



# The America's Goals 2021 Policy Agenda

# A Message from Our Co-founder

When I left the NY State Senate to co-found Future Now in 2017, I believed that state lawmakers were the most important policymakers in our country. Today, it's as true as ever. As state lawmakers, you are leaders on the front lines of the deep economic, health, and equity impacts of COVID-19, the urgent calls to combat police brutality and systemic racism, and the unprecedented risks to our democracy.

With the transition in Washington, D.C. I worry that all eyes will turn to the federal government, leaving states and great lawmakers focused on improving lives to the whims of the worst special interests.

That's why I'm so excited that a group of lawmakers came together with Future Now to present this agenda for 2021. Thoughtfully curated over months by twenty leading lawmakers from around the country, the America's Goals 2021 Policy Agenda reflects the rich diversity of our nation: representatives from rural, urban, and suburban districts, states large and small, and serving in minorities and majorities, with nearly two thirds identifying as people of color, and a majority as women. This impressive group assessed Future Now's model policies, shared their own ideas for solutions, debated values and outcomes, and ultimately came together on this agenda.

**We are so proud of the work they have done. I want to commend this incredible group of lawmakers, and especially our co-chairs: Colorado State Senator Faith Winter, South Carolina State Representative JA Moore, and Nebraska State Senator Tony Vargas.**

These policies have the potential to improve millions of lives. As a state lawmaker, you are in the best position to know what policies will be effective in your state. I hope this helps you plan those crucial efforts.



**Daniel Squadron**  
CO-FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



## THE AMERICA'S GOALS 2021 POLICY AGENDA

# Executive Summary

In 2021, state lawmakers must take bold action to respond to the compounding crises of this moment and strengthen our future in ways that will benefit all Americans. The America's Goals 2021 Policy Agenda provides an action plan for state lawmakers in this urgent moment to improve all people's lives and build a more healthy, prosperous, and sustainable future.

Based on Future Now's America's Goals policy library, a nonpartisan resource with model policies and research from legislation around the country, every policy in this agenda has broad public support, includes a way of paying for itself, and will tangibly improve people's lives.

This lawmaker-driven Agenda advances urgent and widely popular policy solutions to improve lives through addressing the unique challenges of the moment from each of the seven America's Goals:

1. Good Jobs
2. Quality, Affordable Healthcare
3. Investing in Children
4. Empowering People Over Special interests
5. Equal Opportunity for All
6. Sustainable Infrastructure, Resilience, and Innovation
7. Clean Air, Water and Energy

The America's Goals 2021 Agenda offers policy solutions to meet the crises of this moment and ensure all communities are included in a better future. Rapid retraining programs will mean more **Good Jobs** as workers become prepared for the manufacturing, logistics, and health services roles needed to emerge from the pandemic. That investment will open long-term pathways into growth industries like healthcare and clean energy. Right now, **Quality, Affordable Healthcare** means increased testing, vaccine distribution, and more effective COVID-19 treatment. If done equitably and comprehensively, these will create a more effective healthcare system overall. The urgency of getting kids back into school will require **Investing in Children** and prioritizing remediation for early learners, which will also help set all kids up for long-term success. Creating a more fair and effective criminal justice system is critical to addressing both urgent, daily injustices and dismantling structural racism to make **Equal Opportunity for All** real.

Read on to see how you can support the most pressing solutions for recovering and rebuilding towards a more equitable future. **We encourage you to share this Agenda with your colleagues, identify which policies can best serve your constituents now and for the long-term, and use this as a roadmap to set and communicate those priorities.** If you're looking for support, Future Now is here to help.

# THE AMERICA'S GOALS 2021 POLICY AGENDA

## Meet America's Goals 2021 Participants



**Senator  
Tony Vargas**  
*Co-Chair*  
Nebraska LD 7  
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**Representative  
JA Moore**  
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**Senator  
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**Representative  
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Ohio HD 24  
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**Senator  
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Texas SD 29  
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**Delegate  
Lesley Lopez**  
Maryland HD 39



**Senator  
Angela Turner-Ford**  
Mississippi SD 16



**Representative  
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Minnesota HD 59A



**Representative  
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Kentucky HD 38  
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**Representative  
Anna V. Eskamani**  
Florida HD 47  
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**Representative  
Graig Meyer**  
North Carolina HD 50  
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**Representative  
Padma Kupp**  
Michigan HD 41



