

PEOPLE'S  
ACTION | Dēmos

# BEHIND THE CURTAIN

**The Corporate Plot  
to Upend Democracy**



September 29, 2021

## CONTENTS

### 3 Executive Summary

People's Action and Demos have teamed up to uncover how corporate America wants to make inequity a permanent part of American life.

### 4 Introduction

We can grow the economy while we invest in people and the planet if we act on collective values that put our shared future over the wealth and control of a few.

### 5 Corporate Influence

Corporate influence to stop progressive change is nothing new—but the concentration of wealth and monopoly powers in recent years has added fuel to the flame.

### 6 Taxes: Pay Your Fair Share

The people who profit the most should pay their fair share to get this country back on its feet.

### 9 Drug Pricing: People Over Profit

Lifesaving medicines ought to be free or affordable for the public in need.

### 12 Healthcare: A Human Right, Not a Commodity

Any system that puts profits before people is doomed to fail us. We must move toward providing healthcare to all, with no cost to patients.

### 15 Housing: Everyone Deserves a Home

Everyone deserves a safe, accessible, sustainable, and permanently affordable home.

### 18 Climate & the Environment: We Must Act Now!

It's critical that Congress utilize this moment to act on the will of the people and robustly invest in climate solutions that meet the scale of the interconnected crises we face.

### 22 Immigration: Our Strength

We need to create pathways to citizenship that value the lives, families, and work of immigrants and their contributions to American life.

### 25 Conclusion

### 26 Notes

PROFITEERS  
FROM  
PHARMA  
TO THE  
PENTAGON

OVERSIGHT



## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Right now, corporations and the ultrarich are spending millions to derail President Biden's Build Back Better plan. They want to keep the trillion-dollar tax cuts Trump gave them so they can reap obscene profits year after year at our expense. They are working behind the scenes to make pandemic windfalls permanent and keep our elected officials from taking action to restore communities.

People's Action and Demos have teamed up to reveal this power grab and uncover how corporate America wants to make inequity a permanent part of American life. We zero in on who is spending big to stop the Biden plan in key sectors: taxes, drug pricing, healthcare, housing, the environment, and immigration. We name the corporate bad actors and show how their efforts undermine our democracy as well as our economy. We explain what the Build Back Better agenda proposes, and what current polls tell us the people want.

## INTRODUCTION

In a healthy democracy, people work together across differences of race and place, using their government to build and protect everyone's well-being. But for too long, wealthy special interests have used their power and influence to divide us, exploit our people and communities, and snatch up obscene wealth at our expense. That's why the gap between the rich and society keeps growing, and why for decades our government has failed to make the investments needed for everyone to thrive.

The fight over President Biden's Build Back Better agenda is no exception. Corporations and the ultrarich are spending millions of dollars lobbying to preserve the billions they extort from exploited workers and to prevent us from taking needed action to protect our communities.

In August, the Senate passed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and the framework for joining a package of proposals to be adopted through the budget reconciliation process. These would join the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and American Rescue Plan (ARP) to create a total investment of more than \$7 trillion in working people and communities, a level of support not seen since Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal.

Biden proposes long-overdue investments in roads, bridges, and clean water as well as critical funding for social infrastructure, such as the Child Tax Credit, home-based care, and paid leave. These measures dramatically reduce poverty and support those whose work is most essential to our economy.<sup>1</sup>

Three out of four voters and 90 percent of Democrats support the infrastructure bill and budget plan created

by Congress and the Biden administration.<sup>2</sup> They want the federal government to use its resources—their resources—to put our country and its people on a firm footing.

Corporate America, however, wants to keep profits high and taxes low forever. They simply don't want to pay their fair share. That's why they're throwing millions of dollars into lobbying, campaigns, and political advertising to divide us and get legislators to back their agenda of permanent inequality.<sup>3</sup>

As Congress takes on this historic legislation, corporations and their conservative political allies are spreading timeworn lies about "deficit spending" and "big government."<sup>4</sup> But these attacks are simply an effort to shore up an unequal status quo: to shield the profits of the wealthiest Americans and maintain their decision-making power at everyone else's expense. Consider that during the pandemic, U.S. billionaires' collective fortunes grew by \$1.8 trillion—nearly half of the Biden administration's proposed \$3.5 trillion package.<sup>5</sup> And that the Trump tax cuts, if not reversed, will add close to \$2.3 trillion to the national debt.<sup>6</sup>

Let's not forget: The \$3.5 trillion being proposed in Congress is already a major compromise.<sup>7</sup> Every dollar spent is a necessary investment in our communities, and our people cannot afford to be undermined even more by corporate actors.

This debate is about priorities, not resources. We can grow the economy while we invest in people and the planet if we act on collective values that put our shared future over the wealth and control of a few.

# CORPORATE INFLUENCE

Corporate influence to stop progressive change is nothing new—but the concentration of wealth and monopoly powers in recent years has added fuel to the flame.<sup>8</sup> Over the past two decades, money spent on corporate lobbying has doubled.<sup>9</sup> Corporate interests have whittled away key protections for workers and impeded their ability to form unions, intensified climate change, and fueled income inequality.<sup>10</sup>

## TOP LOBBYING SPENDERS IN 2021



US Chamber  
of Commerce  
**\$29,630,000**



Blue Cross/  
Blue Shield  
**\$12,018,300**



Business  
Roundtable  
**\$8,840,000**



Comcast  
Corp  
**\$6,720,000**



Biotechnology Innovation  
Organization  
**\$6,560,000**



National Assn  
of Realtors  
**\$18,133,428**



American  
Medical Assn  
**\$10,880,000**



Raytheon  
Technologies  
**\$8,150,000**



Northrop  
Grumman  
**\$6,690,000**



America's Health  
Insurance Plans  
**\$6,410,000**



Pharmaceutical Research &  
Manufacturers of America  
**\$15,218,000**



Amazon  
.com  
**\$10,190,000**



National Assn of  
Manufacturers  
**\$7,710,000**



Pfizer  
Inc  
**\$6,670,000**



Boeing  
Co  
**\$6,170,000**



American  
Hospital Assn  
**\$12,121,176**



Facebook  
Inc  
**\$9,560,000**



Lockheed  
Martin  
**\$7,467,350**



NCTA The Internet &  
Television Assn  
**\$6,570,000**



Cellular Telecommunications  
Industry Assn  
**\$5,930,000**

**20 corporations have spent over \$201 million on lobbying efforts so far this year.**

Source: "[Top Spenders](#)," OpenSecrets. Last Accessed September 15, 2021.

As a result of this lobbying, social safety nets have eroded and economic inequality has soared to levels not seen since the Great Depression. Disparities are especially stark for communities of color. The median white household holds 7.8 times the wealth of the typical Black household and 6 times that of a Latinx household.<sup>11</sup> Current economic disparities are made worse by regressive tax policies that disproportionately impact people with less income. We must not let corporations and their allies derail the vital measures in the Build Back Better plan that are needed to put our country on a path towards real, equitable recovery.

