

# Moving Americans Ahead: Bold ideas for Shared Economic Recovery and Security

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**Bipartisan Policy Center**

With support from The Rockefeller Foundation

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# OVERVIEW

The United States confronts two interconnected crises: the COVID-19 pandemic and deeply rooted racial inequity. These challenges demand new ideas and creating thinking. To address them, and to open up space for creative ideas, the Bipartisan Policy Center, with support from The Rockefeller Foundation, hosted a three-part series of virtual events. Our goal was to invite others to identify and explore bold ideas to create an economic future that is dynamic, inclusive, and sustainable for all Americans.

We framed these events as a combination of TED Talks and Shark Tank. Each session focused on a critical question. The TEDS had a few minutes to propose their answer to the question. They were then questioned by a bipartisan panel of “Sharks.”

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## TEDS

### **Melissa Bradley**

Co-founder, Ureeka; Managing Partner, 1863 Ventures

### **Oren Cass**

Executive Director, American Compass

### **Betsy Edasery**

Managing Director, The Workers Lab

### **Dawn Gearhart**

Gig Economy Organizing Director, National Domestic Workers Alliance

### **Fiona Grieg**

Managing Director and Director of Consumer Research, JPMorgan Chase Institute

### **J. Steven Landefeld**

Former Director, U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

### **Thea M. Lee**

President, Economic Policy Institute

### **Michael McGeary**

Head of Public Policy, Upwork

### **Lauren Paul**

Chief of Staff, Common Future

### **William Spriggs**

Chief Economist, AFL-CIO; Professor, Howard University



**“Today, we find ourselves facing a dual economic and health crisis. And we know that, even before the pandemic, the United States faced many troubling trends. The motivation behind this event series with the BPC was to engage in conversation about those troubling trends with big thinkers. We asked, how can we create an equitable recovery after the pandemic?”**

### **Eileen O'Connor**

Senior Vice President, The Rockefeller Foundation

## SHARKS

### Julian Castro

Former Secretary,  
Department of Housing and  
Urban Development; former  
Mayor, San Antonio.

### Rick Dearborn

Partner,  
Mindset

### Kelly Darnell

COO,  
BPC

### Jason Grumet

President,  
BPC

### Eli Lehrer

President,  
R Street Institute

### Eileen O'Connor

Senior Vice President,  
Rockefeller Foundation

### Otis Rolley III

Senior Vice President,  
Rockefeller Foundation

### Gail Wilensky

Senior Fellow,  
Project Hope

**“With Covid-19, America started calling low-wage workers “essential” and “heroes.” We thought they were such before, and we are hoping that our efforts with the Bipartisan Policy Center and others help Americans not get amnesia about this. To that end, our grantmaking and partnerships are focused on the question, how do we enable a recovery that provides equitable and sustainable opportunity for all America?”**

### Otis Rolley III

Senior Vice President,  
The Rockefeller Foundation

**“In our normal course of work, the BPC focuses on pragmatic opportunities, where people of strong ideological differences can be brought together around shared agendas that will lead to durable policy change. It is likewise necessary to be imaginative and think in terms of big, bold, and creative ideas.”**

### Jason Grumet

President,  
BPC

# Foreword

by Paul Romer

There have been three major educational moments in American history. The first was the spread of universal primary education in the early 19th century. The second was the establishment of land grant universities in the second half of the 19th century. The third was the high school movement, which dramatically expanded secondary education in the first half of the 20th century.

Each of these was a big commitment by the country to improving education. We decided, as a nation, to improve the way we prepared young people for social and economic participation. Those commitments demonstrate something fundamental about the United States. Progress has always been the product of efforts that we undertake collectively through governments and, in a decentralized way, through individual and organizational actions in the market.

We decided, at a national level, that the country needed a new type of university, one that imparted practical education and conducted high-quality research. This was something new in the world. The Morrill Act provided funding, but implementation was left to individual schools. Entrepreneurial leaders, competing with each other and the world-leading German universities, shaped the land-grants and how they served the country. The high school movement originated in states like Iowa and Oregon and quickly spread, with government support in the form of mandatory schooling laws.

