed Australia offered to share information collected on ordinary Australian citizens with the NSA and other Five Eyes partners.

Swedish intelligence was revealed to be spying on Russian leaders, then passing it on to the NSA; the Norwegian Intelligence Service was developing a supercomputer, called Steel Winter, to decrypt and analyze data from Afghanistan, Russia, and elsewhere; Australia's intelligence service had surveillance teams stationed in Australian embassies around Asia and the Pacific; and Australia's Defense Signals Directorate and the NSA worked together to spy on Indonesia during a UN climate change conference in 2007."

And our allies probably weren't too happy to see in print that we were spying on *them* as well...

"The U.S. government bugged the offices of the European Union in New York, Washington, and Brussels; the U.S. government was spying on at least 38 foreign embassies and missions, using a variety of electronic surveillance methods; the NSA spied on millions of phone calls, emails, and text messages of ordinary German citizens; and using a program called Fairview, the NSA intercepted Internet and phone-call data of Brazilian citizens.

The NSA conducted surveillance on citizens in a number of Latin American countries, including Venezuela, Colombia, Argentina, Panama, Ecuador, Peru, and others. The agency also sought information on oil, energy, and trade; the NSA provided surveillance to U.S. diplomats in order to give them the upper hand in negotiations at the UN Summit of the Americas; and the NSA spied on former Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff and Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto (then a candidate).

Using a 'man in the middle' attack, NSA spied on Google, the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications, and the Brazilian oil company Petrobras; the NSA spied on Indian diplomats and other officials in an effort to gain insight into the country's nuclear and space programs; the NSA tapped the mobile phone of German Chancellor Angela Merkel; the NSA spied on Italian citizens, companies, and government officials; the NSA monitored the phone calls of 35 world leaders and encouraged other government agencies to share their 'Rolodexes' of foreign politicians so it could monitor them; the NSA spied on Spanish leaders and citizens; and the NSA spied on the Vatican.

The NSA spied on millions of cellphone calls in Norway in one 30-day period; widespread spying was revealed in Italy, with the NSA spying on ordinary Italians as well as diplomats and political leaders; and the NSA closely monitored the Chinese technology firm Huawei in attempt to reveal ties between the company and the Chinese military. The agency also spied on Chinese banks and other companies, as well as former President Hu Jintao."

Not to be outdone, in the largest leak in American military history, Bradley Manning (now Chelsea Manning) a former U.S. Army soldier and intelligence analyst, leaked a massive amount of *classified* and *unclassified but sensitive* documents to WikiLeaks in early 2010.

The leaked information included videos of airstrikes, U.S. diplomatic cables, and 391,832 United States Army field reports. These Army field reports, now known as the Iraq War Documents or Iraq War Logs, contain almost 400,000 military logs recorded between 2004 to 2009.

Again, there were certainly things that Americans *needed* to know – like unreported civilian deaths, prison abuse by U.S. troops, and the widespread use of torture – but, because she indiscriminately leaked *everything*, Manning also crossed the line.

Luckily, reputable media outlets such as the Bureau of Investigative Journalism redacted sensitive information before they published the information, but Wikileaks showed no such concern for the well-being of our troops or to anything else having to do with our national interests.

Manning was eventually convicted by court-martial and sentenced to 35 years at Fort Leavenworth. In January 2017, President Obama commuted her sentence to time served, which amounted to almost seven years behind bars.

Julian Assange not only crossed the bright line, he blew right through it over and over and over again. He is not a hero, a journalist or a whistleblower. He's just a straight up criminal hacker.

Even before the *Report on the Investigation into Russian Interference in the 2016 Presidential Election* (the "Mueller Report") was released in April 2019, it had become clear that Wikileaks and Assange gave zero thought to the real-life consequences of indiscriminately publishing stolen material. What started out as a website for so-called "transparency" and "accountability" turned into nothing more than a vehicle for revenge and personal agenda.

We already knew that putting people at risk meant nothing to Wikileaks – publishing Chelsea Manning's unredacted material proved that. But Assange and Wikileaks took it to a whole new level when

they published almost 300,000 emails from Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's Justice & Development Party (AKP).

What was supposedly damaging information about Erdoğan was instead personal information about everyday Turkish citizens, including their home addresses, phone numbers, and political party affiliation. This is beyond inappropriate anytime, but it's especially dangerous at a time when thousands of people – including soldiers and judiciary members – were still being detained and arrested after a failed military coup.

This is all unconscionable behavior but then came the icing on the cake: Wikileaks' interference in America's 2016 U.S. presidential election, including its work with Guccifer 2.0, a hacker, to obtain 20,000 stolen emails from the Democratic National Committee (DNC) and John Podesta, the chairman of the Hillary Clinton campaign.

Worse, in an uber prick move on Assange's part, Special Counsel Robert Mueller revealed that Assange and Wikileaks, in order "to obscure the source of the materials that WikiLeaks was releasing," made the blatantly false claim that Seth Rich – a former DNC staff member who was brutally murdered on the streets of Washington, D.C. in July 2016 – was the one who stole the DNC emails.

Ultimately, in an 18-count indictment for multiple violations of the Espionage Act, the U.S. Department of Justice charged that "cables that WikiLeaks published included names of persons throughout the world who provided information to the U.S. government in circumstances in which they could reasonably expect that their identities would be kept confidential."

"These sources included journalists, religious leaders, human rights advocates, and political dissidents who were living in repressive regimes and reported to the United States the abuses of their own government, and the political conditions within their countries, at great risk to their own safety."

In June 2024, the U.S. Justice Department reached a plea agreement with Assange, who pled guilty to a single felony count of conspiring to unlawfully obtain and disseminate classified information in exchange for no further prison time. In the end, Assange spent

fourteen years in some form of confinement trying to avoid prosecution by the United States.

Anyone looking for any sort of contrition from Julian Assange was disappointed. Three months after the pleas deal, he said: “I am not free today because the system worked. I am free today after years of incarceration because I pled guilty to journalism.”

Foreign Policy Issues

Global Health & the World Health Organization

The Bottom Line

It is imperative that the United States remain committed to the advancement of global health. 1787 supports:

- Rejoining the World Health Organization (WHO). (The Trump/ Vance administration withdrew the U.S. from the WHO in January 2026).

  It is more important than ever before that the WHO's 194 member countries have a common organization to establish worldwide health policies, and to act like a point guard when the world is faced with a global health crisis, coordinating responses and making clear and consistent recommendations.

- Restructuring the WHO to look more like the World Trade Organization (WTO), where the rules – which are set and enforced by the members – can impose disciplines on the individual policies of member countries.

- WHO leadership that does not allow itself to be pulled in too many different directions – especially between influential stakeholders like China, the United States and private donors like the Gates Foundation. The WHO must have leaders who don't bow to political pressure. Period.

- Continued development of drugs, vaccines, diagnostic tests, and other treatments for diseases that are still prevalent in poorer countries, like tuberculosis and malaria. We believe there should be a strong focus on infectious disease prevention and treatment for diseases like pneumonia.

- Continued funding of HIV/AIDS research through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) to end HIV/AIDS as a public health threat once and for all. HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, remains one of the world's most serious public health challenges. There were 39.9 million people across the globe living with HIV in 2023, including 1.4 million children under the age of 15.
- A United Nations resolution to regulate the use of antibiotics – in both humans and agriculture – to effectively manage the growing threat of drug-resistant infections.
- Providing modern contraceptive methods – along with improved education – to women and girls in low- and middle-income countries, which can lead to smaller family sizes, lower infant mortality, and potentially lower levels of disease.
- Investment in effective prevention and treatment options for mental disorders, which are a leading cause of disability worldwide. The mental health impact of recent global events such as the Covid-19 pandemic, wars, geo-political chaos, social isolation, and environmental change has been significant and far-reaching, with no signs of abating.

♦ ♦ ♦

The United States has always been a leading force in improving health outcomes around the world, and we have helped improve the lives of millions of people in low- and middle-income countries. America is, by far, the largest contributor to – and implementer of – health programs and services around the world. In FY2024, total U.S. global health funding through regular appropriations was roughly $12.3 billion.

It's imperative that the United States remain committed to the advancement of global health. It matters now, more than ever before. According to the WHO:

> "In just two years, the Covid pandemic reversed over a decade of gains in both life expectancy at birth and healthy life expectancy (HALE). By 2020, both global life expectancy and HALE had rolled back to 2016 levels (72.5 years and 62.8 years, respectively). The following year saw further declines, with both retreating to 2012 levels (71.4 years and 61.9 years, respectively)."
>
> The report continued, "The pandemic wreaked havoc in population health across the globe. The devastating impacts of the pandemic on health, economy, families and society have been observed worldwide since 2020 and are expected to continue to unfold in the years to come."

The Annual Threat Assessment from the U.S. Director of National Intelligence, released on February 5, 2024, revealed that:

> "National health system shortfalls, public mistrust and medical misinformation, and eroding global health governance will impede the capacity of countries to respond to health threats. Countries remain vulnerable to the introduction of a new or reemerging pathogen that could cause another devastating pandemic."

Other highlights from the report:

- The predicted shortage of at least 10 million healthcare workers by 2030 will occur primarily in low- and middle-income countries.
- Global health governance and adherence to UN health protocols may be eroded during the coming year by continued disregard by governments of international health institutions and norms and adversary interference in global health initiatives.

- Drivers for infectious disease emergence are on the rise, including deforestation, wildlife harvesting and trade, mass food production, and lack of international consensus on biosafety norms. These drivers are compounded by factors that facilitate global spread, such as international travel and trade, inadequate global disease surveillance and control, weakened health systems, public distrust, and medical misinformation.
- Significant outbreaks of highly pathogenic avian influenza, cholera, dengue, Ebola, monkeypox, and polio have stretched global and national disease detection and response systems further straining the international community's ability to address health emergencies.

Global Human Rights

Human rights are rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status. Human rights include the right to life and liberty, freedom from slavery and torture, freedom of opinion and expression, the right to work and education, and many more. Everyone around the world is entitled to these rights, without discrimination.

One of the great achievements of the United Nations is the creation of a comprehensive body of human rights law – an internationally and universally protected code to which all nations can subscribe, and all people aspire. The United Nations has defined a broad range of globally accepted rights, including civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. It has also established mechanisms to promote and protect these rights and to assist states in carrying out their responsibilities.

† Universal Declaration of Human Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) is a milestone document in the history of human rights. Drafted by representatives with different legal and cultural backgrounds from all regions of the world, the Declaration was proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in Paris on December 10, 1948 as a common standard of achievements for all peoples and all nations. It sets out, for the first time, fundamental human rights to be universally protected. Since its adoption in 1948, the UDHR has been translated into more than 500 languages – the most translated document in the world – and has inspired the constitutions of many newly independent States and many new democracies. The UDHR, together with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its two Optional Protocols (on the complaints procedure and on the death penalty) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and its Optional Protocol, form the so-called International Bill of Human Rights.

† Economic, Social & Cultural Rights

The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights entered into force in 1976. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights is the body of 18 independent experts that monitors implementation of the Covenant by its States parties. Its Optional Protocol entered into force in 2013. The human rights that the Covenant seeks to promote and protect include:

- † The right to work in just and favorable conditions.
- † The right to social protection, to an adequate standard of living and to the highest attainable standards of physical and mental well-being.

- The right to education and the enjoyment of benefits of cultural freedom and scientific progress.

Civil & Political Rights

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and its First Optional Protocol entered into force in 1976 and the Second Optional Protocol came into force in 1991. The Human Rights Committee monitors the implementation of this multilateral treaty and its Optional Protocols.

The Covenant deals with such rights as freedom of movement; equality before the law; the right to a fair trial and presumption of innocence; freedom of thought, conscience and religion; freedom of opinion and expression; peaceful assembly; freedom of association; participation in public affairs and elections; and protection of minority rights. It prohibits arbitrary deprivation of life; torture, cruel or degrading treatment or punishment; slavery and forced labor; arbitrary arrest or detention; arbitrary interference with privacy; war propaganda; discrimination; and advocacy of racial or religious hatred.

Human Rights Conventions

A series of international human rights treaties and other instruments adopted since 1945 have expanded the body of international human rights law. They include the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), among others.

† Human Rights Council

The Human Rights Council, established on March 15, 2006 by the General Assembly and reporting directly to it, replaced the 60-year-old UN Commission on Human Rights as the key. UN intergovernmental body responsible for human rights. The Council is made up of 47 State representatives and is tasked with strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe by addressing situations of human rights violations and making recommendations on them, including responding to human rights emergencies.

The most innovative feature of the Human Rights Council is the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). This unique mechanism involves a review of the human rights records of all 193 UN member states once every four years. The Review is a cooperative, state-driven process, under the auspices of the Council, which provides the opportunity for each state to present measures taken and challenges to be met to improve the human rights situation in their country and to meet their international obligations

The Review is designed to ensure universality and equality of treatment for every country and takes place during the sessions of the UPR Working Group which meets three times a year. The UPR Working Group consists of the 47 members of the Council.

† Special Procedures and Investigative Bodies

The Human Rights Council also has special procedures that consist of independent human rights experts who have the mandate to report and advise on human rights from a thematic or country-specific perspective. These experts are not paid and are elected for 3-year mandates that can be extended for another three years. As of November 2023, there are 46 thematic and 14 country mandates.

Since 2006, the Council has set up various investigative bodies to look into alleged violations in specific countries. These have taken the form of fact-finding missions and commissions of inquiry. In addition, there is one thematic body, the Expert Mechanism to Advance Racial Justice and Equality in Law Enforcement

† UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

The United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights exercises principal responsibility for UN human rights activities. The High Commissioner is mandated to respond to serious violations of human rights and to undertake preventive action.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is the focal point for United Nations human rights activities. It serves as the secretariat for the Human Rights Council, the treaty bodies (expert committees that monitor treaty compliance) and other UN human rights organs. It also undertakes human rights field activities.

Most of the core human rights treaties have an oversight body which is responsible for reviewing the implementation of that treaty by the countries that have ratified it. Individuals, whose rights have been violated can file complaints directly to Committees overseeing human rights treaties.

* The information above is directly from the United Nations.

Global Women's Issues

All women are entitled to human rights. These include the right to live free from violence and discrimination; to enjoy the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health; to be educated; to own property; to vote; and to earn an equal wage.

However, across the globe, many women and girls still face discrimination based on sex and gender. Gender inequality underpins many problems which disproportionately affect women and girls, such as domestic and sexual violence, lower pay, lack of access to education, and inadequate healthcare.

As the United Nations says, "Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls is not just a goal in itself, but a key to sustainable development, economic growth, and peace and security." The universal truth is that we cannot have a free and equal society until everyone is free and equal. Until women around the world enjoy the same rights as men, this inequality is everyone's problem.

* Source: Amnesty International

Human Trafficking

The following is from the 2024 Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, issued by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.

> "Human trafficking continues to target the vulnerable, and we see this in persistent as well as emerging trends. Women and girls remain the biggest share of detected victims worldwide, accounting for 61 percent of the total in 2022, and most of them continue to be trafficked for sexual exploitation, a pattern that has carried on for many years now.
>
> In parallel, the number of children among detected victims is growing rapidly and alarmingly, increasing by a third over the space of three years. In particular, the number of girls detected has surged,

increasing by 38 percent. In several regions, children now account for the majority of trafficking victims detected."

The Bottom Line

- The number of victims of trafficking detected globally is on the rise again after falling back during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Child victims are increasingly detected globally with distinct patterns emerging for boys and girls.
- Trafficking for forced labor is on the rise but the criminal justice response is lagging behind.
- Women and girls continue to make up the majority of victims detected worldwide.
- Most trafficking in persons is perpetrated by organized crime groups operating in business or governance types of structures.
- Victims are trafficked globally through an increasing number of international routes, with African victims trafficked to the highest number of destinations.
- Displacement, insecurity and climate change are exacerbating the vulnerability of Africans to being trafficked.

♦ ♦ ♦

1787's Recommendations: Human Trafficking

- Adopt and reinforce counter-trafficking specific measures to prevent child trafficking, and protect and assist child victims.

- Broaden the counter-trafficking institutional framework and understanding.
- Improve the identification of victims and their protection.
- Reinforce the criminal justice response to trafficking in persons, especially in some regions.
- Adopt a multi-layered approach to tackle the drivers of the proliferation of trafficking activity.
- Ensure national and regional institutions are given the instruments they need to collect usable data and make more precise analysis to understand and report on trafficking in persons.

The Ocean & Polar Affairs

The development, coordination, and implementation of foreign affairs aspects of U.S. oceans, Arctic, and Antarctic policy – which includes the law of the sea, freedom of navigation and overflight, marine science, the extended continental shelf, marine mammals, protection of the marine environment, and maritime claims and boundaries – are critical to our continued economic and national security.

We must improve maritime security to protect the United States from terrorism and other criminal threats, as well as secure and protect freedom of navigation and maritime commerce. Moreover, we must fully support marine scientific research; protect the marine environment from pollution and other anthropogenic threats; and promote the conservation and sustainable use of marine biodiversity.

United Nations

Read more on p. 15 of The Great American Reset.

The Bottom Line

- 1787 is deeply committed to the United Nations (UN). We believe that the UN plays an essential role in maintaining international peace and security, protecting human rights, delivering humanitarian aid, promoting sustainable development, and upholding international law.
- In January 2026 alone, the Trump/Vance administration ordered the United States to withdraw from or cease participation in 66 international organizations and entities – including 31 within the United Nations system**.** We need to reengage with every single one of them.
- In 2024, the United States provided about $14.3 billion in assessed and voluntary contributions to the United Nations system, making it the world's largest government contributor. Despite the Trump/Vance administration's push to dramatically reduce U.N. funding, Congress provided $1.39 billion for Contributions to International Organizations (CIO) and $1.23 billion for U.N. peacekeeping (CIPA) in FY2026 – a combined $2.62 billion**.** The administration had requested just $264 million for CIO and zero funding for U.N. peacekeeping**.**

That is *A LOT* of money. Therefore, we must *MAKE CERTAIN* that the UN is operating at a high level and utilizing every penny in the most optimal way.

USAID

*As you read this please keep in mind that, before the Trump/Vance administration came to power, the United States spent **less than 1 percent** of the federal budget on foreign aid. We spent almost $65 billion in 2023, and in terms of dollars, that was more than any other country in the world. But before we break our arms patting ourselves on the back, as a percentage of our economy, the U.S. spent less than Japan, Britain, France, Norway, Sweden, Germany, and the Netherlands. Not to mention that billions of those dollars came right back into the American economy. USAID funded many American researchers, and American farms supplied around 41 percent of the food aid that the agency sent around the world every year.*

Since 1961, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) managed international projects that dealt with food aid, disaster relief, and health and education programs in over 100 countries.

For over six decades, support from the American people vastly increased access to education and healthcare for millions; helped achieve significant reductions in child and maternal mortality; was instrumental in eradicating smallpox and reducing malaria deaths; helped secure democracy for vulnerable nations; and was responsible for sparking economic development in various regions throughout the world. We provided critical assistance during natural disasters, famines, and other emergencies; prevented millions of new infections of HIV/AIDS; and provided access to clean drinking water for millions.

The Center for Global Development estimates that, before 2025, aid distributed by USAID saved up to 5.6 million lives a year by providing interventions for HIV/AIDS, vaccine-preventable illnesses, and emergency/ humanitarian relief alone (this number doesn't include

interventions for water and sanitation, family planning, and nutrition, which are significant in and of themselves).

By itself, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) – the largest ever global H.I.V. program that was started by President George W. Bush in 2003 – is credited with saving the lives of over 26 million people living in over 50 countries.

On his first day back in the Oval Office, Donald Trump signed Executive Order 14169, freezing all new foreign development assistance obligations and disbursements. Four days later, a stop-work order was issued for all existing foreign assistance awards; on February 2nd the USAID website was taken down; and five days later, signs identifying the headquarters of USAID were removed.

Okay, so even if you are going to do something despicable like this, surely you have enough compassion and awareness to understand that it's critical to give organizations around the world time to adjust to this massive change in humanitarian aid, right?

Nope. Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) immediately started to systematically dismantle the rest of USAID, shutting down most all its programming and laying off almost all its staff. This included people working in war zones, who found themselves abruptly cut off from their work emails and the app they relied on to help them in case of an emergency.

Immediately after Elon, in his words, "fed USAID into the wood chipper," at least 11,500 Americans and 54,575 foreigners lost their jobs; around $1 billion in payments for work that had already been completed was frozen; $500 million in food was just sitting in ports, ships and warehouses, rotting; health workers who provided preventive care were forced to leave devastated villages; and immunizations, Vitamin A distributions, and deworming were abruptly stopped.

Wait? Deworming? Like, as in people? What the heck is that? … many Americans are probably asking, since we don't have a clue of the horrors people in other countries face.

… but it's high time we learn more about these horrors, so here it is: Children in many countries are besieged by worms. Apologies if you're eating breakfast, but a female worm can lay 200,000 eggs a day – which vastly worsens children's malnutrition since the very little

nutrients they receive go to the parasites, not to them. The great news is that aid agencies can deworm a child for less than *$1 a year*. The bad news is the $1 has now been cut.