In this brief, we will highlight six key areas where corporations have been using their money and power

to push back against critical elements of the Build Back Better agenda that are long-needed and widely popular: **increasing taxes for corporations and the ultrarich; lowering drug prices; providing affordable healthcare; investing in public and affordable housing; tackling climate change; and providing a pathway to citizenship for undocumented people.**

For each area we will explain the important measures included in the package; show polling results indicating how people feel about these measures; and expose what corporations are doing to lobby against these needed policies and investments.

**TAXES:**

# PAY YOUR FAIR SHARE

**The people who profit the most should pay their fair share to get this country back on its feet.**

Corporate profits are soaring right now, and billionaires in the U.S. got 62 percent richer during the pandemic while the rest of us suffered.<sup>12</sup> Instead of paying their workers more, corporations are spending millions to stop Congress from making them do their part.

## What the People Want

**People in the U.S. want corporations and the wealthy to pay their fair share in taxes.** Over two-thirds of voters support raising taxes on the wealthy and corporations.<sup>13</sup> Voters consider that “ensuring that the wealthy and corporations pay their fair share in taxes” is a top priority, with 43 percent finding it extremely important. A Morning Consult/Politico poll from earlier this year found that 65 percent of registered voters support increasing corporate taxes to fund Biden’s infrastructure plan.<sup>14</sup> Another recent poll from Data for Progress found that voters strongly support both increasing the tax rate on large corporations and bolstering the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) so that they can make sure wealthy people are paying their fair share in taxes.<sup>15</sup> 73 percent of small business owners agree that the current tax system “favors big business over small businesses like mine,” and majorities show strong support for various provisions aimed at leveling the playing field through tax reforms.<sup>16</sup>

## What's in the Budget Plan: Increasing Taxes for Corporations & the Wealthy

The budget plan rolls back many of the provisions in the Trump administration’s Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 (TCJA) and closes loopholes that have allowed the ultrarich and corporations to avoid paying their fair share.<sup>17</sup> This includes increasing the current 21-percent domestic corporate tax rate to 26.5 percent, establishing a 15-percent minimum tax on all firms with over \$2 billion in income, and raising the tax rate on offshore profits to prevent profit-shifting to tax havens.<sup>18</sup>

The plan simultaneously prohibits new taxes on small businesses, family farms and families making less than \$400,000 per year—meaning that only 1.8 percent of all taxpayers would be subject to higher taxes.<sup>19</sup> It would extend the Child Tax Credit expansion in the American Rescue Plan (ARP) as well as the ARP’s increase to the Earned-Income Tax Credit.<sup>20</sup>

An illustration of a person from the chest down, wearing a white dress shirt and a blue necktie. The person is standing on a large pile of money, represented by numerous small, overlapping rectangular pieces of paper in various shades of green and blue. The background is dark, making the white shirt and blue tie stand out.

From 1962-2018,

**the bottom 50 percent of households have seen their tax rates increase by 1.7 percent.**

**The richest 400 adults have seen their tax rates decrease by 31.4 percent.**

*(The New York Times)*

This legislation also increases the tax rate on the wealthiest individuals, taxing income for those who make more than \$1 million a year from investments at the same rate as income generated by wages.<sup>21</sup> Long-term capital gains currently face a top tax rate of 20 percent, compared with the top rate of 37 percent on wage earners.<sup>22</sup> The legislation also closes a loophole that often allows the wealthy to avoid paying taxes on investment gains entirely.<sup>23</sup>

Importantly, the Biden plan also expands the IRS's capacity to pursue tax dodgers, providing much-needed support for an agency that has been systematically stripped of its capacity to enforce the law.<sup>24</sup> Slashed budgets have forced the agency

to shrink its staff and strained its ability to conduct audits, which enables corporations and the ultrarich to stay one step ahead of tax enforcement.

### Corporate Pushback

Corporate forces began fighting back against Biden's changes to the tax code as soon as they were proposed. While the **U.S. Chamber of Commerce**, the nation's largest lobbying group, came out in the summer of 2021 in support of the bipartisan Senate package on hard infrastructure investments, they have vowed to do everything they can "to prevent this tax raising, job killing reconciliation bill from becoming law."<sup>25</sup>

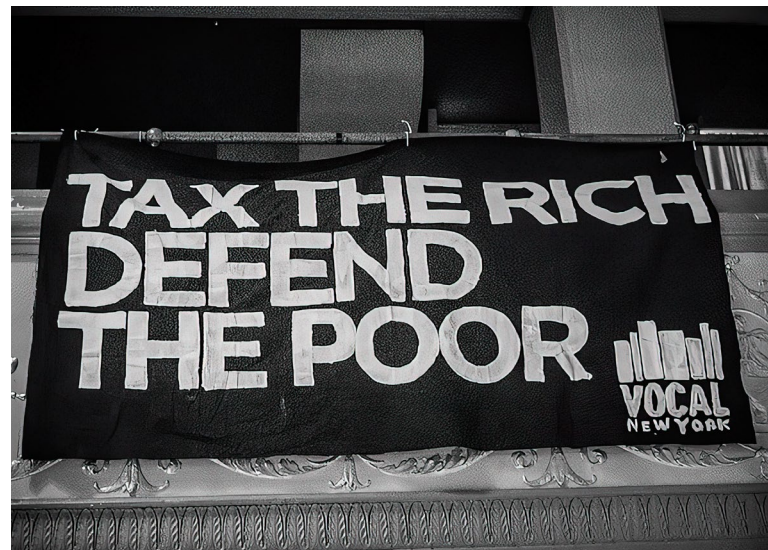
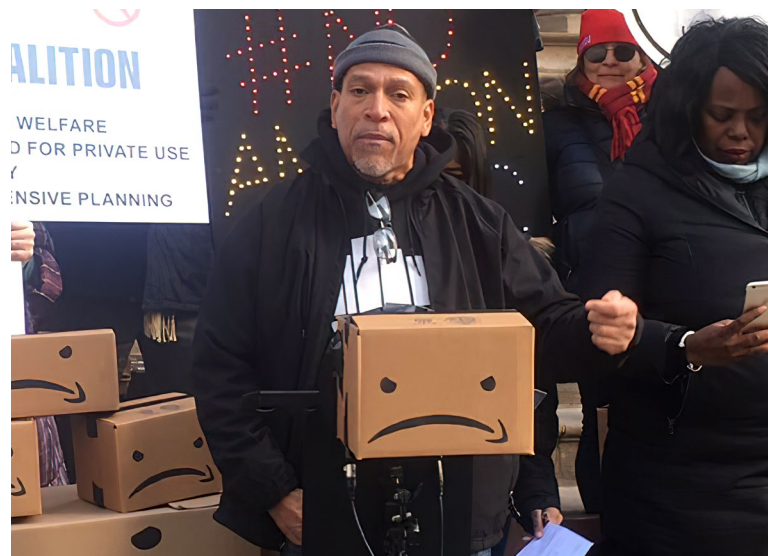
According to the *Washington Post*, they put together a coalition to coordinate the fight against the bill's provisions, including the **National Association of Manufacturers**, whose board members include executives from **Dow Inc.**, **Exxon**, **Caterpillar**, and **Johnson & Johnson**.<sup>26</sup>