**Representative  
Ashton Clemmons**  
North Carolina HD 57  
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**Representative  
Ina Minjarez**  
Texas HD 124  
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**Representative  
Park Cannon**  
Georgia HD 58



**Representative  
Ben Diamond**  
Florida HD 68  
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**Delegate  
Josh Cole**  
Virginia HD 28



**Senator  
Zellnor Myrie**  
New York SD 20



**Senator  
Celina Villanueva**  
Illinois SD 11



**Representative  
Josie Raymond**  
Kentucky HD 31

# Goal 1: Good Jobs

COVID-19 has meant huge gains for a small number of large businesses and the most wealthy – while millions of workers and small businesses have suffered a financial crisis on top of the health risks and casualties. While there is no vaccine for economic hardship, the following policies address people's urgent needs and provide a path to a more prosperous future for all.

- **100% of Jobs Pay a Liveable Wage for All Job Seekers**
- **Paid Family, Vacation, And Sick Leave For 100% Of Jobs**
- **Protect Labor Rights And Increase Worker Representation**



1. **Essential Pay for Essential Workers**: At a time of unprecedented government investment in the economy, essential workers put their lives on the line to keep society functioning. They should get essential pay for their essential work.
2. **Strengthen the Workforce with Paid Sick Leave**: Over half of workers in restaurants and hospitals report having gone to work while sick, which adds up to bad health, risk of transmission, and low productivity. Paid sick leave is a health benefit that can address this both during a pandemic and when it's over.
3. **Support Working Families with Paid Family Leave**: This common-sense program generates significant savings, reduces worker turnover for businesses, helps protect healthy and sick people, and improves outcomes for new families.
4. **Protect Whistleblowers**: Particularly pressing for workers during COVID-19, The Safe at Work Act gives workers a voice in their own well-being by ensuring that employees who speak up about dangerous conditions are protected from retaliation.

THE AMERICA'S GOALS 2021 POLICY AGENDA  
GOAL 1: GOOD JOBS

5. Increased workplace safety: [New York](#), [Minnesota](#) and [Virginia](#) established new pandemic-related workplace safety requirements. This can be a win-win for workers and employers with loan and grant relief programs to help businesses comply. See the following [sample plans](#).
6. Small business loan and grant programs for business interruptions: Colorado passed into law during the pandemic a [\\$250 million small business loan fund](#) and a [\\$20 million grant fund](#) for small businesses struggling to stay open. You can invest in supporting small businesses and workers through the pandemic with funds like this, including providing aid targeted to COVID-19 business interruptions, as South Carolina enacted with a [\\$40 million fund](#) that offers special assistance for minority- and veteran-owned businesses.
7. Assisting companies to retool to support COVID-19 relief and recovery: Beyond producing personal protective equipment for use in healthcare and other industries, these efforts can include restaurant and catering businesses fighting hunger, after-school programs renovating to provide community health stations, and software companies creating platforms to connect patients to testing sites. See examples of business retooling efforts in [Michigan](#) and [Ohio](#).
8. By [Building Out a State Service Corps](#), states can invest in young people and nimbly give them the training and experience they need in a high-needs industry like the [New York State Public Health Corps](#).
9. [Expanding Apprenticeships to Grow Good Jobs](#): Allowing apprenticeships to help meet occupational licensing requirements means that people can get the skills and credentials they need to enter the workforce in a high-needs industry more quickly and while earning a paycheck.

## Goal 2: Quality, Affordable Healthcare

COVID-19 has led to a dramatic loss of human life and unprecedented challenges to our public health system, with particularly acute impacts on Black, Latino, and Indigenous communities. These have been exacerbated by long standing inequities in quality, affordable healthcare. While most people have still not gotten a vaccine, this is the moment to save lives, end the pandemic, and close the life-altering gaps in our healthcare system now and for the future.