Just in case you're not sufficiently outraged yet, a seven-page memo obtained by Bloomberg – dated June 3, 2025, prepared for Secretary of State Marco Rubio and signed by nine U.S. State Department aides – revealed that, instead of $6 billion going to dying children, the Trump/ Vance administration was going to use that money – six billion dollars – to *dismantle* USAID, including hundreds of millions used to fight the legal challenges that were surely coming thanks to the Trump/Vance administration closing the agency.

In a pathetic effort to clear his conscience, in testimony before Congress on May 21, 2025, Marco Rubio said that the gutting of USAID by the Trump/Vance administration had not caused any unnecessary deaths: "No children are dying on my watch… no one has died because of USAID."

That is a preposterous thing for him to say. Without question, ***directly*** because of heartless decisions made by Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio and Elon Musk, babies have needlessly died of malnutrition, cholera, malaria and AIDS, and more women and young girls have fallen victim to violence, both physical and sexual. That's just a fact.

Humanitarian aid in 2025 alone reached 25 million fewer people than the year before; over 2,000 health clinics have closed in crisis zones around the world; global food aid funding has dropped 58 percent; and millions of people have lost access to critical H.I.V. treatment and testing.

In fact, more than 1,700 H.I.V. treatment sites have closed since Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio and Elon Musk's cruel cuts to PEPFAR. PEPFAR treated 77,000 fewer children in 2025 than the year before, and now roughly half of the children living with H.I.V. around the world don't have access to the treatments they must have to stay alive. South Africa is being kicked out of the program altogether, even though the country has the highest H.I.V. rate in the world, with around eight million people living with the virus.

This all is heart wrenching, but it's also incredibly frustrating because, between 2000 and 2020, the number of children who died before their 5th birthday dropped by half. This is considered to be perhaps the greatest achievement *ever* in global health and shows a remarkable level of investment, dedication and collaboration between donors, governments, health professionals, families and communities.

Sadly – in direct contradiction to Marco Rubio's absurd assertion that no children have died on his watch – for the first time in decades, child deaths rose in 2025.

An Impact Counter designed by Dr. Brooke Nichols, an infectious disease mathematical modeller and health economist, put the number of child deaths caused by USAID cuts at 488,550 in 2025, or 88 deaths every hour. She estimates that, by mid-2026, the ruthless cuts had cost over 750,000 lives worldwide. < Dr. Nichols' work has reached over 150,000 people in over 175 countries, and her methodology has been peer-reviewed by multiple academic cohorts across disciplines to certify accuracy and transparency >.

This tracks with numbers provided by Atul Gawande, who told The New Yorker magazine that he estimates seven hundred thousand people have already died because of the cuts. <Mr. Gawande was the assistant administrator for global health at USAID until he resigned after the Trump/Vance administration ended U.S. foreign assistance. >

A study published in May 2026 in the peer-reviewed medical journal The Lancet estimates that development assistance funding cuts will cost 9.4 million lives across 93 low- and middle-income countries by 2030 – including 2.5 million deaths among children under the age of five – if we stay on the current trajectory. If more severe cuts are made – and with these heartless men in charge, why wouldn't they be? – the numbers skyrocket to 22.6 million deaths overall, including 5.4 million among children under five.

Oxfam International – a global confederation of independent non-governmental organizations that operate in almost 80 countries worldwide – estimates that a child under five could die *every forty seconds* by 2030 because of the Trump/Vance/Rubio/Musk cuts to humanitarian and development aid.

To add insult to injury, many of the deaths in 2025 could have been prevented with existing resources. BUT, thanks to the haphazard and incompetent way the Trump/Vance administration dissolved USAID, over 60,000 metric tons of food – along with other commodities and nutritional supplements already paid for by the U.S. taxpayer – sat in warehouses in America and around the world rotting and expiring instead of being transported to crisis zones and famine-stricken countries. It's estimated these supplies could have helped over 60 million people.

More than $12 million worth of contraceptives and HIV-prevention medications purchased by the U.S. taxpayer – originally headed for 18 different countries – just sat in distribution centers in Belgium and the United Arab Emirates, going to waste.

A Washington Post investigation from the first half of 2025 found that supplies valued at over $190 million were scheduled to arrive at distribution warehouses by the end of June; however, shipments worth almost $76 million never made it. An additional $63 million worth of supplies – including life-saving medications for diseases like malaria that must be treated quickly – were delivered to the warehouses but delayed, on average, 41 days… in far too many cases, 41 days too late.

Hundreds of thousands of doses of a lifesaving supplement called Plumpy'Nut sat in a warehouse in Rhode Island, its shipment to Sudan canceled after Washington issued the stop-work order. Meanwhile, at the Almanar food distribution center in Khartoum, the capital city of Sudan, mothers sat in line – waiting – with their starving children.

By September 2025, The New York Times was reporting that the 260,000 innocent civilians trapped in El Fasher, a city taking the full brunt of Sudan's vicious civil war, were eating animal feed, trying to make the decision whether to risk being killed if they stayed OR raped *before* they were killed if they left. You know, much like the daily decisions we make over here, like if we're going to get our coffee at Starbucks or Dunkin'.

Doctors Without Borders reports that, in Somalia, the number of children they see with severe malnutrition has risen by 73 percent since 2024. At Baidoa Bay Regional Hospital, deaths among severely malnourished children increased by 44 percent in the first half of 2025

alone, compared to the same period the year before – with 47 percent of deaths occurring within two days of a child's arrival. By April 2026, the number of patients admitted was more than triple the number in April just one year before.

Elsewhere in Africa – where 46 million people are forcibly displaced, including nine million refugees – millions of refugees in Chad and Malawi lost aid practically overnight as the U.N. Refugee Agency closed American aid programs.

People trapped in South Sudan were living through the most dire humanitarian crisis ever recorded, with 34 million of them – two-thirds of the population – relying on U.S. humanitarian help for their very survival. Nevertheless, the Trump/ Vance/Rubio/Musk cuts forced the immediate closure of close to 80 percent of the emergency food kitchens that were often there only source of food.

The U.N. World Food Program was unexpectedly forced to end food distribution to one million refugees in Uganda's Kiryandongo refugee settlement, a place that cares for people forced to flee unthinkable violence in Sudan. This led to pandemonium, with hundreds of people physically fighting one another over the little food that remained. Duaa Tariq, one of the food kitchen organizers, described it this way: "People are screaming from hunger in the streets."

The 4.5 million people, including 2.9 million children, who are sick and starving in Burkina Faso – where the government's war against Islamist insurgents has intensified, leading to more deaths and mass displacement, widespread hunger and unthinkable human rights violations – now have virtually no support.

In a Rohingya refugee camp in Bangladesh – the world's largest – a million people, including 500,000 children, forced to flee Myanmar have nothing to eat. Even if they live, they are now more susceptible to outbreaks of diseases like tuberculosis and H.I.V. because clinics and programs have closed their doors.

Because USAID was one of the largest providers of health care to Indonesia, H.I.V., tuberculosis and malaria cases have exploded. Women who are being mistreated and/or trafficked in Cambodia and Guatemala are now unguarded and Colombia is on its way to

becoming destabilized again. The six million Haitians who need humanitarian aid are facing, at best, malnutrition and, at worst, starvation.

The hundreds of thousands of displaced people in Syria who live in camps increasingly have no food, fuel or water, and the millions of Ukrainian children at risk of death, forced deportation, psychological trauma, indoctrination, and militarization under Russian occupation are now largely unprotected.

Dangerous pathogens were immediately left unsecured at labs across Africa, and airport and checkpoint inspections for mpox, Ebola, and other infectious diseases were reduced or stopped altogether – meaning millions of unscreened animals and people began freely crossing borders.

This obviously put Americans directly at risk because diseases – like the Marburg virus in Tanzania, the mpox in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Lassa in Nigeria – can travel quickly.

…a consequence that, unsurprisingly, didn't take long to materialize. In June 2026, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) warned that the Ebola outbreak spreading through the Democratic Republic of Congo and Uganda could rapidly become the largest Ebola epidemic in history unless efforts to contain it improve.

This is highly problematic because Ebola is a severe, astonishingly deadly viral disease, with an average fatality rate of 50 percent. In past outbreaks, as many as 90 percent of those infected have died.

Unfortunately, containing this one will be much more difficult now that the Trump/ Vance administration withdrew the United States from the World Health Organization (WHO), and the Trump/Vance/ Rubio/Musk cuts have diminished or eliminated altogether many of the people, systems and agencies that once coordinated the U.S. Ebola and other outbreak responses. In fact, the United States didn't even know about the outbreak until nine days ***after*** the WHO did.

The once extensive disease surveillance networks and emergency teams located in East Africa are largely gone, and the CDC has lost hundreds of epidemiologists and other experts – including many stationed in Africa – who would be instrumental in containing the

epidemic. In all, the CDC's emerging disease center – which handles hantavirus and Ebola – has lost about 700 employees and contractors, and its Global Health Center has lost hundreds more employees.

There is also no coordinator for global health security – a position created by Congress – and no one staffing the White House Office of Pandemic Preparedness and Response Policy, also created by Congress.

In yet another blow to America's readiness to address emerging infectious diseases and biological threats, just months before the Ebola outbreak, the Trump/Vance administration indefinitely paused research at National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) Integrated Research Facility at Fort Detrick, one of the few global institutes with the facilities capable of researching Ebola.

Plus, the administration cut funding for GAVI, the Vaccine Alliance – an incredibly reckless move since GAVI is working to develop a vaccine for this specific strain of Ebola (this outbreak involves the Bundibugyo virus, a strain that has no approved vaccine).

Beyond obvious causes and effects – like the fact that cutting off food leads to people starving – it can be hard to visualize how cuts like the ones made by Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio and Elon Musk link directly to disasters, but here are two examples. For one, the outbreak got a head start because samples were taken to the national lab in Kinshasa, Congo at the wrong temperature – something that would likely never have happened when that task was managed by USAID.

Here's a second one: Because USAID provided crucial supplies that health workers no longer have access to, these workers have been treating Ebola patients wearing only gloves and surgical masks instead of using respirators, face shields, airtight clothing, and/or surgical hoods that prevent exposure to bodily fluids. This obviously puts their lives in danger and exasperates the spread.

Heather Kerr, the International Rescue Committee's country director for Congo, put it this way: "The health system is on its knees here."

USAID was not a perfect agency. And, yes, all our federal agencies have waste issues that we need to address. We cover this on p. 15 of *The Great American Reset*. But these are separate issues. The bottom line is that much of the world needs our help. Desperately.

In 1962, President Kennedy said to the staff of USAID, "The people who are opposed to aid should realize that this is a very powerful source of strength for us. As we do not want to send American troops to a great many areas where freedom may be under attack, we send you."

He also said that foreign aid was essential to America's role as a global leader. "There will not be farewell parades to you as you leave or parades when you come back." In other words, the reward was the work itself and the larger cause of freedom it served. Pulling back on foreign aid, President Kennedy said, "would be disastrous and, in the long run, more expensive. Our own security would be endangered and our prosperity imperiled."

He was 1000% right. Anyone having to do with this disastrous decision should be deeply ashamed of themselves. We must correct this horrible mistake as soon as humanly possible.

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Conflicts

Israel - Palestine

The Bottom Line

- 1787 supports a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (see proposed framework below). We deeply believe there is simply no alternative solution.
- We understand that neither Israel nor Palestine believe we can fairly get to this place – but we absolutely can.
- There has been a renewed push for a two-state solution. On September 12, 2025, a declaration supported by 142 countries was signed, calling for the implementation of the two-state solution; a cease-fire in Gaza; the release of Israeli hostages; the disarmament of Hamas and its exclusion from governance in Gaza; and the normalization of diplomatic relations between Israel and the Arab world.

  Israel and the Trump/Vance administration voted against the declaration and have both harshly criticized the Western countries that plan to recognize Palestine as a state. This was a major mistake on the part of the United States.
- If Israel doesn't cooperate with pursuing a two-state solution moving forward, the United States should leverage the billions of dollars we give them and place conditions on our aid. Plus, the U.S. Congress should absolutely, positively NOT greenlight any arms sales to them.

† Dennis Ross, a longtime U.S. Middle East negotiator who was one of the architects behind the two-state structure we recommend below, said recently that "Palestinian statehood is an easy symbol. It perpetuates for Palestinians what has unfortunately always been the case: that they'll settle for symbolism over substance on the one hand, and yet at the same time they expect if they just hold out they'll be granted a state and never have to take any of the steps that would be required to earn it."

We agree. Hamas must understand that our support for a two-state solution is not a political statement against the Israeli war effort or a reward for Hamas' atrocious, murderous behavior. It is to end this horrible chapter forever.

♦ ♦ ♦

This relentless conflict has been violent, oppressive, frustrating, and futile for decades. Escalating death, damage and destruction have proven that the price of not having some version of peace is devastating for both Israelis and Palestinians.

Through the years, there have been many back-and-forth negotiations between the parties, but we believe the Clinton Parameters, offered to the Israelis and Palestinians by President Bill Clinton on December 23, 2000, are a solid place to resume talks.

Although this deal got closer than many of the others, there is no question there are tricky issues involved – the Palestinian right of return to Israel, concerns about lack of land contiguity, Israel's continued settlement building in the West Bank, and sovereignty over the Temple Mount remain major points of contention, just to name a few. But our hope is that these parameters can serve as a starting point for further negotiations.

As President Clinton said at the time, "I believe this is the outline of a fair and lasting agreement. It gives the Palestinian people the ability to determine their future on their own land, a sovereign and viable state recognized by the international community, al-Quds as its capital, sovereignty over the Haram, and new lives for the refugees. It

gives the people of Israel a genuine end to the conflict, real security, the preservation of sacred religious ties, the incorporation of 80 percent of the settlers into Israel, and the largest Jewish Jerusalem in history, recognized by all as your capital."

The time has come to resolve this destructive, heartbreaking situation once and for all.

The Clinton Parameters
Key Points

(taken directly from The Missing Peace: The Inside Story of the Fight for Middle East Peace by Dennis Ross)

Territory

The solution should provide for Palestinian sovereignty over 94-96 percent of West Bank territory, with a land swap of 1-3 percent to partially compensate for the land Israel annexes for its settlement blocs. Other territorial arrangements such as permanent Safe Passage will need to be worked out (the swap of leased land could also be considered). The final maps should include 80 percent of the settlers in blocs, contiguity of territory for each side, minimize annexation and the number of Palestinians affected.

Security

The challenge is to address legitimate Israeli security concerns while respecting Palestinian sovereignty. The key lies in an international presence that can only be withdrawn by the agreement of both sides.

Israeli withdrawal should be phased over 36 months while the international force is gradually introduced into the area. At the end of this period, a small Israeli presence in fixed locations would remain in the Jordan Valley under the authority of the international force for

another 36 months. This period could be reduced in the event of favorable regional developments that diminish the threats to Israel.

On early-warning stations, Israel should maintain three facilities on the West Bank with a Palestinian liaison presence; the stations would be subject to review after three years, with any change in status to be mutually agreed. For defining what would constitute an "emergency," formulations should be used that refer to "an imminent and demonstrable threat to Israel's national security that requires Israel to declare a national state of emergency."

The international forces would need to be notified of any such determination. On airspace, the state of Palestine will have sovereignty over its airspace, but the two sides should work out special arrangements for Israel training and operational needs.

While Israel wants Palestine to be defined as a "demilitarized state" and Palestine wants to be defined as "a state of limited arms," both should think in terms of a "non-militarized state." This would be consistent with the fact that, as well as a strong Palestinian security force, Palestine will have an international force for border security and deterrence purposes. Whatever the terminology, both sides will need to work out specific understandings on the parameters of the Palestinian security forces.

JERUSALEM

On Jerusalem, the most promising approach is to follow the general principle that what is Arab in the City should be Palestinian and what is Jewish should be Israeli. This would apply to the Old City as well.

Regarding the Haram/Temple Mount issue, there are two approaches that could formalize Palestinian de facto control over the Haram while respecting the convictions of the Jewish people.

Under each, there could be an international monitoring system to provide mutual confidence:

(1) Mutual agreement could provide for Palestinian sovereignty over the Haram, and for Israeli sovereignty over either "the Western Wall

and the space sacred to Judaism of which it is a part" or "the Western Wall and the holy of holies of which it is part." There would be a firm commitment by both not to excavate beneath the Haram or behind the Western Wall.

(2) Alternatively, the agreement could provide for Palestinian sovereignty over the Haram and Israeli sovereignty over the Western Wall and for "shared functional sovereignty over the issue of excavation under the Haram or behind the Western Wall." That way, mutual consent would be required before any excavation takes place in these areas.

Refugees

The issue of Palestinian refugees is no less sensitive than Jerusalem. In 2000, Clinton believed that Israel was prepared to acknowledge the moral and material suffering caused to the Palestinian people as a result of the 1948 War and the need to assist the international community in addressing the problem. He also believed that the Palestinian side was prepared to join in such an international solution.

The fundamental gap seems to be how to handle the concept of the right to return. Because of the history, it would be hard for the Palestinian leadership to appear to be abandoning the principle. At the same time, the Israeli side cannot accept any reference to a right of return that would imply a right to immigrate to Israel in defiance of Israel's sovereign policies on admission or that would threaten the Jewish character of the State.

Any solution will have to address both of these needs. It will also have to be consistent with the two-state approach that both sides have once accepted as the way to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. If these parameters are revived, a new State of Palestine will about to be created as the homeland of the Palestinian people, just as Israel was established as the homeland of the Jewish people.

Under this two-state solution, the guiding principle has to be that the Palestinian state will be the focal point for the Palestinians who

choose to return to the area, without ruling out that Israel will accept some of these refugees.

Both sides should adopt a formulation on the right of return that will make clear there is no specific right of return to Israel, itself, but that does not negate the aspirations of Palestinian refugees to return to the area.

There are two alternatives: (1) Both sides recognize the right of Palestinian refugees to return to historic Palestine. (2) Both sides recognize the right of Palestinian refugees to a homeland. The agreement would define the implementation of this general right in a way that is consistent with the two-state solution.

It would list the five possible homes for refugees: 1) The State of Palestine, 2) Areas in Israel being transferred to Palestine in the land swap, 3) Rehabilitation in host country, 4) Resettlement in third country, 5) Admission to Israel. In listing these five options, both sides would make clear that return to the West Bank, Gaza, or the areas acquired through the land swap would be a right for all Palestinian refugees, while rehabilitation in their host countries, resettlement in third countries, or absorption into Israel would depend upon the policies of those countries.

Israel could indicate in the agreement that it intended to establish a policy so that some of the refugees could be absorbed into Israel, consistent with Israel's sovereign decision.

Russia - Ukraine

Vladimir Putin has been on a brutal, bloody rampage, on a level not seen since the terrorizing reign of Josef Stalin. And why not? He became accustomed to getting away with murder – literally – ever since he found his soul mate in the 45th and now 47th president of the United States.

It's no mystery why Don and Vlad fell in love with one another: 1) They both love politics as theatre, and 2) they both operate from a place of low self-esteem and, as a result, profound weakness (really, does anyone with a high self-esteem emerge from scuba-diving, in

front of television cameras, holding two very rare ancient Greek urns he just happened to randomly "find" on his dive, or ride around shirtless on a horse like Putin does?)…and Donald's weaknesses and insecurities could fill an entire book.

It's safe to say that no foreign state benefited more from the first Trump administration's antics than Russia and, for Putin, the timing could not have been better. When Donald Trump took the oath of office the first time, Russia's economy was shrinking – strangled by slow growth and depressed wages – and the war in Syria was becoming more costly every day. Putin was also having to navigate between increasingly demanding factions within Russia, like the Russian Orthodox Church, oligarchs, and the security forces.

The Russian people were demanding more freedom, and more of them than ever before believed their politicians were corrupt. The standard of living was falling, and Russia was more repressed than it had been since the days of the Soviet Union. Even super rich people were getting twitchy.

Enter Donald Trump, his authoritarian tendencies, and the complete chaos that his first administration inflicted on practically every aspect of American life. For Putin, an unreliable, divided, angry United States fed perfectly into the narrative he had been trying to sell about America for years.

It was more than Putin could possibly have hoped for when he long dreamed of discrediting American democracy: a U.S. president who insulted American allies and threatened the free press; ditched international agreements; maligned NATO; and smeared America's institutions, military, judicial system and intelligence agencies.

Putin delighted in the opportunity to undermine trust in the United States and question our moral authority. He lived for moments like that fateful news conference during the 2018 Russia–United States summit in Helsinki, Finland, when the President of the United States stood right beside him and chose to publicly believe his obviously bogus denial of Russian interference in our elections over the exhaustive investigation of U.S. intelligence agencies.

That said, even with this new ammunition against America, Putin saw his popularity continue to decline. In fact, in 2020 anti-

government protests began to swell across Russia – even in small towns 4,000 miles away from Moscow. The economic fallout from the pandemic and global collapse in oil prices certainly weren't helping matters, as many Russian families were close to losing everything.

Putin's solution? To double-down on authoritarianism. By the end of 2020, Putin's regime had passed laws that severely cracked down on opposition in any form, including peaceful protests, as well as laws that curtail certain Internet sites including Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. Putin now enjoys immunity from prosecution for the rest of his life, and almost all information, however trivial, regarding members of his family, friendship circle, and government is now considered classified.