The Business Roundtable, a lobbying group whose members include the CEOs of **Amazon**, **Home Depot**, **Apple**, **Citigroup**, and **Comcast**, launched an advertising campaign in April of this year opposing any tax hikes.<sup>27</sup> Earlier this year, they came out against the Biden administration's proposal to raise corporate taxes to help pay for infrastructure investments.<sup>28 29 30</sup> Eight companies have explicitly lobbied against the proposed corporate tax provisions, including **Walmart**, **Oracle**, **Bristol-Myers Squibb**, **Accenture**, **Baxter Healthcare**, **Shell Oil**, **Walgreens**, and **Smith & Nephew**. Altogether, these companies have spent nearly \$40 million on lobbying efforts in 2020 and \$20 million in 2021 so far.<sup>31</sup> The executive directors of many of the corporations now protesting the Biden plan, including Johnson & Johnson, **JP Morgan Chase**, **DuPont de Nemours**, and **FedEx**, have all spoken out against the proposed tax increases.<sup>32</sup>

## Background

Trump's tax cuts have supercharged the racial wealth divide. One study found that after the TCJA's passage, 82 ultrarich families were able to avoid paying over \$1 billion in taxes, and the Tax Policy Center estimated that the top 0.1 percent of households got nearly 57 percent of the benefit of low tax rates on investment income in 2018.<sup>33</sup>

The cost of tax avoidance is enormous. U.S. corporations hold over \$2 trillion in profits offshore and dodge \$90 billion a year in income taxes by shifting profits to tax havens. A study from the Institute on Taxation and Economy Policy released earlier this year found that at least 55 of the largest corporations in the U.S. paid zero federal income taxes in 2020.<sup>34</sup>





## DRUG PRICING:

# PEOPLE OVER PROFIT

**Big Pharma constantly lobbies to keep its profits as high as possible, even when many drugs are developed using public funds.** Lifesaving medicines ought to be free or affordable for the public in need. Instead, drug companies and their trade associations lobby against drug price negotiation and patent liberation that could break up monopoly control and lower costs.

Medicare, which provides healthcare to 60 million people, should be able to negotiate drug prices to lower prices. Cost savings could then be invested in expanding public health insurance programs. We need to change policies so the federal government can end the pharmaceutical industry's abusive price-gouging practices and can manufacture or import generic prescription drugs when domestic pharmaceutical corporations fail to set fair prices.<sup>35</sup>

### What the People Want

The public wants prescription drug reform. Survey data show that 80 percent of adults believe prescription drugs are unreasonably expensive.<sup>36</sup> Almost 90 percent of adults support allowing the government to negotiate drug prices.<sup>37</sup> Majorities of the public support giving Medicare the power to negotiate lower drug prices.<sup>38</sup> Healthcare tops the list of costs that people want government action to reduce.<sup>39</sup> A recent poll from the Alliance for Retired Americans found an 87-percent majority of voters over age 65 favor allowing Medicare to negotiate drug prices, which includes 48 percent who are strongly in favor.<sup>40</sup>

### What's in the Budget Plan: Lower Drug Prices

The budget reconciliation package would let Medicare negotiate drug prices, which would spur competition and save as much as \$450 billion over 10 years.<sup>41</sup> Allowing the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to negotiate lower prices could reduce net prices for branded drugs by an average of 55 percent.<sup>42</sup>

The bill would also repeal the noninterference clause which prohibits the government from being involved in price negotiations between manufacturers and health plan sponsors.

In a 2021 working paper, CBO analysts used a simulation model of price negotiations, determining that prices would fall between 57 and 75 percent, relative to current prices, if Congress were to enact this provision.<sup>43</sup>

## Corporate Pushback

Large pharmaceutical companies are already attempting to eliminate drug pricing provisions in the budget plan.<sup>44</sup> **Pharmaceutical Research & Manufacturers of America (PhRMA)**—the third-largest lobbying group in the country—began to run ads in July 2021 which misleadingly suggest that the type of legislation in the budget resolution is designed to make it harder for Medicare patients to get drugs—despite evidence that the opposite is true.<sup>45</sup>

According to Politico, PhRMA and its allies have already spent more than \$18 million on ads opposing the Medicare negotiation proposal since July of 2021.<sup>46</sup> As of August, there are at least eight Big Pharma-backed campaigns on the airways.<sup>47</sup> For years, PhRMA and its members—which include pharmaceutical giants like **Gilead, Johnson & Johnson, Pfizer, and Merck & Co**—have lobbied extensively against allowing Medicare to negotiate drug prices and have sued to block the policy proposals to import lower-priced prescription drugs.<sup>48</sup>

Pharmaceutical product manufacturers spend more money on lobbying than any other industry, spending a record \$306 million in 2020. Pfizer Inc. alone has spent \$6,670,000 and comes in at number 15.<sup>49</sup> Conservative advocacy group the **American Action Network** is running a \$5 million ad campaign attacking the recent budget resolution as a plan that would “limit patients’ access to lifesaving medications.”<sup>50</sup> The group received nearly \$15 million from PhRMA between 2016-2019.<sup>51</sup>

All the while, pharmaceutical giants rake in astronomical profits without limits on what they can charge consumers, then reward their leadership

with lucrative stock options.<sup>52</sup> Last year, executives and directors at **Pfizer Inc., Moderna Inc.**, and other pharmaceutical corporations developing COVID-19 vaccines sold approximately \$496 million of their own stock, effectively cashing in on their pandemic profiteering.<sup>53</sup>

## Background

People in the U.S. pay the highest prices in the world for prescription drugs.<sup>54</sup> But not everyone is impacted equally; Black and brown people are diagnosed at higher rates with conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, and heart disease, and are more likely to ration medications at higher rates than their white counterparts.<sup>55 56 57</sup> A 2019 study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that one in seven adults with diabetes ration their medication due to cost.<sup>58</sup> Research shows Big Pharma systematically targets Black and brown patients with high drug prices and limited access to healthcare—and the results are deadly.<sup>59</sup>

Even though taxpayers in the U.S. paid large sums to help develop COVID-19 vaccines, pharmaceutical companies are protecting their patent rights rather than allowing for mass production of generic versions or sharing vaccine technology with other countries.<sup>60</sup>

**Pharmaceutical product manufacturers spend more money on lobbying than any other industry, spending a record \$306 million in 2020.**

