



TO: Interested Parties

FROM: CAP Action

RE: The Path Forward

Economic and Democratic Renewal

Summary: The 2016 election was a long and divisive road that challenged our country in new ways. Donald Trump won the Electoral College, while former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton won the popular vote by nearly 3 million votes. But lost in the din of this election is the fact that most Americans, including many Trump supporters, support a progressive policy agenda.¹ The strong crossover appeal of progressives' policy agenda threatens to put President-elect Trump and congressional Republicans on a collision course: If Trump pursues Republicans' unpopular policy agenda, he will find himself at odds with many of his own supporters.

In a comprehensive postelection poll focusing on voters' policy preferences, conducted with 2,000 voters, the Center for American Progress found strong consensus among both Trump and Clinton voters for a policy agenda focused on improving jobs and wages; protecting Social Security and Medicare; lowering health care and prescription drug prices; fighting special interest money in politics; reducing gun crimes and violence; and protecting the nation from terrorism. Anywhere from 70 percent to 80 percent of both Clinton and Trump voters say that protecting Social Security and Medicare, creating new jobs and raising wages, and lowering health costs should be top priorities for the next president and Congress. Both Trump and Clinton voters also support action on paid leave, child care support, updated anti-discrimination laws, raising taxes on the wealthy, and even comprehensive immigration reform with enhanced border security and a path to citizenship.²

America did not sign off on a radical-right agenda with Donald Trump's election, and progressive leaders should remember that.

In fact, CAP's comprehensive postelection poll found that just 29 percent of Trump voters cited his policies as the primary reason for their support. That translates to less than 15 percent of all voters being motivated by Trump's policy agenda.

As we see it, Trump's Electoral College success was based on a broad desire for change in Washington more than on any particular issue. This creates an opportunity for progressives—labor, civil rights groups, environmentalists, and all of our allies. In the absence of an incumbent president pursuing a progressive governing agenda, we can both offer a full-throated reform agenda that is grounded in the principle that our economy and our government should work for everyone and resist the regressive policies that the overwhelming majority of voters rejected.

The challenge of Trump is that he will offer many targets; as he did throughout his campaign, Trump will continue to pit Americans against Americans. Progressives must defend against these divisive attacks. Indeed, protecting civil rights is a central progressive value, and we cannot ignore it. But at the same time, we should be ready to call out Trump whenever he breaks one of his signature promises to “drain the swamp” or fight for the middle class. People voted for these promises of change, and they will feel betrayed when Trump does not follow through.

The hallmark of progressive politics has been a commitment to civil rights for all and economic fairness for all. Donald Trump's presidency will threaten both of these principles, and progressives need to be ready to fight back.

Progressivism that cedes an inch on civil rights is not worth fighting for. But progressivism that ignores the economic needs of the struggling and striving will not be successful either. As we chart a path forward, economic and democratic renewal must be the cornerstone of both an affirmative progressive policy agenda and an effective response to Donald Trump's disastrous policies. This memo lays out the case in more detail.

Background

The 2016 presidential election was close: Clinton won the popular vote by nearly 3 million votes, winning the most votes of any candidate other than President Barack Obama in 2008, while a total of fewer than 80,000 votes spread across three states gave Trump a victory in the Electoral College. In total, 54 percent of American voters rejected Trump on Election Day.³ **These facts demonstrate a simple truth: There is no mandate for Trump's agenda.**

However, Clinton faced several setbacks among key groups. She saw a notable decline in support among African Americans in critical states. In North Carolina, for example, African American voters made up 23 percent of the electorate in 2012, with Obama winning 96 percent of their support. In 2016, their share of the state's electorate dropped to 20 percent, with Clinton securing only 89 percent of support.⁴ And while Clinton did well among Latino voters, this advantage was not enough to overcome other demographic deficits, particularly in the states that helped turn the Electoral College.⁵

Voter suppression tactics played a significant role in depressing turnout, especially in communities of color. But these numbers are only part of the story. Voters across party lines sent a clear message that should guide progressive policy and strategy going forward: Too many Americans feel left behind by our economy and unrepresented by our government. They feel ignored and forgotten by their representatives, and they see Washington as distant, ineffective, controlled by special interests, and blind to the hardships of the working class. According to the exit polls, 69 percent of voters overall said they were dissatisfied or angry with the government. Seventy-eight percent of Trump's voters said their own personal financial situation had gotten worse over the past four years, and 63 percent of his voters said life for the next generation of Americans will be worse than it is today.⁶