Despite political disagreements—and these commitments occurred during very fractious times—the country figured out how to agree on the overall objective. The burning question today, after years of bitter partisan fighting and a contentious campaign, is whether we can again figure out how to resolve our political disagreements, make choices, and empower entrepreneurs, companies, nonprofits, and individual citizens.

Many people have lost hope that we can do that. To them, bipartisanship is irrational, a lost cause, a relic from another era. The work of organizations like The Rockefeller Foundation and Bipartisan Policy Center has convinced me that national consensus on policy priorities is possible.

**Political disagreement has to be resolved  
or us to make choices and do something."**

Why? Because of something I learned when I started and ran an edtech company. And that is, if you want to change things you need to start with small stakes. Starting with high stakes immediately stymies any potential consensus. But if you start with small stakes, disagreements can be expressed without massive consequences. Agreements can be forged that build confidence, trust, and momentum for the larger stakes ahead.

The Morrill Act did not declare an intention to transform American higher education. That's what it achieved, but it began as an effort to help create knowledge to support American agriculture. The high school movement began far out in the hinterland, as a series of small experiments to better prepare young Americans to work in new industries.

Over the next few months, the continuing urgency of the COVID-19 crisis and changes wrought by the election results will tempt many government leaders to reach immediately for high-stakes achievements. Ambitions for large-scale change are, in the wake of 2020, understandable. Yet we must learn from what has driven progress before and created consensus around that progress. Seemingly tiny steps—a technical change here, a small amount of appropriations there—are essential building blocks.

It might disappoint some to begin with small stakes. As we've experienced, however, small stakes do not necessarily mean small impact. If we can build momentum by working together on issues with small stakes, we can overcome disagreements and again commit ourselves to national objectives achieved through individual means.

**Paul Romer is an economist, entrepreneur, and professor. He is a Nobel laureate in economics and former chief economist at the World Bank.**

**"We have to, as a nation, figure out how do we recognize our disagreements, expose them honestly, but then come to a resolution, some consensus about what we're going to do, and then just do it."**



**INEQUALITY: HOW DO WE CLOSE  
RACIAL INCOME AND WEALTH  
GAPS?**



The median net worth of Black households is just one-tenth that of white households—and this gap has remained more or less the same for several decades. The COVID-19 crisis worsened these racial disparities. A survey by BPC and Morning Consult in June found that more than one-third of Black households and more than 40 percent of Latino households had missed bill payments during the crisis. Less than one-fifth of white households said the same. It has become increasingly clear to everyone that racial gaps in wealth and income must be closed not only for moral reasons but also for economic reasons. Overall economic growth is held back when full participation is denied or hindered.



### **Lauren Paul: Support business ownership and growth through the CDFI Fund**

Small business ownership is an important wealth-building mechanism for Black and brown communities. Yet black and brown entrepreneurs have trouble accessing mainstream financial tools. One important channel that fills the gap for them are community financial development institutions, CDFIs. Although I'm encouraged by the increased attention to CDFIs during the pandemic, the CDFI sector is quite small in comparison to other financing options. There is an immense opportunity for increased investment and troubleshooting some of the barriers and disincentives that CDFIs face.

The federal government should create incentives to help grow existing CDFIs and attract new organizations to fill gaps in the marketplace. It can do this through the CDFI Fund, a Treasury Department program that helps support these institutions. The CDFI Fund should be required to offer year-over-year grant funding to all CDFIs that meet impact requirements. This funding would help cash strapped CDFIs mitigate risk. The CDFI Fund should also offer capacity-building grants for CDFIs to offer financial tools and products they are currently unable to. This includes lines of credit or revenue-based financing options. Though the unregulated sector fills some gaps within the national lending ecosystem, these efforts are unable to prioritize inclusion at scale. CDFIs are best positioned to fill gaps in access to capital because they're able to build relationships with community members and design services that are truly responsive to them.

#### Resources and references

- Common Future: [website](#).
- The CDFI Fund: [website](#).
- CRS [report](#) on CDFIs.
- Department of Treasury [report](#) on risk and efficiency among CDFIs.

