

The 2014 Agenda for Generational Equity

Executive Summary

Common Sense Action | June 2014



BIPARTISAN POLICY CENTER

ABOUT CSA

Created by and for Millennials, Common Sense Action (CSA) is a bipartisan organization that brings youth voices to the policymaking table to fight for generational equity. Generational Equity is the guarantee that the gateways of American opportunity are open as wide – if not wider – for Millennials as they were for our parents and grandparents. With active college chapters nationwide, CSA convenes young leaders from across the political spectrum to craft and advance solutions to the public policy issues so important to our generation that they transcend party lines.

ABOUT BPC

Founded in 2007 by former Senate Majority Leaders Howard Baker, Tom Daschle, Bob Dole, and George Mitchell, the Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC) is a non-profit organization that drives principled solutions through rigorous analysis, reasoned negotiation, and respectful dialogue. With projects in multiple issue areas, BPC combines politically balanced policymaking with strong, proactive advocacy and outreach.

DISCLAIMER

The findings and recommendations expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views or opinions of the Bipartisan Policy Center’s founders, its board of directors, its project leadership and its current staff.

A Call to Action

To our brothers and sisters, moms and dads, and grandmas and grandpas,

We need to have a conversation. And AGE is a conversation starter.

Right now, young Americans—those with the largest stake in America’s future—are getting the short end of the stick. Older generations are passing enormous bills down to our generation, and they are not investing enough in the foundations, skills, and opportunities to ensure that we—their kids and grandkids—can have as good of a life as they did. To make matters worse, older generations are more polarized and therefore Congress is more polarized than at any time since the Civil War. Political warfare has impeded pragmatic solutions that will preserve the American dream for our children.

Throughout history, we have seen one generation after another exceed the success of the generation before it. However, we are the first generation in our country’s history that may not even live as well as our parents. Our future prosperity is at risk not through decisions of our own, but because of decisions the current generation of leaders has refused to make.

It is clear: young Americans cannot afford to be bystanders for critical debates about our nation’s future when we have the most at stake.

Over the last year, hundreds of Millennials across the country have participated in Common Sense Action’s (CSA) deep exploration of our broken political system, the challenges facing Millennials and future generations, and the policy solutions to those challenges.

The Agenda for Generational Equity (AGE), which we release today, is our response. It is the first national and bipartisan policy agenda created by Millennials. It articulates a pragmatic path toward a more prosperous and just America. AGE and the agenda formulation process brings hundreds of young Americans, or Millennials, from both parties to the policymaking table on college campuses, in statehouses, and in Washington.

AGE is a new kind of agenda. Instead of creating a definitive ten-step, all-or-nothing plan, we offer a menu of policy options designed to advance Millennial priorities. Under each pillar, CSA outlines several policy-based goals that we hope to achieve. And under each goal, CSA outlines a menu of policy ideas that we support.

We do not expect that politicians will enact every single policy we recommend, but by emphasizing pragmatic policy ideas that fall between the Democratic 40-yard line and the Republican 40-yard line, we have created a menu of options to choose from that would make significant progress toward restoring our national fiscal health and expanding economic mobility. When combined with campus organizing, AGE is designed to make

political space for elected leaders to develop principled compromises, make solutions-first decisions, and keep America's promise to future generations.

AGE is only the first step in our process. It's what we do with the agenda that matters.

Therefore, AGE is more than just a wonky policy document. It is a manifesto for the Common Sense Action movement.

This is critical because Millennials don't have a microphone at the policymaking table to safeguard our future from a status quo of political gridlock. And frankly, we haven't organized to use the tools we have—namely, the right to vote. In the 2012 election, only 45 percent of the 46 million Americans aged 18-29 years old eligible to vote actually voted.¹ By contrast, 72 percent of the 39 million eligible seniors voted.² Even more alarmingly, 18-29-year-old voter turnout decreased by six percentage points from 2008 to 2012—while turnout among seniors increased by two percentage points.³ Until that changes and until Millennials start speaking up at the ballot box, elected officials will not have incentives to address the issues that most affect the Millennial generation—the cost of entitlements, high college costs, and the overall lack of investment in the future.