These protections have a huge price tag for the rest of us: as occurred with the AIDS/HIV epidemic, many lives are lost while large pharmaceutical corporations are granted long periods of time in which they can charge whatever they want for a

drug they control.<sup>61</sup> A 2020 report from the Journal of the American Medical Association found that large drug companies' profit margins are far higher than other large companies in nonpharmaceutical industries.<sup>62</sup>

Consider the case of Gilead Sciences. Truvada, a potentially life-saving medication for HIV/AIDS they manufacture, costs approximately \$6 a month to make, yet a month's worth of the prescription can run as high as \$1,500.<sup>63</sup> Despite taxpayer contributions of more than \$70 million to help develop Remdesivir, a medication used to treat

COVID-19, Gilead priced the treatment at over \$3,000 per person, although the drug is estimated to cost less than \$10 to produce.<sup>64</sup>

In August of 2021, Pfizer raised the prices of their COVID-19 vaccines to grow their profit margins and maintain their promises to investors to increase prices.<sup>65</sup> Last year, large pharmaceutical corporations hiked the prices on 245 drugs, including 61 used in the treatment of COVID-19, restricting access to only those who have the means to pay.<sup>66</sup> Big Pharma plans to raise prices on at least 500 prescription drugs this year.<sup>67</sup>



**People in the U.S.  
pay the highest  
prices in the world  
for prescription drugs.**

**HEALTHCARE:**

# A HUMAN RIGHT, NOT A COMMODITY

The United States is one of only three U.N. member states—along with the islands of Palau and Comoros—that denies healthcare is a human right. The pandemic makes it clear that comprehensive healthcare is essential to our survival. Expanding and improving public health to include dental, health, and vision coverage in Medicare, capping out-of-pocket expenses, providing insurance for people in the 12 states which have thus far have refused funds offered to them under Medicaid expansion, as well as the possibility of lowering the age for Medicare, are important stepping stones towards truly comprehensive public health: Medicare for All. Until we achieve this goal, more people need to be covered by the marketplace, but any system that puts profits before people is doomed to fail us. We must move toward providing healthcare to all, with no cost to patients.

## What the People Want

A recent poll from FOX News found that healthcare is among the top concerns for registered voters in our country.<sup>68</sup> Recent polling from Morning Consult and Politico found that a majority of voters support Medicare for All and 68 percent of voters support a public health insurance option.<sup>69</sup> In addition, more than 60 percent believe that government is responsible for ensuring health coverage for all Americans.<sup>70</sup> Healthcare tops the list of costs that

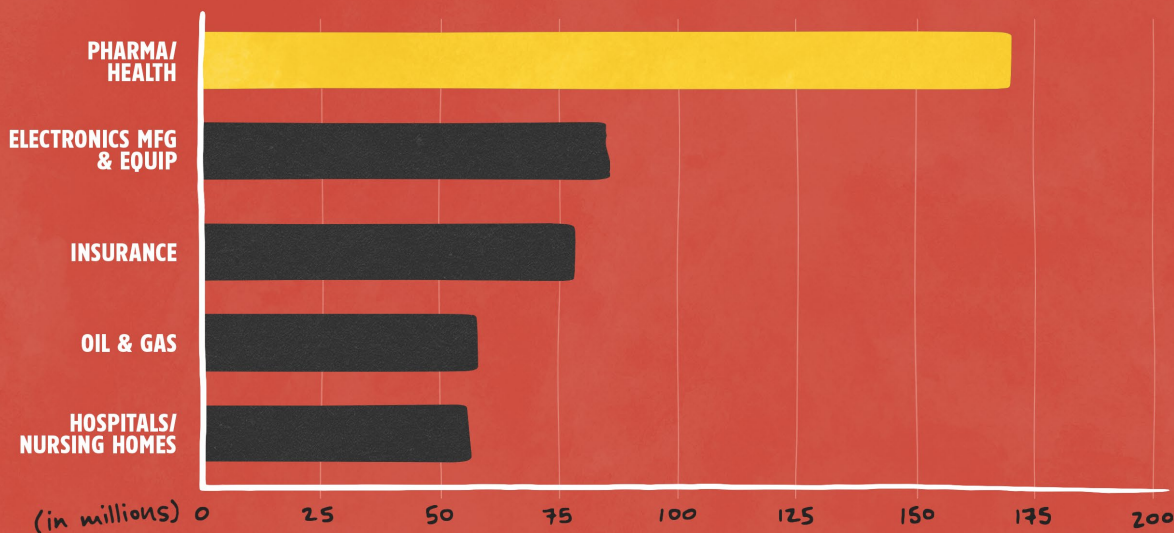
people want government action to make more affordable.<sup>71</sup> Polling from Data for Progress finds that investment in home and community-based care is one of the leading drivers of support for the American Jobs Plan in 10 key states.<sup>72</sup> A June Morning Consult poll found that 77 percent of voters favor expanding home health services and support for direct care workers.<sup>73</sup>

## What's in the Budget Plan: Expanding Medicare & Medicaid

The Biden plan makes large strides toward lowering healthcare costs for people in the U.S. and expanding healthcare coverage. The plan would add dental, vision, and hearing coverage to Medicare, helping to fill the gap for the millions of people in the U.S. who currently lack these comprehensive benefits.<sup>74</sup> The bill would also close the Medicaid gap for low-income Americans in states where expansion has been blocked by legislators, which could help four million uninsured

people gain coverage.<sup>75</sup> Additionally, lowering the age when people can sign up for insurance through Medicare—currently at 65—is still being considered, which would improve access or affordability for millions of people.<sup>76</sup> The bill would reduce health insurance premiums for those purchasing coverage through the Affordable Care Act (ACA) marketplaces and expand access to financial assistance for more middle-class families.<sup>77</sup> The bill would save 9 million people currently receiving financial assistance an average of \$50 per person per month.<sup>78</sup> The proposal also adds \$400 billion in Medicaid Home and Community Based Services.<sup>79</sup>

### TOP INDUSTRIES BY LOBBYING EXPENDITURES



The Pharmaceuticals and Healthcare Industry has spent over \$171 million so far in 2021 on lobbying, **the most of any industry.**

## Corporate Pushback

Private health insurers and their trade associations spend big to defend their market power and derail the healthcare provisions outlined in the Build Back Better agenda. Pharmaceutical and health interests spent \$92 million to lobby the federal government in the first three months of 2021 and are on track to spend more than twice on lobbying than any other industry this year.<sup>80</sup>

The **Partnership for America's Health Care Future (PAHCF)**, an umbrella lobbying entity created by

for-profit insurers, hospitals, and pharmaceutical makers in 2018 to stop the momentum towards Medicare for All, has continuously pushed back against public health options and instead promotes private insurance.<sup>81</sup> Its members include PhRMA, the **Blue Cross Blue Shield Association**, and the **American Hospital Association**.<sup>82</sup> **CVS Health** donated \$5 million to PAHCF at the same time the group began to launch advertising campaigns in Colorado, Maine, Montana, Connecticut, and Washington D.C. urging voters to oppose Medicare for All.<sup>83</sup>

