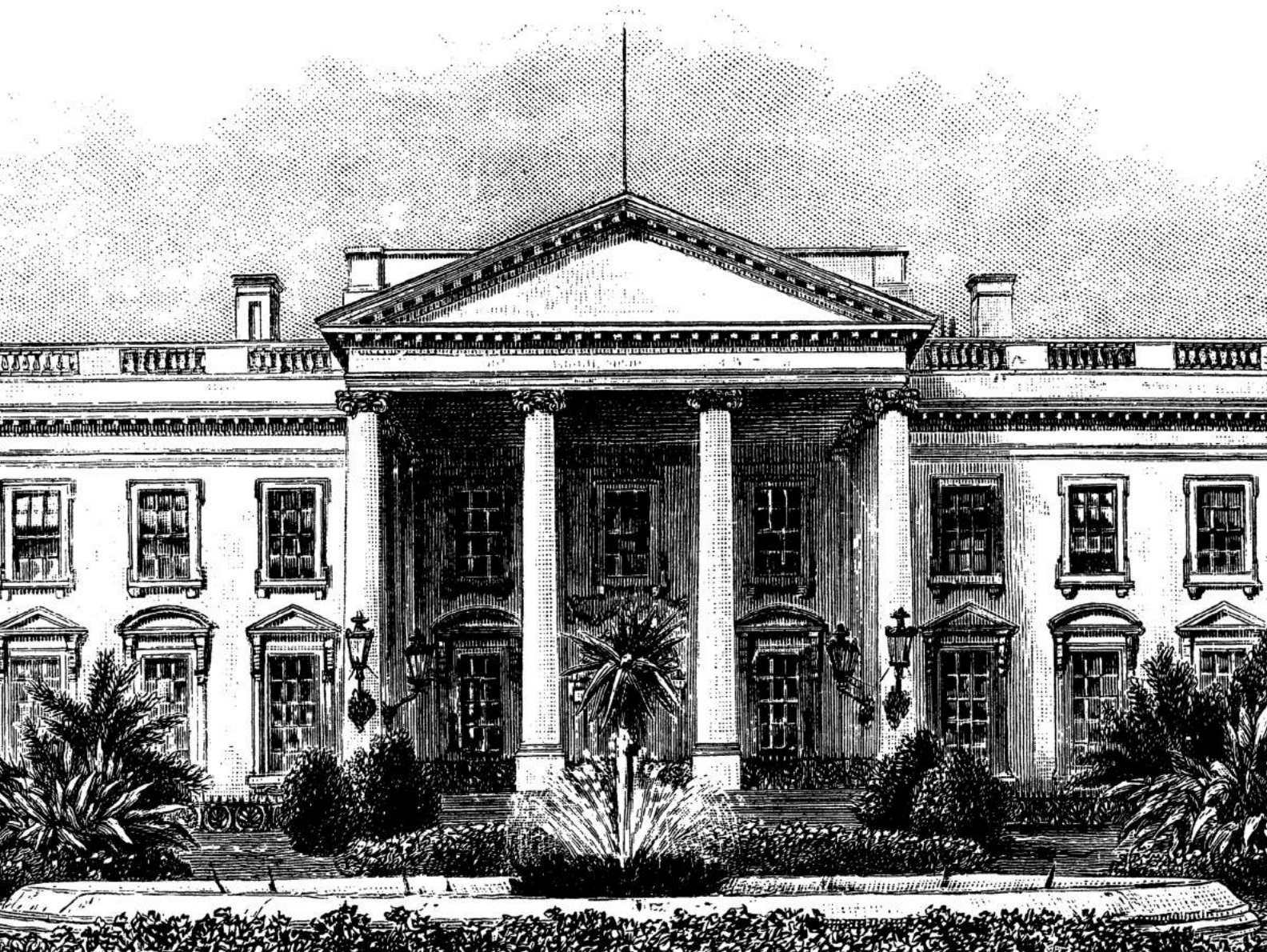


NO LABELS

**COMMON
SENSE**



COMMON
SENSE

NO LABELS

CHAPTER
I

AN
INTRO

An Intro

Most Americans are decent, caring, reasonable, and patriotic people.

But we do not see those traits reflected in our politics today.

Instead, we see our two major political parties dominated by angry and extremist voices driven by ideology and identity politics rather than what's best for our country. We hear reason and persuasion—the pillars of our democracy since its founding—being replaced by anger and intimidation.

So many of us are concerned. We worry about falling behind and wonder why so much of what people say or do in Washington, DC, has no connection to the kitchen table concerns most Americans think about every day.

If you feel this way, No Labels' *Common Sense* is for you.

This booklet takes its name and inspiration from the original *Common Sense* pamphlet, published in 1776 by Thomas Paine. Its arguments for America's independence from Great Britain were so clear and inspirational that historians rank Paine as one of the fathers of the American Revolution.

Well, if *Common Sense* helped found America then, it can help restore America now.

No Labels has spent the past two years listening to and surveying tens of thousands of Americans to understand their priorities, concerns, and aspirations. They helped us identify where our next president should apply some commonsense leadership to improve Americans' quality of life and make our nation safer, stronger, and more prosperous.

Along the way, it became clear that most Americans agree on foundational beliefs that many politicians have forgotten.

FOUNDATIONAL BELIEFS

- *We are grateful to live in a country where we can openly disagree with other people.*
- *We care about our country more than any political party.*
- *We respect hard work and believe it should be rewarded, but we also believe America should help people who cannot help themselves or fall on hard times.*
- *We want a well-functioning government that addresses our common problems and empowers every American—no matter who they are, where they are from, or what they believe—to reach their full individual potential.*
- *We know America is not perfect. But we'd rather live here than anywhere else.*

Our beliefs are so obvious—so grounded in the American experience and timeless American ideals like pride and patriotism, free expression and free enterprise, generosity and goodwill toward our fellow Americans—that we shouldn't even have to say them.

But we do, because powerful and extreme forces in both major parties so obviously reject them. That's why America is in the mess we are now in. It's why American politics no longer feels like a battle of ideas. It feels more like a war of two tribes bent on each other's destruction.

The way out is for America's growing commonsense majority to come together in advance of the 2024 presidential election, to demand something better, and to clarify what we expect from whoever will occupy the White House in January 2025.

This booklet provides a clear blueprint for where America's commonsense majority wants this country to go.

Now we just need a president with the courage to lead us there.

Years ago, when No Labels founded the bipartisan House Problem Solvers Caucus, one of its members articulated what would soon become the group's North Star. He said, "Let's focus on the areas where most of us can agree before we start fighting over where we most disagree."

No Labels developed *Common Sense* with that same spirit. We know this spirit is still alive in America because we've seen it recently from No Labels' courageous allies in the Problem Solvers Caucus and the Senate who have managed to defy the odds and lead the passage of historic bipartisan legislation like the 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Most important, we see this spirit in the legions of Americans who join the No Labels movement every day and who know in their hearts that this great nation of ours can do better.

We know that we the people deserve better from our political leaders.

In these pages, you will find a way for us to break out of the endless doom loop consuming our politics. Here you will find the optimistic—and one day soon triumphant—voice of America's commonsense majority.



CHAPTER
2

A
COMMON
SENSE
AGENDA

THE POLITICS OF PROBLEM SOLVING

- 1 America can't solve its biggest problems and deliver the results hardworking taxpayers want, need, and deserve unless Democrats and Republicans start working together side by side on bipartisan solutions.

BEING RESPONSIBLE

- 2 Our leaders must act now to solve today's economic challenges before they become impossible to solve tomorrow.
- 3 Washington must stop spending so much more than it takes in. From now on, the annual budget should be reasonable and responsible, which means our national debt needs to stop growing faster than our economy.
- 4 Congress owes it to the American people to pass a budget every year, and to do it on time.
- 5 Our leaders must take action to get health-care costs under control to give all Americans access to quality health care and reduce our debt.

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER SECURITY

- 6 America is a nation of laws, so we must immediately regain control of our borders and stop releasing migrants who enter America illegally into the country.
- 7 America is also a nation of immigrants, so we should create a path to citizenship for the Dreamers and a plan to attract more legal immigrants, because more hardworking taxpayers means lower inflation and faster economic growth.

PUBLIC SAFETY

- 8 Public safety is the highest priority. We need to fix the criminal justice system so career criminals can't keep committing crimes.
- 9 America needs more and better community policing to keep people safe.
- 10 Americans have a constitutional right to own guns, but society also has a responsibility to keep dangerous weapons away from dangerous people.