#### Melissa Bradley: Empower the CFPB to promote alternative credit scores

I have been both thrilled and concerned about the massive amounts of money trying to find black and brown entrepreneurs recently. They are what we call new majority entrepreneurs, the fastest and largest-growing segment of entrepreneurship in the United States. The reality, however, is that just putting money on the street doesn't mean it's accessed, particularly when the distribution channels are extremely limited. The pipes are often blocked by this thing called a credit score.

The credit score has saddled the majority of Americans with a lifelong financial identity but, for many, it is an unerasable mark that reflects bad behavior in the past. It is really hard to make changes to one's credit score and recognize people's performance toward good behavior. Credit scores are often one of the biggest challenges faced by entrepreneurs as they seek capital to scale and grow their business.

**"If we're really serious about equity and inclusion in this country, we need to be looking toward solutions that truly build economic power in our most marginalized communities. Those solutions that allow black and brown communities to build wealth and create economic independence and autonomy are exactly the kinds of solutions that are really going to bring us forward."**

**Lauren Paul**  
Chief of Staff,  
Common Future

**“Part of the challenge is that every borrower situation is very unique, but we’re operating with a static set of data to make a very distinct decision each time.”**

**Melissa Bradley**

Co-founder, Ureeka;  
Managing Partner, 1863 Ventures

My proposal is to create a new scoring division within the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau to work with the three major credit bureaus to implement alternative credit scoring approaches. Such approaches would consider alternative credit scores inputs that are more relevant to the daily survival of low-income communities and unbanked communities to be able to determine creditworthiness. Alternative inputs might include rent, utility, cell phone, bank accounts, shopping history, driving records and more. Alternative scores can provide opportunities to increase access to credit for historically marginalized communities.

#### Resources and references

- Ureeka: [website](#).
- 1863 Ventures: [website](#).
- Melissa Bradley Medium [post](#) on alternative credit scores.
- CFPB [study](#) on credit scores.

#### William Spriggs: Endow HBCUs to support great socioeconomic mobility

We often talk about the racial wealth gap in terms of individuals, but it’s also important to understand that the legacy of the racial wealth gap involves institutions. Within higher education, we have placed far more burden on students to fund higher education through tuition. Yet tuition increases have followed the income increases of the top five percent of the income distribution, which means universities needs these students the most. The result is at many of our leading universities, there are more students from the top five percent than the bottom 50 percent.

But there is a class of universities still dedicated to teaching low-income stu-

**“The problem with our current market-driven higher education system is that we have shut off opportunity to all sorts of low-income students, not just Black students.”**

**William Spriggs**

Chief Economist, AFL-CIO;  
Professor, Howard University

dents. All historically Black colleges and universities remain committed to educating this population. HBCUs score above average on the joint probability of admitting and graduating Pell-eligible students. They are above average for economic mobility. Yet at HBCUs, around 70 percent of their students are eligible for Pell Grants. This is a formula which doesn't work.

What is missing is that these are the universities that don't have the endowments. This is the deepest legacy of the racial wealth gap. Let's make a commitment to endow HBCUs at the rate of our top ten endowed universities, \$1 million per student. It's one thing to talk about the resiliency of individuals, but we're faced with this other challenge, which is the resiliency of the institutions that support community, that generate the wealth.

### **Resources and references**

Howard University: [website](#).

Brookings [post](#) discussing research on the contribution of HBCUs to economic mobility.

### **BPC View: Political Considerations**

Addressing longstanding racial inequities in the American economy will require durable and sustainable policy change at the federal, state, and local levels. Equality is an American value, not a partisan interest, and solutions informed by progressive, conservative, and moderate principles are within reach. The COVID-19 crisis hit people of color disproportionately hard, but no one has been spared its effects. In a June [survey](#) commissioned by The Rockefeller Foundation and Bipartisan Policy Center, Republicans and Democrats were equally likely to have applied for unemployment benefits. About half of all applicants faced difficulties or delays in receiving UI. That helps explain why 89% of respondents in the survey favored UI system reform—with similarly strong support across race and ideology. A divided Congress can make strides by building on bedrock engines of American economic progress including small business and entrepreneurship and historically Black colleges and universities.