Fortunately, CSA is building a movement to do just that: to keep that American promise to future generations and ensure that not just we as a generation, but America itself, continues to prosper and be a leader to the world.

If we can organize, mobilize, and empower the largest, most networked, most diverse generation in U.S. history to support AGE, young people can impact our political process and policy debates to create lasting change.

Using AGE as a galvanizing vision for a better future, each of Common Sense Action's chapters have begun to pull Americans—on their campuses and in their communities—off the sidelines and into the political arena to pursue three primary objectives: advancing generational fairness, investing in Millennial mobility, and repairing politics. In just over two months of organizing, nearly 3,400 people endorsed this agenda before we even launched it.

Together, we imagine a world where the American promise to future generations is stronger than ever. We imagine a world where aspiring politicians run for office using the Agenda for Generational Equity as their platform, knowing that thousands of Millennials across the country will mobilize on their behalf. We imagine a world in which our leaders can be principled partisans but see benefit in crossing the aisle to make bipartisan progress. We imagine a world where the gateways of opportunity are open ever wider for future generations of Americans.

Sincerely,

Sam Gilman & Andrew Kaplan

A Letter from BPC's President

In the summer of 2013, four students from Common Sense Action (CSA) came to the Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC) with an idea. Their aspiration was to organize their peers and create a policy platform reflecting the interests and commitments of their generation. Over the course of the summer they visited every congressional office, recruited and engaged hundreds of interns and worked with the policy staff at BPC to explore an array of complex public policy questions. At the end of the summer they published a framework setting forth the key pillars of the Agenda for Generational Equity (AGE). But the effort did not end there.

In the fall, the enterprising young leaders grew their organization and developed chapters on campuses across the country. The CSA chapters held Campus Congresses and devoted hundreds of hours to researching and debating ideas and proposing workable policy solutions. In early 2014, the student leaders came to Washington, spending three days at BPC developing the shared ideas contained in this tremendously thoughtful and provocative document.

For BPC, it has been an inspiration to partner with CSA in this effort. At the heart of our work is the belief that the best ideas emerge through engaged, passionate and principled debate. The seriousness of purpose, collaborative spirit and creativity demonstrated by our partners at CSA shines through the pages that follow. While BPC provided support and policy advice throughout the development of the AGE Initiative, the recommendations contained in the following pages come directly from the 24 CSA campuses across the country.

Some of the conclusions and recommendations in this document differ from policy proposals developed and supported by BPC. This is the point of encouraging new voices in the national debate. BPC is proud to have the opportunity to help inform, elevate and learn from young leaders across the country. If there is room at the table for both right and left, surely there is room for fresh perspectives from the next generation of leaders.

We encourage you to join the conversation.

Sincerely,

Jason Grumet

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Our Goals



Advancing Generational Fairness. The United States needs a national entitlement and revenue solution that both keeps the promise of a fair and adequate social safety net for our grandparents today and also sustains that safety net for future generations.

- ✓ Goal: Reform Social Security to ensure 75-year solvency while preserving the fairness and adequacy of the program.
- ✓ Goal: Reform Medicare in order to achieve the “triple aim:” improved patient experience, improved population health, and decreased per-capita costs.
- ✓ Goal: Invest in the capabilities of the next generation to strengthen the infrastructure of today and to develop the infrastructure of tomorrow.
- ✓ Goal: Exercise generationally responsible taxing and budgeting to promote long-term economic growth and address long term-debt.



Investing in Millennial Mobility. The United States must make additional investments in education, workforce development, and the infrastructure of the future, so that all young Americans have the opportunity to succeed in the 21st century.

- ✓ Goal: Increase access to affordable post-secondary education to give every student the opportunity to pursue his or her dream.
- ✓ Goal: Expand the school-to-job pipeline.
- ✓ Goal: Reduce incarceration rates and promote reintegration.
- ✓ Goal: Achieve universal access to early childhood education.