Meanwhile, Putin was busy poisoning his opposition, including former Russian military officer Sergei Skripal and his daughter, and Alexei Navalny, who was the Kremlin's most visible opposition figure and who, having survived his 2020 assassination attempt, was locked in a Russian prison in 2021, where he eventually "died" three years later.

Navalny's message particularly resonated with many Russians because it focused on Putin's – or as Navalny so perfectly described him, the "little thieving man in the bunker" – corruption. Putin was so threatened by Navalny's political movement that he had a Russian court designate the group an "extremist network." This meant that the group's organizers, donors and supporters could arbitrarily be arrested, prosecuted and imprisoned at any time.

But then, on February 24, 2022, Vladimir Putin brutally invaded Ukraine with no right or justification. Since that time, Ukraine has fought its aggressor – a nuclear power ten times its economic size – with unimageable bravery and remarkable tenacity.

The United States ***cannot*** allow Vladimir Putin to get away with this unspeakable atrocity. We have a vital national security interest in Putin's illegal invasion because we benefit mightily from a peaceful and secure Europe; we value global commerce; and we have a deep commitment to protecting fairness and democracy around the world.

Equally important is the fact that other countries are closely watching how this unfolds. Chinese President Xi Jinping, for one, is

most certainly interested in how America responds to Russia illegally taking territory by force as he determines the risk versus reward of invading Taiwan.

For all these reasons, the United States must fully support Ukraine – along with Georgia, the Baltic nations and other former "republics" of the Soviet Union who have chosen to seek a free and democratic future – to the very best of our ability, including economically, diplomatically, and by providing weapons and sharing our intelligence. At the same time, we must make sure our European allies continue to share the burden, and help Ukraine develop its own arms industry to help reduce its dependence on outside forces… which they have done to an astonishing degree.

Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov says that the industrial capacity of Ukrainian companies has increased enough to produce four million drones a year. These Linza drones are equipped with anti-jamming modules; utilize AI navigation; and can gather reconnaissance, deliver supplies, and even set land mines.

Even before that, Ukrainian soldiers were giving the Russians one hell of a fight by adding deadly modifications to the Mavic, a drone sold to ordinary people by a Chinese company called DJI. DJI, the world's largest drone manufacturer, sells 70 percent of all commercial drones sold for hobby and industrial use worldwide (you can get a version of the Mavic for as little as $300). Experts say that DJI can make millions of drones per year, more than a hundred times more than anybody in the United States can make.

Ukraine has gotten so good at this that the Trump/Vance administration was forced to ask them for help within a week of its 2026 attack on Iran. As swarms of Iranian Shahed drones rained down over the middle East – breaching allied air defense systems and killing at least six U.S. soldiers – Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky posted on X: "We received a request from the United States for specific support in protection."

The American people must be diligent and vocal about standing shoulder to shoulder with Ukraine because things took a surreal turn early in the Trump/Vance administration – firmly *toward* Russia. Almost immediately after President Trump's inauguration, Secretary of

State Marco Rubio started unilateral "peace" negotiations with Russia without Ukraine or any U.S. allies involved, including NATO members.

Vice President JD Vance – who once said, "I don't really care what happens to Ukraine" – traveled to Germany, where he condescendingly lectured our European allies about their retreat from "traditional values," and told them that the main security threat they face is inadequate free speech. His main proof of this was that German political parties refuse to cooperate with the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, who many accuse of aligning, at least on some level, with Nazism.

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth ordered U.S. Cyber Command to stop all offensive operations against Russia, later saying he thought it was "unrealistic" for Ukraine to become a member of NATO or get all its territory back from Russia through peace negotiations.

They *all* started faithfully parroting Putin's talking points. Steve Witkoff, the Trump/Vance administration's special negotiator on Ukraine, told Tucker Carlson (of all people) that Putin "100%" doesn't want to continue his authoritarian march across Europe. Witkoff even suggested that Putin doesn't really want to control Ukraine: "Why would they want to absorb Ukraine? That would be like occupying Gaza. Why do the Israelis really want to occupy Gaza for the rest of their lives? They don't." …which is just an idiotic thing to say about an autocrat who has made it very clear in every way possible that he wants to restore the Russian empire of yore.

Meanwhile, Putin was playing Donald Trump like the useful idiot he created him to be. The president of the United States launched a full-throttled attack against Ukraine, claiming "dictator" Volodymyr Zelensky started the war and that Zelensky "probably just wanted to keep the "gravy train going," then ambushing and berating Zelensky in the Oval Office in one of the most shameful scenes that has ever happened in that room – prompting former Russian president Dmitri Medvedev to say, "The insolent pig finally got a proper slap down in the Oval Office," and the Kremlin to comment, with glee, that "the new administration is rapidly changing all foreign policy configurations. This largely aligns with our vision."

President Trump even suggested in a phone conversation in late March 2025 that, instead of an unconditional ceasefire, he would just prefer that both sides stop bombing each other's energy infrastructure (unsurprisingly, one of the best targets for Ukraine). Plus, Ukraine had to agree to a freeze on foreign military aid and agree to stop all recruiting and training. Russia, of course, didn't have to do any of those things.

On the call, Putin demanded that the "root causes" of the conflict be resolved – meaning, he wanted all the land back and wanted Ukraine to cease to exist. After the call, former British prime minister Boris Johnson spoke for the entire world when he said that Putin is "laughing at us."

For a second there, it seemed like President Trump and the Republicans were tiring of Putin's games… or as Trump said in a cabinet meeting in July 2025, "We get a lot of bulls--- thrown at us by Putin," who seems "very nice all the time, but it turns out to be meaningless." He also told the press that "I don't think (Putin's) looking to stop, and that's too bad." To that end, he renewed American arms shipments to Ukraine.

But not long thereafter, President Trump was at it again, proposing a "peace plan" that read more like a Russian wish list than anything else – all the while lashing out at Ukraine for being "ungrateful" for America's help. The "peace plan" that the Trump/Vance administration first proposed in November 2025 was so Russian-friendly, in fact, that Secretary of State Marco Rubio had to continuously deny that it wasn't written by the Russians themselves.

< This perception was amplified after an October 14th phone call between White House envoy Steve Witkoff and Yuri Ushakov, Putin's senior foreign policy advisor, was leaked to Bloomberg News. On the call, Witkoff suggested that Putin call President Trump before an upcoming visit by Ukrainian President Zelensky and said that Trump would give Witkoff "a lot of space and discretion to get to the deal." Incidentally, Witkoff also suggested that the Russian president start the call by congratulating Trump on the Israeli "peace" deal and say that he "respects that he is a man of peace." Then, on October 29th, Ushakov and Kirill Dmitriev, an economic envoy for Putin who had

just met with Witkoff, spoke. Dmitriev told Ushakov that he felt the plan put forward by the Trump/Vance administration would be as close "as possible" to Russia's proposals. >

The original 28-point proposal would force Ukraine to shrink its army; give up land that Russia desperately wants but hasn't managed to yet steal from the Ukrainians; and would disallow the presence of NATO troops, among many other ridiculous concessions.

Days after the proposal was made public, American, EU and Ukrainian mediators met in Geneva to discuss it and emerged with a sort of framework – albeit very thin, with practically no details – that included what Ukrainian officials defined as their country's "red lines" on territory, military capacity and foreign alliances.

Just hours after the talks ended, Russia attacked the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv with a deadly onslaught of missiles and drones.

Then came the National Security Strategy released by the White House in November 2025. We're not conspiracy theorists, but if anything were going to convince us that Donald Trump is a Russian asset, this document – plus his 28-point plan to end the Russia/Ukraine war – would be it.

In September 2026, Jared Kushner and Witkoff returned to Moscow for more than three hours of talks with Putin in an attempt to revive negotiations over Ukraine. Unsurprisingly, the meeting produced no breakthrough. Putin continued to insist on sweeping territorial concessions and Ukrainian neutrality, while the Americans proposed restarting direct U.S.-Russia-Ukraine negotiations.

After meeting Putin on September 5th, Kushner and Witkoff traveled to Kyiv the following day to meet President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and European officials. Kushner acknowledged that the previous negotiating format had sometimes left the Americans effectively arguing Russia's position to the Ukrainians and called for a return to direct trilateral talks. Although Russia and Ukraine temporarily backed-off strikes on their respective capitals during the diplomatic visit, the fundamental dispute remained unresolved: Moscow continued demanding Ukrainian territory it had not conquered, while Kyiv rejected surrendering it.

The Trump/Vance administration's tolerant stance toward Vladimir Putin is unacceptable. Putin is literally shooting Donald Trump the bird.

The United States must take serious measures to make certain that Vladimir Putin is stopped. Taken separately, his war crimes in Ukraine; flying Russian drones over NATO-alliance territory; his interference in our elections; the cyberattacks he has waged and sanctioned against us; his poisoning of pro-democracy opposition leaders; bullying behavior in places like Moldova, South Ossetia, Montenegro, and the Balkan; the annexation of Crimea; the slaughtering of innocent civilians in opposition-held areas in northwest Syria with his now ousted buddy Bashar al-Assad; and providing intelligence to Iran behind our back, including satellite imagery showing the locations of our warships and military personnel in the Middle East, would each independently warrant brutal consequences. Together, they are just completely intolerable and must not go unanswered.

Enough is enough with this guy.

* * The Munich Agreement: A Cautionary Tale for the Ages * *

Czechoslovakia's political class became its own state in the aftermath of World War I – thanks in large part to President Woodrow Wilson's support – and the Czechs in Prague finally created a liberal constitution.

By the 1930s, Czechoslovakia was a prosperous democracy with a fortified military and strong relations with Great Britain and France – and had become home to a wide range of ethnic groups, including over three million Germans who lived mainly in an area along the German border called the Sudetenland.

After the *Anschluss* – when German troops marched into Austria in March 1938, with practically zero opposition, incorporating Austria into Nazi Germany – Adolf Hitler set his sights on Germany's

neighbor to the east, demanding that the Czech government hand over the Sudetenland.

The Czechs forcefully rejected Hitler's aggressive overture, but war weary members of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's cabinet moved toward appeasing the Führer saying, "It would be a mistake to plunge into a certain catastrophe in order to avoid a future danger that *might never materialize*."

As a result, in 1938 Germany, Italy, France and Britain signed the Munich Agreement, allowing Nazi Germany to annex the Sudetenland in exchange for a promise of peace from Hitler. After he landed in London, back from the negotiations in Munich, Chamberlain stood on the tarmac at Heston Aerodrome waving a piece of paper as if in victory, boasting that he and Adolf Hitler had just ensured "peace for our time." Just 336 days later, all hell broke loose.

It's shocking to think of today, but many people around the world fell for Hitler's subterfuge, including President Franklin Roosevelt who sent a telegram to Hitler encouraging him to continue negotiations: "On behalf of the 130 millions of people of the United States of America and for the sake of humanity everywhere I most earnestly appeal to you not to break off negotiations looking to a peaceful, fair, and constructive settlement of the questions at issue."

However, one man who saw right into Hitler's heart from the start was Winston Churchill, who eventually ended up with World War II firmly in his lap. In a speech in the House of Commons, Churchill called the Munich Agreement "a total and unmitigated defeat" and warned that "there can never be friendship between the British democracy and the Nazi power, that Power which spurns Christian ethics, which cheers its onward course by a barbarous paganism, which vaunts the spirit of aggression and conquest, which derives strength and perverted pleasure from persecution, and uses, as we have seen, with pitiless brutality the threat of murderous force. That Power cannot ever be the trusted friend of the British democracy."

Two years after his telegram, with the Nazis now occupying much of Western Europe, President Roosevelt finally understood what Hitler was: "No man can tame a tiger into a kitten by stroking it."

… but it was too late.

Potential Conflicts

Armenia & Azerbaijan

The decades-long conflict between the Muslim Azerbaijanis and Christian Armenians – which ignited two wars and displaced over 100,000 Armenians from Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023 alone – may have finally reached (at least the beginning of) a resolution.

In August 2025, the foreign ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan initialed a peace treaty at the White House, while Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and President Ilham Aliyev signed a joint declaration committing their countries to peace. The two countries have been moving steadily toward a settlement since Azerbaijan regained control of Nagorno-Karabakh in 2023. Even though, more than a year later, the peace treaty itself has still not been formally signed or ratified, and several issues, including final border demarcation, remain unresolved, it certainly looks promising.

At the center of the dispute is the area known as Nagorno-Karabakh, which was taken by force in September 2023 by Azerbaijan. Once part of the Soviet Union, this land was a separatist ethnic-Armenian enclave located inside Azerbaijan. Today, it's a mostly uninhabitable wasteland that lies in ruins, destroyed by war.

Almost three decades ago, with help from Russia, Armenia captured this territory – even though it was internationally recognized as belonging to Azerbaijan – claiming it was, as a homeland, essential to its identity. The six-year war ended with hundreds of thousands of Azerbaijanis forced into exile.

The Armenians felt justified in these actions because, during the fall of the Ottoman Empire, they had suffered what many throughout the world (including the United States) recognize as genocide as they were violently forced out of Turkey.

On September 27, 2020, Azerbaijan, with the help of Turkey, finally declared war to get the land back. After six weeks of brutal fighting – which included the use of drones by Azerbaijan, a game changer – Azerbaijan conquered the cities of Fizuli and Aghdam.

Soon after, Russia helped broker a ceasefire – signed by Russian President Vladimir Putin, President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan and Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan of Armenia – that allowed Azerbaijan to keep most of the territory it had regained. Most importantly, they were keeping Shusha, a town on a hill that holds great cultural significance for them.

However, the agreement left the capital of Nagorno-Karabakh, Stepanakert, in control of the Armenians. Under Armenia's security agreement with Russia, Russia committed to provide a peacekeeping force there for the next several years. Turkey also agreed to operate a peacekeeping command in Azerbaijan.

The deal authorized a transport corridor from eastern Turkey through Nakhchivan (a territory that borders Turkey) to the Caspian Sea. In fact, no one benefited from this more than Turkey since the corridor grants them much greater access to Central Asia.

Although this signaled progress, there were a couple of unresolved issues back then that, even today, need to be watched closely – one from a geopolitical perspective and one from a humanitarian perspective.

From a geopolitical perspective, Turkey and Russia inserted themselves into this war and subsequent "peace" from the beginning. Obviously, they were both operating from a place of 100% self-interest, and their opportunistic fingerprints were all over the terms of the ceasefire. Knowing the players, it's safe to assume that they could not care less about the human beings involved. Rather, they wanted access – which they both got in spades.

Also, to both Turkey and Russia's benefit, the agreement left a ton of issues vague – like the fate of refugees and associated humanitarian issues, rebuilding, and the future role of the United Nations – and lots of wiggle room for the issues that were considered settled.

Hopefully, this time will be different, and these two historic enemies can finally settle on a pathway to peace once and for all.

The Balkans

The Balkans are the easternmost of Europe's three great southern peninsulas – the Iberian Peninsula, the Italian Peninsula, and the Balkan Peninsula. The countries usually considered to be part of the Balkans are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Slovenia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, and Serbia (portions of Greece and Turkey are also within the Balkan Peninsula).

As the United States develops a smart strategy for the U.S./Balkans relationship, something that we have never really had, we need to – as always – keep a close eye on Vladimir Putin.

Putin constantly and continually exploits the region's vulnerabilities to try to destabilize these countries and gain a stronger foothold, as he tries to keep them far away from the influence of the European Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). His goal it to insert himself into the economic and political bloodstream of the Balkans, destroying their democracies and making them completely dependent on Russia.

Although Putin has worked hard to cultivate close ties with Serbia and other Slavic allies in the Balkans, his brutal invasion of Ukraine has led some Balkan governments to distance themselves from Moscow.

The United States should seize on this opportunity to commit to the region and encourage Balkan nations to more deeply integrate with Western institutions and NATO to further erode Putin's influence.

This is important. We must look no further than when Putin tried to disrupt Montenegro's and North Macedonia's entries into NATO – which didn't work in the end. To the other Balkan nations, forget Putin and his shady ways. We've got your back!

Haiti

Things have been grim in Haiti for a long time. Almost 60 percent

of Haitians live on less than $2 a day. Food, water and fuel are scarce. Elections are chronically shady; gang violence is brutal; and kidnappings, money-laundering, and arms trafficking are commonplace.

In 2024 alone, Haiti had three prime ministers; thousands of people were killed; and – despite the fact that the United States spent $600 million on law enforcement efforts to squelch violence and restore order – the international airport was closed twice for extended periods due to threats from armed gangs (this got so bad that the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration barred American aircraft from flying under 10,000 feet in Haitian airspace so they wouldn't be shot).

It's been tough from the start. Haiti won its independence in 1804, when both enslaved and free people rebelled against their French colonial masters. Since that time, Haiti has endured several brutal dictators. Two of the worst were François Duvalier ("Papa Doc") and his son Jean-Claude Duvalier ("Baby Doc"). Although Jean-Bertrand Aristide won Haiti's first free democratic election in 1990, he was derailed twice by military coup d'états.

On July 7, 2021, Haiti's president, Jovenel Moïse, was assassinated in his home. In the months before, the country had been split on the fate of Moïse. At the heart of the dispute was the date Moïse's presidential term was officially over. His supporters said that, thanks to a disputed election, there was one more year on his term. Opposition leaders said that Moïse's term ended on February 7, 2021, four years after he took office. When the opposition attempted to swear in a new president, Moïse and his supporters decried their actions as a coup.

During his tenure, Moïse dissolved Parliament, undermined the judicial system and other institutions, and ruled by decree. Before his death, many Haitians accused Moïse and his cronies of stealing millions of oil dollars and, in December 2020, the U.S. Treasury Department issued sanctions on two top government officials and a gang leader for a 2018 anti-government gathering that left over seventy Haitians dead.

Even still, many Haitians didn't care for Moïse's successor, Ariel Henry. During Henry's three-year tenure, killings and kidnappings by

armed gangs escalated and, in February 2024, rival gangs joined forces, wreaked holy terror throughout the country, and threw him out of office.

With help from the United States and Caribbean countries, Haiti then put a nine-member transitional presidential council in place to rule the country, naming a former U.N. official, Garry Conille, interim prime minister. The Council soon fired Conille – unleashing yet another barrage of gang violence – and replaced him with Alix Didier Fils-Aimé. Conille responded by saying that his removal was "nothing more than a maneuver that further weakens our country and seriously compromises our chances of overcoming the crisis."

Haiti is the definition of a failed state. Practically everything about the country needs to be reformed, and the United States must continue to engage not only for the safety of the Haitian people, but to protect our national security interests in the region. It's important to remember that Haiti is less than 700 miles from the shoreline of Florida. The last thing we need is a failed state run by violent drug warlords – who now control an estimated 80 percent of the country – that close to our border.

Taiwan

Let's be crystal clear: We *cannot* under any circumstances allow China to invade Taiwan. Period. Full stop.

There are multiple reasons this cannot happen. For one, a Chinese attack could pull Japan – and potentially the United States – into the conflict. Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi has said some Chinese military action against Taiwan could constitute a "survival-threatening situation" for Japan, potentially allowing Japanese military intervention.

While the U.S.-Japan security treaty does not automatically require America to enter a Taiwan war simply because Japan does, if China attacked Japanese territory or U.S. forces stationed in Japan, America's treaty obligations could come directly into play.

A Chinese invasion or blockade would also be an economic catastrophe since Taiwan sits at a crucial maritime crossroads that a huge portion of global trade passes through (with crucial chokepoints like the Bashi Channel sitting at Taiwan's edges). It's impossible to overstate the importance of the South China Sea to worldwide commerce. Roughly one-third of global maritime shipping – trillions and trillions of dollars – passes through the South China Sea, making it one of the most important commercial waterways on Earth.

Not to mention that, if China cut off Taiwan's chip exports to American companies, our tech industry – heck, the entire U.S. economy – would be paralyzed.

A 2022 confidential report commissioned by the Semiconductor Industry Association and reviewed by The New York Times revealed that America losing access to chips from Taiwan would lead to the largest economic crisis since the Great Depression. U.S. economic output would drop 11 percent, twice as much as the 2008 recession.

Four years later, a 2026 Bloomberg Economics analysis estimated that a Chinese invasion of Taiwan that draws the United States into the conflict could cost the global economy $10.6 trillion – nearly 10 percent of worldwide GDP – in the first year alone. U.S. GDP could fall 6.6 percent. Much of the damage would come from losing access to Taiwan's semiconductor production, which currently accounts for roughly 62 percent of the world's cutting-edge logic chips. Even a yearlong blockade of Taiwan, without a full-scale war, could reduce global GDP by 5.3 percent and U.S. GDP by 3.2 percent.

But the strategic and human consequences could be even greater. A forcible takeover of democratic Taiwan would dramatically alter the military balance in East Asia and increase pressure on U.S. allies including Japan and the Philippines.

When Washington established diplomatic relations with Beijing in 1979, the United States recognized the People's Republic of China (PRC) government as the sole legal government of China. But it did not recognize Beijing's sovereignty over Taiwan. Instead, Washington merely "acknowledged" the Chinese position that Taiwan is part of China.

Congress simultaneously passed the Taiwan Relations Act of 1979 which obligates the U.S. to assist Taiwan in maintaining its defensive capability, demands peaceful resolutions between Beijing and Taipei, and forbids unilateral changes to the status quo by either side. While there is no formal defense pact, meaning the U.S. isn't automatically required to go to war if China attacks Taiwan, we are required to make defensive weapons available to Taiwan and maintain the capacity to resist force or coercion against it.