In April 2021, President and CEO of **Cigna** David M Cordani, Chief Executive of CVS Karen S. Lynch, President and CEO Gail K. Boudreaux of **Anthem Inc.**, **Harvard Pilgrim Health Care + Tufts Health Plan** CEO Thomas A. Croswell, and **United Health Group** president and COO Dirk McMahon all co-signed a letter to Connecticut Gov. Ned Lamont, warning that the effort to enact a public health insurance option would drive health insurance businesses out of the state.<sup>84</sup> In July, the **American Dental Association (ADA)** came out opposing a broad Medicare dental benefit.<sup>85</sup> Politico has reported that the ADA and other similar groups are trying to influence the outcome, advocating for Congress to limit the provision to individuals earning less than 300 percent of the federal poverty line.<sup>86</sup>

In a September op-ed from **America's Health Insurance Plans**, the CEO argued that Congress “should not jeopardize an efficient, effective, and popular healthcare program that serves so many Americans for their coverage and care,” despite evidence suggesting otherwise.<sup>87</sup> For months, PAHCP has been posting misleading tweets about Medicare expansion, claiming that such provisions as those outlined in the Build Back Better agenda would “threaten access to quality care” and arguing that we should “continue to build on and improve what’s working.”<sup>88</sup>

## Background

A long history of structural racism and blatant discrimination in the healthcare system has contributed to gaps in health insurance coverage, uneven access to services, and poorer health outcomes especially for communities of color.<sup>89</sup>

The COVID-19 crisis has illuminated the long-standing disparities and inequities in healthcare. People of color are dying from the coronavirus at far higher rates than their white counterparts and are more likely to lack access to healthcare and health insurance.<sup>90</sup> As of 2018, the uninsured rate among African Americans was 9.7 percent, while it was just 5.4 percent among whites.<sup>91</sup> The rate is even higher for Hispanic or Latinx people, who face an uninsured rate of nearly 18 percent.

The high cost of coverage keeps the number of uninsured and underinsured Americans high.<sup>92</sup> Research from the Century Foundation finds that the average family spends 11 percent of family income per year on healthcare premiums and out-of-pocket costs.<sup>93</sup> For Black people, the average annual cost for healthcare premiums is nearly double, at almost 20 percent. Narrowing these disparities in cost and access is key to improving our nation’s overall healthcare system and reducing the unnecessary costs borne by working people and families.<sup>94</sup>



**HOUSING:**

# EVERYONE DESERVES A HOME

**Everyone deserves a safe, accessible, sustainable, and permanently affordable home.** As we advocate for our long-term vision of a Homes Guarantee and a National Tenants Bill of Rights, we need to invest substantially in repairing the diminishing stock of public housing and building more affordable units. While the Biden plan adds more money into housing than in decades, it's still not enough, and big banks and realtor associations are pushing back on even this step.

We must address the \$80 billion public housing repair backlog, allocate \$45 billion for the National Housing Trust Fund per year, repeal the Faircloth Amendment, which prohibits the net expansion of public housing, make weatherization and energy efficiency upgrades consistent with the Green New Deal for Public Housing, and establish a federal Affordable Housing Acquisition fund to prevent the loss of viable rental options in the wake of an economic downturn.<sup>95</sup>

## What the People Want

Polling has shown that a Homes for All agenda is broadly popular.<sup>96</sup> Majorities of people support policies that would build enough new nonprofit and publicly owned homes to ensure every person in the U.S. has a place to live. Majorities also support policies that cap rent increases.<sup>97</sup> Data for Progress polling from earlier this year found that 60 percent of likely voters say they're in favor of public housing. Other polling shows that a Green Homes Guarantee is popular, with majority support across all the different policies sampled.<sup>98</sup> A majority of U.S. families support the federal government doing more to make housing more affordable.<sup>99</sup>

Another recent poll commissioned through Hart Research found that 89 percent of the public believes the government should enact a uniform, nationwide policy that stops all evictions during the coronavirus outbreak.<sup>100</sup>

## What's in the Budget Plan: Investing in Public & Affordable Housing

The housing elements of the American Jobs Plan would mark the largest federal investment in affordable housing in a generation, funding more low-income affordable housing than at any point in our country's history.<sup>101</sup> The proposal is expected to make historic investments in affordable

housing, with money going to rental assistance and homeownership programs like the National Housing Trust Fund, which provides states with grants to construct and preserve homes affordable to people with the lowest incomes.<sup>102</sup> The bill also makes major investments in our public housing stock, HOME, the Capital Magnet Fund, and rural housing. Specifically, the bill would use tax credits and government financing to bolster affordable and resilient housing, stating that it will support the construction or rehabilitation of more than two million homes.<sup>103</sup> By providing down payment assistance, rental assistance, and other homeownership initiatives, the bill would make housing more affordable and put a substantial dent in our housing deficit.<sup>104</sup>

The plan also includes new project-based vouchers to provide long-term affordability and ensure that very low-income households are able to access new affordable homes.<sup>105</sup> However, providing vouchers when there isn't enough housing stock, especially since some landlords refuse them, doesn't solve the problem. We must urge policymakers to actually build and invest enough in new public housing stock, not rely on band-aid fixes.

While recent steps taken by the Biden administration to expand the supply of affordable housing units, with an emphasis on lower- and middle-income families, are promising, much more remains to be done.<sup>106</sup>

## Corporate Pushback

So far this year, real estate groups have spent \$41,772,440 on lobbying.<sup>107</sup> The **National Association of Realtors (NAR)**—the nation's second-largest real estate lobbying group, fiercely opposes eviction moratoriums—and spent \$84,113,368 on lobbying efforts in 2020.<sup>108</sup> Large corporations, through the NAR and other real estate industry groups, have spent millions to halt the national eviction moratorium.<sup>109</sup> The Mortgage Banking Association, which has also been pushing for the Biden administration to end the moratorium, spent \$2,458,313 in 2020.<sup>110</sup> On July 27 the **National Apartment Association (NAA)**—whose top tier partners include Home Depot, **AT&T**, and **Sherwin Williams**—filed a lawsuit to recover damages on behalf of rental housing providers that have suffered severe economic

losses under the "overreaching" federal eviction moratorium.<sup>111</sup> The National Association of Realtors filed a similar lawsuit.<sup>112</sup> An investigative study from Popular Information found that despite receiving millions in forgivable loans from the Paycheck Protection Program, 62 corporate landlords were filing evictions during the moratorium—putting thousands on the streets in the midst of a pandemic.<sup>113</sup>

The NAR publicly boasts of its commitment to protecting property interests. While most real estate industry lobbying over the past year has been spent pushing back against the eviction moratorium, this is consistent with their long history of promoting the interests of private landlords and developers over those of tenants.