Repairing Politics. Millennials should help heal our political system by voting more, participating in public and community service, and working across party lines. CSA must take a lead in repairing the fabric of U.S. politics by encouraging our friends and peers to serve, participate, and vote.

- ✓ Goal: CSA should increase Millennial civic and electoral participation to strengthen the democratic process.
- ✓ Goal: CSA should help build a social expectation of national service over the course of a lifetime to increase nation-building at home.

Executive Summary

What is AGE?

The Agenda for Generational Equity (AGE) is the first bipartisan policy agenda created by members of the Millennial generation through a nationwide process. AGE serves as a policy platform and the first manifesto for the national CSA movement.

Through a responsibly partisan process of research, debate, negotiation, and democratic decision-making, Common Sense Action (CSA) chapters comprised of hundreds of Democratic, Republican, and independent young people from across the United States developed AGE in partnership with the Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC), a think tank committed to advancing bipartisan policy solutions.

What are the foundations of AGE?

AGE is framed by three principles outlined by the AGE Steering Committee in the AGE Framework:

1. AGE must be credibly bipartisan, and it must address Millennial priorities that transcend party lines: Fiscal Responsibility, Economic Mobility, Investments, and National Service.
2. Fiscal responsibility and investments are not mutually exclusive. We have an obligation to both keep our financial promises and make critical investments in education and infrastructure.
3. Advancing generational equity demands service, shared sacrifice, and consensus-building.

Why is AGE innovative and different?

AGE is America's first Millennial policy agenda to be generated through an entirely Millennial-driven, nationwide, and bipartisan process.

Unlike most policy documents, AGE was not created by a small group of policy experts. Instead, the report was crafted in a nation-wide, open-source process that engaged hundreds of young people.

In the fall of 2013, each CSA chapter researched, formulated, and presented a total of more than 150 distinct policies for inclusion in a national agenda. These policies were debated and

vetted at Campus Congresses—conventions that brought together CSA chapter members and other student stakeholders, including student body presidents and the leaders of the college Democrats and college Republicans to vote on each proposal. Two representatives from each of the participating chapters convened at the AGE Policy Summit in Washington. At the summit, they determined the final policy agenda, which consisted of 40 policy options.

What does it mean that AGE is a policy *menu*?

Most policy agendas present demands for policymakers to follow. AGE, however, is designed to give policymakers the political space to make decisions. We are not policy experts and, for this reason, we do not profess to know the ten-step definitive plan to get America back on track.

We do not demand that policymakers adopt every single one of our policy options. Instead, we argue that there are different ways to tackle the challenges facing our nation. We support a range of ideas, some center-left and some center-right, on which we believe the parties could find common ground. AGE draws a fence around the Democratic and Republican policy 40-yard lines and is intended to serve as a charge for politicians to take meaningful action.

The next generation of Democratic and Republican leaders will have to tackle these challenges. They will have to propose policy solutions to confront issues of fiscal responsibility, economic mobility, investments, and national service. We aim to kick-start the process.

What is the structure of AGE?

The policy document itself is broken into pillars, goals, and policy options.

AGE is built on three pillars: Advancing Generational Fairness, Investing in Millennial Mobility, and Repairing Politics. It outlines ten goals spread throughout the three pillars; four each for Generational Fairness and Millennial Mobility and two for Repairing Politics. Finally, there are several policy options beneath each goal that propose pragmatic solutions to advance these goals.

The pillars and goals are meant to complement each other. It is extremely important to note that each individual goal or policy option is not centrist; instead, the document as a whole is balanced. The Generational Fairness pillar provides more sustainability; the Millennial Mobility pillar includes more investment.

What is our process?

The Agenda for Generational Equity was researched, crafted, and negotiated over the last ten months by the members of Common Sense Action's 17 founding chapters, each located on a college campus.