We cannot ignore the danger here. In late December 2025 – in what China called a "stern warning" against outside interference in Chinese affairs, after the Trump/Vance administration approved an $11 billon U.S. arms sales package to Taiwan – the People's Liberation Army (PLA) fired over two dozen long-range rockets into the waters around Taiwan and surrounded the island with bombers, fighter jets, and new amphibious assault ships, while its vessels and aircraft practiced repelling an approaching enemy force. These live-fire military exercises sure looked a lot like a practice run for an assault on the democratically governed island.

Now, as of August 2026, the Trump/Vance administration is procrastinating on a $14 billion arms package to Taiwan – in addition to $30 billion of U.S. approved weapons to Taiwan that have yet to be delivered – enabling China and further undermining U.S. deterrence in the Indo-Pacific. We need to get these air-defense systems, missiles, drones and other weapons to Taiwan to strengthen deterrence and to allow Taiwan to defend itself against China when – not if – it comes to that.

Venezuela

The Bottom Line

† 1787 believes there are multiple problems with the Trump/ Vance administration ordering the U.S. military to attack Venezuela and seize its dictator, Nicolás Maduro, and his wife. First, the administration did this

unilaterally, without Congress. Second, the administration launched the military operation under false pretenses. Their claim that Venezuela is the premiere narco-terrorist state that exports huge quantities of opiates to the U.S., killing hundreds of thousands of Americans, is nonsense – and is as false as the claims that Saddam Hussein had WMDs.

- The military strikes the Trump/Vance administration is conducting in the Caribbean Sea and the Eastern Pacific are illegal under domestic and international law. The administration has ordered the execution of people who are not at war with the United States and who have not been afforded due process. Essentially, they are acting as judge, jury and executioner – and that is not allowed by the global community or by the United States of America.

♦ ♦ ♦

On January 3, 2026, the Trump/Vance administration ordered the U.S. military to attack Venezuela and seize its dictator, Nicolás Maduro, and his wife. There are multiple problems with this. First, the administration did this unilaterally, without Congress. Second, the administration launched the military operation under false pretenses. Their claim that Venezuela is the premiere narco-terrorist state that exports huge quantities of opiates to the U.S., killing hundreds of thousands of Americans is nonsense – and is as false as the claims that Saddam Hussein had WMDs.

But let's back up a bit. Four months earlier, President Trump announced that the United States had carried out a military strike in the southern Caribbean against – *he claimed* – a drug-carrying vessel that had just left Venezuela and was operated by the Tren de Aragua gang.

Eleven people, the U.S. president reported, had been killed… including, it turns out, Alejandro Carranza, a Colombian fisherman who had long fished the Caribbean for marlin and tuna (we learned of

this from his 14-year-old daughter, who told The New York Times, "I never thought I would lose my father in this way.")

< In January 2026, the families of two Trinidadian men, Chad Joseph and Rishi Samaroo, filed a wrongful-death lawsuit against the Trump/ Vance administration, alleging American military boat strikes off the Venezuelan coast unlawfully killed their relatives. The suit claims the men were innocent, not drug smugglers as alleged by the U.S. >

Since then, the U.S. has attacked at least 67 boats, killing at least 221 people. Even though people are being killed – and 15,000 U.S. service members are stationed in the region – the Trump/Vance administration is using military force against a target that poses no direct threat to the United States and is ***still*** doing so without congressional authorization.

President Trump also announced that he had authorized covert CIA action on the ground in Venezuela – which kind of defeats the purpose of something being "covert," does it not? – evidently authorizing everything from clandestine information operations to training guerrilla opposition forces to conducting lethal strikes.

… which is STRAIGHT UP UNCONSTITUTIONAL.

Even though the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) is grossly outdated and is being used outside its original mandate, it still at least *exists* – meaning it's one thing to use lethal force against terror groups in the Middle East, where the military has relied on congressionally approved authorizations for using force, but it's a different situation entirely when dealing with Latin American-based "cartels," where no semblance of such authorization exists whatsoever.

At the time, President Trump said: "I authorized for two reasons, really. Number one, they have emptied their prisons into the United States of America. And the other thing, the drugs, we have a lot of drugs coming in from Venezuela, and a lot of the Venezuelan drugs come in through the sea."

First of all, there is zero evidence that Venezuela has "emptied their prisons into the United States of America." Second, bombing random motorboats leaving from Venezuela seems like the wrong target because Venezuela is not a leading source of illegal drugs coming into the United States. Most cocaine is produced and smuggled from Colombia, Peru and Bolivia, and Venezuela plays essentially no role in the production and/or smuggling of fentanyl.

But that's that even the point. The point is that, despite Vice President JD Vance's claims that "killing cartel members who poison our fellow citizens is the highest and best use of our military" – which is an absurd thing to say – our armed forces are not law enforcement agencies.

Our soldiers are not empowered to hunt down suspected criminals and kill them without trial (and remember, the U.S. military is attacking civilian vessels, not military ones). Because this is essentially what the Trump/Vance administration has our soldiers doing, there are legal questions not only about the strikes themselves but also concerning the U.S. military personnel involved in the operations, who could possibly be held personally liable.

The Trump/Vance administration using self-defense as a legal justification for the military strikes, as Secretary of State Marco Rubio did when he said the drug cartels "pose an immediate threat" to the nation, is also absurd.

In one instance, for example, U.S. national security officials told Congress that the first boat "had turned around and was heading back to shore" and "was fired on multiple times by the U.S. military after it had changed course." Fleeing boats don't exactly seem like an "immediate threat" to the United States.

Obviously, the Trump/Vance administration was inventing reasons to invade Venezuela, so what was all of this *really* about? Well, a couple of things, actually.

In the Cold War-inspired mindset that plagues Donald Trump, JD Vance and Marco Rubio, strategic interests are key. So, locking down strategic assets is certainly one reason they're doing these things – using the same logic that Vladimir Putin used when he brutally

invaded Ukraine in 2022 in the first major land offensive for territorial advantage in Europe since World War II.

Even though Marco, the late Senator Lindsey Graham, and other Trump enablers turned themselves into pretzels trying to convince us that Venezuela was about "narcotrafficking," President Trump toppled Nicolás Maduro while pardoning ex-Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández, who actually said – out loud – that he wanted to "stuff the drugs up the gringos' noses"…. which is why the narcotrafficking explanation made no sense from the jump.

What made perfect sense – and came as no surprise – was President Trump's announcement in late August 2026 that he had cut what he called the "biggest oil deal in world history" with President Delcy Rodríguez for preferential rights to 65 billion barrels of Venezuelan oil reserves. Essentially, America will take a 35 percent stake in a private company run by Alejandro Betancourt, a Venezuelan businessman who Swiss authorities have issued a warrant for in connection with a money laundering investigation. His company, North American Blue Energy Partners, will have the right to develop those 65 billion in reserves and America will have the right to 20 percent of what they produce at the cost of production. Colonialism at its finest.

The invasion was also about Nicolás Maduro. The Trump/Vance administration – especially Secretary of State Marco Rubio who, as a former senator from Florida, is faithful to the Venezuelan and Cuban exiles in Miami, and who also has a well-established loathing of leftist Latin American dictators – wanted Maduro out.

This is not the first time Donald Trump has been down this road. The first Trump administration tried other tactics to remove Maduro. For example, the U.S. Department of Justice indicted him and 14 other senior officials on charges of narco-terrorism, corruption, drug trafficking and other criminal charges, saying that "Maduro and other high ranking Venezuelan officials allegedly partnered with the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) to use cocaine as a weapon to 'flood' the United States."

Although Cuba, China, Russia and Turkey remain hard-core Maduro defenders, the United States and over fifty other governments

tried hard in 2019 to elect Maduro out of office by recognizing a young opposition leader, Juan Guaidó, as the legitimate interim president of Venezuela – an effort that included a surprise appearance by Guaidó at President Trump's 2020 State of the Union address. But the Venezuelan police, military, and courts all continued to recognize Maduro as the country's rightful leader, which undermined the opposition effort.

Then, in July 2024, Maduro – who happens to control the election board – declared he had won a third six-year term, which seemed unlikely since the exit polls showed just the opposite and he had polled behind his opponent Edmundo González by more than 25 percentage points for weeks. < González was running mainly because María Corina Machado, the Venezuelan opposition leader and recent Nobel Peace Prize recipient, had been barred from running in the presidential election. >

Listen, there is no question that Nicolás Maduro is a bad guy who wrecked Venezuela.

Once Latin America's richest country and longest-running democracy – plus, the owner of the world's largest proven oil reserves – Venezuela is now in deep, deep trouble. Thanks to hyperinflation, corruption, cronyism, severely inadequate government investment, and significant economic mismanagement by Maduro and his predecessor Hugo Chávez, Venezuela is now a failed state.

Falling oil production, decrepit infrastructure (think sporadic water, electricity, and cellphone coverage), failing banking systems, and U.S. sanctions have intensified the crisis, causing 7.7 million Venezuelans to flee their country.

The Maduro regime violated human rights on a colossal scale, leaving hundreds of anti-Maduro peaceful protestors dead.

Living standards and the health care system have collapsed, medicine is scarce, infant mortality is high, malnutrition is rampant, and diseases like measles, diphtheria, malaria and tuberculosis are resurgent. Over 7.6 million people still live in Venezuela are in dire need of humanitarian assistance.

Plus, Maduro was most definitely in the drug trade and wanted desperately to grow his business. A 2022 report by the think tank

InSight Crime reported that the "principal role" of Maduro & Co. was "to ensure the drug trafficking system functions to the benefit of the regime by placing corrupt and loyal personnel in strategic political and military positions."

In November 2025, the U.S. government designated the Cartel de los Soles as a foreign terrorist organization, identifying Nicolás Maduro as the group's leader (labeling an organization as a terrorist group gives American law enforcement and military agencies broader powers to target it). Already, the U.S. had indicted Maduro on narco-terrorism charges and put a $50 million bounty on his head.

< Sidebar: There is confusion as to exactly what Cartel de los Soles is and is not. It is not, for example, a traditional Latin American family-run drug cartel and some analysts say, because there are no members and no hierarchy, it's not even a unified organization. >

Then there is the gang Tren de Aragua, which wasn't under Maduro's control but was definitely in cahoots with him. The gang, which started in a prison in the Venezuelan state of Aragua, trades in drugs, extortion and human trafficking. Its influence has moved beyond Venezuelan borders, and the group is trying hard to corrupt and destabilize neighboring democracies.

Nicolás Maduro is bad. Tren de Aragua is bad. Drugs are bad. We get all of that. However, the United States of America should have learned by now that trying to achieve regime change through military force and CIA-sponsored coups d'état usually results in total disaster.

< Although Nicolás Maduro's vice-president Delcy Rodríguez took over as the interim president of Venezuela after he was captured, we still liken this to regime change because the actions of the U.S. government led to a major reshuffle of Maduro's cabinet and Venezuela's military leadership, including Rodríguez replacing long-time Defense Minister Vladimir Padrino López. >

America's history of regime change is grim. U.S. interventions in Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua were followed by decades of dictatorship and repression; the CIA-backed 1954 overthrow of Guatemalan President Jacobo Árbenz helped set the stage for the country's bloody 36-year civil war; and the disastrous 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion, intended to overthrow Fidel Castro, pushed Cuba

closer to the Soviet Union and intensified fears of another U.S. invasion. The following year, Castro allowed the Soviet Union to deploy nuclear missiles in Cuba, triggering the Cuban Missile Crisis and bringing the world perilously close to nuclear war.

The involvement of the United States in these operations also leads to chronic anti-Americanism and radicalizes many of the young people (like Che Guevara, who was in Guatemala in 1954).

The asymmetrical political and economic dominance of the United States in Latin America – and its history of often unwanted interventions – is already so acute it even has a name: the Colossus of the North.

Our relationships in Latin America were already in serious trouble, which is another colossal mistake made by the administration. They have alienated Colombia and Brazil by 1) imposing 50 percent tariffs on Brazil because officials there refused to stop the trial of President Trump's buddy, former Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro, and 2) threatened to cut all U.S. aid to Colombia after Colombian President Gustavo Petro blasted the U.S. strikes in the Caribbean. Typically, it quickly got worse. President Trump then called President Petro a "lunatic who has many mental problems" and "an illegal drug leader" before the U.S. Treasury Department hit him with sanctions.

… which is a major problem because it's critical that the U.S. remain fully committed to helping Colombia fight cartels and cocaine trafficking, as we have done for decades.

Randomly bombing boats and storming into other countries and arresting people is not what stable, healthy democracies do. It's what dictators like former President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines do – who now, incidentally, is facing charges in the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity because, in part, he directed the execution of over 6,000 people suspected of using and/or selling drugs.

So, let's take a minute to assess what the United States has both lost and gained from attacking at least 67 boats, killing at least 221 people, and seizing Nicolás Maduro and his wife.

We lost the right to say anything if Xi Jinping decides to overthrow Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te.

We lost any moral authority we had since the military strikes the Trump/Vance administration is conducting in the Caribbean Sea and the Eastern Pacific are illegal under domestic and international law. The administration has ordered the execution of people who are not at war with the United States and who have not been afforded due process. Essentially, they are acting as judge, jury and executioner – and that is not allowed by the global community or by the United States of America.

We lost this round in the war on drugs itself. President Trump has said at least 15 times that the American strikes have reduced maritime drug trafficking into the country by 97 or 98 percent, including an April post on Truth Social that said, "98.2% of Drugs coming into the U.S. by Ocean or Sea have STOPPED!"

That's a flat out lie. On May 29, 2026 – after the United States had spent $4.7 billion, which included AC-130J Ghostrider gunships, F-35 fighter jets and guided-missile destroyers, and around 15,000 U.S. military personnel – The New York Times reported that "epidemiologists, addiction scientists and public health experts say cocaine, by far the top drug smuggled out of South America, is as easy to get in much of the United States as it was before the strikes began" (these findings were based on evaluations of street prices, lethal overdoses, purity of samples and drug seizures at U.S. borders).

For example, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection "seized 47,808 pounds of cocaine in the eight months since the strikes began, more than the 43,227 pounds the agency seized in the eight-month period before the campaign."

Then, on July 27, 2026, The Washington Post followed that up with a report of its own. According to a previously unreported assessment by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), a closed-door congressional briefing, and interviews with current and former U.S. and foreign officials: "The Trump administration's deadly military strikes on alleged drug trafficking boats have not reduced the amount of cocaine entering the United States, but they're prompting criminal organizations to develop new strategies and tactics and undermining traditional investigative methods."

"In a recent assessment reviewed by The Washington Post, DEA analysts found the strikes had failed to affect the supply or price of cocaine in the United States and had led traffickers to diversify beyond go-fast boats and to avoid international waters, opting instead for larger boats and hemming close to coastlines, where U.S. forces are less likely to open fire… traffickers are also relying more on aircraft, which take off from clandestine airstrips along the Colombian-Venezuelan border and head east to Guyana and Suriname to avoid U.S. forces."

A senior Colombian security official told the Post that the boat strikes have had a minimal impact: "There was a dissuasive effect in one type of transportation. So, it has forced them to seek out other methods. Taking the drugs out through ports has increased, stockpiling it on large ships."

We have gained one thing though!! Now that we are "running" Venezuela until it can be "put back on track," in President Trump's words, the United States is now on the hook to help cleanup and rebuild after two earthquakes on June 24th caused an estimated $37 billion in damage (equivalent to roughly a third of Venezuela's annual economic output) and killed more than 4,930 people.

Danny Muñoz, "a bricklayer who pulled the lifeless body of his pregnant stepdaughter out from underneath debris after their apartment building along the coast collapsed", summed it up perfectly to the Wall Street Journal: "We're in the hands of God, as well as the Americans. No one else can save us now."

Americans

Organization of American States (OAS)

Founded in 1948, the Organization of American States (OAS) is a multilateral regional body focused on human rights, security, electoral oversight, and social and economic development in the Western

Hemisphere. Member states pledge to strengthen regional peace and security, promote representative democracy, and encourage economic and social cooperation.

There are now thirty-four member states: Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, The Bahamas, Trinidad and Tobago, United States, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

Colombia

When Iván Duque was elected president of Colombia in 2018 he had a lot on his plate. He was, at once, trying to reduce violence and drug trafficking; implement crop substitution and coca eradication programs, (which wasn't exactly popular with many of his people); and manage an increasingly hostile relationship with Venezuela.

At the same time, the 2016 peace accord former President Juan Manuel Santos struck with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) – which ended Colombia's fifty-year war with the guerilla group, a conflict that killed over 200,000 Colombians and left seven million displaced – was unraveling. The violence that came after the agreement was signed came mainly from FARC fighters who refused to disarm as well as other groups who filled the vacuum that the peace accord created. These groups not only attack civilians, but they also attack each other.

Just over two years after the historic agreement was signed, the United Nation's human rights commissioner reported that at least 400 human rights activists (whom the Colombians called "social leaders") had been killed. The Colombian ombudsman put that number at closer to 710. These social leaders were advocates for everything from the environment to the rights of indigenous and Afro-Colombian people.

Ultimately, a proposed tax increase, high unemployment, continued inequality, and increased crime led to plummeting approval

ratings for Iván Duque. Gustavo Petro was elected president of Colombia in June 2022 and took office on August 7, 2022.

Over time, the relationship between Washington and Bogotá has evolved into a close economic and security partnership. Recently, we have joined forces to stop migrants from crossing through the Darién Gap, the only land route from South America to the United States – which is an incredibly dangerous journey for families.

For decades, this unforgiving, arduous terrain acted as a natural barrier between North and South America, but then "entrepreneurs" made this dangerous, dense jungle passable, providing boat rides, camps, porters, guides, restaurants, and even all-inclusive packages to make the entire experience easier. "Like a ticket to Disney," one Venezuelan construction worker told The New York Times.

When you imagine migrants being "smuggled" into the United States, you may picture old-school, thuggish "coyotes" hiding people in the bottoms of battered trucks or walking them through the hot desert or across rapid rivers or helping them creep through secret tunnels. But that's no longer the case.

In 2023, 520,085 people crossed through the Darién Gap, shattering 2022's record of 250,000. The New York Times reported in 2023 that the people shepherding migrants through the dangerous jungle were "politicians, prominent businessmen and elected leaders, now sending thousands of migrants toward the United States in plain sight each day – and charging millions of dollars a month for the privilege… today, that profit is greater than ever, with local leaders collecting tens of millions of dollars this year alone from migrants in an enormous people-moving operation – one that international experts say is more sophisticated than anything they have seen."

One of the things, among many, that made this so dangerous was that the Gaitanist Army of Colombia (EGC), often called the Gulf Clan – an uber powerful drug-trafficking group – essentially ruled the Urabá region of Antioquia, which includes the entrance to the jungle… to such an extent that the Colombian government considered the Gulf Clan to have "criminal governance" over the area. Colombian President Gustavo Petro estimated that the group was earning $30 million a year or more from the migration business alone.

In April 2023, the United States, Colombia, and Panama signed an agreement to "end the illicit movement of people" through the Darién Gap, a practice that they warned "leads to death and exploitation of vulnerable people for significant profit.

Unfortunately, relations between Colombia and the Trump/Vance administration started off rocky and went straight downhill from there. In January 2025, in response to Colombia's decision to turn away U.S. planes carrying Colombian deportees, President Trump threatened tariffs on Colombian goods, along with travel and visa bans.

President Petro countered with retaliatory tariffs of his own, saying Colombia would not accept any deportation flights until the Trump/Vance administration treated migrants with "dignity and respect." Later that month, Colombia's foreign ministry announced it would accept deportation flights and even use the presidential plane to transport returning migrants.

Then, the Trump/Vance administration threatened to cut all U.S. aid to Colombia after President Petro blasted the U.S. military strikes in the Caribbean. Typically, it quickly got worse. President Trump then called President Petro a "lunatic who has many mental problems" and "an illegal drug leader" before the U.S. Treasury Department hit him with sanctions.

This is a major problem because it's critical that the United States remain fully committed to helping Colombia fight cartels and cocaine trafficking, as we have done for decades.

This is not the time to back off, because progress is being made. In 2025, Colombian authorities seized hundreds of tons of cocaine and destroyed thousands of drug laboratories. And by April 2026, the Petro government had carried out 873 extraditions since taking office – including 566 to the United States – the highest total of any recent Colombian administration.

Cuba

The ouster of Nicolás Maduro from Venezuela has intensified Cuba's economic crisis, which already rivaled the post-Soviet collapse. We stand by what we say below and DO NOT support U.S. military intervention in Cuba.

It has been over sixty-five years since Fidel Castro entered the scene and almost a decade since he died. His brother Raúl stepped down as head of Cuba's Communist Party and is now in retirement. Cuba's president, Miguel Díaz-Canel, is the first non-Castro leader of Cuba since the revolution. Things have changed, and it is finally time for the never-ending, unnecessary drama between our two countries to end.

The United States should lift the misguided, antiquated U.S. trade embargo against Cuba *at once*.

In exchange, President Díaz-Canel should agree to significant concessions, like releasing political prisoners, eliminating restrictions that discourage private investment and business, removing restrictions on the press and other types of free expression – and hopefully and eventually holding free elections.