These voters are not driven by blind party loyalty; many counties with white working-class voters that voted for Trump had previously supported Obama in 2008 and 2012. In fact, one-third of counties nationwide that voted for Obama twice switched to support Trump.⁷ In Wisconsin, for example, 22 counties that Obama won in 2012 went for Trump.⁸ In Iowa, Trump flipped 31 counties that went for Obama four years ago.⁹ In Pennsylvania, traditionally Democratic counties such as Luzerne and Erie saw double-digit swings from Obama in 2012 to Trump.¹⁰ These counties were predominantly white, with strong working-class roots and, most notably, a high population of noncollege-educated voters.

Support for Trump correlated with education level more than income in numerous counties across the country. In the 50 most educated counties nationwide, Clinton outperformed Obama significantly.¹¹ In Arlington, Virginia, for example, where nearly 70 percent of voters were college-educated, Clinton's support increased 10 percent from Obama's from 2012.¹² In Johnson County, Kansas, which also boasts a majority of voters with college degrees, Clinton's support increased 5 percent, as Trump barely managed to hold onto a county that Mitt Romney won handily four years ago.¹³ Clinton also made gains from 2012 in medium- and lower-income counties where at least 35 percent of voters ages 25 and above had college degrees.

Conversely, Clinton's support declined substantially in counties with lower education levels. In Erie County, Pennsylvania, and Howard County, Indiana, where just around 20 percent of voters went to college, Clinton's support dropped 10 percent from Obama's in 2012.¹⁴ Even many high-income counties where less than 35 percent of voters had college degrees shifted to Trump. In Chisago County, Minnesota, where just more than 20 percent of voters are college-educated, Trump outperformed Romney's margin by 18 points, nearly winning a normally solid-blue state. Overall, Trump beat Clinton by double-digit margins in every income group among those without a college degree, while performing significantly worse in each group among those with a degree.¹⁵

Although we won't be able to deconstruct the exact turnout and support patterns of core progressive groups that generally supported Clinton until we get upcoming census data, it appears from the exit polls that a series of small shifts in turnout and support rates made the difference in a number of key states—particularly in the face of her overwhelming 37-point deficit among white noncollege voters nationally.¹⁶ This low turnout among groups that supported Clinton, combined with a significant shift in rural support, assured her loss in these critical Midwestern states.¹⁷ And while Clinton nearly matched Trump with white college voters, a demographic Obama lost to Romney by 14 points, it was not enough to overcome these other deficits.¹⁸

Of course, Clinton did gain ground in other parts of the map. In Texas, where Obama lost to Romney by 16 points in 2012, Clinton closed the gap to 9 points. In Arizona, where Obama was defeated by 9 points, Clinton lost by just 4 points. Progressives need to keep reaching out to people in these regions. Going forward, we must stand strong with core Obama coalition voters in the face of potentially reactionary and exclusionary Trump policies. And we must do even more to engage young people; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender, or LGBT, people; people of color; naturalized immigrants; and women in the years ahead on the issues that matter most to them.

But at the same time, we need to recognize that a cross-racial, cross-regional, cross-class coalition will be critical to the long-term success of progressive candidates and policy initiatives all around the country. Most importantly, in the elections to come in 2018 and beyond, we must do more to bring white noncollege voters into our movements and campaigns in ways to advance policies that will help all working people, those of color as well as white voters. Progressives cannot give up on the Obama coalition, but we must recognize that it included a larger share of white working-class voters than voted for Clinton's coalition this year. That is the opportunity in the future.

The good news is that our country is not as divided as it seems. CAP's postelection poll found that a vast majority of Clinton and Trump voters are united around a progressive policy agenda—from protecting Social Security and Medicare; to fighting special interest money in politics; to supporting action on paid leave, child care, and even comprehensive immigration reform. By contrast, there is no public consensus on the priorities that Trump and Republican leaders are threatening to put forth in early 2017, including steps to lower corporate taxes, repeal the Affordable Care Act, and build a wall along the Mexican border—all of which would harm working-class families and the American economy.¹⁹

How progressives can resist Trump and forge progress

Going forward, progressives must rebuild a genuinely cross-racial, cross-regional, cross-class alliance to advance progressive policies aimed at reversing inequality and cleaning up the government to help increase public trust and confidence in our nation's institutions.