AMERICA'S YOUTH

- 11 As a matter of decency, dignity, and morality, no child in America should go to bed or go to school hungry.
- 12 Every child in America should have the right to a high-quality education. No child should be forced to go to a failing school.
- 13 America should make a national commitment that our students will be number one in reading and math globally within a decade.
- 14 Financial literacy is essential for all Americans striving to get ahead.

ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY

- 15 An all-of-the-above energy strategy is the best way to lower prices for American families.
- 16 To have cleaner energy, America needs to be able to build clean energy technologies.

PROTECTING AMERICA

- 17 America should make it a national priority to have the most efficient, most effective, and most powerful military in the world to protect democracy at home and abroad.
- 18 A world led by America is safer than a world led by Russia and China would be.
- 19 It's in America's interest to work with our allies to advance our mutual interests.
- 20 America should lead the world in the development of ethical artificial intelligence.

DEMOCRACY

- 21 National service could help heal America's political divide.
- 22 Our children should have a civics education that will make them informed, engaged, and active participants in our democratic system.
- 23 The public has the right to know. Political parties, social media companies, and government institutions should not be able to censor information they don't like.

24 The First Amendment to the US Constitution protects free speech. No American should face discrimination at school or at work because of their political views.

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25 Every legal voter should have the right and the ability to vote, every legal vote should be counted, and every counted vote should be verified.

EMPATHY AND EQUALITY

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26 America must strike a balance between protecting women's rights to control their own reproductive health and our society's responsibility to protect human life.

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27 Every American deserves respect and freedom from discrimination.

OPPORTUNITY

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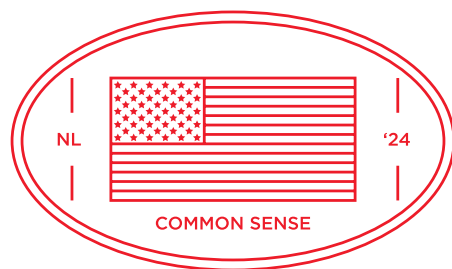
28 We should give small businesses the resources they need to grow and get rid of the rules standing in their way.

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29 Members of the US military should be given the dignity and opportunity to put their skills to good use when they leave the service.

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30 Building more homes in America will make housing more affordable for Americans.



CHAPTER
3

THE POLITICS OF PROBLEM SOLVING

IDEA I

America can't solve its biggest problems and deliver the results hardworking taxpayers want, need, and deserve unless Democrats and Republicans start working together side by side on bipartisan solutions.

Here are two reasons you should care about having leaders in Washington who believe Democrats and Republicans must work together for the good of the country.

- *America has had divided government—with one major party controlling the White House and the other controlling at least one house of Congress—for 29 out of the last 40 years. For almost three-quarters of that time, passing bipartisan legislation has been the only way to enact anything.*
- *The most significant and enduring legislative achievements of the twentieth century occurred when members of both sides came together to achieve bipartisan success that benefited all Americans. There's no greater example than the enactment of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which depended on the leadership of civil rights leaders like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., working alongside Democratic President Lyndon B. Johnson and Republican Senate Minority Leader Everett Dirksen.*

More recently, even amid Washington's dysfunction and divisions, No Labels' allies in the House and Senate helped lead the passage of consequential legislation that made historic investments in our infrastructure and in the next-generation technologies we need to stay ahead of communist China. They also rewrote the outdated Electoral Count Act that created so much uncertainty after the 2020 election and led to the horrors of January 6, 2021.

Now, think of the huge list of problems that our country faces heading into the 2024 election, including inflation, low economic growth, and spiraling debts. A broken immigration system. Crime and gun violence. A generation of students struggling in the classroom. Declining belief in the American Dream. The list goes on.

The one thread that connects all these challenges is that none will be solved unless and until enough members of both parties put country before party and work together to solve them.

CHAPTER 4

BEING RESPONSIBLE

IDEA 2

Our leaders must act now to solve today's economic challenges before they become impossible to solve tomorrow.

Social Security's approaching funding crisis is a textbook example of how leaders kick the can down the road in a manner that makes a foreseeable problem even harder to solve for the next generation.

In early 2023, President Joe Biden and former president Donald Trump both said they would never cut Social Security benefits for anyone, and many pundits commended them for the political masterstroke of "taking Social Security off the table."

In reality, Social Security, the program that almost 67 million Americans depend on, is nearing fiscal insolvency. The government trustees who manage Social Security project that the program's trust fund will be exhausted within a decade because America won't have enough taxpayers paying benefits to a growing group of retirees. At that point, the program will automatically have to pay out 24 percent less in benefits. If that happens, it will double the rate of poverty among America's elderly.

Make no mistake: Americans need Social Security and consider it one of the most important and successful government programs ever created. We want to be able to rely on it now and for generations to come.

But the longer Washington waits to fix Social Security, the harder it will be to do so and the more likely it becomes that Americans will get hit with punishing tax increases, significant benefit cuts, or both.

In fixing Social Security, the next president and Congress should be grounded in two foundational principles that are clearly embraced by America's commonsense majority and are included in various bipartisan reform proposals: 1) **No one in retirement—or close to it—should face any benefit changes;** and 2) **no middle-class or lower-income Americans should face a benefit cut.**

America just needs a president and a Congress with the courage to say that Social Security's impending insolvency is a challenge that we can and must solve together.

IDEA 3

Washington must stop spending so much more than it takes in. From now on, the annual budget should be reasonable and responsible, which means our national debt needs to stop growing faster than our economy.

Here are three things we all need to know about America's debt and why it's such a serious problem.

- *America's total national debt is over \$32 trillion and our debt as a share of our economy has not been this high since World War II. Our overall debt-to-GDP ratio is 120 percent and it is getting worse by the day. From America's founding in 1787 until 2008, we accumulated \$10 trillion in debt. In the 15 years since, we have accumulated another \$21 trillion.*
- *Over 70 percent of all federal spending is "mandatory" spending, which refers to programs like Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid, and interest payments on the debt. These are ongoing obligations the government is legally required to pay every year. The remaining 30 percent is "discretionary" spending—for every other priority the government spends money on, like defense, education, medical research, agriculture, and the environment—that Congress has to appropriate each year. When you see Congress fighting over the budget and members threatening government default or a government shutdown, they are usually fighting over the 30 percent of the total budget allocated to discretionary spending while ignoring the 70 percent devoted to mandatory spending.*
- *Washington is now paying \$400 billion in interest annually, which is more than it spends on food and nutrition, housing, higher education, science, space, and technology combined. If current trends hold, 40 percent of all federal revenues—in other words, your tax dollars—will go toward interest payments within the next 30 years.*

Federal spending has grown exponentially since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, spiking almost 50 percent in 2020 compared to the year prior and remaining above six trillion dollars annually ever since. Many economists believe this spending is at least partly responsible for the inflation that is hurting so many American families because it has significantly increased the demand for goods and services.

Washington doesn't need to immediately balance the budget every year, because the required spending cuts or tax increases would be more than our economy could handle and more than most Americans would accept. But Washington does need to get a handle on our finances so our debt doesn't continue to get bigger as a share of our economy, which could put us in a fiscal hole from which we could never dig ourselves out.

America's debt is so big, and the burden of it is so serious, that there may only be two ways to meaningfully address the problem.

A STATUTORY DEFICIT REDUCTION COMMISSION

In 2010, the White House created the bipartisan Simpson-Bowles Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform, which produced a report laying out a long-term vision for stabilizing America's finances through a mix of modest spending cuts and revenue increases.

The report was sensible and responsible, and dead on arrival. The White House and members of Congress from both parties could not distance themselves from Simpson-Bowles fast enough.

Politicians are smart enough to know that most policy ideas—especially most deficit reduction ideas—never become law. And they did not want to go on the record to support the kinds of revenue increases or spending cuts that would give their opponents easy fodder for attack ads.

The problem with Simpson-Bowles was in its design, namely that Congress was not required to vote on it. That's why the next president should call on Congress to appoint an independent and bipartisan deficit reduction commission—which could include current members of Congress, as well as respected outside experts—that would be tasked with forming a deficit reduction plan that Congress would have to vote on *in its entirety*, meaning members of Congress could not offer amendments to change it.