**GIG ECONOMY WORKFORCE:  
EXPLOITED OR EMPOWERED?**

According to Upwork, over one-third of Americans now engage in some form of freelancing or independent work. The growth of so-called “alternative work” has raised questions about wages, worker protections, the social safety net, and benefits. During the COVID-19 crisis, Congress extended unemployment insurance to freelancers and independent workers for the first time, a recognition of the social and economic importance of this work. Yet the flexibility of such work remains important for workers and businesses. Questions around how to take advantage of the emerging “gig economy” while also ensuring that workers thrive will be increasingly central for policymakers.



### **Fiona Greig: Move toward a national UI system**

We have seen a huge rise in participation in the gig economy over the last five to ten years. There are many different types of activities within this. Some have been decimated by the pandemic. One thing that the various activities have had in common is that people were doing them on a fairly sporadic basis in terms of income streams. They do platform work in some months and not in others. In the months in which they're active, a significant share of their income can come from these—sometimes, half of their monthly income might come from these platforms.

When it comes to accessing social insurance and unemployment insurance, these jobs never qualified people for unemployment insurance. Through the



CARES Act, we expanded our UI system through new programs such as Pandemic Unemployment Assistance for these types of workers. PUA has turned out to be incredibly large and incredibly important for them through the pandemic. Yet the value of benefits and the efficiencies of getting your claim filed vary dramatically from state to state.

**“It’s important to realize that we don’t have one unemployment insurance system. We have 53.”**

**Fiona Greig**

Managing Director and Director of Consumer Research, JPMorgan Chase Institute

We ought to think about a national UI system. And, let’s think about permanently instituting some kind of UI that would serve the needs of those who are contingent workers and relying on contingent work and self-employment as their source of income.

### Resources and references

JPMCI [policy brief](#) on unemployment benefits.

JPMorgan Chase Institute [report](#) on platform economy

How to Improve [Unemployment Insurance Administration](#)

### Betsy Edasery: Encourage and invest in new ideas about increasing power for workers

The range of what workers need is broad—they need to be not only safe but also financially secure, have control, be mobile, and be able to freely participate in our democracy. The Workers Lab finds, funds, tests, learns from, and shares new ideas about increasing worker power with the field of people who can do something with those ideas—especially people in power making decisions about the future of work and workers.

We need to give a chance to new ideas that increase the power of workers regardless of classification. The Workers Lab has been testing new ideas, through design sprints adapted to solving problems for workers. Prior to the pandemic, we ran the Workers Strength Fund, providing \$1,000 cash grants, no strings attached, to help gig workers in times of crisis. The findings from that experiment

**“To the extent that we can fund innovation aimed at re-imagining the safety net for workers working without one, there’s so much opportunity to build up from the current model of gig work.”**

**Betsy Edasery**

Managing Director,  
The Workers Lab

became incredibly relevant when Covid-19 hit.

Together with Steady, in April 2020, we launched The Workers Fund, a coronavirus relief fund, to quickly deliver cash to nearly 2,000 workers, the vast majority of whom make under \$40,000 per year. Also in partnership with Steady, one of our design sprints focused on developing and testing a technology solution to the challenges of administering unemployment insurance, especially for non-W2 workers.

In many ways, the gig economy model has been the prime example of what a good job isn't. This crisis and these innovative ideas can help us envision what a good job is and should be and what workers need now and in the future.

### Resources and references

The Workers Lab: [website](#).

Workers Lab [blog](#) on The Workers Fund

[Report](#), "The Impact of Emergency Cash on Gig Workers."

### Dawn Gearhart: Vision for an equitable and inclusive future of work

**"We believe that if we harness technology for good, we can use the window of opportunity to build new, equitable and inclusive structures that ensure dignity and respect for all."**

#### Dawn Gearhart

Gig Economy Organizing Director, National Domestic Workers Alliance

Domestic workers are, in many ways, the original gig workers. They have been piecing together livings by working small jobs for multiple different employers for years, often in a precarious construct with no guarantee of continued work. And, domestic workers have experienced many of the problems that have arisen with the introduction of what is now called the gig economy.