## Background

The historical legacy of large corporations like **Coldwell Banker** and **Wells Fargo** in perpetuating housing segregation dates to nearly a century ago, but the effects of these decisions are still prevalent today.<sup>114</sup> Residential segregation has inhibited home value appreciation for Black people, helping to fuel the Black-white wealth gap.<sup>115</sup> It's also meant that Black households are more likely to live in concentrated poverty.<sup>116</sup> A study from 2020 found that formerly redlined neighborhoods are more susceptible to COVID-19 complications, bringing to light just one example of the connection between housing discrimination and health.<sup>117</sup>

Still today, exclusionary zoning is ubiquitous in cities across the country and has been found to exacerbate both economic and racial segregation.<sup>118</sup> The home ownership rate for Black families is 45 percent, compared to 74 percent for white families.<sup>119</sup> Research shows that owner-occupied homes in Black neighborhoods are undervalued by an average of \$48,000 per home.<sup>120</sup>

The COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated housing insecurity across the country. This has been especially the case for low-income renters and renters of color.<sup>121</sup> The federal eviction moratorium passed through the CARES act in March of 2020 helped save lives and was estimated to have prevented 1.55 million evictions.<sup>122</sup>



Still today, over one in seven renters are not caught up on rent. For Black renters the rate is over 1 in 5.<sup>123</sup> However, because the moratorium expired and a recent Supreme Court decision is blocking the president from extending the program, the fate of this critical protection is left in the hands of Congress.<sup>124</sup>

But our affordable housing crisis existed long before the COVID-19 pandemic. We currently have a shortage of 7 million affordable and available homes—meaning that in the richest country in the world, only 37 affordable and available rental homes exist for every 100 extremely low-income renter households.<sup>125</sup> A report from last year found that 10.9 million renters spent more than 50 percent of their income on housing in 2018.<sup>126</sup> In 2017, the U.S. Government Accountability Office found that 48 percent of renters were cost burdened, meaning these

households were paying more than 30 percent of their household income on rent.<sup>127</sup> The burden is heavier for communities of color; Black, Native American, and Hispanic/Latinx households are more likely than white households to be extremely low-income renters, for whom there is a shortage of homes.<sup>128</sup>



**105 million Americans** are currently facing eviction or foreclosure because of the COVID-19 crisis.

## CLIMATE & THE ENVIRONMENT:

# WE MUST ACT NOW!

United Nations scientists warn we have only a narrow window of opportunity during which to prevent the worst outcomes of global warming and climate change, and we must act now. Yet while experts agree people and the planet depend on large investments to address the climate crisis, fossil fuel corporations and their shareholders resist any efforts to regulate or make them pay for the problems they created.

**It's critical that Congress utilize this moment to act on the will of the people and robustly invest in climate solutions that meet the scale of the interconnected crises we face.** We must transform our economy into a 100 percent clean energy economy and immediately ban all new fossil fuel and extractive energy projects, end all taxpayer subsidies for oil and gas companies, and clean up abandoned mines and wells.

We must invest in public and community ownership of renewable energy as we decarbonize and democratize all sectors of the economy. This includes replacing 100 percent of all lead pipes, retrofitting and electrifying our public houses and schools, and expanding access to clean public transit through union-built electric vehicles and investments in charging infrastructure. To successfully build a resilient and clean economy, we must also create a Civilian Climate Corps that would employ people to address climate change, including through restoration and repair efforts and greening our neighborhoods.

### What the People Want

A Pew Research Center poll from earlier this year found that two-thirds of U.S. adults say the federal government is doing too little to reduce the effects of climate change.<sup>129</sup> July polling from Third Way found that the majority of voters in all 50 U.S. states endorse federal action to reach a 100 percent clean energy grid.<sup>130</sup> All but six of the 435 congressional districts in the U.S. endorse such an action.<sup>131</sup> Additionally, voters strongly back

climate-related infrastructure investments—70 percent of voters support addressing the challenge of climate change by shifting to greater use of clean energy, reducing carbon pollution from vehicles and industry, and making homes and buildings more energy efficient.<sup>132</sup> A majority of voters—69 percent—support investing in clean energy such as wind and solar power by extending tax credits to spur innovation and manufacturing.<sup>133</sup>

Eighty percent of U.S. adults worry about the pollution of drinking water and of rivers, lakes, and reservoirs.<sup>134</sup> Polling from February shows that a majority of voters support the government moving the country to a 100 percent clean energy electricity grid by 2035 to help address climate change and reduce pollution.<sup>135</sup>

## What's in the Budget Plan: Addressing Climate Change

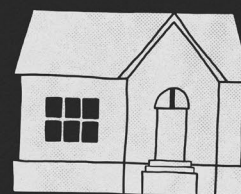
The package will enact a Clean Electricity Payment Program that would move our utilities energy production away from fossil fuels and toward sustainable energy.<sup>136</sup> The bill also includes trillions of dollars in measures to help decarbonize and keep the country within the targets, confirmed again recently by the International Energy Agency, of halving greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 to avoid the most catastrophic effects of climate degradation.<sup>137</sup>

Another major climate measure being considered is a carbon-based border adjustment tax, a proposed tariff on imports like iron, steel, and aluminum from China and other countries with more lax regulations on emissions.<sup>138</sup> Also encouraging are the bill's billion-dollar investments to help address per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or, contamination in drinking water and wastewater discharges, to reclaim mine lands, and to increase climate resilience by electrifying public transit and school buses, and providing tax incentives for union-built electric vehicles and electric vehicle charging stations.<sup>139</sup> The plan also includes \$30 billion in funding for a Civilian Climate Corps, an amount that reflects the size and scale we need to respond to the climate crisis and that ensures that this program is equitable and accessible to all.<sup>140</sup> The plan also reinstates Superfund excise taxes that were repealed in 1995, making chemical companies and federal entities pay for past pollution.<sup>141</sup> It also includes historic investments in housing, including billions toward funding improved energy and water efficiency standards and removing health hazards that disproportionately impact people of color, among other green housing provisions.<sup>142</sup>

However, elements of the package would actively do harm to our communities, including the bill's funding for fossil fuel school buses, financing for construction of a gas pipeline in Alaska, and weakening of the National Environmental Policy Act.<sup>143</sup> Even though the Senate voted to repeal fossil fuel subsidies, the House proposes to maintain billions of dollars of handouts to fossil fuel companies.<sup>144</sup> Congress should work to remove these harmful provisions and go bigger and bolder on the provisions that move us towards a 100 percent clean-energy future.