It's time. The steps taken by the Obama administration to restore diplomatic ties between the two countries was a necessary first step but didn't go far enough.

Although President Obama's new rules allowed certain American businesses to trade with Cuba, the embargo continued to ban most Cuban exports, prohibit American tourism, and make banking almost impossible. This paradox creates confusion and makes potential investors uneasy.

In his first administration, Donald Trump erased even those minor concessions, restoring travel restrictions on Americans and re-instituting constraints on U.S. investments and commercial dealings in the country. He also limited the amount of money that Cuban Americans can send back to Cuba; established even stricter travel restrictions on U.S. citizens; and sanctioned government officials who allowed medical professionals to work abroad.

For decades, Cuba has sent doctors to other countries as good-will ambassadors, as well as to make money. Even though the number of these professionals has fallen by over half in the past ten years, there are still roughly 24,000 of them working in over fifty countries– including as many as 1,500 of them working in the Caribbean.

Now, in his second administration, Donald Trump picked up right where he left off, but worse. Secretary of State Marco Rubio – the son of Cuban migrants who fled the island before Fidel Castro's revolution seized power – has characterized the work of the Cuban doctors abroad as "forced labor," and said that any Cuban officials involved in the medical program will have their visas to the United States revoked. This time, the policy not only affects the officials but their families as well. It also puts pressure on Caricom, a group of twenty-one countries (fifteen member states and six associate members) in the Caribbean.

This official reasoning makes ZERO sense. The Cuban government does, in fact, take a cut of what the medical professionals make from other governments, but their take-home pay is considerably more than it would be back in Cuba.

Beyond that, Caribbean countries need this medical help desperately. … to the point where some Caribbean leaders have said they would forgo their U.S. visas if it came to that. Prime minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines Ralph Gonsalves is one: "I would prefer to lose my visa than to have sixty poor and working people die."

This makes us look like total jerks.

The Cuban embargo should be lifted for at least Four reasons:

1. It is an important economic move for America.

Even with the trade embargo in place, U.S. goods trade with Cuba totaled an estimated $827.1 million in 2025. U.S. exports to Cuba reached $809.6 million, up 38.3 percent from 2024, while imports from

Cuba totaled $17.5 million. The U.S. goods trade surplus with Cuba reached $792 million, up 36.4 percent from the previous year.

2. It will vastly improve the lives of the Cuban people.

In January 2025, right before he left office, President Biden removed Cuba from a list of state sponsors of terrorism, continuing the tradition of schizophrenic U.S. Cuba policy (President Obama removed Cuba from the list, then President Trump put them back on right before he left office in 2021). Now, the Trump/Vance administration has put Cuba *back* on the list that includes North Korea, Iran and Syria.

One of the reasons the Biden administration gave for removing Cuba from the list was to help its battered economy – which many blame for causing Cuba's dire financial condition that has sparked a humanitarian and migration crisis – because being on the list makes it difficult, if not impossible, to get aid and/or do business with the United States. However, this reasoning makes little sense because Cuba is forced to contend with the U.S. trade embargo either way.

With or without Cuba being on "the list," America must support the Cuban people in their desire for a democratic government and respect for human rights – encouraging more private enterprise and greater cultural freedom – and, realistically, the only way to truly help them do this is to address the trade embargo directly.

Some people say that easing U.S. sanctions won't help, pointing to the fact that little changed within the Cuban government when President Obama tried a similar approach, but that's apples and oranges. Like we said before, Obama's new rules left too many restrictions in place.

We need to do this as quickly as possible because the Cuban people are suffering through one of the worst humanitarian crises in decades. Prolonged blackouts from the failing electrical grid have become a fact of daily life, while severe shortages of food, clean water, medicine, fuel, and other basic necessities have left families struggling to survive. Hospitals face shortages of medicines and supplies, more than 100,000 patients have been waiting for delayed surgeries, and the country's once-vaunted health care and educational systems have

deteriorated dramatically. Food insecurity has become widespread, and an estimated one to two million Cubans have fled the country since 2022.

3. It is an inconsistent policy.

The U.S. trade embargo was enacted, in part, to take a hard stand against a repressive regime. However, it's ridiculous to still link this embargo to human rights when we have no problem doing business with China, which is way more authoritarian and repressive than Cuba. And remember this: *the Castros are GONE.*

4. The embargo has not worked.

Instead of punishing the Cuban government and forcing it into submission, the embargo has given its leaders a convenient scapegoat for the country's economic hardships – and a pretext for further repressing the Cuban people.

We need to get with the program, America. Fast.

El Salvador

In 2019, Nayib Bukele became El Salvador's president, becoming the youngest head of state in Latin America and its first millennial leader. He was the first president to come from outside the right-wing Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) or the left-leaning Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN) parties in over thirty years.

His party, called New Ideas, won a landslide victory in the legislative and municipal elections held on February 28, 2021, giving him control of two of the three branches of government (the executive and legislative branches) and, after the new Bukele-friendly legislature chose five Supreme Court judges, he also controlled the third branch.

Bukele ran for president on an anti-corruption platform and pledged to tackle crime and unemployment. This sounded promising because the Northern Triangle countries – El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras – continued to fight significant corruption.

To that end, President Bukele quickly established El Salvador's own anticorruption commission with the Organization of American States (OAS) called the International Commission Against Impunity in El Salvador (CICIES).

Although Bukele remains incredibly popular with his constituents, many of his actions are reminiscent of the authoritarian leadership of the past, which could potentially threaten El Salvador's fragile democracy.

For instance, he used armed soldiers to intimidate Congress into passing legislation and detained people who violated Covid quarantine in government facilities, then ignored the Supreme Court's ruling that deemed it unconstitutional. Bukele undermines democratic institutions, circumvents checks and balances, vows revenge on those who oppose him, and claims election fraud without evidence. Hmmm…does this remind you of anyone?

But the most concerning move is that President Bukele takes pride in showing the world how terribly he treats El Salvador's prisoners, saying barbaric treatment is imperative in his fight to control the wide-spread gang problem in the country. While it's true that crime in El Salvador has plummeted – homicides in the country are down 92 percent from 2015 – human rights have equally suffered.

President Bukele has declared a perpetual state of emergency that allows suspected gang members to be arrested arbitrarily and without due process, and he opened the "Terrorism Confinement Center" that can hold 40,000 inmates.

Amnesty International reports that "between the start of the state of emergency on March 27, 2022 and the end of 2023, more than 73,000 detentions were recorded."

"The penitentiary system faced critical levels of overcrowding, reaching a 300 percent occupancy rate, equivalent to more than 100,000 inmates. This accounted for 1.14 percent of the country's

general population and positioned El Salvador as having the highest rate of incarceration globally."

"Many detainees reported being subjected to torture and other ill-treatment, including restrictions on food, water and access to sanitary facilities, lack of adequate medical care, and excessive use of force by prison guards. Women inmates lacked attention to their specific needs, including access to reproductive health services and protection against gender-based violence."

In October 2025, Amnesty followed up with this: "More than three years after it began, the state of exception, which has already been extended 42 consecutive times, has established a model that gives the appearance of legality to mass detention without evidence, the suspension of judicial guarantees and the imposition of disproportionate terms of administrative detention." The criminal system in El Salvador "is used as a weapon to criminalize human rights defenders and to silence critical voices, exposing them to a prison regime that threatens their personal integrity and their lives."

Further, "the prison situation in El Salvador continues to be alarming: prolonged solitary confinement, extreme overcrowding, lack of timely medical care and the risk of torture characterize the prison system."

With that as the backdrop, the United States is now sending migrants to El Salvador's prisons. In late March 2025, then Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem visited the Terrorism Confinement Center – wearing a $50,000 18-karat gold Rolex watch – saying "First of all, do not come to our country illegally: You will be removed, and you will be prosecuted… but know that this facility is one of the tools in our toolkit that we will use if you commit crimes against the American people."

… and Bukele wants even more, telling Secretary of State Marco Rubio that he can "house in his jails dangerous American criminals" and accept deportees of any nationality… with the U.S. secretary of state replying that the offer is "the most unprecedented and extraordinary migratory agreement anywhere in the world."

Guatemala

Guatemala's 36-year civil war that ended in 1996 – after killing over 200,000 people – sparked persistent, widespread crime and corruption.

Many of those who fought in the war transitioned from soldiers and security officers to gang members and kingpins, engaging in everything from extortion to drug smuggling and trafficking to kidnapping. Some even weaseled their way into the political and judicial systems, and bribes and threats leveled at judges, attorneys and witnesses became status quo.

As the murder rate exploded, it was clear the world needed to step in and help Guatemalans find peace. At the request of the government, help came in the form of the International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala (CICIG), which was supervised by the United Nations. The CICIG was created to fight corruption and dismantle drug cartels, money-laundering rings and death squads.

The CICIG conducted independent investigations, then handed the cases to local prosecutors, a partnership that successfully prosecuted hundreds of corrupt politicians and business executives as well as many drug traffickers and other bad guys.

From the beginning, the main cheerleader for the CICIG was the United States, who played a central role in supporting the effort – both diplomatically and financially – contributing around half of the CICIG's budget.

There were locals who believed the CICIG violated Guatemala's sovereignty but, huge surprise, these naysayers were, or had been, in the crosshairs of the commission. At one point, 20 percent of Guatemala's legislature was under investigation.

Alfonso Portillo, Guatemala's president from 2000 to 2004, was investigated and charged with money laundering, and Otto Pérez Molina, Guatemala's president from 2012 to 2015, was investigated and charged – along with his vice-president Roxana Baldetti – for embezzlement.

Then there was Jimmy Morales, Guatemala's president from 2016 to 2020, who was investigated for campaign-finance violations – as his

son and brother were investigated for fraud. Before his presidency, Morales was a comedian who ran on the slogan "neither corrupt nor a thief," but turned out to be both.

In August 2018, Morales announced he would not renew the CICIG's mandate which was set to expire in September 2019 (the mandate had to be renewed every two years or be dissolved). Then, for good measure, he tried to kick Iván Velásquez, the head of the CICIG, and Yilen Osorio, a CICIG investigator, out of Guatemala for good. Although he had already announced the end of the commission, investigation-riddled Morales decided for some crazy reason to terminate it nine months early, a move rejected by the United Nations and Guatemala's highest court.

Enter the first Trump administration, which President Morales knew exactly how to handle. For example, when the United States moved our Israeli embassy to Jerusalem, so did Guatemala. To Donald Trump, that show of support ranked up there with a gigantic billboard with his face plastered on it, which is just one of the many things Saudi Arabia did the first time around.

This loyalty to Donald Trump paid off, because Morales seemed to have free reign to do whatever the heck he wanted to do in his last months as president. He somehow convinced the Trump/Vance administration and other Republicans, led by Marco Rubio, that the CICIG was influenced by the Kremlin (which is just incredibly ironic), prompting the Republicans to suspend the CICIG's funding.

Another example of Morales' free reign was the treatment of Thelma Aldana, who worked closely with the CICIG when she was the country's attorney general from 2014 to 2018.

In her role as AG, Ms. Aldana uncovered the massive scandal that led to the resignation of Otto Pérez Molina. During her tenure, she sent over 250 people to jail which, unsurprisingly, resulted in powerful enemies determined to get revenge.

Revenge peaked when, in March 2019 – after Ms. Aldana announced she would be a candidate in the Guatemalan presidential race – a judge issued a warrant for her arrest on bogus embezzlement and tax fraud charges. Thankfully, Ms. Aldana has since been granted asylum in the United States.

After Jimmy Morales, Alejandro Giammattei became president, and Guatemala was as corrupt and insecure as ever. But, in January 2024, Bernardo Arévalo was sworn in as president.

Arévalo ran an optimistic, anti-corruption, campaign and promised that, under his presidency, the executive branch would cease to be the source of "fundamental lubricant of the corrupt system." He is considered a political moderate with experience in conflict resolution and vowed in his campaign to reestablish important institutions. He has smart agendas on economic growth and good governance, and a solid national security approach. President Arévalo seems to prioritize human rights, democracy, and citizen security – a combination that Guatemalans desperately need.

After Arévalo was sworn in – an act that the Attorney General's Office tried to block – he said that "the political crisis from which we are emerging offers us a singular opportunity to build an institution, a democratic, realist and healthy democratic unity on the rubble of this wall of corruption that we are beginning to take down brick by brick."

One year into his presidency, Arévalo still faced a challenging uphill battle as his optimism collided with the realities of political opposition, institutional obstacles, a weak judiciary, and limited resources.

One of his main problems is the Attorney General's Office under Maria Conseulo Porras, who opened nine investigations against him in early 2025. Consuelo Porras – who was appointed by President Giammettei – has been sanctioned by the United States, the European Union, and 40 other countries for substantial corruption, plus undermining democracy and the rule of law.

For instance, she promotes persecution against dissident voices (think journalists, human rights defenders, and independent justice officials) but refuses to prosecute organized crime and drug and human trafficking.

Her investigations against Arévalo are widely considered to be politically motivated, to the point where the European Union has expressed its "deep concern" about the "misuse of legal and procedural measures targeting elected officials" in Guatemala.

Many Guatemalans were disappointed that President Arévalo didn't simply remove Consuelo Porras after his election. However, we believe his decision – which was based on *Ley Orgánica del Ministerio Público,* a law that requires due process for the removal of the attorney general – respected the rule of law and democratic norms – and was very honorable.

In October 2025, President Arévalo accused the prosecutor's office – specifically Consuelo Porras and criminal court Judge Fredy Orellana – of leading an attempted coup. Speaking to his nation, Arévalo said. "Orellana, a hitman who twists the law at the service of Consuelo Porras, is trying to force the unconstitutional removal of elected officials."

The good news is that Guatemala has installed new leadership in two institutions critical to the country's democracy. In May 2026, President Bernardo Arévalo appointed Gabriel Estuardo García Luna as attorney general, succeeding Consuelo Porras. And in March, Congress elected a new Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) for the 2026–2032 term.

The new TSE will oversee Guatemala's 2027 general election to choose Arévalo's successor. Under Guatemala's Constitution, presidents serve a single four-year term and are barred from seeking re-election.

Honduras

Honduras – together with the other two countries that make up the Northern Triangle, El Salvador and Guatemala – has been rife with corruption for years. After a government embezzlement scandal in 2015 – which included the theft of hundreds of millions of dollars from the country's social security fund – Honduras partnered with the Organization of American States (OAS) to establish the Mission to Support the Fight Against Corruption and Impunity in Honduras (MACCIH).

However, unlike the anti-corruption commission in Guatemala, Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández demanded the initiative

be purely advisory, meaning no investigations without the consent of the government. President Hernández did not renew the MACCIH mandate in January 2020.

If you are wondering why President Hernández, who took office in 2014 and was re-elected in 2017, didn't really like the MACCIH, it's because he was straight-up corrupt. Although they couldn't investigate it thoroughly because of President Hernández's restrictions, MACCIH staff found evidence of significant corruption involving Hernández, his family and close associates.

Although allegations of fraud, corruption and drug trafficking had followed Hernández for years, the first Trump administration overlooked them because of Hernández's commitment to help with America's immigration issues. But! In January 2021, New York federal prosecutors accused Hernández of accepting millions of dollars from drug traffickers in exchange for him looking the other way as they sent massive amounts of cocaine to the United States. He was extradited to the United States in April 2022.

On June 26, 2024, the U.S. Department of Justice announced that Juan Orlando Hernández, former President of Honduras, was sentenced to 45 years in prison for conspiring to distribute over 400 tons of cocaine and related firearms offenses.

Honduras remains among the poorest countries in Latin America, is terrorized by severe violence – mainly by organized crime and gang activity – and has one of the highest murder rates in the entire world.

As a result, Xiomara Castro – who was elected president of Honduras in January 2022 – followed the same strategy imposed by Nayib Bukele in El Salvador. For one, President Castro suspended many constitutional rights, which is not a good thing in a country where security forces have an appalling human rights record. Although these extraordinary measures were presented as being temporary, they proved not to be.

In February 2025 – after reaching an agreement with the Trump/Vance administration for Honduras to receive U.S. deported migrants – President Castro reversed course on her previous decision to end a long-running extradition treaty with the United States.

… but the domestic problems just kept getting worse for President Castro. Although she was elected to power on an anti-corruption message, a video was released in 2024 showing her brother-in-law meeting with drug traffickers in 2013, seemingly negotiating bribes… giving weight to the rumors that President Castro and her family were involved in the same criminal networks as President Hernández was.

Following one of the country's most contentious electoral cycles in years, Nasry "Tito" Asfura narrowly defeated Salvador Nasralla in the November 2025 presidential election and was sworn in as Honduras' president on January 27, 2026.

Since taking office, Asfura has pursued fiscal austerity, reduced government spending, promoted private investment, rejoined the World Bank's international investment-dispute system, and advanced structural economic reforms. In June, the IMF praised Honduras' prudent fiscal policies and renewed reform momentum, approving another $242 million in financing under its economic program.

Mexico

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Nicaragua

Nicaraguan co-president Daniel Ortega, who has been in power this time around since 2007, has been around since his Sandinista Liberation Front overthrew the American-backed Anastasio "Tachito" Somoza dictatorship in 1979 (Ortega remained in power that time until he lost an election in 1990). His wife, Rosaria Murillo, who was previously his vice-president, is now co-president.

In 2018, Ortega, once a Marxist revolutionary, aimed to slash pension benefits, an action that sparked protests throughout Nicaragua and ended with roughly 450 people killed, thousands more injured, and 25,000 citizens fleeing the country.

La Crisis, as that period is called, prompted the United States and European Union to impose sanctions against Nicaraguan officials and institutions. The United Nations accused the Ortega administration of human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings.

Although Nicaragua was once one of Latin American's fastest-growing economies – helped by lots of money from Venezuela – the economy had spiraled downward even before the country was hit hard by two hurricanes in 2020, then by the pandemic, which Ortega didn't take seriously. These events caused Ortega's approval rating to crumble, and several pro-democracy opposition movements emerged in advance of the November 2021 elections.

However, things suddenly took a dark turn. After Ortega passed a law that sanctioned life sentences for people involved in "hate crimes" – a law his opponents feared he would use against them – he did exactly that.

Soon after announcing her candidacy for president, Ortega's government arrested Cristiana Chamorro on charges of money-laundering and something called "ideological falseness." In March 2022, she was given an eight-year sentence after being found "guilty" of the charges.

Another presidential candidate, Arturo Cruz, was detained for "conspiring against Nicaraguan society" and three others were

confined to their homes with no official charges filed against them at all. Well, that's certainly one way to win an election!

Panama

The Panama Canal is a crucial shipping route between the Pacific and Atlantic oceans – one that saves ships the long journey around Cape Horn, at the southern tip of South America.

Donald Trump has repeatedly argued that the United States should "take it back," claiming that U.S. ships are being unfairly overcharged and that China controls the canal. But American ships are not charged higher tolls because they are American. Canal tariffs are based on factors such as a vessel's type, size and capacity, cargo and the locks it uses – not its nationality. U.S. Navy vessels pay tolls as well, although American warships are entitled to expedited passage under the canal's neutrality agreement.

Trump has also claimed that China controls or operates the Panama Canal. It does not. The canal itself is operated by the independent Panama Canal Authority. The confusion stems in part from Chinese commercial involvement in ports near the canal. For decades, a subsidiary of Hong Kong-based CK Hutchison operated the Balboa and Cristóbal container terminals at the canal's Pacific and Atlantic entrances. But operating ports beside the canal is not the same thing as controlling the canal – and in January 2026, Panama's Supreme Court struck down those port concessions as unconstitutional.

In the early 1900s, the United States took over construction of the canal from the French and completed it in 1914. For more than six decades, the United States controlled the canal and the surrounding Canal Zone, establishing a substantial military presence there.

Over time, U.S. control and its military presence became a major source of tension with Panamanians, culminating in deadly riots in 1964. In 1977, President Jimmy Carter and Panamanian leader Omar Torrijos signed two treaties. One provided for the gradual transfer of the canal to Panama, culminating in full Panamanian control at the end of 1999. The other established a permanent regime of neutrality

requiring the canal to remain open to vessels of all nations on a nondiscriminatory basis.
Since 1999, the canal has been operated by the autonomous Panama Canal Authority, which manages its locks, infrastructure, tolls and day-to-day operations.

The canal does face a serious challenge – but it's water, not Chinese control. Because the canal depends on freshwater to operate its locks, drought can force the Authority to reduce the number and size of vessels allowed through each day. During periods of restricted capacity, shipping companies can also pay substantial premiums to secure scarce reservation slots. After the severe 2023–24 drought eased, water shortages again became a concern in 2026, and canal officials have warned that additional transit restrictions may be necessary if rainfall remains inadequate.

Panama is now moving forward with the Río Indio reservoir project to provide a more reliable long-term water supply for both the canal and the Panamanian population. The project is expected to cost roughly $1.5 billion and take until approximately 2031 or 2032 to complete.

Eurasia

Belarus

Starting in August 2020, hundreds of thousands of heroes in Belarus began fighting back against oppression, corruption and a blatantly stolen election – where the opposition candidate Svetlana Tikhanovskaya won more votes but incumbent President Alexander Lukashenko, who had been in office since 1994, refused to step down.