The domestic workforce has historically been excluded from bedrock labor protections. But over the next decade, the projected growth rate for home health and personal care jobs is five times higher than for all other occupations. Caring for elders, children, and people with disabilities

cannot be outsourced. This means domestic worker jobs need to be good, family-supporting jobs, where everybody can afford to care for themselves as well as others.

We need to shift the balance of power toward domestic workers. One way to do that is to adopt a data justice framework when it comes to the marketplace companies and platforms where domestic workers are found. This would mean that workers have the right to access the data that's collected about them. And,



technology companies should be incentivized to include workers and service providers in their understanding of who the customer base is. These steps would help empower workers without requiring formal processes of job reclassification or organizing

### Resources and references

National Domestic Workers Alliance: [website](#).

NDWA Labs' [Alia](#).

Bureau of Labor Statistics, [Occupational Outlook Handbook](#).

### BPC View: Political Considerations

Despite differences between the parties, a divided Congress can work together to bring the country's labor laws and social safety net into the 21st century. While policymakers have long grappled with these issues, until recently they have not received strong incentives to advance solutions. Economic dislocation triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic and recession may alter this landscape. There is demonstrated bipartisan support for modernization. In 2020, voters in blue-state California [chose to codify](#) gig-economy labor rules. And in Republican-led states like Florida, the need for a more robust and flexible social safety net has [become clear](#). These state-level results corroborate the Rockefeller-BPC [survey](#), which found that 89% of voters favor portable benefits. Federal lawmakers can build on this foundation by crafting solutions that are compatible with the needs of workers and the political incentives of the moment.



**MAIN STREET OR WALL STREET:  
HOW SHOULD WE MEASURE  
ECONOMIC GROWTH?**

## Overview: J. Steven Landefeld, former director of the Bureau of Economic Analysis

Gross domestic product is an unduplicated measure of total economic activity, accounting for total expenditures and total income by types. GDP is among the most accurate, timely, and relevant economic indicators in the world. Why? Because it is constantly evolving.

GDP was created during the Great Depression to meet the need for a single aggregate number for the economy. New GDP accounts were developed in the 1940s to help policymakers meet the needs of mobilization and demobilization. It continued to evolve to meet the needs of the moment in subsequent decades. In the 1990s and 2000s, for example, the Bureau of Economic Analysis developed new measures of software and information technology to keep pace with the economy.

In recent years, the BEA has made progress with supplemental measures—or satellite accounts. These are one-off estimates using the powerful mechanism of the GDP national accounts without overburdening the usefulness of those. Recently, for example, the BEA created supplemental measures of the distribution of income. Also on the BEA agenda are satellite accounts for areas such as health care, the impact of the economy on the environment, human capital, the role of free goods, and the sustainability of economic growth.

Developing such estimates can significantly improve the relevance of national accounts for policymaking and public understanding. They can help supplement and improve GDP, not replace it.

### Resources and references

Bureau of Economic Analysis, GDP and Beyond [work](#).

BEA, Satellite Accounts [glossary](#).

**“Certainly, GDP is useful in terms of trying to stimulate market activity and trying to maximize that. But problems shouldn’t be ignored. What is largely missed in the existing accounts is the distribution of economic growth across households, the impact of growth on the environment and natural resources, and the sustainability of growth.”**

**J. Steven Landefeld**  
Former Director,  
U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis



### **Oren Cass: Create new measures of national productivity and quality job creation**

The secret sauce of American capitalism has always been a two-phase process. In the first phase, jobs and tasks become unnecessary because of technological change. In the second phase, entrepreneurs help create new and better opportunities for those disrupted during the first phase. Yet this process can generate good-looking GDP numbers and corporate profits even without that second step of creating new opportunities.

To an extent, that's what has happened in our economy in recent years—and, unfortunately, it's not something we look at in the productivity data today. There are two additional measures we would do well to focus on that don't exist today.

First, what I call national productivity. This is the idea of how much output we're getting from a fixed number of people who could be working. Such a measure would recognize that if a company fires a lot of people, the individual firm may look more productive, but the economy isn't more productive yet. We only become more productive at the time when there's something else for those people to do. National productivity would be calculated by looking at total output and choosing as a denominator not total hours of labor, but an addressable population of prospective workers.