**1 in 3 Americans  
live in a county  
hit by a weather  
disaster in the last  
three months.**

*(Washington Post)*



## Corporate Pushback

Fossil fuel companies, which bear responsibility for the carbon dioxide and methane emissions that are driving climate change, are pushing back against climate action. Soon after Biden released his \$2 trillion climate plan, collective ad spending by these companies and their lobbying groups rose more than 1,000 percent.<sup>145</sup> The **American Gas Association** and the **Interstate Natural Gas Association of America**, whose members include for-profit local utility companies like **Duke Energy** and **We Energies**, recently signed a letter to congressional leaders with concerns about the proposed methane emissions tax in Biden's plan.<sup>146</sup> A recent report found that six congresspeople accepted over \$300,000 from Exxon Mobil in its latest attempt to fight against the infrastructure package. The oil and gas industry ranks fourth in total lobbying expenses in the country, with \$55,616,000 in spending so far in 2021.<sup>147</sup>

The **Edison Electric Institute**, a for-profit utility lobbying association that represents investor-owned electric utilities which serve almost three-quarters of the nation's electricity customers, has been advocating to include a natural gas carveout as part of the budget reconciliation package.<sup>148</sup>

The **Consumer Energy Alliance**, a group that bills itself as "voice of the energy consumer" and whose members include **UPS**, **FedEx**, **Alliant Energy**, **Atmos Energy**, **Caterpillar**, **CenterPoint Energy/Vectren**, **Delta Airlines**, **United Airlines**, **JetBlue**, and **American Airlines**, is run by the Republican-linked consultancy **HBW Resources** and was party to a lawsuit seeking to overturn Oregon's clean fuel program, which aims to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions from transport fuels.<sup>149</sup> The Consumer Energy Alliance spent \$100,000 on lobbying efforts in 2020.<sup>150</sup>

The **American Petroleum Institute**, which represents oil companies including **Shell**, **ExxonMobil**, **BP**, and **Chevron**, has pledged to resist the Biden administration's environmental proposals.<sup>151</sup> According to a report from **Influence Map**, in 2019 **BP** spent \$53 million on climate lobbying, leading the nation in the most money

# Fossil fuel companies are pushing back against climate action.

going toward pushing back on climate action.<sup>152</sup> In the same year **BP** pushed out another \$13 million in donations to a campaign that successfully stopped a carbon tax in Washington state.<sup>153</sup>

**Shell** and **BP** support groups such as the **Alliance of Western Energy Consumers**, which fought against Oregon's efforts to put a price on carbon emissions, as well as the **Texas Oil & Gas Association**, a Texas-based trade group pushing back against rules to restrict output of methane, a gas that's at least 80 times as effective at trapping heat as carbon in a 20-year period.<sup>154</sup> The second highest spender in the oil and gas industry in 2019 was **Shell**, spending \$49 million on climate lobbying and \$55 million on climate branding.<sup>155</sup> Altogether, the report found that since the Paris agreement, 5 major oil companies have been spending \$200 million annually on activities to influence climate policy, whether directly or through trade associations, and over \$1 billion on misleading climate related branding or advertising campaigns and lobbying.<sup>156</sup>

**Big Oil** is not the only corporate entity to blame for resistance against climate action. Three out of every 4 board members at 7 major U.S. banks have current or past ties to 'climate-conflicted' companies or organizations.<sup>157</sup> Many of these same banks, including **Bank of America**, **Citigroup**, **JPMorgan Chase**, and **Wells Fargo**, have also helped finance **Line 3**.<sup>158</sup> A report from the **Rainforest Action Network** and the **Sierra Club** found that the world's 60 largest banks poured a total of \$3.8 trillion into fossil fuels from 2016–2020.<sup>159</sup>



## Background

The public health implications of climate change are well-documented. Climate change contributes to increased respiratory and cardiovascular disease, premature deaths related to extreme weather events, and changes in the prevalence and geographical distribution of food and water-borne illnesses, among many others.<sup>160</sup> However, not everyone is impacted equally.<sup>161</sup> A recent report from the Environmental Protection Agency finds that Black individuals are 40 percent more likely than non-Black individuals to live in areas with the highest projected increases in mortality rates due to climate-driven changes in extreme temperatures.<sup>162</sup> In addition, people of color are more likely to live near toxic facilities.<sup>163</sup> Heat waves—which kill hundreds, if not thousands of people a year—are becoming more frequent and more severe due to the climate crisis.<sup>164</sup> Formerly-redlined neighborhoods, which remain disproportionately Black, tend to be hotter than whiter and wealthier neighborhoods, putting these communities more at risk.<sup>165</sup> People of color tend to

live in areas with more pollution from every type of source; from industry to agriculture, vehicles, and emissions from restaurants.<sup>166</sup> And while air pollution is disproportionately caused by white people's consumption of goods and services, its health impacts disproportionately affect Black and Latinx communities.<sup>167</sup> Research shows that Black individuals are 34 percent more likely than white individuals to live in areas with the highest projected increases in childhood asthma diagnoses due to climate-driven changes in particulate air pollution.<sup>168</sup>

Only a small handful of companies are responsible for the majority of greenhouse gas emissions that cause global warming.<sup>169</sup> In fact, 90 fossil fuel companies have accounted for nearly two-thirds of carbon dioxide emissions since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution.<sup>170</sup> While our most vulnerable communities suffer, these companies—including Exxon Mobil, Chevron, and BP—have been reaping rewards while evading responsibility for their actions.

## IMMIGRATION:

# OUR STRENGTH

**Immigrants contribute extensively to the diversity and the success of our country. We need to create pathways to citizenship that value the lives, families, and work of immigrants and their contributions to American life.**

It's been decades since Congress passed meaningful immigration reform. Since the turn of this century, there have been two attempts—one in 2007 and another in 2013— which both failed.<sup>171</sup> Today, those currently eligible for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Temporary Protected Status (TPS)—many of whom are essential workers—have no pathway to citizenship.<sup>172</sup>

We can no longer rely on temporary solutions like these for immigrants. People who make significant contributions to our society and economy should not be expected to continue living their lives in two-year increments. To ensure an equitable economic recovery, it's critical that the Biden plan include a permanent pathway to citizenship for DACA recipients, TPS holders, farmworkers, and essential workers.

### What the People Want

**Voters overwhelmingly support a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants.**

Data for Progress's polling released in March showed that 69 percent of voters support a pathway to citizenship, compared to just 25 percent opposing.<sup>173</sup> A poll on the bill found that the majority of likely voters support a proposal that would provide a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who arrived in the United States as children, who work in essential industries, and/or who would not be safe in their country of origin.<sup>174</sup>

An ACLU commissioned poll from last month shows strong majorities of registered voters support a pathway to citizenship for immigrants who were brought to the country as children and support Congress passing citizenship legislation as part of a national recovery package that would include protections for Temporary Protected Status holders and essential immigrant workers.<sup>175</sup>

### What's in the Budget Plan: Pathway to Citizenship for Immigrants

The Biden plan is a big step towards the thorough immigration reform our country needs now: it includes \$107 billion for immigrant communities—including immigrant youth, people with TPS, farmworkers, and essential workers—to get a pathway to citizenship.<sup>176</sup>

Unfortunately, the unelected Senate Parliamentarian ruled last week that the immigration citizenship positions did not meet the Byrd rule, meaning it was deemed to have an insignificant budgetary effect, and thus could not be included in Budget Reconciliation. It's disappointing and unacceptable that an unelected staff attorney for the Senate can block a proposal supported by all. However, this fight is not over and it's encouraging to see legislators prepare alternative proposals so that Congress can deliver on this desperately needed piece of the Build Back Better plan.