Robert “Bobby” Kennedy accomplished this in his extraordinary 82-day presidential campaign in 1968, building a diverse coalition bound by common economic concerns. Moving forward, we must bring together a broad coalition of voters while continuing to fight forcefully for the values that have long animated our progressive cause: fairness, equality, and economic opportunity for all people, no matter their gender, sexual orientation, color, class, or creed. We can expand our reach without abandoning our base. By rewriting the rules of the economy to work for everyone and reforming our politics to work for everyone, progressives can revive a Bobby Kennedy-style coalition and bring together working-class voters across racial lines into a strong progressive movement.

We must resist Trump's anti-worker agenda, and we need to start building support for progressive candidates in 2018 and 2020, providing all families—those with college degrees and those without, people of all races and creeds—with an alternative to Trump's divisive and disastrous policies. Here are a few ideas for how to do that.

Economic renewal

We need to center our economic policy work on fighting for a fairer economy, helping working families, and rebuilding hard-hit urban and rural areas.

Over the past four decades, working families have seen their wages stagnate as the costs of economic security have skyrocketed. They want an economy that works for them instead of the wealthiest and most powerful special interests.

Progressives should better serve these families by embracing a bold economic agenda, while clearly communicating our message far and wide that these policies will make lives better for those left behind in our economy. This agenda includes:

- Providing more tax relief for middle- and lower-income families struggling from wage stagnation by redirecting Trump's tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans
- Investing in infrastructure projects that will actually help create jobs for working people, especially in hard-hit urban and rural areas that need them
- Guaranteeing debt-free public college and free community college

- Expanding access to high-quality, affordable child care and providing paid leave
- Fighting monopolies that hurt consumers and lower wages
- Raising the minimum wage and extending basic labor protections to all workers
- Clawing back the special tax breaks that corporations receive for locating research and production in the United States if they ship jobs overseas
- Imposing a financial transactions tax that will help stymie high-frequency trading while also making our tax code fairer
- Using a combination of interest rate, expenditure, and tax policy to run a full-employment, high-pressure economy that will tighten labor markets and raise wages
- Strengthening unions and bargaining power across sectors and industries, so that workers earn a fair share of the productivity gains they help create

We also need to confront and address the harmful effects globalization has had on working-class Americans. Too many Americans have not seen the economic benefits of our past trade agreements. Rather than bringing shared prosperity, globalization has depressed wages for many workers, leaving millions of families without the economic security they once knew. Badly regulated trade has also created a substantial drag on U.S. economic growth. Negative trade balances, which have gone on for decades, have reduced aggregate demand and made tight labor markets more difficult to achieve.

Progressives should acknowledge that our responses to the downsides of trade have been insufficient. Trade Adjustment Assistance is not working, and we need to take a more aggressive stance against China and other countries that benefit from playing by a different set of rules. That means any trade agreements should deter currency manipulation, penalize unfair competition from state-subsidized firms, eliminate government-created nontariff barriers, and bring an end to the global race to the bottom in labor and environmental standards. We should also push for stronger tariff protections against countries that engage in unfair dumping practices, which have continued to hamper American steel and aluminum manufacturers.

It's time to level the playing field on trade and protect American workers from the negative effects of global competition. These changes are more likely to happen if representatives of workers and consumers have a seat at the table when agreements are negotiated, and if there is public accountability for enforcing the terms of those agreements.

Taking on Trump

These are strong, affirmative economic policies. But progressives also need to respond to the outrageous and outright hypocritical proposals being put forth by Trump, focusing our efforts on exposing how his administration's economic policies undermine his campaign's populist promises.