During the summer of 2013, CSA brought together a Steering Committee of 25 young Americans from 18 states to craft the Framework for AGE. For eight weeks, the committee met over pizza to debate, deliberate, and design the agenda. The result was the Framework for the Agenda for Generational Equity.

With the Framework as a blueprint, each chapter worked in the fall of 2013 to craft their own vision for AGE. Through rigorous policy research, committees drafted policy proposals that advanced the goals outlined in the Framework. Chapters then hosted Campus Congresses, where they invited chapter members and other students to debate and vote on proposals, ultimately voting on which policies to include in the final chapter proposal for the agenda. Overall, chapters voted and passed more than 150 distinct policies through this campus process.

In January 2014, CSA convened 40 leaders—two from each CSA chapter—at the BPC to finalize the national Agenda for Generational Equity. We began by breaking into small groups, discussing each individual objective and policy intently. On the second day, the entire group gathered to debate and vote on AGE's policy goals and policy options.

We all came to that table strong in our own beliefs and ready to fight for them—principled partisans in short. As the day went on, the conversation grew more and more productive. We did not ask participants to put aside their own political beliefs and passions for the sake of bipartisanship. Instead, we actually sought to embrace the wide range of perspectives in

the room. At times, we disagreed passionately on ideological grounds. And we honored that disagreement as a necessary part of a responsible partisan process. However, we were able to build trust through discussion. We tried to live the example that we wished Congress would follow: we had made a commitment to ourselves, to each other, and to our chapters to craft an agenda by working together across difference, and we wouldn't leave the room until it was done. Three meals, 15 hours, three pillars, and 40 accepted policies later, we had finalized the document.

During the spring of 2014, a team of Policy Fellows led by Director of Policy Ryann Roberts worked to weave the selected policy proposals into a cohesive narrative through more research and iterative writing.

Finally, throughout the AGE process, we worked with experts from BPC to help guide our research, craft meaningful objectives, and identify potential policy options for achieving those objectives. Their support, guidance, and expertise were invaluable in the policy-generation process.

What's Next?

AGE is not an end—it is a beginning. With the agenda in hand, Common Sense Action chapters and members will work together to continue bringing youth voices to the policymaking table on college campuses, in state houses, and in Washington.

The movement behind this agenda is growing quickly. Almost 3,400 people have already endorsed the AGE pillars and goals, and we hope to see that number keep rising as work to spread the word.

Here's what you can do to support this growing movement:

- ✓ **Endorse the Agenda**
- ✓ **Join or start a CSA chapter**
- ✓ **Volunteer for CSA advocacy campaigns**

We're asking Millennials to take a chance with us. Help us convince lawmakers to stop ignoring the issues that matter most to our generation. We have to show them we are passionate and dedicated. For politicians to take action, we must show them that we care first.

We imagine a world in which Millennials have just as a good a chance to succeed as our parents and grandparents. We imagine a world in which our children and grandchildren have more opportunities to succeed than we do.

Join us – it's our future.

Generational Fairness



What is our vision for Advancing Generational Fairness?

The Generational Fairness pillar of the Agenda for Generational Equity outlines a set of priorities that promotes responsible public budgeting by reforming entitlements, strengthening safety nets, investing in infrastructure, and reforming the tax code.

While the framers of the Agenda for Generational Equity do not purport to be budget experts, our vision is to articulate generational priorities for federal spending and taxing. AGE articulates a strategic vision for America's spending priorities that protects our elders as they age and simultaneously invests in our future talent. We imagine a generationally fair federal budget. Such a forward-looking budget is critical for our nation's economic security.

We believe in a government that maintains a fair safety net for our parents and grandparents while ensuring that we sustain that safety net for our generation, for our children, and for our children's children.

We believe in a government that maintains a fair safety net for our parents and grandparents while ensuring that we sustain that safety net for our generation, for our children, and for our children's children. Meanwhile, we must also ensure that our entitlement programs do not crowd out investment in the foundations of America's future. We must make the critical investments that will promote commerce, improve our standard of living, and ensure that the United States expands its economic prosperity. Similarly, we must simplify the tax code while raising revenues to create more room for businesses to innovate and the necessary funds to pay for our spending commitments. But as we live within our means, we must ever be investing in expanding our means.