Without these guardrails, members of Congress would inevitably kill any deficit reduction plan with “poison pill” amendments that feature politically toxic provisions that would make it impossible for a majority of members to support the plan.

America simply will not solve our debt problem unless Washington is forced to do so with a process that requires Democrats and Republicans to develop a plan that puts everything on the table—from what and how we spend to what and how we tax.

GET AMERICA'S ECONOMY FIRING ON ALL CYLINDERS

From 1947 to 2003, America's economy grew at an average of 3.5 percent each year. For the last 20 years, it has grown at only 1.9 percent per year. If the US economy started growing closer to the rate we saw in the 50 years after World War II, it would create trillions in additional tax revenue and make every budget problem we have easier to solve.

IDEA 4

Congress owes it to the American people to pass a budget every year, and to do it on time.

The Constitution makes it clear: “No money shall be drawn from the Treasury but in Consequence of Appropriations made by Law.” In other words, Congress *has* to pass a budget and appropriate funds for the federal government; otherwise, the whole thing shuts down.

But the vast majority of the time, Congress fails to complete this basic task. Since 1974, Washington has passed a budget and spending bills on time only four times, and it has not done so at all this century. When Congress doesn’t pass a budget on time, they instead pass slapdash temporary measures called continuing resolutions or end-of-year “omnibus” spending packages that leave almost no time for members of Congress to even read the bills or ask important questions like:

- Why are we spending this money?
- Is this or that program actually effective?
- Would we be better off spending less money here and more money over there?

By law, Congress is supposed to pass a joint budget resolution each year to guide spending, followed by 12 spending bills to actually authorize it. If the required spending bills are not passed, it can lead to a government shutdown, affecting millions of citizens and public services.

Over a decade ago, No Labels first proposed a simple fix to this problem called “No Budget, No Pay,” which says that if Congress doesn’t pass the required annual budget and spending bills on time, members should not be paid until they do.

It was a good idea then and it’s a good idea now.

IDEA 5

Our leaders must take action to get health-care costs under control to give all Americans access to quality health care and reduce our debt.

Here are actual costs that appeared on actual bills of patients in US hospitals: \$15 for a single Tylenol pill, \$10 for the little paper cup that holds the pill, \$53 for a pair of latex gloves, and \$800 for a sterile water IV bag.

Add it all up and here is what you get: the US spends over 60 percent more on health care per person than any other developed country, even as we have worse outcomes for critical measures like life expectancy, chronic disease, and infant mortality. The average cost of employer-provided health insurance for a family of four is now over \$22,000. That's one-third of an average family's household income.

This puts a huge strain on American families and government budgets alike because the federal government pays for over one-third of all health-care expenditures in the US.

There's no easy fix for this cost problem because there are so many causes, including:

NO ONE KNOWS WHAT ANYTHING COSTS

Three out of four US adults don't know of a resource to help them compare costs among providers.

DRUG PRICES ARE TOO HIGH

Americans pay 256 percent more for prescription drugs than residents of any developed country.

ADMINISTRATIVE OVERLOAD FOR DOCTORS

American doctors spend more time filling out paperwork than seeing patients.

“DEFENSIVE MEDICINE”

Several studies suggest that medical malpractice suits and defensive medicine—the practice of doctors ordering unnecessary tests and treatments to protect themselves from litigation—cost in excess of \$100 billion each year.

There are several different ways Washington could help reduce the price of health care—which would save money for individual Americans as well as government insurance programs like Medicare.

Including:

Change how Medicare and Medicaid pay. Despite some recent reforms, Medicare still mostly pays for the volume of care delivered (the number of tests and services) rather than the value provided (improving patient health). Washington should experiment more with different fee schedules to make Medicare more efficient. One example could be adding bonuses for physicians who can meet a certain target budget for an episode of care. Medicaid needs the same kinds of forward-looking reforms. Because states control how Medicaid is run and the federal government pays most of the bills, no one has had both the desire and the ability to keep costs in check. States could do it, but they don't really care; the federal government might want to do it, but it can't.

Allow Medicare to negotiate the prices of more medicines. (The 2022 Inflation Reduction Act allowed negotiation for a small group of medicines beginning in 2026.) The US pharmaceutical industry spends a lot on research and development, and there's no guarantee they will discover new medicines: only 12 percent of drugs entering clinical trials make it to market. But seven of the top 10 pharmaceutical companies also spend more on sales and marketing than they do on R&D, which suggests these companies could afford to charge lower prices without harming innovation.

Reduce the rebates paid to pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs), who often serve as the middlemen between drug companies and insurance companies. PBMs serve a purpose, but these rebates—which encourage manufacturers to raise drug prices—have risen sharply over the past few years. One study shows that manufacturer rebates to PBMs increased from \$39.7 billion in 2012 to \$89.5 in 2016, the last year for which reliable data was available.

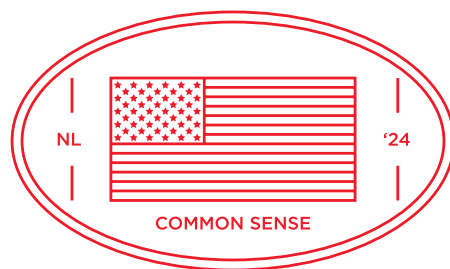
Make it harder for drug companies to game the patent system for biologic drugs, which are produced from living organisms as opposed to chemical compounds. These drugs now account for

nearly 40 percent of all prescription drug spending in the US even though they are only used by 2 percent of the population.

The companies behind these drugs—which are often used to treat serious autoimmune and other disorders—can get up to 20 years of patent protection before facing competition from “biosimilars,” the generic versions of biologics. However, some biologic manufacturers appear to be gaming the patent system by filing for dozens or even hundreds of new patents right before their medicine is about to lose its patent exclusivity, covering minor changes (like changing the dosage) that don't represent any real breakthroughs but do have the effect of discouraging biosimilars from coming to market.

Stop the baseless lawsuits. According to the American Medical Association, over two-thirds of medical malpractice suits are easily dismissed, and doctors win the vast majority of the cases that do proceed to trial—indicating that these suits lack merit. Washington could pursue real tort reform that makes it harder to file frivolous medical lawsuits and cap jury awards.

Ensure real price transparency. In early 2018, the US Department of Health and Human Services directed all hospitals to post prices for all their services. Hospitals are now doing it, but the information is often useless. A January 2019 *New York Times* story showed procedures from various hospital price lists: \$42,569 for a cardiology procedure described as “HC PTC CLOS PAT DUCT ART” from Vanderbilt University Medical Center and \$9,818 for “Embolza Protect 5.5” from Baptist Health in Miami. In other words, complete gibberish to anyone who isn't a medical professional. Health care is complicated, and hospital prices and services will never be as simple as a McDonald's menu. But real price transparency that would allow informed consumers to shop for the best and most affordable care means lists of prices and services that everyone can understand.



The background of the entire page is a stylized, monochromatic blue-tinted image of the United States flag. The stripes and stars are visible, creating a textured, wavy effect. The text is overlaid on this background.

CHAPTER
5

IMMIGRATION AND BORDER SECURITY

IDEA 6

America is a nation of laws, so we must immediately regain control of our borders and stop releasing migrants who enter America illegally into the country.

America's border security problem can be described simply: it's too easy for unauthorized individuals to sneak across the border and too easy for migrants to claim asylum when they don't qualify for it.

In fiscal year 2022, the US Border Patrol encountered over 2.3 million migrants trying to illegally cross the US-Mexico border. That's the most on record. That same year, our Border Patrol:

- *Encountered 6,000 people every day trying to cross our border illegally.*
- *Seized over 14,000 pounds of fentanyl, a drug that's killing more Americans every year than guns and car crashes combined.*
- *Fielded a record-breaking 250,000 requests for asylum.*

Our immigration system is a disaster that is straining US communities and creating desperate and unsafe conditions for migrants coming to America. The only ones who benefit from America's immigration status quo are the drug cartels that make billions each year trafficking people and lethal drugs across our border.

To secure the border, America needs much more manpower. There are fewer than 17,000 agents stationed on the 1,954-mile-long US-Mexico border. That means each mile of the border, on average, has fewer than nine Border Patrol agents. Protecting our border also requires better security technology like cameras and sensors, improved data sharing between agencies, and even physical fortifications in some areas.

We also need to reform our broken asylum system. It is being abused by migrants who don't meet the legal requirements for asylum, which according to US law is a "well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion."