According to a recent study, providing a pathway to citizenship for DACA recipients, TPS-eligible individuals, and undocumented essential workers could boost U.S. gross domestic product by a cumulative \$1.5 trillion over 10 years and create over 400,000 new jobs.<sup>177</sup> The study finds that this would increase wages for all workers, not just the wages of undocumented workers, by an average of \$600 a year.

## Corporate Pushback

Today, Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) detention system is overwhelmingly outsourced to for-profit prison companies.<sup>178</sup> The two largest private prison companies (**CoreCivic** and **GEO Group**) made a combined \$1.3 billion in 2019.<sup>179</sup> GEO Group, in particular, has been a multimillion-dollar beneficiary of harsh anti-immigration policies for years. They have aggressively lobbied to secure contracts and influence the nation's immigration policy.<sup>180</sup> GEO Group spent \$1,390,000 on lobbying in 2020.<sup>181</sup> CoreCivic spent \$1,750,000.<sup>182</sup> CoreCivic received \$225 million in funding from ICE to manage immigrant detention facilities in 2018.<sup>183</sup>

**3 out of 4  
undocumented  
immigrants in the  
United States are  
essential workers.  
They currently  
have no path to  
citizenship.**



But it's not just private prisons lobbying against immigration reform. Many of the largest corporations in the U.S. play a role as well. **Altria Group/Philip Morris, Koch Industries/Flint Hills, State Farm** and **UPS**—just to name a few—all sit on the **American Legislative Exchange Council's** private enterprise board, which has a history of supporting anti-immigrant legislation.<sup>184</sup>

## Background

The U.S. has a long and bipartisan history of xenophobic, racist, and exploitative immigration policy. Structural racism has been baked into our domestic policies for over a century, making it so that undocumented communities of color are disproportionately harmed and face harsher consequences compared to their counterparts, including through blatant abuse at the hands of the state, wage theft, workplace violations, apprehensions, and deportations.<sup>185</sup>

Six million undocumented workers pay more than \$328 billion every year in federal, state, and local taxes for the Medicaid, Medicare, and Social Security benefits of others, which they are not eligible to receive.<sup>186</sup> More than 5 million of these workers were deemed part of the U.S.'s critical infrastructure as "essential workers" during the pandemic, yet they were not granted a pathway to citizenship.<sup>187</sup>

According to CLASP, approximately 69 percent of all immigrant workers and 74 percent of all undocumented workers are employed in essential industries.<sup>188</sup> Many of these workers and their families do not receive critical workplace protections, livable wages, or benefits like paid leave and paid sick days. Undocumented immigrants are also much more likely to be uninsured, creating barriers in access to healthcare which are especially and acutely harmful during a global pandemic.<sup>189</sup>

Immigrants disproportionately make up low-wage occupations and face disproportionately higher

poverty rates.<sup>190</sup> Meanwhile, a recent IPS report found that the CEOs of the 100 largest low-wage employers each earned an average of \$14 million last year.<sup>191</sup> This includes a range of corporations across sectors such as Hilton Worldwide, Nike, Lowe's, Chipotle, Gap, and Western Digital Corp., among many others.<sup>192</sup>

Today, millions of immigrants continue to live in fear of deportation and of having their families torn apart, even as they raise families and contribute to our local economies and communities.

## CORPORATIONS AND DEMOCRACY REFORM

**Rich corporations are fighting tooth and nail to prevent the American people from getting what they want: a government that works for everyone, not just a wealthy few. Their massive use of corporate power to frustrate the will of the people on an issue-by-issue basis is part of a larger anti-democracy effort backed by corporate America.**

**As corporations seek to undermine the Biden plan's much-needed tax provisions, historic investments in drug pricing reform, healthcare, housing, climate and immigration reform, they are also attacking our freedom to vote. Many of the same companies combating elements of the Build Back Better proposal are also bankrolling voter suppression legislation.<sup>193</sup>**

**Corporations have given \$50 million since 2015 in political contributions to state legislators who support voter suppression bills, which includes \$22 million in contributions during the 2020 election cycle.<sup>194</sup> During the 2018 and 2020 election cycles, 182 companies gave millions of dollars to groups or campaigns which support elected officials who sponsored, advanced, or promised to act on voting restriction or nullification legislation.<sup>195</sup>**

**Restrictive voter registration policies disproportionately and deliberately block**

**Black and brown voters from exercising their fundamental right to vote.<sup>196</sup> Transformative structural reform proposals currently on the table, such as the Freedom to Vote Act, would help to ensure all eligible voters have access to the ballot box and can hold politicians accountable, limit the power of money in elections, and restore the rights of Black and brown voters that corporate funders have actively undermined since 2013, when the Supreme Court struck down parts of the 1965 Civil Rights Act.<sup>197</sup>**

**These provisions would modernize voter registration, eliminate discriminatory voter ID laws, restore the voting rights of people with felony convictions post-release, promote racially equitable redistricting, and create a small-donor matching system to combat big money in politics, among many other provisions.<sup>198</sup>**

**We need more democracy in our economy, not corporate special interests using their wealth to entice elected officials to betray their constituents.**

**Corporations are attacking our electoral process and limiting people's ability to vote in—or out—elected officials who support—or oppose—the policies that we need.**



## CONCLUSION

Now we know who the real villains are behind the curtain, who want to keep our communities from getting what we need and deserve. Corporations and the wealthy few are undermining our democracy. They are lobbying hard to preserve an unequal status quo, using money to steer government rather than allow a real democracy to bring about what the people overwhelmingly want—a country that works for all of us.

President Biden's Build Back Better plan is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to restore our democracy and rebuild our economy. If we work together, we can confront climate change, create good jobs, expand healthcare, invest in public and affordable housing, and reform immigration.

While the Biden Jobs Plan's historic investments in our physical infrastructure will create as many as 650,000 jobs, this is not nearly enough to dig us out of an economic hole and stratification that's been decades in the making and exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>199</sup>

That's why Congress must also pass the Budget Reconciliation, which addresses immediate needs and builds the social infrastructure of our communities. This \$3.5 trillion proposal calls for long-term investments to tackle the climate crisis, create a pathway to citizenship for undocumented people, expand public healthcare and the Child Tax Credit, establish paid family and medical leave, invest in affordable housing and childcare, and much more. These investments will largely be offset by reversing regressive tax cuts to generate new tax revenues from corporations and the very rich, as well as healthcare savings and long-term economic growth.

If we're going to heal the wounds in our economy and our society, we need Congress and the President to deliver what the people want: assistance and investments so we can survive and thrive. That is what the Biden Build Back Better plan can provide. Our economy, our democracy, and our lives all hang in the balance—the time is now.



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**PEOPLE'S  
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