Tikhanovskaya announced her candidacy after her husband, Sergei, was arrested and thrown in jail after announcing his own. Directly after the election, several of her staff were effectively taken hostage, and she was forced to read an obviously coerced concession speech before leaving Belarus for neighboring Lithuania. Based on comments she has made since many people assume Lukashenko and

his thugs threatened her children. < In March 2023, a Belarus court sentenced her to a 15-year jail sentence in absentia. >

Saying that a woman could not possibly be president because "our Constitution is not for women" and calling peaceful protesters "rats," "trash" and "bandits," Lukashenko and his security forces (who are still called KGB) pulled out all the stops to end the 2020 protests – including shuttering the Internet; beating, imprisoning and even killing protestors; using flash grenades, water cannons, tear gas and rubber bullets on the crowds; and getting people fired from their jobs and removed from universities. Outraged, factory workers and even people who work at state run institutions went on strike, and many in Belarus called for an even more comprehensive one.

In typical authoritarian fashion, Lukashenko repeatedly raided the homes and offices of journalists and human rights activists, after already detaining hundreds of them. He also announced his intentions to change the country's Constitution. In response, the European Union (EU) issued sanctions on several organizations, as well as Lukashenko and dozens of his officials. This included his son Viktor who was his "national security advisor."

Then, in May 2021 Lukashenko literally skyjacked an airborne plane, forcing it to land to arrest a Belarusian pro-democracy journalist named Roman Protasevich who had been living in exile in Lithuania.

The following day, a video was released featuring Protasevich "admitting" to inciting disorder in Belarus. The video also clearly showed bruises and abrasions on the journalist's face, which convinced almost everyone that Protasevich's "confession" was coerced. Once again, the European Union issued sanctions and banned Belarus's national airline, Belavia, from flying over EU territory. < In May 2023, Protasevich was sentenced to eight years in prison, but less than three weeks later was granted a presidential pardon after agreeing to cooperate with the justice system and support President Lukashenko in the official media. >

Naturally, Vladimir Putin wormed his way into the crisis (Belarus is bordered by Russia to the east and northeast). Putin regards Belarus – as he does Ukraine – to be part of what he terms the

"Russian world," which, based on the war crimes Putin is perpetrating in Ukraine, is obviously extremely concerning.

Not long before Putin's invasion of Ukraine, Putin and Lukashenko announced joint military exercises, permanent joint training facilities, and a new Russian airbase in Belarus – all while a newly organized pro-Kremlin political party held its first meeting in Minsk.

Then, in October 2022 – after a meeting with Putin, who Belarus is deeply dependent on for financial and security assistance – Lukashenko announced that large numbers of Russian forces would be returning to Belarus and that he was forming a "joint regional group of troops" to combat "possible aggression" against Belarus by NATO and Ukraine.

Since that time, Lukashenko has provided Putin a major strategic advantage in Russia's war against Ukraine. Belarus's involvement in the war has drastically raised tensions with NATO allies, including Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland.

In June 2025, after being held for five years in almost total isolation, Sergei Tikhanovsky was released from prison, along with at least fourteen other well-known political prisoners, including former professor Nataliia Dulina and Radio Free Europe journalist Ihar Karnei.

Tikhanovsky's release was unexpected and happened after a meeting between Alexander Lukashenko and General Keith Kellogg, President Trump's special envoy to Ukraine. Tikhanovsky's wife Svetlana – who has now established herself as the leading opposition leader against Lukashenko – was right by his side.

In September 2025, Belarus freed 52 prisoners as Lukashenko sought to normalize relations with the United States. Since then, the releases have accelerated. In March 2026, Belarus freed another 250 prisoners in a U.S.-brokered agreement in exchange for additional sanctions relief, and U.S. diplomacy has now helped secure the release of hundreds of detainees.

But the thaw with Washington has not fundamentally changed Lukashenko's authoritarian rule or his close military relationship with Russia. Hundreds of political prisoners remain behind bars, new arrests

continue, and Belarus remains closely aligned with Moscow. In September 2025, Belarus and Russia conducted the joint Zapad military exercises – including training involving nuclear weapons and Russia's nuclear-capable Oreshnik missile system – just two days after Russian drones entered Polish airspace and heightened tensions across NATO.

Georgia

Once upon a time, the South Caucasian country of Georgia seemed to be a blossoming model for democratic transition among former Soviet states. However – despite strong public support for European Union (EU) and NATO membership – Russian influence continues to increase.

America needs to try to stop this backslide toward authoritarianism before Georgia sets an unfortunate example across Eastern Europe and beyond.

Kazakhstan

Since 1991, when it gained independence from the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan has implemented a superb strategy designed to protect its sovereignty while expertly navigating relationships with both Russia and China (which is on Kazakhstan's eastern borders). Kazakhstan has also developed industries beyond oil and gas and nurtured relationships with other countries, including the United States, European Union, Turkey, Iran, and other Central Asian states, among others. These smart actions have provided Kazakhstan diversification, where the country is not reliant on any one industry, country or region. Brilliantly done!

Europe

Denmark/Greenland

Read more about the Trump/Vance administration's threats against Greenland and our NATO allies on p. 15 of The Great American Reset.

"One way or the other," the United States needs to "get" Greenland. These words from President Trump should have been alarming to Americans but are most definitely beyond offensive to the people of Greenland – an integral part of the Kingdom of Denmark.

Denmark is one of America's most faithful allies – one of a handful of countries that sent troops to stand with us in Iraq and Afghanistan (and one that suffered many casualties in that fight). The people of Greenland have been committed to sovereignty and protecting their land since self-rule was established in 2009. In fact, it is against the law for anyone to privately own land there and the rights to its resources collectively belong to the people.

To make these words far worse, how can we – when the president of the United States says things that suggest we can just seize Greenland "one way or the other" – possibly condemn Xi Jinping when he says China has the right to just seize Taiwan?

The allure of Greenland is understandable at a time when there is a worldwide scramble for the Arctic, both economically and militarily.

The world's largest island, around three times the size of Texas, is located on the North American continent, to Canada's northeast, and is situated between North America, Western Europe and Russia. It is positioned along what is known as the GIUK Gap, a Cold War term that indicates a critical point between Greenland, Iceland and Britain that can protect the North Atlantic from Russian ships and submarines.

China and Russia – who have agreed to work together to develop new Arctic shipping routes – are clamoring to take advantage of the island's position as global warming opens more trade routes (an estimated 11,000 square miles of Greenland's ice sheets and glaciers have melted over the past thirty years). The location of Greenland is

especially useful to China and its "Polar Silk Road," as it creates shorter distances for China to ship goods via the Arctic and lets them avoid bottlenecks at the Suez Canal and the Malacca Strait.

Melting ice will also bring more opportunities to drill for Greenland's 17.5 billion untapped barrels of oil and 148.2 trillion cubic feet of natural gas and increase opportunities to mine its 1.5 million tons of reserves of rare-earth elements.

From a national security perspective, the American military base located on Greenland, Pituffik Space Base, is strategically located for missile defense and space surveillance missions and includes a radar station that is part of our ballistic missile early-warning system… but we are far from alone in the Arctic.

Russia has already reopened dozens of old Soviet military bases; its Northern Fleet and its main submarine base are headquartered on the Barents Sea near Murmansk; and its vessels operate freely in the North Atlantic. Russia is also playing Arctic wargames that include amphibious assaults in the glacial seas.

Hungary

If you ever want to study a textbook example of how a traditional liberal democracy can backslide, look no further than Hungary and its Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.

< Note: The word "liberal" is not used here as it's used to describe someone's political positions in U.S. politics. A *liberal democracy* refers to a representative democracy that protects individual liberty through established rule of law. On the other hand, an *illiberal democracy* places no (or very few) limits on the power of elected representatives. Orbán himself describes Hungary as an illiberal democracy. >

It's important to make clear that Orbán is an authoritarian leader (one who favors strict obedience to authority over personal freedom) that champions autocracy (a government led by one person who has absolute power). For fifteen years, Orbán has methodically shifted Hungary away from the traditions of liberal democracy by embracing

far-right, nativist politics – effectively shutting down immigration; bribing and threatening the media; stacking the judiciary with close allies; and sabotaging free and fair elections through aggressive gerrymandering.

Orbán wraps his populism in national sovereignty and antisemitic "Christian" identity while, at the same time, wages fierce culture wars on everything from multiculturalism to LGBTQ rights. He has worked hard to make the educational system in Hungary more "patriotic" – as defined by him – and spies on journalists and dissidents.

The most frightening tool Orbán and his Fidesz party has used to centralize power for themselves is to place Hungary's three branches of government – the executive, legislative and judicial – firmly under Fidesz's control. Orbán calls this a "system of national co-operation," probably because it's less alarming than saying what it really is: a fully illiberal regime.

Freedom House – a nonprofit organization funded in part by the U.S. government that conducts research and advocacy on democracy, political freedom, and human rights – put it this way in 2020:

> "Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's government in Hungary has dropped any pretense of respecting democratic institutions. After centralizing power, tilting the electoral playing field, taking over much of the media, and harassing critical civil society organizations since 2010, Orbán moved during 2019 to consolidate control over new areas of public life, including education and the arts. The 2020 adoption of an emergency law that allows the government to rule by decree indefinitely has further exposed the undemocratic character of Orbán's regime. Hungary's decline has been the most precipitous ever tracked in Nations in Transit; it was one of the three democratic frontrunners as of 2005, but in 2020 it became the first country to descend by two regime categories and leave the group of democracies entirely."

In 2018, Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) removed Hungary's status as a democracy. Based at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden and funded by several government organizations including the

World Bank, V-Dem measures democracy by assessing five high-level principles of democracy: electoral, liberal, participatory, deliberative, and egalitarian.

Thankfully, in a major blow to global right-wing populism, Viktor Orbán was defeated by Peter Magyar, a former Orbán loyalist and the leader of the main opposition party, in April 2026. Orbán lost despite fierce support from Donald Trump, JD Vance, Marco Rubio, Vladimir Putin and Benjamin Netnyahu. Welcome back to democracy, Hungary!!

Moldova

We must do everything in our power to protect Moldova, the country next to Ukraine that has suffered deeply from Vladimir Putin's murderous behavior in the region. Moldova is one of the poorest countries in Europe but is desperately trying to break the cycle of political dysfunction and corruption that has been historically thrust upon them by Russia.

With the reelection of pro-reform, pro-West and anti-corruption President Maia Sandu – a Harvard-educated World Bank economist – they have an excellent shot. Despite the potential severe consequences, Moldova condemned Putin's invasion of Ukraine and has been steadily pivoting toward the European Union (EU).

Despite Putin using every nasty trick in the book – including bribery, disinformation, cyber-attacks, and even low-level violence – on October 20, 2024, the people of Moldova narrowly voted to amend their constitution to make integration into the European Union (EU) a strategic objective.

Nevertheless, Putin continued his sabotage efforts, and Moldova's September 2025 parliamentary elections were again targeted by extensive foreign interference, illicit financing, cyberattacks and disinformation. But voters kept the pro-European Party of Action and Solidarity (PAS) in power with a parliamentary majority, allowing the country's push toward EU membership to continue.

And that push is advancing. Moldova completed the EU's accession-screening process in September 2025, formally opened its first negotiating cluster in June 2026, and opened another in July – moving the country another step closer to eventual EU membership.

Poland

Poland is a superb ally and partner of the United States. This is true in many areas – human rights, economic growth, energy security – but particularly in counterterrorism, nonproliferation, missile defense, and regional cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe. As Putin continues his aggressive behavior, Poland remains one of NATO's biggest defense spenders – devoting nearly 5 percent of GDP to defense – and a stalwart defender of NATO's eastern flank.

The strong U.S.-Poland relationship – and our shared commitment to freedom and democracy – dates back to the American Revolution. In fact, today, there are around 10,000 American soldiers stationed there. Poland can never doubt that the United States of America will stand with them, and that we will always have their backs.

In December 2023, Donald Tusk, the leader of the centrist Civic Coalition, was elected Prime Minister by the Polish parliament, beating the governing Law and Justice party (PiS) and its allies and bringing together three separate political coalitions.

Tusk framed the election as a referendum on the future of democracy in Poland and pledged to repair relations with the European Union (EU). He also pledged to unblock EU funding by reversing the judicial reforms of the PiS Government; promised support for Ukraine; committed to make anti-LGBT hate speech a crime; and depoliticize the media.

Some of Tusk's promises have been kept – like beginning to restore the independence of the judiciary and removing the board of state TV, radio and press organizations – but some, like the loosening of abortion laws, have not (to the immense frustration of many voters).

Meanwhile, Tusk started to prepare Poland for war. In early March 2025, he announced that Poland would seek access to nuclear

arms and would build a 500,000-strong army to defend Poland against Russian threats. Under Tusk, Poland has increased its domestic military spending to 4.7 percent of GDP and reaffirmed its relationship with NATO.

Thank goodness for Tusk's leadership because, in September 2025, Vladimir Putin – in the first confrontation between NATO warplanes and Russian drones over alliance territory – escalated his standoff with the West, violating Polish airspace with 20 Russian drones outfitted with additional fuel tanks, indicating Putin meant for them to fly even farther.

After NATO-member fighter jets shot down the drones, Prime Minister Tusk said, "I have no reason to claim we're on the brink of war, but a line has been crossed, and it's incomparably more dangerous than before. This situation brings us the closest we have been to open conflict since World War II." Yikes!

In the beginning of his tenure, the main political problem facing Prime Minister Tusk and his populist conservative politics was Polish President Andrzej Duda, who was backed by the right-wing populist and national-conservative Law and Justice Party. Although the presidency in Poland is mostly a ceremonial role, the president can veto legislation or recommend it to the Constitutional Court for review, as well as other obstructionist things like refusing to sign the budget.

This didn't get any better for Tusk when, in June 2025, conservative historian Karol Nawrocki, backed by the Law and Justice Party and endorsed by Donald Trump, narrowly won Poland's presidential election. Nawrocki was sworn in on August 6th and quickly emerged as a powerful opponent of Tusk's centrist government. He opposes Ukraine's membership in NATO, has cultivated close ties with the Trump/Vance administration, and favors a stronger relationship with the United States even as Tusk remains firmly oriented toward Europe.

The hostility between the two men has only intensified. During his first year in office, Nawrocki vetoed 41 bills, repeatedly blocking parts of Tusk's domestic and economic agenda and clashing with his government over defense, the judiciary, foreign policy, Ukraine and Poland's relationship with the European Union. The result is an

increasingly bitter political standoff between a nationalist president and a centrist government forced to share power at a particularly dangerous moment for Poland and Europe.

Asia

ASEAN Countries

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is an economic union made up of 11 States: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Vietnam.

The ASEAN Declaration states that the aims and purposes of the association are: (1) to accelerate the economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region through joint endeavors in the spirit of equality and partnership in order to strengthen the foundation for a prosperous and peaceful community of Southeast Asian nations, and (2) to promote regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law in the relationship among countries in the region and adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter.

In most of these countries, democracy is fragile and civil rights are, at times, tenuous. Both Russia and China have increased their engagements and cultivated military and diplomatic alliances in the region. They are also trying hard to diminish America's influence. One of China's strategies is to frame the narrative around the South China Sea as "*us* versus all of *them*," perpetuating the claim that any American opposition is a major threat to the entire region.

Cambodia/Thailand

A long-term border dispute between Cambodia and Thailand escalated in July 2025, when the border between these Theravada

Buddhist neighbors in Southeast Asia was partially closed – and crossing times restricted – after shots were fired, government websites were hacked, and threats were made by the Thai government to cut electricity in response to what they see as a military buildup by Cambodia (the contested area is called Mom Bei – which Thailand calls Chong Bok – in the Emerald Triangle where the borders of Cambodia, Thailand and Laos meet).

President Trump has claimed that he "ended" the "war" between Cambodia and Thailand, but that's false. On July 28, 2025, after five days of fighting along their border, Thailand and Cambodia agreed to an unconditional ceasefire – but the talks were hosted by Malaysia (to be fair, President Trump did pressure both governments, speaking with their leaders and threatening to halt U.S. tariff negotiations unless they stopped fighting). However, the agreement began unraveling within months, and Thailand suspended parts of a subsequent peace declaration in November after several of its soldiers were injured by a landmine.

When fighting erupted again in December, Trump claimed on December 13th that the two countries had agreed to stop, but Thai Prime Minister Charnvirakul immediately rejected that characterization and said military operations would continue. The fighting lasted another two weeks before Thailand and Cambodia signed a new ceasefire at a border checkpoint on December 27th. That ceasefire has largely held, but the underlying territorial dispute remains unresolved and tensions between the two countries remain high.

Meanwhile, in Thailand, the Constitutional Court ousted Prime Minister Paetongtarn Shinawatra, the youngest one ever, after just one year in office for alleged ethical violations that arose from a leaked phone conversation between Shinawatra and former Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen. In the phone call, the two spoke of the recent border dispute, with Shinawatra ridiculing a Thai army general in charge of the border.

This was the fifth time in 17 years the powerful Constitutional Court – which is an unelected body of nine judges – has removed a Prime Minster (Srettha Thavisin was banished just 12 months before Shinawatra was). Anutin Charnvirakul, the leader of the Bhumjaithai

Party, was elected by Parliament on September 5, 2025 and was then re-elected for a new term following a parliamentary vote on March 19, 2026.

Hong Kong

The Bottom Line

† The United States must demand that China honor the agreement it signed with the United Kingdom on December 19, 1984. We must be unequivocal in our support of both the letter and spirit of the agreement, ensuring an autonomous, democratic Hong Kong.

♦ ♦ ♦

The CIA describes Hong Kong's origin story this way: "Occupied by the United Kingdom (UK) in 1841, Hong Kong was formally ceded by China the following year; various adjacent lands were added later in the 19th century. Pursuant to an agreement signed by China and the UK on December 19, 1984, Hong Kong became the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China on July 1, 1997. In this agreement, China promised that, under its one country, two systems formula, China's socialist economic system would not be imposed on Hong Kong and that Hong Kong would enjoy a 'high degree of autonomy' in all matters except foreign and defense affairs for the subsequent 50 years." This means that Hong Kong has its own laws, as well as freedoms that the Chinese people are not afforded.

China has violated this agreement – big time – and has launched a full-scale attack on democracy in Hong Kong, putting the freedoms of 8 million people in serious jeopardy.

In February 2019, a proposal was put forth in Hong Kong that would allow extraditions to mainland China, meaning people in Hong Kong suspected of criminal activity could be sent from Hong Kong to mainland China for their fate to be determined.

This aggressive action by China ignited fiery protests throughout Hong Kong. The tens of thousands of protesters believed that this extradition law would be nothing more than a tool to enable political persecution and, since judges in China exclusively serve the Communist Party, it most certainly would be. By the beginning of June, more than half a million people had taken to the streets. On October 23rd, after months of hard-core protests, Carrie Lam, the chief executive of Hong Kong and an agent of China, apologized and withdrew the bill. However, even that did not quell the protests, which had become increasingly violent.

On May 21, 2020, China doubled down, installing secret police in Hong Kong and moving to impose a "national security" framework that essentially criminalized all dissent against China. The new "criminal" offenses include "secession, subversion, organization and perpetration of terrorist activities, and collusion with a foreign country or with external elements to endanger national security," plus "provoking by unlawful means hatred among Hong Kong residents" – all defined arbitrarily by China, naturally.

In March 2024, Hong Kong officials unanimously passed Article 23, yet another sweeping security law meant to address things that were supposedly missed four years earlier. The main thing the law achieved was to further silence any political opposition, making it illegal for pro-democracy candidates to run in elections and disallowing pretty much anyone from publicly opposing China's control over Hong Kong. The legislation also broadened the definition of political crimes and addressed the crimes of "external interference" and "theft" of state secrets.

Even though Hong Kong remains a global financial hub – with a solid financial system, relatively low taxes, minimal regulations, and 1,200 American companies doing business there – China's actions are chipping away at its influence, threatening businesses and professionals, civil servants, diplomats, journalists, and academics.

One man targeted by the law – newspaper owner and pro-democracy advocate Jimmy Lai, who is a British citizen – made an incredibly brave, inspirational stand against Beijing. Arrested in 2020 on charges of foreign collusion and sedition, he steadfastly maintains his innocence and insisted on pleading his case in public. In December 2025, a Beijing-backed court found Lai guilty and, two months later, he was sentenced to 20 years in prison. Six of his colleagues were also found guilty.

It's a shame that President Xi fails to understand that an autonomous Hong Kong only serves to provide an important bridge for him between China and the global market – which makes the relationship potentially very valuable to him. Without question, a vibrant, prosperous, democratic Hong Kong is in China's best interest in the long run.

Regardless, the world must demand that China honor the agreement it signed with the UK on December 19, 1984, and the United States must be unequivocal in our support of both the letter and spirit of the agreement.

Japan

America's alliance with Japan has been the foundation of U.S. security policy in East Asia for decades. The United States has over 80 military facilities in Japan and more American military personnel are permanently stationed there (approximately 55,000) than in any other country.

Unfortunately, Japan is also one of the most horrifying examples of Donald Trump's consistently disrespect behavior toward our allies. In June 2019, before his departure for the G-20 summit in Osaka, Japan, President Trump threatened to withdraw the U.S. from the security treaty we have had with Japan since 1951. The Security Treaty Between the United States and Japan solidifies the incredibly important relationship between our two countries and has, for decades, been an integral part of American foreign policy.