Ultimately, only a budget that not only balances the interests of Democrats and Republicans, grandparents and grandchildren, but also engages each generation at the policymaking table can effectively maintain economic security and advance future economic prosperity.

What is the status quo and how did we get here?

In the 1990s, the United States recognized that it needed to save for retirement—the retirement of its large baby-boomer workforce. With several hard-fought legislative

compromises, like the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, coupled with tremendous economic growth in the late 1990s, the United States had its fiscal house in order. The nation balanced its budget for three straight years (1999–2001).

During the early 2000s, the trend was reversed. With surpluses in hand, Democrats and Republicans each took credit for popular expansions of Medicare and other federal spending programs while simultaneously passing tax cuts. Over the next decade, budget surpluses quickly became rapidly growing deficits. The result of these taxing and spending policies, a recession, and an aging population is a federal debt of nearly \$17.149 trillion, or more than 73 percent of GDP—a ratio seen only during the Great Depression and World War II.⁴

Deficits are now falling due to slight GDP growth, reductions in the growth of discretionary programs, and modest tax increases, but these incremental improvements are not nearly enough to put us on solid footing. As the baby boomers retire, Social Security and Medicare spending will rise significantly, crowding out the ability to make critical investments in the nation’s infrastructure. In other words, the long-term deficit problem is an entitlement spending—especially health care spending—problem, combined with an imbalance in revenue receipts. Social Security and Medicare will be unable to pay out full benefits well before the first Millennial retires at age 65. We must make a priority of addressing the projected increases in entitlement spending before these bills become too big to pay.

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Meanwhile, America’s infrastructure is outdated, inefficient, and in need of repair. The American Society of Civil Engineers awarded the nation’s overall infrastructure as a D+ in 2013.⁵ It estimates that the United States needs to see \$3.6 trillion in infrastructure investments by 2020 to maintain its current grade.¹⁶ Despite the dreary statistics, infrastructure spending hit a 20-year low last year, totaling only 1.7 percent of GDP, according to *Business Insider*.⁷ And the country is not just falling behind in physical infrastructure, but also in research and development (R&D). As of 2006, the United States spent only 2.6 percent of its GDP on R&D, which ranked the United States seventh among peer Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development countries.⁸ In today’s budget debates, however, these programs have been squeezed by ever-increasing mandatory spending. This has meant fewer new construction contracts and less money available for scientific research and development.

Finally, the tax code could be significantly simplified. The Joint Committee on Taxation estimated that, for FY2013, if Congress eliminated all tax expenditures, such as employer-sponsored health insurance, it could cut individual income tax rates by about 44 percent and stay revenue-neutral. In absolute terms, tax expenditures add up to \$1.3 trillion per year—that’s a lot of money that could otherwise be going to pay for federal programs or to reduce the debt.

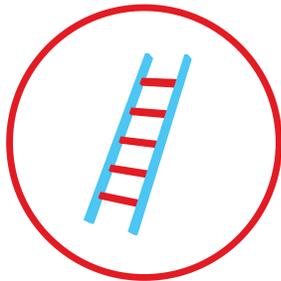
In 2013, we saw tentative first steps toward bipartisan budgetary negotiation. Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) and Representative Paul Ryan (R-WI), chairs of the budget committees in their respective houses, developed a bipartisan budget agreement for 2014 with the support of their party leadership. While an important step, this budget agreement fell far short of articulating a sustainable and long-term vision for the federal government. It is in that context that we propose our budgetary framework.

What do we propose?

Advancing Generational Fairness: The United States needs a national entitlement and revenue solution that both keeps the promise of a fair and adequate social safety net for our grandparents today and also sustains that safety net for future generations.