About 55 percent of asylum seekers during President Biden's tenure have had their claims denied for not meeting those standards, but most people who claim asylum are released into the US and told to wait for a court hearing that takes, on average, over four years to happen. Many never show up for their eventual day in court.

This isn't working for Americans and it certainly isn't working for the asylum seekers, as they aren't authorized to work in America while waiting for a hearing. That forces them into the underground economy where they aren't paying taxes and can be exploited by unethical employers.

Meanwhile, there are nearly 790,000 pending asylum cases and only 650 immigration judges hearing those cases. Just to clear the existing backlog, each judge would have to decide over 1,200 cases. That's a tall order considering the average judge completed only 87 cases in fiscal year 2022.

So America needs more immigration judges, but we also need them dealing with fewer cases. That's why the commonsense majority approves of asylum process changes like former President Trump's so-called Remain in Mexico policy or President Biden's similar rule, which requires most asylum seekers to wait outside the US until a judge hears their case.

IDEA 7

America is also a nation of immigrants, so we should create a path to citizenship for the Dreamers and a plan to attract more legal immigrants, because more hardworking taxpayers means lower inflation and faster economic growth.

Most of us have read the famous inscription on the Statue of Liberty that says America has always welcomed “your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free.”

Those beautiful words speak to why so many immigrants want to come to America and to the opportunities our country can provide for them. But we sometimes forget how much immigrants do for all the Americans who are already here.

The vast majority of immigrants come here to work and to pursue the American Dream. They do the essential jobs that must be done on our farms, in our factories, and in our communities. And they bring an unrivaled spirit of entrepreneurship: almost half of America’s Fortune 500 companies were founded by immigrants or their children, and immigrants are twice as likely to start a new business as a native-born American.

This is why it is so important for our next president and Congress to address immigration in two ways.

ATTRACT MORE LEGAL IMMIGRANTS WHO WILL BE HARDWORKING TAXPAYERS

America doesn't have enough people to do the work that needs to be done. As of April 2023, there were nearly twice as many unfilled jobs (10.1 million) as there were in 2015. Ninety-one percent of construction firms had projects delayed due to worker shortages according to a 2022 poll by the Association of General Contractors, while farmers are growing less and seeing more crops die without enough workers to help.

More unfilled jobs are bad for businesses and consumers: lower output, higher costs, more inflation, longer wait times.

The pandemic exacerbated these problems, but they've been building for a long time:

- *The labor force participation rate—the proportion of the working-age population that's either employed or seeking a job—plateaued in the 1990s and has trended downward since then. As of May 2023, the participation rate stands at 62.5 percent—a low not seen since the 1970s.*
- *It will only get more challenging from here because:*
  - *Our population is aging. By 2040, one in five Americans is projected to be over 65 years old. Soon, there will be too few taxpayers taking care of too many Social Security and Medicare recipients.*
  - *Our population could soon start shrinking. American women are having too few children, on average, to keep the population—and workforce—growing.*

America remains the number-one dream destination for immigrants from across the world, and that is a huge advantage for us over countries like China, which faces its own aging workforce, but foreign workers have little interest in moving there.

We should double down on attracting hard workers from around the world to join the American experiment and contribute to our world-class economy.

PROVIDE A PATH TO CITIZENSHIP FOR THE DREAMERS

Across America, there are roughly two million people who were brought to the US illegally as children by their parents.

They're called Dreamers, and most American citizens think they're every bit as American as someone who was born here.

- *The median Dreamer is 24 years old and has been here since they were six years old.*
- *More than 95 percent of Dreamers attend or graduated from an American high school, 250,000 are in college, and hundreds if not thousands have served in our armed forces.*
- *Nine in 10 Dreamers speak only English or speak it well or very well.*
- *Thirty thousand are health-care workers—that's enough to staff more than 100 average-sized Veterans Affairs health facilities.*

For years, Dreamers have lived in limbo because Congress hasn't created a permanent path for them to stay here or become citizens, which has forced successive White Houses and the federal courts to throw together ad hoc solutions that let them stay temporarily.

It's just common sense that the White House and Congress should pass legislation that lets Dreamers stay permanently. But American citizenship is a privilege, not a right, so to become a citizen, Dreamers should need to:

- *Have a clean criminal record.*
- *Be pursuing an education, working, or serving in the military.*
- *Enter a process that takes five years before they can apply for citizenship.*

CHAPTER
6

PUBLIC SAFETY

IDEA 8

Public safety is the
highest priority.
We need to fix the
criminal justice
system so career
criminals can't keep
committing crimes.

In communities large and small, urban and rural, red and blue, Americans are worried about the surge in crime.

They are right to be. Motor vehicle theft incidents increased 59 percent from 2019 to 2022 in 35 cities of various sizes. In 2021, there were 26,031 reported homicides, a 56 percent spike compared to 2019, while the aggravated assault rate rose by 12 percent from 2019 to 2020.

Although crime in America hasn't reached the epidemic levels seen in the past—violent crime is still down 44 percent since the 1990s, for example—it is unequivocally on the rise in far too many places across America.

Crime is a scourge anywhere, but the heaviest burden falls on low-income communities and people of color. To cite just one example, although Black Americans are just 14 percent of the population, they represent 32 percent of all violent crime victims and 54 percent of homicide victims.

One major driver of crime in American communities is the career criminals who victimize people over and over. A 2021 study by the National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform estimated that roughly 500 people are responsible for driving up to 70 percent of all gun violence in Washington, DC. And New York City's police department reported that nearly a third of all shoplifting cases in the city in 2022 involved just 327 people who collectively were arrested and rearrested more than 6,000 times.

Crime in America is increasingly organized and directed across state and country lines too.

According to some estimates, gangs are responsible for 75 percent of violent crime in Atlanta and the majority of shootings in New York City. Meanwhile, the leading suppliers of fentanyl, heroin, and methamphetamine in the US are all international drug cartels, contributing to the hundreds of thousands of overdose deaths in America in recent years. Even shoplifting is becoming organized now. "Organized retail crime" features sophisticated operations where teams will steal from stores and then sell the goods online, on the black market, or internationally, costing the US economy over \$100 billion and nearly 700,000 jobs in 2021.

Unfortunately, some local district attorneys haven't been enforcing the law with the rigor required to keep career criminals off the streets. In other instances, well-intentioned bail reform efforts that sought to address a real problem (innocent people being kept in jail because they didn't have enough money to post bail) have in practice prevented judges from detaining dangerous criminal suspects or habitual offenders.

These enforcement problems need to be solved mostly at the state and local level, but our next president should ensure the Justice Department and federal law enforcement agencies focus on and put more resources behind disrupting organized crime and coordinating more closely with state and local law enforcement.

IDEA 9

America needs more and better community policing to keep people safe.

It's a simple equation: the more cops patrolling a given community, the less crime that community experiences. A 2021 study found that a 10 percent decrease in police presence results in a 7 percent increase in crime and adding a single police officer to a city can prevent anywhere from 0.06 to 0.1 homicides, meaning that as few as 10 extra cops can save a life that would otherwise be cut short.

But our nation's police departments are facing a desperate shortage of manpower, in part due to pressure from activists to defund police departments and to difficulty recruiting qualified candidates.

But good policing goes beyond manpower. Local police departments need to do more to win the community trust effective policing is built on. Local citizens need to feel like the police are there to protect them, not prey on them, and community policing needs to be practiced with the same spirit of constructive engagement in Harlem as it is in the Hamptons.

Current police training models are often misfocused, too short, and out of alignment with both community safety priorities and research about what works to minimize bias and use of force. Seventy-one percent of police agencies surveyed by the Police Executive Research Forum in a

2020 study devoted less than 5 percent of their total budget to recruit training, which is why US police officers get many fewer hours of training, on average, than those in other developed countries. Smart training programs that emphasize de-escalation and stress recognition have been linked to significant declines in use-of-force incidents, officer injuries, and citizen complaints.

This kind of smart, well-funded, effective officer training is still in too short supply. So too are actual police officers. Dallas is short by 550 officers, Atlanta is looking for another 250, and Seattle needs another 100 detectives.

Washington could help by providing more funding to help localities hire and retain police and invest in effective training.

Another compelling idea: the federal government could consider establishing police service academies in line with military academies like West Point to ensure the best of the best are being sent to help patrol our communities.