Asked about the fairness of the treaty, Donald Trump irreverently responded, "If Japan is attacked, we will fight World War III. But if we're attacked, Japan doesn't have to help us at all. They can watch it on a Sony television."

Put aside for the moment that he sounded like a complete jerk, this was not the time for disruptive rhetoric aimed at one of our closest allies. At a time when China's military ambitions increase and a nuclear North Korea continues its bad behavior, the security treaty between the United States protects us every bit as much as it does Japan. In fact, we need Japan now more than ever. This was just an insanely irresponsible to do.

Beyond that, we need true American leadership to ensure that our allies get along among *themselves*. Historical grievances between South Korea and Japan have reached critical mass, with grave global economic and security consequences. What started as a question about what, if anything, Japan owes South Korea for Japan's colonial occupation of the Korean Peninsula until Japan's surrender in World War II has expanded to disputes over territory and geopolitical squabbles.

To maintain rules-based international order in the Indo-Pacific, it is important that the United States help bridge the gap between our two allies and encourage trilateral cooperation between the United States, Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK). Although it seemed former South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol was open to improving relations – establishing a foundation in 2023 to compensate former forced laborers from Japan – Japan remained distrustful, to say the least.

Thankfully, after the first Trump administration ended, our relations with Japan got back on track. Saying in an April 2024 address to a joint session of the United States Congress that the "Ukraine of today may be East Asia of tomorrow," then Prime Minster Fumio Kishida announced a new national security and defense strategy that included growing Japan's defense spending, establishing a Joint Operations Center to improve the Japan Self-Defense Forces' (SDF) operational effectiveness, and acquiring long-range counterstrike capabilities.

Plus, after being revived by the first Trump administration, the Quad – a security arrangement among the United States, Australia, India, and Japan because of nervousness over China's behavior – was reenforced by the Biden administration, and President Biden and Prime Minister Kishida established over seventy agreements during Kishida's state visit to the United States in April 2024.

All of these actions are more important than ever as China escalates its aggressive maritime behavior; China and Japan continue their long-standing dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, a group of uninhabited islets in the East China Sea; the increasing threat of missile development in North Korea; and concerns over stability in the Taiwan Strait (former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe once said that "a Taiwan emergency is a Japanese emergency").

Although things in the Trump/Vance administration got off to a promising start – Japan's Foreign Minister Iwaya Takeshi attended the inauguration, becoming the first Japanese foreign minister to do so, and met with Secretary of State Marco Rubio the very next day – the Trump/Vance trade policies soon became a major source of friction.

Just days after President Trump announced a 25 percent tariff on imported automobiles, trade ministers from Japan, South Korea and China – all three countries Trump had criticized over trade – met to strengthen economic cooperation among themselves.

By June 2025, Trump was on FOX News accusing Japan of "unfair" automobile trade and saying he might send Tokyo a letter along the lines of, "Dear Mr. Japan, here's the story. You're going to pay a 25 percent tariff on your cars."

The two countries eventually reached a broader trade agreement in July that generally capped U.S. tariffs on Japanese imports at 15 percent, including automobiles, while Japan committed to a massive $550 billion U.S. investment initiative. Although substantially better than the 27.5 percent tariff Japanese vehicles temporarily faced, it remained far higher than the 2.5 percent rate before Trump returned to office.

Since then, the relationship has stabilized and cooperation has expanded. By September 2026, the two governments had announced roughly $109 billion in U.S. energy and infrastructure projects under

the investment agreement and were discussing additional semiconductor investments.

Security ties have deepened as well, even as President Trump has scaled back some military cooperation with South Korea. In August 2026, he ordered the annual U.S.–South Korean Ulchi Freedom Shield exercise cut short, citing costs, Seoul's refusal to support U.S. operations against Iran and his desire to avoid sending a "hostile" signal to North Korea. Yet trilateral cooperation with Japan continued: U.S., Japanese and South Korean forces completed the five-day Freedom Edge 26 exercise in September, expanding coordination on air and missile defense, maritime operations, cyber capabilities and real-time data sharing.

That said, tensions remain over trade, the weak yen, defense spending and China. The most interesting thing to watch is that Japan's first female prime minister Sanae Takaichi saw Donald Trump coming from a mile away and played her hand perfectly when he visited Japan in late October 2025 – enchanting him with a putter that belonged to former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who Trump considered a friend during his first term; a rare-earth minerals deal; and even a Nobel Peace Prize nomination…. to which Donald Trump responded by saying Takaichi would "go down as one of the great prime ministers." Worked like a charm, Ms. Takaichi!

Kashmir

Kashmir is a territory that both India and Pakistan claim and have already fought two wars over. Although both countries claim to have full rights over Kashmir, the area is globally recognized as "Indian-administered Kashmir" and "Pakistan-administered Kashmir."

On August 5, 2019, Modi's Hindu nationalist government revoked Article 370 of the Indian constitution, a provision that granted autonomy to Jammu and Kashmir. Technically, it takes approval by the Jammu and Kashmir constituent assembly for Article 370 to be revoked – which is impossible because the assembly was dissolved in 1956.

The United States' response to this dangerous and volatile situation was embarrassing. Essentially, Donald Trump clumsily forced his way into the conflict between Delhi and Islamabad at a meeting with Prime Minister Imran Khan in July 2019.

After the meeting, Donald falsely claimed that Prime Minister Modi had specifically requested his involvement, which led to India's Ministry of External Affairs releasing a Tweet – the only way Donald Trump would probably see it – that said, "We have seen @POTUS's remarks to the press that he is ready to mediate, if requested by India & Pakistan, on Kashmir issue. No such request has been made by PM @narendramodi to U.S. President."

The tweet continued, "It has been India's consistent position that all outstanding issues with Pakistan are discussed only bilaterally. Any engagement with Pakistan would require an end to cross border terrorism. The Shimla Agreement & the Lahore Declaration provide the basis to resolve all issues between India & Pakistan bilaterally." This sure seemed like India's way of saying butt out!

That said, it's in America's best interest to encourage a resolution on Kashmir between India and Pakistan, as well as demand that the Muslim minority in both Kashmir and India is protected.

…which leads to the escalating (unacceptable) dynamic within India. In May 2019, Modi, the incumbent prime minister, and his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) won a historic victory which

solidified the Hindu nationalists' place in the power structure of the country.

Today, more than a decade after taking office, Modi remains enormously popular at home and one of the world's most prominent political leaders. His extraordinary popularity – and what critics describe as a growing cult of personality – makes India's democratic backsliding all the more concerning. Under Modi, power has become increasingly concentrated, journalists and civil-society groups have faced growing pressure, government institutions have been used against political opponents, and protections for dissent and minority rights have eroded.

In 2023, the Varieties of Democracy Institute (V-Dem) ranked India 108th among 179 countries on its Liberal Democracy Index and classified the country as an "electoral autocracy." That assessment continued in subsequent reports. In 2025, India ranked 100th out of 179 countries on V-Dem's Liberal Democracy Index, while V-Dem continued to identify India as one of the world's major autocratizing countries.

In its 2026 report, V-Dem described India's democratic decline as a "slow but systematic dismantling of democratic institutions," citing deteriorating freedom of expression and media independence, harassment of journalists critical of the government, and attacks on civil society and the political opposition.

Indeed, press freedom has deteriorated dramatically under Modi. In its 2023 World Press Freedom Index, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) ranked India 161st out of 180 countries, warning that violence against journalists, politically partisan media and concentrated media ownership had left press freedom "in crisis." India subsequently climbed to 151st in 2025 but fell six places to 157th in 2026. RSF now points to increasing judicial harassment of independent media, the use of defamation and national-security laws against journalists, violence against reporters, and growing political pressure on the press.

Most frightening is the increasingly brazen anti-Muslim rhetoric from parts of India's Hindu nationalist movement, including explicit calls for violence. In 2025 alone, India Hate Lab documented 1,318

hate-speech events targeting religious minorities – 98 percent targeting Muslims.

Of particular concern is Kashmir. In 2019, Modi's government revoked Article 370, stripping Jammu and Kashmir of its special autonomy, deployed additional troops, imposed sweeping restrictions, detained thousands and shut down communications. Although regional elections finally returned in 2024, Jammu and Kashmir still has not regained full statehood. Tensions erupted again after the April 2025 terrorist attack in Pahalgam killed 26 people, triggering a massive security crackdown and ultimately military strikes between India and Pakistan.

Meanwhile, India's roughly 200 million Muslims – the country's largest religious minority – have faced growing discrimination, communal violence and unequal treatment by authorities.

In 2024, Modi's government began implementing the Citizenship Amendment Act, which provides an expedited path to citizenship for immigrants belonging to six non-Muslim religions from neighboring countries while excluding Muslims. Combined with proposals for a nationwide citizenship register, it has raised fears that Muslims unable to prove their citizenship could be disproportionately affected. Those concerns intensified in 2025, when authorities expelled hundreds of Bengali-speaking Muslims suspected of being undocumented immigrants – including some Indian citizens.

Myanmar (Burma)*

The Bottom Line

† For decades, the United States has been a champion of democracy in Myanmar, but things on the human rights front have gone dramatically downhill and will not likely change without outside intervention.

† What the world has allowed to happen – and continue to happen – in Myanmar is an abomination. Five years after seizing power, the military junta continues to commit widespread killings, torture and attacks on civilians that amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity. More than 3.6 million people are displaced and over 15 million face acute food insecurity.

The Rohingya remain especially vulnerable, facing severe restrictions on humanitarian aid and abuses by both the junta and the Arakan Army, which now controls most of Rakhine State.

† The United States must get off the sidelines or Myanmar's crimes against humanity will only get worse. At a minimum, we must target banks that support the junta and make sure that an international tribunal is convened to hold the junta accountable for these atrocities. We can't let things like this happen to human beings. Period.

♦ ♦ ♦

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In Myanmar's Rakhine State, hostilities between Buddhist and Rohingya Muslims, an ethnic minority population, boiled over in 2017. After the Arakan Rohingya Salvation Army (ARSA) – a group of Rohingya Muslim militants – led a series of attacks against Myanmar's

military and police stations, Myanmar's security forces retaliated with a ruthless campaign of murder, arson, human burnings and beatings, gang rape and other mass brutalities. These actions by Myanmar amounted to ethnic cleansing by genocide, plain and simple.

The vicious conflict forced over 740,000 Rohingya Muslims to flee Myanmar into Bangladesh, causing a massive humanitarian crisis as hundreds of thousands of people, at least half of them children, now lived in ill-equipped and tattered refugee camps along the border.

Today, almost a decade later, deadly attacks against the Rohingya people are again on the rise as Rohingya civilians are once again caught in the middle of intensifying conflict in Rakhine State between the Arakan Army and the Myanmar military – looking eerily like the atrocities that happened in 2017.

This is even more unacceptable because the crimes of carnage inflected upon the Rohingya refugees was heard by the International Court of Justice in The Hague (ICJ) in January 2020. The ICJ ruled that Myanmar had to implement emergency measures to protect these refugees against violence, prevent any future egregious acts as outlined by the Genocide Convention, and preserve any evidence of potential genocide.

Ironically, Myanmar's leader at the time, the Nobel Peace Prize laureate Aung San Suu Kyi – who is also the daughter of General Aung San, the country's independence hero who was assassinated when his daughter was two years old – personally presented her country's case in The Hague, arguing that while "it cannot be ruled out that dis-proportionate force" had been used against the Rohingya, calling the behavior genocide was an "incomplete and misleading factual picture."

This from a woman who, in 2010, was freed from fifteen years of house arrest after a military junta imprisoned her two separate times since 1989. In 1991, she won a Nobel Peace Prize for "her nonviolent struggle for democracy and human rights."

Upon her release, she was welcomed by thousands of supporters as a pro-democracy leader who promised to release all political prisoners and end the ethnic tensions that haunted the country.

Instead, she made a sharp turn toward the very military that once imprisoned her and strongly denied any government misconduct in regard to the Rohingya Muslims. Her political party, the National League for Democracy, won an election in November 2020 that kept them in power for another five years.

In February 2021, Myanmar's military, the Tatmadaw, declared a state of emergency and took control of the country, in what amounted to a military coup (the military claimed there was voter fraud in the previous election). The country's election commission insisted there was no evidence to support this claim.

The military detained Aung San Suu Kyi and other leaders of the National League for Democracy, who had been reelected in November in only the second democratically held election since the country moved to a democracy from almost fifty years of military rule.

The military announced that power would be transferred to the commander in chief, Min Aung Hlaing, then handed to Myint Swe, the military-backed vice president. However, Min Aung Hlaing is still in power, murdering dissenting voices in the street.

For decades, the United States has been a champion of democracy in Myanmar but things on the human rights front have gone dramatically downhill and will not likely change without outside intervention.

The junta has propelled Myanmar further into a human rights and humanitarian disaster. At least 55 townships are under martial law and arbitrary arrests, torture, extrajudicial killings, and indiscriminate attacks on civilians amount to crimes against humanity and war crimes. Further, the junta are deliberately starving the Rohingya by essentially cutting off all supplies from the filthy internment camps.

Amnesty International reports that "unfair trials of pro-democracy activists and others regarded as opponents of the military authorities continue and more than 1,600 people have been sentenced to prison, hard labor or death. More than half a million people have been displaced by internal armed conflicts. Tens of thousands of ethnic Rohingya people forcibly displaced over a decade ago remain in squalid displacement camps in Rakhine State. Rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly remained severely

curtailed and journalists were among those imprisoned for their legitimate work."

It is disgraceful that the world not only let things get so catastrophic back in 2017, but that we are letting it happen again.

In June 2019, the United Nations released a damning report – written by an independent investigator but commissioned by the UN Secretary-General António Guterres – detailing the UN's immense failures in Myanmar:

"Since 2012, and especially since August of 2017, the world has witnessed a wrenching spectacle of human rights violations on a massive scale. The statelessness and extreme deprivation of some 1.4 million Rohingya people, not to mention the grave abuses wrought on them and other Muslim minorities in Myanmar, are totally unacceptable and nothing less than an offence to humanity. Clearly, the main responsibility for this belongs to the Government of that country; sadly, in this it seems to count with the solid support of most of its population. Further, the human rights abuses are undermining an otherwise positive albeit imperfect political process of gradual democratization and (paradoxically) reconciliation."

"The United Nations System, despite the advocacy efforts from the Secretary-General's personal involvement, as well as that of the most senior officials down to members of the country team, has been relatively impotent to effectively work with the authorities of Myanmar to reverse the negative trends in the area of human rights and consolidate the positive trends in other areas. Given the increasingly ominous events taking place in the first arena, especially in Rakhine State (but also in Kachin and Northern Shan), progress in Myanmar in other areas seems to have essentially bogged down at the time of writing."

"The root causes of those events persist and probably have even been aggravated up to the time of writing this review. By any metrics utilized, the treatment accorded to Muslim minorities in Myanmar is incompatible with the political and peace processes launched under the Constitution adopted in 2010."

"There simply is no way to reconcile the extreme limitations imposed on the Rohingya community with international humanitarian

and human rights norms and legislation. Those grave limitations include state-lessness, arbitrary and discriminatory restrictions on freedom of movement, discriminatory treatment in access to services and the means to a dignified livelihood, and now the vexing situation of repatriation and relocation of up to one million desperate people. These problems will not go away and pose huge challenges to Myanmar, its immediate neighbors and the United Nations. Indeed, not only Myanmar and Bangladesh are faced with the excruciating question of how to deal with so many refugees concentrated in the Cox's Bazar's district; it is a question faced by the international community in general."

To add insult to injury, on March 28, 2025, Myanmar was struck by a powerful 7.7-magnitude earthquake that decimated infrastructure, crushed homes and buildings, and destroyed century-old religious monuments. The death toll surpassed 3,600.

The United States must get off the sidelines or Myanmar's crimes against humanity will only get worse. At a minimum, we must target banks that support the junta and make sure that an international tribunal is convened to hold the junta accountable for these atrocities. We can't let things like this happen to human beings. Period.

* This Myanmar/Burma name thing is confusing. In 1989, the military government changed the name of the country from Burma to Myanmar. Although most of the global community recognized the name change, the U.S., United Kingdom, and several other countries continued to use the name Burma. America's official answer for not accepting the name change is that the change was made without the consent of the people.

Pakistan

The United States established diplomatic relations with Pakistan in 1947 following the country's independence. America has historically been one of the largest sources of foreign direct investment in Pakistan and has long been Pakistan's largest export market.

Pakistan has fallen on hard times, both politically and economically. In February 2024, the two main political groups – the Sharifs of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz party (PML-N) and the Bhuttos of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) – agreed to back a new army-sponsored government. However, the vote is viewed by many as illegitimate because of the widely held belief it was rigged.

The controversy started way before the election itself, because Imran Khan, a popular politician who served as prime minister from August 2018 until April 2022, was sentenced to 14 years in prison in January 2025 after being convicted on corruption charges. Previously, Khan was convicted on other charges of corruption, revealing official secrets, and violating marriage laws in three separate verdicts (with sentences of 10, 14 and 7 years respectively). Khan and his allies are adamant about his innocence and claim all the charges leveled against him are nothing more than a strategy to keep him out of office.

Imran Khan's Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party has consistently accused Pakistani authorities of rigging elections to keep it away from power.

Economically, Pakistan is a financial disaster, thanks to the enormous amount of money it owes other countries and years of mismanagement. In September 2024, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) approved a $7 billion loan to Pakistan (this loan is in addition to the $3 billion bailout they gave Pakistan in July 2023). Pakistan is now the IMF's fifth-largest debtor.

In terms of national security, Pakistan has 170 nuclear warheads, and that must be taken seriously… as does the fact that Islamabad is developing a long-range ballistic missile that could provide Pakistan a weapon capable of striking the United States.

On the counterterrorism front, Pakistan has been an inconsistent, unreliable partner. America won't soon forget that, even though it initially appeared that Pakistan was on board with President George W. Bush's War on Terror – helping us capture several senior al-Qaeda leaders and a slew of lower-level operatives – we now know that those who were not captured continued to use Pakistan as a safe-haven to plot future attacks, often against U.S. interests. This included Osama bin Laden, the biggest slap in the face of all.

We fought against an insurgency in Afghanistan for two decades, only to have Pakistan provide them sanctuary and support. We hunted Afghan Taliban, al-Qaeda, and Haqqani leaders, only to have Pakistan provide them safe harbor. In many ways, Pakistan undermined our efforts in Afghanistan from the very beginning but, because they had control of the supply line from Karachi to Kabul, they believed themselves to be untouchable.

Now, they are learning the hard way they are not. The Afghan Taliban, Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), have made Pakistan less safe, killing Pakistani soldiers at the border and increasing militant and terrorist attacks in Pakistan by the day. An angry and frustrated General Asim Munir, Pakistan's army chief, summed up the problem: "They don't listen to us."

Philippines

The Bottom Line

- One of the main things we need to watch regarding the Philippines is China's aggressive, unlawful behavior in the South China Sea – where the People's Liberation Army has built a $50 billion+ military fortress. Tensions continue to escalate quickly, and it's becoming a more dangerous situation by the day.
- In a case brought by the Philippines in 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague unanimously ruled that China had no sovereignty over the waters of the South China Sea and, therefore, was violating international law by militarizing artificial islands and occupying disputed reefs and shoals.
- The Philippines' response to China's behavior in the South China Sea is significant to the United States because we have a mutual-defense treaty that says we must "meet the common danger" in the event of an armed attack on a Philippine public vessel. This must be navigated carefully.

♦ ♦ ♦

The Philippines supposedly transitioned from authoritarian rule in 1986, but the shift remains tenuous. Freedom House – a U.S. government-funded nonprofit organization that conducts research and advocacy on democracy, political freedom, and human rights – classifies the Philippines as "partly free," saying "the rule of law and application of justice are haphazard and heavily favor political and economic elites."

Until former President Rodrigo Duterte left office, human rights abuses were abhorrent. The United Nations released a damning report in June 2020 that documented tens of thousands of killings during Duterte's "war on drugs." The report said that police acted with "near impunity" during the campaign against illegal drugs, which led to a significant suppression of dissent, arbitrary arrests, and extrajudicial killings.

Human Rights Watch – a global non-governmental organization, that conducts research and advocacy on human rights – reported that thousands of people, including children, were killed by "death squads" during Duterte's "war." To fan the flames, Duterte himself repeatedly called for violence, at one point saying, "If you know of any addicts, go ahead and kill them yourself as getting their parents to do it would be too painful."

Meanwhile, the Covid-19 crisis provided Duterte a perfect excuse to significantly expand his powers and severely further curtail the rights and freedoms of Filipinos. To that end, President Duterte introduced, and his Duterte-friendly legislature passed, an "anti-terrorism" law that eliminated the need for legal warrants, increased surveillance on citizens, and significantly increased the power of government security forces.

Three years after Duterte left office, in March 2025, the Philippine authorities arrested him, acting on a warrant issued by the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity.

Although the new president, Ferdinand Marcos Jr., promised to end brutality and violence when he took office in 2022, he has seemingly kept many of the violent policies of Rodrigo Duterte.