Second, we need a measure of the types of jobs being created. There's no guaran-

tee that the new opportunities created for people are going to be better than the ones that got destroyed. Rather than just looking at the net change in jobs, we need to think about the gross dynamic of which jobs are going away and which jobs are being created.

Those are the measures we need to focus on: national productivity and quality job creation. Those trends would tell us a lot more about our economic health than whether GDP has gone up an extra tenth of a percentage point in a quarter.

### Resources and references

American Compass [website](#).

“Putting Dynamism in Its Place,”  
[National Affairs](#).

U.S. Private Sector Job Quality Index,  
[more information](#).

### Thea Lee: invest more resources to support better labor market indicators

When we ask ourselves *how* we should measure economic growth, we have to go back to first principles of *why* we want to measure economic growth. We need to be able to assess our economic health—both in terms of time trends and across countries or localities. Right now, we give too much attention to aggregate measures like GDP and too little attention to the measures that better capture how the economy is performing in the area that matters most for the vast majority of people. And that is the labor market.

We need to supplement GDP with much better investment in the kinds of data that help us better understand the labor market and whether the labor market is producing for people. If we want a single concise measure of the success of economic policy, we should look at the growth of the median hourly wage rather than GDP. Median is better than average because the average swings dramatically with big changes at the top or bottom of the income distribution. The hourly wage captures how hard and long people have to work to earn a given income better than the annual or weekly wage.

We need to drastically improve the quality, frequency, and coverage of the wage data we collect. And, we need to redirect and focus more policy and media attention on the median hourly wage and away from GDP growth and the stock market.

**“If you want to get progress on the metrics that really matter, it’s not sufficient to drive massive levels of productivity gain in a few industries in a few cities. You actually are going to need a suite of policies and a role for government that’s going to reward certain types of investments.”**

**Oren Cass**  
Executive Director,  
American Compass

**“The United States has underinvested in data collection and particularly in labor market data collection. And that’s why we don’t have the answers to really important questions.”**

**Thea Lee**  
President,  
Economic Policy Institute

In order to get higher quality data, we need to invest in the infrastructure to collect and publish, on a quarterly basis, detailed wage and wage distribution data with race and gender and education breakdowns. We should invest resources in systems that allow us to ask and answer these questions.

#### **Resources and references**

Economic Policy Institute [website](#).

“Curb your enthusiasm,” EPI [blog post](#).

Bureau of Labor Statistics, Earnings [data](#).

#### **Michael McGeary: We need better workforce data**

We need a better understanding of the breadth and depth of what policymakers have too simply called, “the gig economy.” That is, in some ways, an imperfect moniker. Our most recent study of the independent workforce in the United States found that 59 million people engaging in this work. Within 59 million, there is huge variance in how individuals access certain sites, platforms, or apps, the frequency with which they engage in the work, and the impact on their personal revenues.

Cast against the COVID-19 crisis, we know that many independent workers paused their work because of the pandemic. We know that many were able to access PPP relief as small business owners and the Pandemic Unemployment Assistance. The crisis has shown the need to broaden the larger conversation around the safety net in this country—what it means and how we are building it. Work is increasingly going online, being influenced by online platforms, and becoming less location dependent.

To have that conversation, we need to better understand what we’re facing, how people are interacting with online work, and what the underlying characteristics are. That requires better data. Congress should appropriate more money for the BLS Contingent Worker Survey. Once we

**“Instead of rooting this conversation in something like labor classifications which have been with us since the 1930s, we should start thinking about how we as a nation care for our citizens and whether that is expansion of existing programs or new ones, building an entirely new safety net or adding onto the one that we have been building, [and] what that’s going to mean in a digital environment.”**

**Michael McGeary**  
Head of Public Policy,  
Upwork

have better data, we can move beyond a conversation rooted in arcane employment law and look at innovative and bipartisan policy approaches.

### Resources and references

Upwork, Freelance Forward 2020 [report](#).

Bureau of Labor Statistics, Contingent Workers [data](#).