- Goal: Reform Social Security to ensure 75-year solvency while preserving the fairness and adequacy of the program.
- Goal: Reform Medicare in order to achieve the “triple aim:” improved patient experience, improved population health, and decreased per-capita costs.
- Goal: Invest in the capabilities of the next generation to strengthen the infrastructure of today and to develop the infrastructure of tomorrow.
- Goal: Exercise generationally responsible taxing and budgeting to promote long-term economic growth and address long term-debt.

Millennial Mobility



What is our vision for Millennial Mobility?

We imagine an America where every child, every student, every young person is equipped with the tools and preparation needed to succeed in today's world. These policies are a blueprint for this America—a future where the next generations enjoy economic prosperity and have every opportunity to achieve their American dreams.

When youth unemployment has risen by more than 50 percent in recent years, when college costs are far outpacing families' abilities to pay, and when the United States incarcerates the most people per capita in the entire world, we know that something must be done. America can no longer afford to stand idle while its foundations crumble.

Consequently, the Millennial Mobility pillar addresses the need to open up more opportunities for achievement for all Americans through concrete policy solutions.

America can no longer afford to stand idle while its foundations crumble.

Post-secondary education is frequently the pathway to success; by ensuring that more young Americans have access to affordable post-secondary education, we will pave the way for more students to achieve their dreams. An expanded school-to-job pipeline will ensure that everyone graduates high school either career or college ready, ensuring that those with a college degree can find employment, while those who choose a different educational route have the skills, tools, and opportunities they need to support themselves. With reform of our outdated and abhorrent incarceration policies, we will ease the societal and financial strain on our criminal justice system and refocus our resources on programs that reduce recidivism. Promoting and expanding early childhood education will guarantee that each American child receives the proven educational, health, and behavioral benefits that accompany early education.

What is the status quo and how did we get here?

It is becoming harder and harder to climb the ladder of American opportunity. Socioeconomic mobility is difficult to achieve in the United States: more than half of children born in the top quintile of income distribution get a college degree, while a mere 7 percent from the bottom quintile graduate from college.⁹ These statistics are especially discouraging given the importance of higher education to economic mobility: only 5 percent of children born into the bottom quintile who do not graduate from college end up in the top quintile. On the other hand, 30 percent of bottom-quintile children who graduate from college rise to

the top quintile.¹⁰ Opportunity is unfortunately elusive for those who can't afford post-secondary education.

It is getting harder for students to gain access to post-secondary education: between 1982 and 2007, college tuition costs increased 439 percent while the median family income only rose 147 percent.¹¹ Worse still, total student loan debt has accrued to an estimated \$1.2 trillion—triple the \$363 trillion in outstanding student loan debt held by Americans a decade ago,¹² and it is rising at an average of 6 percent per year.¹³ The average Millennial owes nearly \$30,000 in student loan debt. Even with the help of student loans and financial aid, students and their families are feeling the pinch. Forty-seven states spend less on higher education today than they did in 2008.¹⁴ While states are spending less on education, many states are increasing their incarceration budgets—many to the point of spending more on prisons than colleges.¹⁵ In fact, over the last 30 years, incarceration rates have increased by more than 500 percent, while the American population has increased by only 36 percent.¹⁶ Indeed, the United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world: 716 citizens out of every 100,000 were behind bars in 2011.¹⁷ And incarceration provisions, like the mandatory minimum-sentencing guidelines, have been shown to disproportionately affect Millennials and minority groups.¹⁸

Meanwhile, the unemployment rate for those under 30 remains significantly higher than the national average.¹⁹ Finally, it is critical that Millennials advocate for the next generation of Americans by making the most sensible investment in America's future: early childhood education and school readiness. For every dollar invested in early childhood education, we can expect to see a seven-dollar return.²⁰ This return can be seen in better school performance, improved health outcomes, lower incarceration rates, and better future employment rates for students who enroll in pre-k programs.

The average Millennial owes nearly \$30,000 in student loan debt.

What do we propose?

Investing in Millennial Mobility. The United States must make additional investments in education, workforce development, and the infrastructure of the future, so that all young Americans have the opportunity to succeed in the 21st century.