One of the main things we need to watch regarding the Philippines is China's aggressive, unlawful behavior in the South China Sea – where the People's Liberation Army has built a $50 billion+ military fortress.

Tensions continue to escalate quickly, and it's becoming a more dangerous situation by the day. Hainan, often referred to as China's Hawaii, now doubles as China's launching pad into the South China Sea, complete with advanced military weapons and nuclear-armed submarines. Meanwhile, boats that China insists are just for "fishing"

patrol the shores armed with machine guns, rocket-propelled grenades, and high-velocity water cannons.

In a case brought by the Philippines in 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague unanimously ruled that China had no sovereignty over the waters of the South China Sea and, therefore, was violating international law by militarizing artificial islands and occupying disputed reefs and shoals.

Predictably, the Chinese rejected this ruling out of hand because Beijing ostensibly believes that roughly 90 percent of the South China Sea has belonged to them since "ancient times," pointing to waters within a "nine-dash line" that, oddly enough, appears only on Chinese maps.

The Philippines' response to China's behavior in the South China Sea is significant to the United States because we have a mutual-defense treaty that says we must "meet the common danger" in the event of an armed attack on a Philippine public vessel. This must be navigated carefully.

South Korea

South Korea was in turmoil after President Yoon Suk Yeol declared martial law on December 3, 2024, putting the country under military rule and creating the country's biggest constitutional crisis since the country was democratized in 1987. Mr. Yoon said he declared martial law out of, in his words, "desperation" as his opposition used its political majority to "paralyze" his government.

Although President Yoon's martial law decree lasted only six hours, he was impeached by Parliament ten days later on charges of perpetrating an insurrection by declaring martial law and for sending troops into the National Assembly. After a weeks-long standoff that ended in a dramatic raid on the official presidential residence, Yoon Suk Yeol was detained.

< In November 2025, Yoon Suk Yeol was indicted on charges of aiding the enemy and abuse of power, adding to the criminal charges he already faces stemming from his decision to declare martial law. >

On April 4, 2025, South Korea's highest court unanimously upheld the impeachment of Yoon Suk Yeol, clearing the way for the election of a new president. In June 2025, Lee Jae Myung was elected South Korea's new president.

South Korea is another clear example of Donald Trump' irresponsible and disrespectful behavior toward our allies. Take his first trade war, for example. Early in his administration, Donald Trump's tariffs affected over 50 percent of Chinese imports, but that was not the worst of it. At the same time, tariffs affected 9.6 percent of imports from South Korea, 7.3 percent from Canada, 3.8 percent from Japan, and 2.5 percent from the European Union – ALL OF THEM OUR ALLIES! That is just not cool.

We imagine South Korea is completely baffled by Donald Trump. To our close friend – who has a lot to lose in the face of an empowered North Korea – Donald Trump's bromance with Kim Jong Un, along with his constant griping about overseas American deployments, must be downright chilling.

Worse, Trump has repeatedly intertwined economic and often petty disputes with U.S. security commitments. In 2019, he demanded that South Korea increase its annual contribution for the roughly 28,500 U.S. troops stationed there from about $1 billion to $5 billion. After returning to office, Trump again pressed Seoul for substantially greater defense contributions. And in August 2026, he ordered joint military exercises with South Korea dramatically scaled back, explicitly citing their cost and Seoul's refusal to join U.S. military operations against Iran.

We cannot overstate how short-sighted and irresponsible these actions were. As China's military ambitions increase and North Korea essentially shoots us the bird, we need our allies now more than ever. The only thing these aggressive actions achieve is to push South Korea straight into the arms of China – a move that would not serve America well in the long-term, to say the least.

Beyond that, we need true American leadership to ensure that our allies get along among *themselves*. Historical grievances between South Korea and Japan have reached critical mass, with grave global economic and security consequences. What started as a question about

what, if anything, Japan owes South Korea for Japan's colonial occupation of the Korean Peninsula until Japan's surrender in World War II has expanded to disputes over territory and geopolitical squabbles.

To maintain rules-based international order in the Indo-Pacific, it is important that the United States help bridge the gap between our two allies and encourage trilateral cooperation between the United States, Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK). Although it seemed former president Yoon Suk Yeol was open to improving relations – establishing a foundation in 2023 to compensate former forced laborers from Japan – Japan remained distrustful, to say the least.

That said, leave it to Donald Trump's anti-ally behavior to bring even these two together. Just days after signing a proclamation to impose a 25 percent tariff on auto imports, top trade officials from South Korea, Japan and China – all three of which Donald publicly accused of being trade abusers – set a meeting to discuss economic cooperation among themselves. In November 2025, China's Xi Jinping visited Lee Jae Myung, his first visit to South Korea in 11 years.

Tibet

The Bottom Line

- In the past, the United States government has treated the Central Tibetan Administration – which is the Tibetan government that is in exile – with a certain lack of respect, for no other reason than to walk on eggshells for China's benefit. Certainly, our relationship with China is delicate – and we certainly understand the issue of Tibet is a major sticking point – but not standing up for Tibet is just not right.
- America's willingness to tiptoe around this only emboldened China to escalate human rights abuses against

the Tibetan people and try even harder to destroy the Tibetan culture, language and religion for good.

† Thankfully, in December 2020, the U.S. Congress passed the Tibetan Policy and Support Act. The legislation supports the idea that Tibetan Buddhists, not the Communist Party of China (CPC), should be able to choose the 15th incarnation of the Dalai Lama after the current Dalai Lama passes on.

The legislation also updates the Tibetan Policy Act of 2002 to reflect support of the Dalai Lama's Middle Way Approach and the idea that Beijing and the Central Tibetan Administration should negotiate directly with one another. The Middle Way Approach says that Tibetans are not seeking independence, but rather autonomy within the framework of the People's Republic of China. This is a perfectly reasonable solution.

Finally, the legislation calls on the U.S. government to sanction any Chinese Communist Party (CCP) official who violates human rights in Tibet and for the establishment of a U.S. consulate in Lhasa, the administrative capital of Tibet.

♦ ♦ ♦

For centuries, Tibet and China stood side-by-side in harmony. That all changed in 1950 when, in the Battle of Chamdo, the People's Republic of China invaded and seized control of Tibet in what Beijing still calls a "peaceful liberation," but what the Tibetan spiritual leader the Dalai Lama calls "cultural genocide."

Tibet not only offered the Chinese an abundance of natural resources, but also a coveted border with India – which the Chinese immediately militarized. At first, there was an uneasy truce, with Tibet acknowledging Chinese rule in exchange for an independent political system and the protection of Tibetan Buddhism.

Unfortunately, China did not honor the agreement and probably never intended to. Beginning in 1956, the Chinese were met with increasing resistance from the Tibetans until March 10, 1959 – now commemorated as National Uprising Day by the Tibetans – when the Tibetan people surrounded the Potala Palace in Lhasa to protect the Dalai Lama from rumored harm. The Chinese answered with a ruthless retaliation, forcing the Dalai Lama to flee into exile in Dharamsala, India.

In the past, the United States government has treated the Central Tibetan Administration – the Tibetan government that is in exile – with a certain lack of respect, for no other reason than to walk on eggshells for China's benefit.

For example, the Obama administration informed the Dalai Lama that he would be unable to visit the White House in President Obama's first year. When His Holiness was finally invited, Obama met him in the Map Room of the White House instead of the Oval Office, presumably to pacify Beijing. What is this, eighth grade? Donald Trump and Joe Biden didn't meet with him at all.

America's willingness to tiptoe around this only emboldened China to escalate human rights abuses against the Tibetan people and try even harder to destroy the Tibetan culture, language and religion for good.

For decades, China has built military-style "training centers" in Tibet, mandating that hundreds of thousands of people be trained for what will ultimately be forced labor. These camps engage in forced assimilation and ideological indoctrination. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) officials are given strict quotas for the number of Tibetans they are expected to capture.

After reviewing Chinese documents about the program, the Jamestown Foundation – an institute for research and analysis – described the situation this way: Reports "bluntly say that the state must 'stop raising up lazy people' and that the 'strict military-style management' of the vocational training process 'strengthens [the Tibetans'] weak work discipline' and reforms their 'backward thinking.'"

"Tibetans are to be transformed from '[being] unwilling to move' to becoming willing to participate, a process that requires 'diluting the negative influence of religion.' This is aided by a worrisome new scheme that 'encourages' Tibetans to hand over their land and herds to government-run cooperatives, turning them into wage laborers."

These camps are like those in Xinjiang, another ethnic minority region of China, where the Chinese have detained over one million Muslim ethnic minorities – including Uyghurs and Kazakhs, both Turkish ethnic groups. Over 500,000 children have been separated from their families.

In a very concerning statement, the Chinese said that what many activists call mass detention centers are, in fact, nothing more than vocational and education centers, and that most of the people who had been there have "graduated." Hmmm…. we don't like the sound of that.

As appalling, for two decades now, China has removed Tibetan children from their homes and placed them in state-run boarding schools to eviscerate Tibetan culture once and for all. A typical sign at the pre-schools reads, "I am a Chinese child, I love speaking Mandarin," as the kids sing songs and play games exalting Chinese culture and identity. This must deeply please Chinese leader Xi Jinping, who has said that children must be reached as babies "so that the red gene seeps into their blood and permeates their hearts."

Oceania

ANZUS Treaty

The 1951 Australia, New Zealand and United States Security Treaty (ANZUS Treaty) is an agreement signed to protect the security of the Pacific.

Although the agreement has not been formally revoked, the United States and New Zealand no longer maintain this security relationship between themselves. However, the ANZUS Treaty still obligates

Australia and the United States to consult on mutual threats and to act to meet common dangers. Australia invoked the ANZUS Treaty for the first time in response to the U.S. terrorist attacks of September 11th.

The U.S. and Australia are excellent long-term allies. We are strong economic partners and have deep defense/security cooperation between the two countries, with combined training courses, military exercises, and shared intelligence capabilities. This cooperation allows for regional engagement and security and stability in the Indo-Pacific.

Middle East/North Africa

Yemen

The Bottom Line

- The devastation that Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and others in the region caused in Yemen over the past decade is a clear violation of international law.
- The United States provided many of the weapons used in the war. The fact that we provided support for these atrocities *in any way* is one of the most disgraceful things this country has ever done. We must *never* forget the damage our bombs caused, because we can *never* allow this shameful history to repeat itself.

♦ ♦ ♦

In 2011, amid the Arab Spring, the people of Yemen began to protest unemployment, economic conditions, and corruption, as well as against the possibility of the government modifying Yemen's

constitution. This obviously threatened President Abdullah Saleh, who had ruled there for 33 years.

In 2014, Iran-backed Houthi rebels seized control of Sanaa, Yemen's capital, which ultimately led to a civil war with the existing government, which was supported and defended by a Saudi-led coalition. To that end, Saudi Arabia set blockades at Yemen's ports to deny the people of Yemen any humanitarian aid – while bombing them during a severe famine and widespread cholera outbreak.

This quickly turned into the largest humanitarian crisis in the world. At the time, Human Rights Watch reported that "roughly 80 percent of Yemen's population requires humanitarian aid, including over 12 million children. The United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) warns that the number of children under the age of 5 who suffer from acute malnutrition could rise to 2.4 million. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) reports that 50 percent of Yemeni children are experiencing irreversible stunted growth. UNICEF warns that 7.8 million children had no access to education following Covid-19-related school closures and nearly 10 million did not have adequate access to water and sanitation."

The devastation that Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and others in the region caused in Yemen was a clear violation of international law, plain and simple.

But here's the problem for the United States: We provided many of the weapons used in the war. A report called *Day of Judgement* revealed that "in 2017, the U.S. administration notified Congress of $17.9 billion of proposed sales of arms and other military support to Saudi Arabia and $2.8 billion to the UAE. In 2016, about $5 billion of sales to each country were proposed."

To his credit, President Obama halted the sale of precision-guided military technology to Saudi Arabia in December 2016, but Donald Trump resumed selling weapons to them just three months later.

In April 2019, Donald Trump vetoed legislation supported by a bipartisan congressional majority to end American support for Saudi Arabia's deadly intervention in Yemen.

Then, the very next month, the Trump administration announced it was invoking "emergency authority" to bypass opposition in Congress

to finalize twenty-two arms deals with several countries, including one with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates that totaled around $8 billion. Never mind this move was 100% illegal because under the Arms Export Control Act, the U.S. Congress has the authority to review weapons sales.

Thankfully, in February 2021, President Biden ended all remaining American support for the travesty in Yemen and appointed a new special envoy for the country.

That's great and all, but we must *never* forget the damage our bombs caused, because we can *never* allow this shameful history to repeat itself.

One of the most horrifying travesties in the conflict in Yemen took place in August 2018, when a Saudi-led airstrike hit a school bus killing at least 43 people, many of them children. The bomb that hit the bus was reportedly a 500-pound laser-guided MK 82 bomb made by U.S. defense contractor Lockheed Martin and sold to Saudi Arabia by the United States.

One eyewitness told CNN: "I saw the bomb hit the bus. It blew it into those shops and threw the bodies clear to the other side of those buildings. We found bodies scattered everywhere, there was a severed head inside the bomb crater. When we found that, that was when I started running. I was so afraid."

A similar bomb, also provided by the United States, was used in October 2016 to decimate a funeral hall filled with 155 people. Amid international condemnation, Saudi officials called the strike "a mistake." That's some mistake, guys. Plus, earlier that year, an American-sold MK 84 bomb killed 97 people in a market.

The fact that the United States provided logistical and intelligence support for this atrocity *in any way* is one of the most disgraceful things this country has ever done – *AND IT MUST NEVER BE REPEATED.*

Now, in the wake of the Trump/Vance administration's war in Iran, Yemen has once again become a major front in the regional war. In September 2026, the Iran-backed Houthis seized the strategic Red Sea port of Mokha and Perim Island, strengthening their position around the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, while Saudi Arabia resumed large-

scale airstrikes against Houthi forces. The Houthis retaliated with missile and drone attacks on Saudi cities, military installations and energy infrastructure, prompting Riyadh to seek additional air-defense assistance from allies.

Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman also reportedly sought U.S. military support, but Washington has so far limited its involvement largely to intelligence assistance while maintaining its separate 2025 ceasefire with the Houthis. The renewed fighting is highly consequential because it threatens another critical global shipping chokepoint while traffic through the Strait of Hormuz is already severely disrupted.

Sub-Saharan Africa

Sudan "has descended into an even darker hell."
~ Tom Fletcher, United Nations Emergency Relief Chief ~

Violence is spiraling out of control in Sudan. Because of the fighting that erupted between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) on April 15, 2023, 25 million Sudanese now face extreme hunger; at least 12 million have been forced from their homes; and as many as 400,000 are believed to be dead.

Mass executions are a daily occurrence. Burning people alive and violent sexual assaults are commonplace. Hospitals are being bombed. Homes are being torched. Food and other humanitarian aid are being destroyed. War crimes by both sides are being committed.

In El Fasher, the capital of North Darfur in Sudan, a genocidal blood bath was ignited when the Arab militia seized the city from the Sudanese Armed Forces and the African tribesmen that were fighting with them.

During the massacre, Rapid Support Forces fighters posted videos of themselves casually executing unarmed civilians at point-blank range as they begged for their lives, and satellite images revealed piles of bodies and bloodstains so massive they can be seen from space.

Despite its denials, multiple sources – including U.N. investigators, news and human rights organizations, and U.S. officials – have established that the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is the main supporter of the Rapid Support Forces, supplying money and weapons, as well as advanced Chinese drones that are in violation of a twenty year U.N. arms embargo in Sudan (Egypt, Iran, Russia and Turkey are also supplying arms to the conflict).

Among other weapons, the UAE is supplying RSF fighters with bomb-carrying Wing Loong II and FeiHong-95 drones, howitzers, heavy machine guns, and mortars.

Worse, the Emirates is doing this in the shadiest way imaginable, using the cover of the highly trusted Red Crescent (the counterpart of the Red Cross) and acting as if they are fighting for peace and diplomacy in the region instead of total death and destruction.

Far from stepping up to help, the Trump/Vance administration is actively slashing aid to Sudan – an unforgivable act of cruelty.

The United States must right this wrong this immediately. We must do everything possible to help open and supply humanitarian corridors to feed the 25 million people who are literally starving to death.

We can't stop there. The United States should halt all arms sells to Egypt and the Emirates until both countries stop enabling these atrocities. This will likely work, just like it did when the U.S. successfully pressured the UAE to pull out of the deadly war in Yemen.

Also, because income from the gold trade helps fund this war, the United States should label all gold originating from Sudan as "conflict gold" and demand strict due diligence from international banks and gold traders and refiners that deal in it. We should also expand existing sanctions to include any individuals or companies that break the rules.

Lastly, the United States should designate the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) a foreign terrorist organization. Before this conflict started, RSF leader Lt. Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, who is widely known as Hemedti, positioned himself as a democratic leader who only cared about the safety and welfare of the Sudanese people. However, he and his troops have proven to be brutal war criminals, including committing genocide against the Zaghawa ethnic group.

Sanctions have already been placed on Dagalo but, because of the UAE's support, he has not fully felt the impact of them. The United States should put all countries on notice that we will consider any country that helps the RSF and/or the UAE complicit in aiding genocide.

The War on Terror

To make matters far more dangerous, the global War on Terror is increasingly moving to Africa. For example, Nigeria, Africa's most populous country and largest economy, continues to be under attack from jihadist terrorist groups Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa (ISIS-WA).

The Islamic State-Sahel Province is infiltrating Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger. Meanwhile, Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM), an al-Qaeda affiliate, is now the most well-armed militant force in the Sahel, if not the entire world. Its 6,000+ fighters have stormed cities in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Benin – and have plans to expand their reign of terror.

The U.S. State Department reports that "these groups have conducted numerous attacks on government and civilian targets, resulting in thousands of deaths and injuries, widespread destruction, the internal displacement of more than two million persons, and the external displacement of somewhat more than an estimated 300,000 Nigerian refugees to neighboring countries."

They have "recruited and forcefully conscripted child soldiers; and carried out scores of person-borne improvised explosive device attacks – many by coerced young women and girls – and other attacks on population centers in the Northeast and in Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. Both groups subjected many women and girls to sexual and gender-based violence, including forced marriages, sexual slavery, and rape."

Violence by Islamic State loyalists in Northern Mozambique has displaced almost 670,000 people and thrown over a million people into a humanitarian crisis. The United Nations (UN) reports there are over 100 armed groups operating in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), including longtime rebel group Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) which established ties with ISIS in late 2018. These groups routinely attack civilians, the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (FARDC), and UN peacekeepers.

In March 2021, the State Department "designated the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria – Democratic Republic of the Congo (ISIS-DRC) and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria – Mozambique (ISIS-Mozambique) as Foreign Terrorist Organizations and also designated ISIS-DRC and ISIS-Mozambique as Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGTs), while also designating respective leaders of those organizations, Seka Musa Baluku and Abu Yasir Hassan, as SDGTs."

The 2024 Annual Threat Assessment from the U.S. Director of National Intelligence, released on February 5, 2024, issued the following warnings:

The Sahel

"Since 2020, the Sahel has experienced seven irregular transfers of power because leaders have failed to address poor governance and public grievances or adequately resourced their militaries to achieve their missions. This turmoil raises the likelihood that these crises will metastasize and spillover to neighboring countries in Coastal West Africa in 2024. Many Coastal West African governments are facing potential coups because of lingering civil-military strains, growing public dissatisfaction with their failure to deliver improved governance and living standards, and an increase in foreign partners willing to condone military rule to focus on narrow security interests. Future coup leaders most likely will calculate that competition among major powers will create the space to weather any international fallout."

Sudan and South Sudan

"Prolonged conflict heightens the risks of conflict spreading beyond Sudan's borders, external actors joining the fray, and civilians facing death and displacement. The Sudanese Armed Forces and Rapid Support Forces are still fighting because their leaders calculate that they can achieve their goals absent a negotiated cessation of hostilities. With Sudan at the crossroads of the Horn of Africa, the Sahel, and North Africa, it could once again become an ideal environment for terrorist and criminal networks."

† Sudan's warring security forces may be receiving more foreign military support, which is likely to hamper progress on any future peace talks. Any increased involvement by one external actor could prompt others to quickly follow suit.

Horn of Africa

"Ethiopia is undergoing multiple, simultaneous internal conflicts, heightening interethnic tension and the risk of atrocities against

civilians. A new conflict emerged in the Amhara Regional State in April 2023, when the Ethiopian Government clashed with Amhara militia and fighting persisted throughout the year. While the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement in November 2022 between the Ethiopian Government and the Tigrayans ended a two-year war, unresolved territorial issues could lead to a resumption of conflict."

- Russia has opportunistically capitalized on domestic turmoil, offering rhetorical and, in some instances, substantive support to those seeking to oust regimes.
- Mounting crises are beginning to fray regional institutions, further hampering their ability to develop effective regional security responses. In 2023, juntas in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger formed a separate alliance to buck pressure from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), historically one of the most consistent bodies in trying to uphold anti-coup norms in the region.
- Several Western partners are focusing on core security interests in the region – such as stemming migrant flows, containing geopolitical rivals, and CT gains – at the expense of longer-term support to democracy and governance.

I'll meet you at www.1787forAmerica.org

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