IDEA 10

Americans have a constitutional right to own guns, but society also has a responsibility to keep dangerous weapons away from dangerous people.

Americans have always had the right to bear arms, and most Americans today support Second Amendment rights.

But Washington has also long exercised the right to put reasonable limits on gun ownership, beginning with the National Firearms Act of 1934, which outlawed the machine guns that organized crime members were using to cause mayhem on American streets.

In 2021, nearly 49,000 Americans lost their lives to firearms, a level of carnage unparalleled in any other developed country. Two commonsense measures can make a difference.

One measure would prohibit gun purchases among people under 21. Young people are the most likely victims and perpetrators of gun violence in America, especially the mass shootings that terrify every American parent. Research has shown that more 18 and 19-year-olds are arrested for homicide than people of any other ages, and

scientists' growing knowledge of the brain tells us that full mental maturity isn't reached until the mid-twenties, yet our laws permit individuals to purchase potent weapons like AR-15 rifles as early as age 18. A "No Gun Purchases Under 21" law wouldn't bar parents from buying guns for their children and could include exceptions for any head of household under 21 or members of the US military or public safety employees. But raising the age for gun purchases can save lives.

The second measure would be to enable universal background checks by closing the notorious gun show loophole to ensure all firearms are sold with the same level of scrutiny required for licensed gun dealers. Right now, nearly a quarter of all firearms in the US are purchased without a background check. Washington also needs to close another significant gap in the federal background check system known as the Charleston Loophole. Under existing law, gun purchases can proceed automatically after three business days if a federal background check has not been completed. But in 2015, a mass murderer killed nine people at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, with a handgun he purchased after the three-day waiting period, but before his federal background check could be completed. Had the background check been completed, he would not have been able to purchase a gun because he had a previous drug conviction. There is already bipartisan support in Congress for legislation that would close the Charleston loophole by requiring 10 days to complete a federal background check instead of three.

Universal background checks have been shown to reduce homicides by approximately 15 percent in states where they've been implemented. Considering that over 26,000 people died by homicide in the US in 2022, that works out to nearly 4,000 people who might still be alive today if America had universal background checks.

CHAPTER
7

AMERICA'S YOUTH

IDEA II

As a matter of decency, dignity, and morality, no child in America should go to bed or go to school hungry.

In America, no child should worry about missing their next meal. But that was the case for children in 2.5 million households at some point in 2021—that's one in every 16 families. In another 2.5 million households, children ate while their parents went hungry. That includes nearly a quarter of all single-mother families.

This is a travesty for these kids and for our country, because when you don't give a young child enough food, it harms their body and brain both in the short term and the long term.

Even though Washington must reduce spending in many areas, there are a few essential areas where it needs to invest more. This is one of those areas, and the next president and Congress should significantly expand funding or tax incentives to ensure young children receive the proper nutrition they need to grow and thrive.

UNDERNOURISHED CHILDREN

- *Make smaller gains in math and reading, repeat grades more, and are less likely to graduate from high school, which means they're more likely to end up in prison.*
- *Become more prone to heart disease, respiratory issues, autoimmune disease, and cancer.*
- *Disrupt classrooms more, hurting their own and other students' education.*

IDEA 12

Every child in America should have the right to a high-quality education. No child should be forced to go to a failing school.

Access to high-quality education has long been a foundational promise from the US government to our citizens. When the school system works, America is stronger: workers are more productive, companies are more innovative, and all of us are healthier, wealthier, and safer.

But this promise is not being kept in too many communities, especially urban ones. Take New York City, Chicago, and Los Angeles, which spend the first, fifth, and sixth most per pupil on their public-school students, but 37, 39, and 33 percent of their eighth graders respectively can't even read at the basic level. Overall, America spends more on education per school-aged child than any country in the world, with worse results.

Because public schools are funded mostly by local property taxes, wealthier areas tend to have better schools. In fact, houses near schools with an A+ rating are four times more expensive than houses near schools rated D or worse. Meanwhile, average private school tuition is \$15,650 per year for high school and \$11,200 for elementary school, and voucher programs are often not enough to make these schools accessible for all families.

Prices this high give too many low-income families no choice but to send their children to a failing or underresourced local school. That's why more governors—both Democrats and Republicans—have recently supported the expansion of education savings accounts, vouchers, and tax credit scholarships that provide parents with more choice about where to send their kids to school.

Public charter schools can also offer an alternative. Not long ago, leading Democrats and Republicans supported them, including the chancellors of big school districts in New York and Washington, DC, as well as former presidents Barack Obama and George W. Bush. It's time to rebuild this bipartisan consensus, because students in well-run charter schools—especially Black, Hispanic, and low-income students—learn more than their peers. And traditional public schools perform better when there's a charter school nearby—the closer the charter, the bigger the benefit.

But America's charter schools don't have enough room. In Texas, there are 77,000 names on wait lists for enrolling in charter schools (although some students might be listed twice). Massachusetts has 21,000, and Washington, DC, has nearly 8,000.

Despite the success of charter schools, and the clear demand for them, only 13 percent of school districts across the US have at least one charter school. On balance, America's commonsense majority supports public schools, but we like competition too. That's why the next president should extend a lifeline to students trapped in failing traditional public schools and commit America to the ambitious goal of opening 10,000 public charter schools across the country in the next 10 years—more than doubling the current amount.

IDEA 13

America should make a national commitment that our students will be number one in reading and math globally within a decade.

COVID-19 set American students back a generation. Test scores for K–12 math and reading are the worst in over two decades. But even before COVID-19, our kids were falling behind.

Compared to students in 78 other countries, US students are thirty-first in math, thirteenth in reading, and eighteenth in science. Chinese students are number one in all three subjects.

If America wants to maintain our lead in the technologies of tomorrow, we'd better spend less time on waging culture wars in our schools and more time focusing on promoting, rewarding, and reaching for excellence.

Even though most K–12 education is funded and controlled locally, a president can have a galvanizing and organizing effect on the country when they set a big goal. Think of President John F. Kennedy announcing in 1962 that America would send a person to the moon by the end of the decade.

Our next president should send a signal to us and the world that America is embarking on a national goal to make our students number one in math and reading within a decade.

IDEA 14

Financial literacy is essential for all Americans striving to get ahead.

Almost six in 10 Americans say they are living paycheck to paycheck. Inflation is arguably the biggest driver of this insecurity, but far too many Americans also lack the knowledge and tools to become financially independent and get ahead.

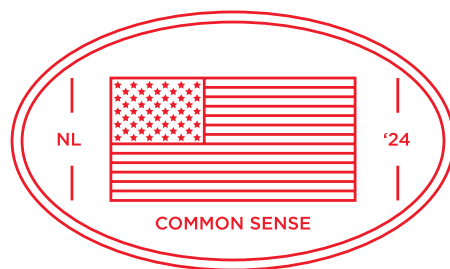
Financial literacy is a big problem in the US. Over 40 percent of people failed a 2022 financial literacy test on concepts like credit, interest rates, and risk management. The costs add up: a lack of financial literacy can cost someone hundreds or thousands of dollars each year as they access financial products they don't understand and are hit with late fees and interest charges they don't expect. The problem starts early for many people, as only 14 states require personal finance classes in high school.

Even when Americans are equipped with the right financial knowledge, they may lack the tools to build up their finances, namely a credit score. Your credit score is a number that tells lenders how reliable you are, but there's a catch: you (generally) need a credit card to build up the score.

That's why credit scores solidify disparities. Black and Hispanic communities, on average, have worse credit scores than white communities, and younger Americans have worse scores than older ones. Over half—54 percent—of Black adults have a bad score or no score at all.

The implications are enormous: if you have a low credit score, it's harder or sometimes impossible to get a loan to buy a car or a home, finance an education, or start a business.

To improve access to financial literacy, states could require the completion of a personal finance course as a condition of high school graduation. The US Department of Education could provide grants or incentives to help make the course available. To make it easier to build up credit scores, Washington could mandate or incentivize things like counting rent payments toward your score, limiting the inclusion of medical debt, and prohibiting the use of credit scores in many hiring decisions.



CHAPTER
8



ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY

IDEA 15

An all-of-the-above energy strategy is the best way to lower prices for American families.

Most Americans want clean air and water, are concerned about climate change, and support the idea of Washington making significant investments to spur the adoption of cleaner energy sources.