Despite its campaign rhetoric, for instance, the incoming Trump administration shows little interest in sincerely addressing the challenges of working-class Americans. Even before assuming office, Trump has already begun breaking or walking back promises he made during the campaign. And his transition team is shaping an agenda that will wreak havoc on working-class Americans while creating another windfall for the country's wealthiest and most powerful corporations. Trump's tax plan, for example, would raise taxes on millions of middle-class families, while giving the biggest tax breaks to the top 0.1 percent of American earners.²⁰

According to analysis by the Tax Policy Center, households in the top 0.1 percent would get an average tax cut of about \$1 million each year under Trump's plan, which is 1,000 times more than the tax cut Trump provides for the average middle-class family. Trump would raise taxes on approximately 8.7 million families, which includes 11 million adults and 15 million children, as well as a majority of single parents.²¹ Of course, the one tax he has pledged to repeal—the estate tax—would benefit only the wealthiest of the wealthiest—just 0.2 percent of estates each year. In fact, repealing the estate tax would save Trump's own family billions of dollars. To make matters worse, the overwhelming cost of Trump's tax plan would mean huge cuts to Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, education, and infrastructure.²²

What's more, congressional Republicans are already moving to strip health care from millions of Americans by repealing the Affordable Care Act, or ACA. But their plan does not stop with the ACA: Republican leaders, along with Trump's nominee for health and human services secretary, Rep. Tom Price (R-GA), have promised to privatize Medicare and turn Medicaid into a block grant program, slashing trillions of dollars from these programs over the next decade.²³ This will make the lives of many people who voted for Trump much worse-off.

We should do everything in our power to protect working families from such devastating policies and to ensure that the money conservatives would spend on millionaires goes instead to tax cuts and investments that benefit the middle class.

Trump also talked a big game about standing up to Wall Street: He derided the greed of bankers and hedge fund managers, and he even entertained the idea of reimplementing the Glass-Steagall Act to better protect our economy from the threat of risky banking practices, which was outlined in the Republican Party's platform. Unfortunately, Trump seems focused only on helping big banks and other large financial firms by dismantling

the Dodd-Frank Act. In the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, Dodd-Frank has brought much-needed stability to our financial system, protecting American consumers from the reckless and predatory practices that helped plunge our economy into recession. And yet Trump and Republicans want to repeal this progress. Progressives need to stand up to these assaults on Dodd-Frank and provide real protections to consumers.

While cozying up to Wall Street, Trump is also walking back his promise to advocate for American workers. His choice for labor secretary, Andrew Puzder, is a fast food restaurant CEO who makes more in one day than the typical fast food worker makes in a year. Puzder is against raising the minimum wage, blames low-wage workers for poverty, and supports replacing workers with machines.²⁴

Put simply: Trump's economic policy agenda and those he has picked to lead it represent a full-out assault on working families, and progressives must be ready to fight back.

Democratic renewal

We need to take on special interests, protect voters' rights, and make political reform a central cause of progressive politics again.

Voters' distrust of government has reached alarming levels. But contrary to conservative claims, Americans do not think government can't solve problems. In fact, 72 percent of Americans believe that, with the right kind of leadership, the federal government can be a force for good. But as it stands, they think government is run by and for the wealthiest and most powerful special interests. Based on our extensive research, voters believe near-universally that the government works for the rich—80 percent of voters nationwide—big corporations—83 percent—and special interests—84 percent—over the interests of the middle class.²⁵

What's more, millions of Americans—especially in communities of color—continue to be denied their democratic rights and shut out of the political process by discriminatory voter suppression laws.

We need a bold, progressive agenda for political reform that will make government more transparent, hold elected officials accountable to the interests of working-class Americans, protect the voting rights of all Americans, and ensure that wealth doesn't translate into greater political power. This agenda includes:

- Stopping conflicts of interest between political leaders and their financial interests
- Increasing government's public reporting so voters know what government is doing and how taxpayer money is being spent, and imposing stricter penalties for contractors who violate agreements

- Strengthening bribery and public corruption laws to ensure that politicians don't alter public policy for political spending
- Strictly limiting the amount of money that special interest lobbyists can bundle and contribute, and enacting effective transparency rules for special interest lobbying
- Instituting and enforcing strict anti-nepotism laws
- Getting big money out of politics by passing a constitutional amendment to overturn the *Citizens United* decision or shifting the U.S. Supreme Court's jurisprudence to uphold laws that defend democracy and protect public power from private takeover
- Investing in small donor-driven campaigns and elections to align incentives between representatives and constituents, lowering barriers to running for office, and engaging and diversifying community supporters
- Requiring transparency for political spending and closing dark-money channels so that special interests don't influence elections and officials without accountability
- Stopping Super PACs and designing and enforcing limits to prevent corporations and wealthy individuals from spending unlimited amounts of money to influence elections
- Empowering more Americans to exercise their democratic right to vote by standing up to discriminatory voter suppression, restoring the Voting Rights Act to prevent racial discrimination in voting, and restoring voting rights for people with felony convictions
- Transforming voter registration from a barrier into a gateway to voter participation through truly automatic voter registration and other necessary upgrades to America's election infrastructure
- Fixing the process for drawing election districts to prevent manipulating maps and to achieve responsive, reflective, and accountable elected representation

These issues—especially fighting for stricter bribery and conflict-of-interest laws—may be critical affirmative agenda items for progressives during a Trump administration. By developing policies to fight corruption, ensure transparency, and defend and expand voting rights, we can restore people's faith in our government and protect the integrity of our democracy.