### BPC View: Political Considerations

In the wake of the Great Depression, federal leaders recognized that a measure of economic growth was essential to reviving the economy. The present economic disruption highlights the need to update and supplement our national metrics for the modern economy. Whether one's goal is getting Americans back to work, reducing income inequality, increasing business investment and productivity growth, or some combination of these and other objectives, economic indicators play a central role in guiding policy development. In the Rockefeller-BPC [survey](#) commissioned in June, three in four Americans agreed on the need to update the social safety net. What such updates can and should entail will require improved measures of how the safety net interacts with the changing nature of work. Policymakers should be able to reach agreement on an updated set of metrics that reflect the reality of today's American economy and inform recovery efforts.

## CONCLUSION



Over a year ago, with the support of The Rockefeller Foundation, the Bipartisan Policy Center embarked on an important effort. This was fueled by a shared belief that there are actionable, near-term policies that can improve the lives of working families—and be adopted in a bipartisan way.

The COVID-19 pandemic and economic crisis amplifies the urgency to pursue these policies. It also demonstrates that a polarized Congress must substantially enhance its capacity to establish significant, bipartisan programs that respond to the needs of American working families.

These needs have grown more acute for millions of Americans as the pandemic has persisted and economic suffering continues. That suffering has disproportionately affected hourly workers, whom we have come to call “essential” but have long faced challenges of wages, wealth-building, and support systems. The outcome of the 2020 election demonstrates that neither party is empowered with a popular mandate. Historic levels of voter turnout, however, also demonstrate that Americans of all political stripes are demanding action to support working families. They are divided as to what should be done, making bipartisan collaboration essential for anything to get done.

The election results also reinforce the fierce urgency of evidence-based debate and workable solutions. Voters rejected polarization in favor of progress. In the current environment of multiple crises, real progress will require a combination of potentially modest but immediate accomplishments as well as creative ideas for real reform that can break through partisan gridlock.

To be effective, new ideas must confront the unprecedented challenges facing our country and build a foundation for economic renewal and social inclusion. That foundation must enable every American to access opportunity that can unleash their full potential.

In the series of events showcased here, we framed these challenges along three dimensions. Racial gaps in wealth and income are among the most insidiously pervasive and damaging to our country. The changing nature of the workforce—illustrated by but not limited to the gig economy—is placing new demands on our public and private systems of support. And, the ways in which we measure economic growth and prosperity need updating if public policy is to remain responsive to every American.

Participants in the events were passionate, creative, and pragmatic leaders. While not intended to be comprehensive, the discussions reinforced the power of ideas and the importance of elevating diverse voices in national policy.

We must all continue to work together to forge agreement and empower creative thinkers to challenge our nation’s leaders. This document is intended as a starting point, a blueprint for the types of discussion and idea generation that can still take place within divided government. We’re optimistic that our political leaders possess the capacity for creative and constructive progress in supporting American workers and families.

# Additional Resources from the Bipartisan Policy Center

- “Flexible Policies for Balancing Family, Caregiving, and Work in a Pandemic,” [Event](#), November 2020.
- “The Next Unemployment Insurance Cliff: Expanded Eligibility and Extended Time,” [Blog](#), November 2020.
- “Child Care in 25 States: What we know and don’t know,” [Report](#), October 2020.
- “Unemployment Insurance: A System that Works for Economic Recovery,” [Event](#), September 2020.
- “Today’s Challenges and Tomorrow’s Skills: How the Workforce of the Future Starts with Strategic Action Now,” [Event](#), September 2020.
- “Rebooting the American Workforce post-COVID-19,” [Blog](#), August 2020.
- “Survey Points to Potential Racial Disparities in Approval Rates for Unemployment Insurance Claims,” [Blog](#), July 2020.
- “Start with Equity: From the Early Years to the Early Grades,” [Report](#), July 2020.
- “Administrative Failures Plague State Unemployment Insurance Programs,” [Blog](#), July 2020.
- “Four Bipartisan Federal Policies That Would Promote Racial Equity in Higher Education,” [Blog](#), June 2020.
- “Racial Inequities Have Long Existed in the Economy: A New BPC Survey Shows COVID-19 Made Them Worse,” [Blog](#), June 2020.