But what concerns them most today about energy is how much it costs them to fuel their cars and heat and cool their homes.

In 2022, the average US household spent well over \$4,000 on gasoline, up from \$2,800 the year prior. Electricity prices in the US are at an all-time high, and as a result, 20 million families—one of every six—were behind on their utility bills at the end of 2022.

This is why most Americans do not support government restricting access to fossil fuel energy at a moment when we don't yet have enough affordable and reliable renewable energy to replace it. They believe that fossil fuel energy is absolutely essential to our economy now and for the foreseeable future, and they are right.

Even though renewable energy deployment has grown rapidly around the world, so has the demand for energy, which is why fossil fuels still account for about 80 percent of all the world's energy use—essentially the same proportion they accounted for 30 years ago.

When Washington tries to prohibit exploration of America's fossil fuel resources or discourage investment in the sector, all it does is weaken our country and strengthen other oil- and gas-producing countries like Russia that will gladly meet the world's growing demand for energy.

Meanwhile, neither Democrats nor Republicans in Washington have done enough to champion the expansion of carbon-free nuclear power, which is more reliable than wind and solar and cleaner than oil and gas. Despite the fact that US nuclear facilities are among the safest industrial facilities in the world—and newer reactor designs could make them even safer—the number of nuclear reactors in the US hasn't increased in three decades.

Most Americans want an all-of-the-above approach to our energy challenges, and that's exactly what the next president should deliver.

IDEA 16

To have cleaner energy, America needs to be able to build clean energy technologies.

As America accelerates our shift to cleaner energy sources, we should not trade what was once an overreliance on Middle Eastern oil for an overreliance on the foreign countries that control the metals, minerals, and refineries needed for the energy technologies of tomorrow.

But that is where we are headed.

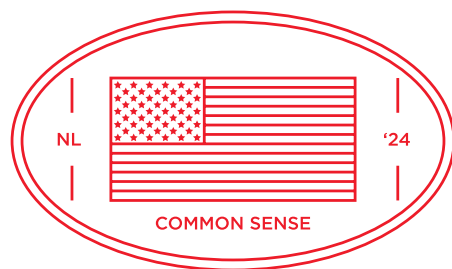
According to the US Department of Energy, China controls the production and refining of 80 percent of the rare earth metals that are key to direct drives in wind turbines, 60 percent of the lithium refining capacity needed for electric vehicles and battery storage, and 100 percent of graphite processing needed for battery anodes. Then there's the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which produces 70 percent of the world's cobalt, about half of which is actually controlled by Chinese companies.

What's more, almost half of America's uranium (the fuel for nuclear power) comes from Russia and Kazakhstan.

Washington has lately made some welcome steps toward strengthening US clean energy supply chains, and the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023—which averted the debt ceiling crisis—has some small measures to make it easier to build energy infrastructure in the US.

But on balance, federal, state, and local governments still make it much too hard to do the mining in America that would provide the essential minerals and metals we need to build clean energy technologies and to build the transmission lines, distribution systems, and other infrastructure we need to deliver energy to homes and businesses.

That's why improving the regulatory and permitting process for how we build things in America needs to be at the top of the next president's agenda.



CHAPTER
9

PROTECTING AMERICA

IDEA 17

America should make it a national priority to have the most efficient, most effective, and most powerful military in the world to protect democracy at home and abroad.

Republican president Ronald Reagan believed America could achieve “peace through strength,” warning that “war comes not when the forces of freedom are strong, but when they are weak.” Four decades earlier, Democratic president Franklin Roosevelt said that America must be the “great arsenal of democracy,” with a military force “so strong that by its very existence, it will keep the threat of war far away from our shores.”

Today, most Americans understand there is growing danger in the world and, like Reagan and Roosevelt, believe in the importance of American military power. They want Washington to invest more in the military so we will be prepared to fight a two-front war against Russia and China if that is necessary, even as we all hope it never is.

But America is not adequately prepared. By most measures, America still has the strongest military in the world. However, our lead is shrinking. We may not have enough ships to deter Russia and China

and to patrol the Pacific and critical sea lanes, while the Army and other branches are missing their recruiting goals. America’s military spending as a share of our economy is less than half what it was 40 years ago.

Meanwhile, China actually has more manpower, ships, and submarines than the US. A recent war game showed that Chinese hypersonic missiles could sink American aircraft carriers.

Our government shouldn’t just blindly dump more money into the Pentagon—especially amid reports from early 2023 that military contractors have been overcharging and billions have been wasted on unnecessary or ineffective weapons systems.

So America undoubtedly needs to spend more to protect our security in a dangerous world, but we need to do so with much less waste and with *zero* corruption.

IDEA 18

A world led by America is safer than a world led by Russia and China would be.

Since World War II, the US-led world order has seen the longest period of major power peace in modern history. We built a system of rules and alliances that deepened trade ties, enhanced security, and helped lift millions out of poverty.

Russia and China are intent on upending this order. Listen to Chinese President Xi Jinping, who accuses the West of “all-round containment, encirclement and suppression against us,” or Russian President Vladimir Putin, who says, “America has nothing to

offer the world except domination.” Listen to them both say Russia and China are forging a “friendship without limits,” and it’s obvious they aim to create a new, more dangerous and less stable order where they can bully other countries into submission.

Americans don’t think we’re a perfect country, but most think we have been—and continue to be—a force for good in the world. Our next president should govern with that same assumption.

IDEA 19

It's in America's interest to work with our allies to advance our mutual interests.

If you agree, as most Americans do, that adversaries like Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea are trying to challenge or undermine American influence globally, then you should agree that it helps America to have friends.

Take America's European allies and partners as an example. With their support, we've built an incredible security network across much of the Northern Hemisphere, particularly through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which now includes 31 countries. NATO is premised on the idea of collective defense: if one member is attacked, it's considered an attack on every member. That means when America is attacked—as we were on 9/11—NATO comes to our defense. NATO also makes adversaries think twice about violating the sovereignty of any NATO member, because they know if they do, they're picking a fight with 30 other countries.

In 2023, NATO members collectively maintained approximately 20,800 military aircraft, 2,400 ships (including sixteen aircraft carriers), and 1.03 million combined ground combat vehicles (including 12,500 tanks).

Beyond Europe, key US allies like Japan, South Korea, Israel, and Australia have their own formidable firepower to defend our mutual interests. Those four countries alone provide 2,175,500 personnel, 4,000 aircraft, 420 ships,

and 350,000 combined ground combat vehicles, helping defend the vital Indo-Pacific and Middle East regions.

These alliances are built on more than collective military strength—they're about advancing our shared values and economic interests. Our allies and partners push back against powers like Russia and China that challenge the rules-based global order. We work together to exert political, economic, and diplomatic pressure on rivals, using the leverage of multinational and intergovernmental organizations like the World Trade Organization to promote human rights and the rule of law.

In every community across America, there are jobs and businesses selling American-made products and services all over the world. In 2022, US exports to NATO countries plus Japan, South Korea, Israel, and Australia totaled nearly one trillion dollars. That equates to millions of American jobs in sectors ranging from manufacturing and construction to engineering and energy.

America is a sovereign country, and the commonsense majority wants our leaders to prioritize the interests of America. But in a world that is increasingly interconnected, the US can't afford to go it alone. Our alliances and partnerships aren't just nice-to-haves; they are critical components of our national security, economic prosperity, and global leadership.

IDEA 20

America should lead the world in the development of ethical artificial intelligence.

In 2023, with the release of large language models like OpenAI's ChatGPT, Americans were forced to reckon with the awesome and alarming possibilities of AI, which has already proven its ability to ace the bar exam and spread convincing false images, voices, and videos across the web.

This is just the beginning of the disruption. AI will affect many of our jobs, making us more productive and creating new jobs, but at the same time making some jobs obsolete. It could help solve many problems—enhancing our ability to cure diseases, combat climate change, and fight terrorism—while worsening others, like polarization, privacy concerns, and the spread of misinformation.

AI-integrated war systems also have the potential to significantly accelerate the pace of decision-making on the battlefield. At the same time, AI introduces fresh dangers, like the possibility that AI decision-making could proceed faster than humans can oversee it.

So far, America has been the leader in AI breakthroughs. A study from the Paulson Institute found that nearly 60 percent of top-tier AI

researchers are employed at American universities and companies and that 18 of the 25 most productive AI research institutions are in the US. Our AI research network benefits from top talent but also from a more open regulatory environment than places like Europe, where multiple governments have already sought to put the brakes on AI development until stricter regulations can be implemented.