Taking on Trump

Donald Trump tapped into this desire for political reform with his promise to drain the swamp in Washington. But now he's pursuing an agenda that will let Wall Street run wild, give massive tax breaks to the wealthiest Americans and most powerful corporations, and fill the swamp even higher with lobbyists and insiders.

Trump's nominee for Treasury secretary, hedge fund founder Steve Mnuchin, was practically born in the swamp. Among his many notorious accomplishments, Mnuchin's hedge fund purchased a distressed mortgage lender accused of using grotesque practices including redlining, robo-signing, and fabricating documents to churn out foreclosures. While homeowners, communities, and the American economy suffered deeply during the financial crisis, the lender—under Mnuchin's leadership—was able to walk away unscathed with billions of dollars in profits, much of which was reaped on the backs of taxpayers.²⁶

Trump's choice for commerce secretary, Wilbur Ross, took his first summer job on Wall Street in the 1950s, and he's been getting rich at the expense of working families ever since. Dubbed the "king of bankruptcy," Ross has amassed a \$2.5 billion fortune by buying troubled companies, slashing workers' wages, eliminating retired miners' benefits, closing down steel plants, laying off American workers, and opening factories in Mexico and China.²⁷ Trump talks about a "rigged system," but the American people deserve to know that the system has been rigged by people exactly like Mnuchin and Ross.

Meanwhile, conflicts of interest also abound on the foreign policy side of Trump's Cabinet. Trump's recent choice for national security adviser, retired Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, has been linked to lobbying for the Turkish government; last year, he was even paid to be Russian President Vladimir Putin's guest at a gala celebrating Russia's premier propaganda network.²⁸ Trump's pick for secretary of state, Exxon CEO Rex Tillerson, has overseen significant investments in Russia's oil and gas industry and has developed a close personal relationship with Putin, even receiving Russia's Order of Friendship award in 2013.²⁹

In all, Trump's first 17 Cabinet picks represent the opposite of any effort to drain the swamp, and their many business interests raise serious questions.³⁰ But beyond Trump's Cabinet, the president-elect himself is a walking conflict of interest. In fact, his bait-and-switch on draining the swamp only reflects the shady business practices that have long defined his career—from defrauding students and discriminating against people of color, to bankrupting companies and stiffing contractors. As president, Trump will find himself entangled in a global web of conflicts. For example, the Trump Organization owes millions of dollars to a bank that is currently negotiating a financial settlement with the U.S. Department of Justice, an agency Trump will oversee. Trump Hotels can bring disputes before the National Labor Relations Board, another agency under Trump's purview.³¹ The list goes on and on, with conflicts extending around

the world; in fact, we won't actually know the full extent of Trump's conflicts unless he decides to release his tax returns. But since his victory, Trump has already tried to exploit the presidency for his own personal gain and put America's influence on sale to the highest bidder. Even some of his fellow Republicans have voiced concern that Trump's business interests could threaten America's security at home and abroad.³²

Conclusion

There are a whole host of issues that progressives must fight for right now—from defending Planned Parenthood and *Roe v. Wade*; to protecting undocumented immigrants and their families from the threat of deportation; to preserving our planet from the urgent threat of climate change; to ensuring the survival of the ACA, which provides health coverage for 20 million Americans.³³ But while we lead these fights and protect the progress we've made, we must also put forward a positive agenda that shows working-class voters who is truly on their side. That means uniting around a strategy that will protect the progress we've made, push back against Trump's harmful policies, and help ensure a stronger and more successful progressive future.

Despite the results of the election, working-class Americans of all backgrounds are still bound by common economic concerns. From Bobby Kennedy to Barack Obama, successful progressives have rebuilt this coalition before. We must do so again.

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