- Goal: Increase access to affordable post-secondary education to give every student the opportunity to pursue his or her dream.
- Goal: Expand the school-to-job pipeline.
- Goal: Reduce incarceration rates and promote reintegration.
- Goal: Achieve universal access to early high-quality childhood education.

Repairing Politics



What is our vision for Repairing Politics?

Repairing Politics requires a different approach than advancing Generational Fairness or investing in Millennial Mobility. Repairing politics requires culture change. It requires a culture of participation and collaboration. By building on shared experience—a shared commitment to participation, collaboration, and service—we can begin to advance a pragmatic national policy vision outlined by the Generational Fairness and Millennial Mobility pillars of the Agenda for Generational Equity.

Our objectives are simple: Millennials should help heal our political system by voting more, participating in public and community service, and working across party lines. In order to change the current political culture and climate, Common Sense Action must be a leader and take initial responsibility for repairing the fabric of U.S. politics by encouraging our friends and peers to serve, participate, and vote.

Accordingly, the Repairing Politics pillar has a different approach than the other two pillars of AGE. The two principal goals of Repairing Politics—increased civic participation and an expectation of national service—are as much a demand of ourselves and our generation as a recommendation for policymakers. As CSA members, we must commit ourselves and our friends to civic engagement and national service in order to re-weave the fabric of our political culture.

Fortunately, strengthening the United States through service and participation represents a distinctly American value: shared experiences create strong community and national bonds. Time and time again, our country has seen Americans band together: to defeat Hitler and the rise of fascism, to put a man on the moon, and to respond to the national tragedy of September 11, 2001. Through civilian, military, and faith-based service, Americans of all backgrounds have served together to cultivate a greater sense of purpose and belonging.

CSA is here to help lead the charge. As we ask for more from our government and older generations, we commit to paying it forward by becoming more active and engaged citizens, improving our democracy, and serving our country.

What is the status quo and how did we get here?

America has long been a nation of individuals committed to a communitarian ideal. As John Winthrop outlined in the 17th century, the United States is a “city upon a hill,” watched by the world and guided by a dedication to our fellow citizens and a democratic ideal. This commitment to community has persisted throughout U.S. history and continues to this day.

Perhaps summarized best by President John F. Kennedy in his 1961 inauguration speech, the U.S. system of civic engagement and national service declares that we “ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country.”

Yet our commitment to this ethos has been tested in recent times. A gridlocked political system has deflated enthusiasm for politics and voting numbers. This is particularly true among Millennials: according to a recent Harvard poll, only 23 percent of Millennials say they will “definitely be voting” in the 2014 midterm elections.

Today, large numbers of Americans are attempting to answer the call to service. However, opportunities for national service are shrinking as funds become more limited, meaning that would-be national servants are turned away. For example, AmeriCorps could only accept 14 percent of its applicants in 2011.²¹ In addition, at any given point in the last decade, less than 1 percent of Americans was serving in the military, creating a wider disconnect between civilians and the military.²² Exacerbating the problem further, civics education has fallen through the cracks, and Millennial voting rates hover well below the average of other generations.

We stand at a crossroads now—faced with a tough road ahead. That road must begin with a first step—a first step started by CSA members across the nation.

What do we propose?

Repairing Politics: Millennials should help heal our political system by voting more, participating in public and community service, and working across party lines. CSA must take a lead in repairing the fabric of U.S. politics by encouraging our friends and peers to serve, participate, and vote.

- Goal: CSA should increase Millennial civic and electoral participation to strengthen the democratic process.
- Goal: CSA should help build a social expectation of national service over the course of a lifetime to increase nation-building at home.

Endnotes

- ¹ "Youth Voting," The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, accessed May 9, 2014, <http://www.civicyouth.org/quick-facts/youth-voting/>.
- ² "The Youth Vote in 2012," The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, published May 10, 2013, http://www.civicyouth.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/CIRCLE_2013FS_outhVoting2012FINAL.pdf.
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