Some AI innovators and thinkers are so concerned by the technology's implications that they've signed letters calling for a pause on all AI development until proper guardrails to guide its development can be put in place. However, there is little precedent for any embargo on the advancement of science.

That is why it is so important for America to remain the pacesetter in AI development, because China is eager to surpass the US and implement its own vision for the technology. China also appears to be planning offensive cyberoperations with AI. In June 2023, the US government's lead cybersecurity

official called Chinese cyberespionage and sabotage the “defining threat” of our time. While US government and tech leaders are trying to spur conversations and develop frameworks to ensure AI is developed for ethical purposes, the Chinese Communist Party has already used its AI advances to conduct unprecedented levels of surveillance and repression of the Chinese people.

As a first step in tackling the AI challenge, the next president should create a commission to handle two big objectives: ensuring America remains the world leader in its development and ensuring that development puts the world on a path toward ethical, safe AI.

Such a national commission on artificial intelligence could be modeled on the President’s Council on Bioethics (created by President George W. Bush) and the National Bioethics Advisory Commission (created by President Bill Clinton), which studied and advised on the implications of medical advances like cloning and stem cell research.

It could also build on bipartisan legislation in the Senate to establish an office of global competition analysis to regularly evaluate how America stacks up regarding AI research compared to other nations to help guide US policy, determine where public AI research dollars could best complement private sector research, and protect our competitive edge.

Artificial intelligence is going to change everything, so let’s ensure that the country that values human rights and freedom leads in the development of AI.

CHAPTER
10

DEMOCRACY



IDEA 21

National service could help heal America's political divide.

Polarization is up, civic engagement is down, and blue America and red America seem farther apart than ever. Somehow, people need to see that we are all Americans first and foremost. When people start thinking their neighbors are enemies because they think differently, that's when democracies fall apart.

Ask most any member of the US military and they'll tell you how quickly class, race, gender, and religious divides fall away when you know you're all part of the same mission and are all responsible for one another's well-being.

A new program of universal national service is one way for the next president to start healing the divisions in our nation and helping Americans see how much we have in common with one another.

It could require or incentivize one million young people to devote one year of their lives to service by serving in the military, working as a teacher, building up disadvantaged communities, or helping in countless other ways.

National service wouldn't be a panacea, but in bringing together Americans of different creeds, backgrounds, and political beliefs to solve problems, it would remind us that what unites us as Americans is so much greater than what divides us.

IDEA 22

Our children should have a civics education that will make them informed, engaged, and active participants in our democratic system.

America is the oldest continuous democracy in the world. Generations of Americans have sustained this great experiment because they had pride in our country and because they understood and embraced the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

But America is enduring a crisis of confidence.

Just 38 percent of Americans say they are “extremely proud” to be American, and the sentiment is even worse among young people. Only a quarter of them feel this way.

Many Americans also don’t know the basics of our federal government or the Constitution. Half of young adults rarely or never participate in civic or political activities, and the US ranks twenty-fourth in voter turnout among developed countries.

One reason why Americans have such a deficit of patriotism and of an understanding of our government is that only seven states require a yearlong civics course in high school, while 13 states do not require civics at all. Navigating civic life in America is already hard enough; it’s much harder if you’ve never even learned the basics.

In our divided America, even patriotism has become a partisan issue. But it shouldn’t be. That’s why the next president should see to it that resources are available for every American high school to offer every student a yearlong stand-alone civics course so our students can understand why we should all be proud to be Americans.

IDEA 23

The public has the right to know. Political parties, social media companies, and government institutions should not be able to censor information they don't like.

The free flow of information is crucial for a free society. For a democracy to work, the people must have access to the whole truth and hear from all sides of the debate.

But governments, big corporations, and many social media platforms are increasingly colluding to shut down access to information they don't like. This goes well beyond censoring child pornography, terrorist videos, violent hate speech, or other content every decent person would reject.

The so-called Twitter Files, a series of whistleblower reports about Twitter's content moderation decisions over the last few years, confirmed Americans' worst suspicions.

The administrations of both Presidents Biden and Trump pressured Twitter and other platforms to ban their critics. In addition, Twitter secretly boosted or suppressed users and content based on those users' political views around issues like COVID and climate change, and the FBI and other agencies were proactively advising Twitter and other platforms to ban certain content.

It's but one example of a fast-growing and serious problem, and most Americans would support a ban on political parties and government institutions censoring online information unfavorable to them.

IDEA 24

The First Amendment to the US Constitution protects free speech. No American should face discrimination at school or at work because of their political views.

In America, you get to speak your mind.

The First Amendment says government can't censor your speech, and our society has always championed free expression. It's who we are, or at least it's who we were.

Today, too many Americans who go against conventional wisdom are met with discrimination, retaliation, and cancellation.

On college campuses—where uncomfortable ideas should be debated freely—40 percent of students feel afraid to disagree with a professor, and nearly a quarter report self-censoring “often” to avoid backlash. Over half of professors are afraid to lose their job for saying the wrong thing. In the workplace, about a quarter of Americans say they have recently faced bias for their political beliefs—more than double the amount in 2019.

It's just common sense: you shouldn't be denied an education or a living based on your opinions. Twenty-two million government employees already enjoy protection from being discriminated against for their political beliefs—it's time to give all Americans the same treatment.

IDEA 25

Every legal voter should have the right and the ability to vote, every legal vote should be counted, and every counted vote should be verified.

Poll after poll paints a deeply concerning picture of American democracy: just under half of Americans trust that election results are accurate. Skepticism of election integrity is more prevalent among Republicans, who think the 2020 presidential election was stolen (it wasn't, according to over 60 court cases—many overseen by judges appointed by former president Trump, that rejected the Trump campaign's stolen election charges after the 2020 elections), but a growing share of Democrats don't trust our election system either.

Here are three easy fixes to make voting both more accessible and more secure, which our next president could champion and states could implement if they chose:

- *Make it easier to vote by mail, which is how 40 percent of Americans voted in the 2020 election. One problem with mail-in voting: many state laws don't even allow election officials to start counting mail-in ballots until the polls close on Election Day, dragging out the race and creating space for conspiracy theories to run amok.*
- *States should let mail-in ballots be counted early, so votes could be counted within 24 hours of Election Day.*
- *Finally, every voter should need to have a valid ID. It can be too hard or cost prohibitive for elderly, rural, or low-income voters to get an ID. But the answer isn't to reject ID requirements; the answer is for every state to make it free and easy to get an ID.*

CHAPTER
II

EMPATHY AND EQUALITY

IDEA 26

America must strike a balance between protecting women's rights to control their own reproductive health and our society's responsibility to protect human life.

For everyone, everywhere, abortion is a deeply moral and personal issue that turns on a question on which we may never reach a certain answer:

When does life begin?

In the realm of politics, our elected leaders must find a sustainable and inevitably imperfect compromise that balances the belief of most Americans that women have a right to control their own reproductive health and our society's responsibility to protect human life.

In America's abortion debate, there is only one thing that can be said with certainty.

Most Americans do not support a total ban on abortion and most Americans do not support unlimited access to abortion at later stages of pregnancy.

The politics of abortion is complicated and so is the science. When Florida prohibited abortions beyond six weeks in early 2023, the bill's supporters cited the fact that today's ultrasounds can detect a fetal heartbeat as early as five or six weeks into a

pregnancy. Meanwhile, those arguing against more restrictive abortion laws note that they could force women to carry a nonviable fetus to term because some genetic testing to detect catastrophic birth defects can't be done until 15 to 20 weeks of pregnancy.

Although late-term abortions are one of the hottest flashpoints of the abortion debate, 94 percent of abortions in America are done before the fifteenth week of pregnancy.

Abortion is too important and complicated an issue to say it's common sense to pass a law—nationally or in the states—that draws a clear line at a certain stage of pregnancy.

But it is common sense that America will not find a sustainable abortion compromise most Americans can live with until we have more political leaders—especially a president—who don't seek to enflame and exploit our divisions on this issue but instead choose the path of empathy and respect.

IDEA 27

Every American deserves respect and freedom from discrimination.

When America was founded, a promise was made that citizens would enjoy full equality under the law.

It was a promise out of reach for too many Americans for far too long.

But over time, the arc of America, to borrow a phrase from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., did “bend toward justice.”

Slaves were emancipated. Women were given the right to vote. Then came the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin, and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, which outlawed discriminatory practices that were denying Black Americans the right to vote.

Later, gay marriage was enshrined as a right in federal law and the Supreme Court ruled that US civil rights laws protected gay, lesbian, and transgender Americans from workplace discrimination.

None of this progress was easy, but it was possible because Americans are fundamentally good people. It was possible because the vast majority of Americans reject racism, anti-Semitism, and hatred in all its forms.

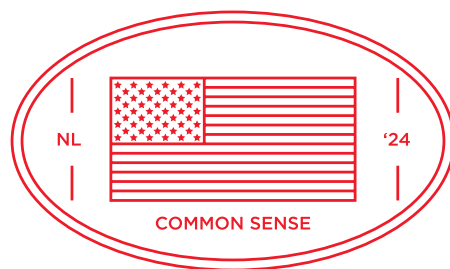
We don’t hear that enough from the forces of division in our politics and our media, but it’s true. We’re told Americans are consumed by hatred and intolerance, but even on the most divisive issues, the commonsense majority can point a clear way forward.

The latest contentious debate over transgender rights and discrimination is instructive.

Almost three-quarters of Americans:

- *Support laws that protect transgender individuals from discrimination in schools, work, and housing.*
- *Don’t want sexuality and gender issues taught to young children in elementary schools and do want fairness in women’s sports.*

If our leaders consider this controversial issue from a position of dignity, respect, and common sense, they can ensure all Americans have the full measure of respect and equality they deserve, while giving parents a say in when and how their kids learn about sensitive issues of gender and sexuality.



CHAPTER 12

OPPORTUNITY

IDEA 28

We should give small businesses the resources they need to grow and get rid of the rules standing in their way.

Over the last 25 years, two out of every three new jobs in the US were created by small businesses. These job creators are the backbone of many American communities, but Washington often piles on burdens that make it harder for them to grow.

Small businesses are hit particularly hard by regulatory compliance. Regulations cost small businesses over \$10,000 per employee—36 percent higher than the cost to larger businesses. Overall, small businesses pay 82 percent of all federal regulation costs, and the compliance burden can be even heavier at the local level. Opening a barbershop in an average American city, for example, requires 55 regulatory steps, interacting with eight different state and local agencies, and permits and fees costing up to \$14,000... just to cut some hair!

The federal government can do a lot more to help entrepreneurs start and grow local businesses. Providing a one-stop-shop online “road map” to help small business owners identify and navigate the web of federal, state, and local regulations would be a good start. But that’s just the beginning.

The federal Small Business Administration should work more closely with localities to study and cut burdensome regulations while upholding the rules that protect consumer safety and satisfaction.

The opportunity to create and grow small businesses is not shared equally across America. Minority-owned businesses have a tougher time getting access to credit and have loan denial rates three times as high as nonminority firms. Washington could help fix the problem by enhancing the Community Reinvestment Act, which provides incentives for banks to meet the credit needs of people in low- and moderate-income neighborhoods, to allow more funding to be funneled to start-up businesses.

Rural communities also lack opportunity. About 80 percent of all venture capital investment goes to 10 big cities, and two-thirds of federal R&D spending goes to just nine states plus Washington, DC. An expansion of the Rural Business Investment Program, which helps create job opportunities in rural areas by meeting the equity capital investment needs of rural businesses, could help.

IDEA 29

Members of the US military should be given the dignity and opportunity to put their skills to good use when they leave the service.

A US military medic is taught and qualified to patch wounds, treat infections, set broken bones, and deal with just about any other challenge a nurse would face in an emergency room.

But in many US states—which are in desperate need of doctors and nurses—military medics can’t get work as a nurse when they leave the service.

Why? Because these medics aren’t considered to have the right “credentials,” namely a college degree or professional certification or license, in the state where they want to work.

This is not just a problem for medics. The US military is full of truck drivers, mechanics, welders, and other talented specialists who receive world-class training and do their work with the utmost professionalism. But they too face barriers to employment when they leave the service. So do many other Americans with real-world know-how and skills who might only lack a college degree.

Many states have taken steps to cut some of the red tape that prevents US service members from putting their skills to good use. But America’s next president needs to take the lead in fixing these policies, which are unfair to service members and prevent our country from filling essential jobs.

To cite just one example, the National Council of State Boards of Nursing reports that about 100,000 registered nurses either retired or left the workforce over the past few years and another 610,388 plan to leave by 2027.

The men and women of the US military could fill some of these open roles and many others.

There are simple steps the president could take to make it easier for service members to apply their skills when they leave the service.

For instance, a president could mandate officially recognizing military training and experience to allow veterans to take the certificate assessment for civilian jobs without having to go through redundant training. Because licensing boards are often made up of self-interested members of an industry that benefit from denying licenses to competitors, the president could also use the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to sue state licensing boards for anticompetitive, anticonsumer behavior. The US Supreme Court allowed the FTC to sue the North Carolina dental licensing board in 2014. The next administration could follow suit in other states and industries.

A president could also push Congress to enact federal tax incentives encouraging states to work with schools to create more fast-track programs for veterans. These programs would fill in any missing training that veterans need to transition to civilian jobs.

Finally, the next president could build on the work done by many states to eliminate unnecessary

degree requirements for jobs and bolster apprenticeship programs. The president could set an example by eliminating these requirements for many executive branch jobs.

Together, these are the kind of steps that will open doors for more veterans and all Americans, not just those with college degrees.

IDEA 30

Building more homes in America will make housing more affordable for Americans.

There's a good chance your rent or mortgage payment is the biggest chunk in your budget and that it's only getting bigger. In the last 10 years, home prices increased almost twice as fast as wages. It's the same story for rent: tenants are now spending more of their income on rent than ever before.

Many factors make housing expensive, but one is pretty simple: we simply aren't building enough homes to keep up with the number of people who need them.

According to a recent study from Freddie Mac, the US has 3.8 million fewer homes than we need just to keep up with household formation. There aren't enough affordable places to rent or buy, especially the starter homes that have for generations offered a way for families to build wealth and get into (and stay in) the middle class.

Inadequate housing supply is a problem throughout the country, in large, small, urban, rural, and suburban communities. And there are two bipartisan proposals in Congress that the next president could get behind to make a dent in the problem. The Neighborhood Homes Investment Act would help spur more construction, particularly in distressed urban and rural areas, by creating a federal tax credit that covers the difference between the cost of building or renovating a home in these areas and the price they can be sold for. And the Affordable Housing Credit Improvement Act would support the financing of more housing by expanding both the number and size of low-income housing tax credits available in states nationwide.

A blue-tinted background image of the Statue of Liberty, showing the crown and face of the statue.

CHAPTER
13

CONCLUSION

It was July 1787, 11 years after Thomas Paine published *Common Sense* and four years after America had defeated the British in the Revolutionary War.

Delegates from each state (except Rhode Island) had come to Philadelphia for the US Constitutional Convention. But a gathering that had begun with so much promise was on the verge of collapse.

At issue was how to share power between the states.

Large states wanted population-based representation in the legislature, while smaller states wanted every state to share equal representation. The stalemate wasn't broken until two delegates from Connecticut—Roger Sherman and Oliver Ellsworth—came up with what would appropriately be called the Connecticut Compromise.

Under the deal, there would be a House of Representatives with delegates assigned according to population and a Senate in which every state would have two members. The divide between the small and large states was bridged, and soon after, a nation was born.

America's founders are often venerated for their rock-ribbed principles. Less discussed, but no less important, were their beliefs in the virtue of

cooperation and the understanding that democracy demands commonsense compromises between people with very different ideas about how to build a more perfect union.

These virtues seem dead in our politics today. But they're alive and well in the hearts and minds of most Americans. Each day in communities across the country, Americans identify difficult problems at home, at school, and at work and find commonsense ways to solve them. They don't ever get or expect 100 percent of what they want in their own lives and can't understand why so many of our politicians act as if they should.

Americans have the ability and the responsibility to demand a restoration of common sense in the 2024 election. No Labels' twenty-first-century version of *Common Sense* is the blueprint for how to do it.

This booklet—which represents the will of America's commonsense majority—offers a way to unite this country and bring us closer to solving the problems that have plagued us for far too long. It shows where most Americans want this nation to go.

Which presidential candidate will have the courage to take us there?

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