- **Universal, Affordable Health Coverage With A Cap On Out-Of-Pocket Expenses**
- **Life Expectancy Of At Least 84 Years**
- **End Hunger For 100% Of Households**

1. **No One Should Be Denied Health Insurance Because of a Pre-Existing Condition**: States can ensure residents with pre-existing conditions have the fair healthcare coverage they need.
2. **Reduce Healthcare Costs – Stop Surprise Billing**: Surprise bills leave people with thousands of dollars of bills for emergency services that were beyond their control or routine services they could have received at much lower cost without unknowingly incurring out-of-network fees. And these bills often come at the worst time, when people are ill, need COVID-19 services, or are in recovery.
3. **Expand Access to Affordable Healthcare through a Medicaid Buy-in Plan**: A “buy-in” plan allows families and individuals not otherwise eligible for Medicaid the chance to “buy-in” to Medicaid as an insurance plan.

THE AMERICA'S GOALS 2021 POLICY AGENDA  
GOAL 2: QUALITY, AFFORDABLE HEALTHCARE

4. **Increase Access to Safe, Low Cost Prescription Drugs:** The Safe and Low Cost Prescriptions Act gives customers in U.S. states access to safe, regulated prescription drugs at lower costs by importing them.
5. **Telehealth Services:** During COVID-19, telehealth has been a life-line. Expanded telehealth services can mean better long-term health access, but only if insurance is required to remove outdated regulatory roadblocks. [Indiana](#), [New Jersey](#), [New York](#), and [Nevada](#) all removed location requirements, for example.
6. **Save Lives, Advance Equitable Outcomes, and Reduce Healthcare Costs with Better Data:** Racial and ethnic disparities in healthcare lead to shorter, less healthy lives and higher systemic healthcare costs. By collecting and assessing data about patients' race, ethnicity, and primary language, states can take a first, critical step towards improving health outcomes for all.
7. **Support Farmers and Combat Hunger By Purchasing Food Produced In-State:** Expanding tax credits for farmers to donate produce to food pantries and making it easier for state agencies to purchase from in-state farmers will support farmers' bottom lines while leveraging in-state agriculture to fight hunger and ensure healthy foods for everyone.



# Goal 3: Investing in Children

Remote schooling and increased childcare responsibilities have significantly disrupted people's daily lives and brought policy failures into families' living rooms and kitchens across the country. Every single child is going to come out of this pandemic with the need to get on track, which requires building a better system of support for kids from cradle to career, now and for years to come.



- **100% Completion Of Quality K-12 Education**
- **Path To Higher Education, Including Technical Training Without Debt For 100% Of Students**
- **Early Childhood Education And Services For 100% Of Children**

1. **Big Relief for Working Families' Childcare Costs**: The Childcare Advance offers meaningful support to working families, providing relief from the crushing—and growing—costs of childcare by allowing parents with young children to offset state taxes.
2. **Maximize the Impact of Critical Early Childhood Programs with a State Office of Early Childhood**: Providing care and services to young children and their parents improves their lives forever. And the return on investment through a lifetime of higher earnings, improved education outcomes, and reduced criminal justice costs is unmatched. The Office of Early Childhood Act brings coordinated care and services for young children and their families into one State Office to ensure maximum impact for these critical investments, including federal stimulus dollars. States can also make use of any available federal funding to help all families afford childcare, especially families of essential workers, and to assist childcare providers to continue operating safely during and after the pandemic.

THE AMERICA'S GOALS 2021 POLICY AGENDA  
GOAL 3: INVESTING IN CHILDREN

**3. Universal Home Visiting for New Families - an Investment in Our**

**Future:** The Universal Home Visiting Act provides evidence-based programs for eligible families, who need every possible type of support under the strain and ongoing emotional costs of the pandemic. Over time, evidence-based home visiting leads to reduced health, education and criminal justice costs. And the biggest payback is invaluable: improved lives. [Michigan](#) released safety guidelines for visits during the pandemic for its program.

**4. End the Scourge of Preventable Maternal Deaths:** During the pandemic, even routine medical conditions have an added layer of risk, which makes existing inequities especially acute. Coming out of this health crisis, a state Maternal Mortality Review Board can help prevent devastating and unnecessary deaths and harm by providing widespread safe, affordable, quality pre- and post-natal care for all pregnant women.

**5. Pre-K through 3 Literacy Recovery:** Students' ability to read by Grade 3 is one of the most important factors influencing their future; for students in younger grades, COVID-19 has already been a profound disruption. States like [Idaho](#) and [Alabama](#) have prioritized personalized, evidence-based literacy interventions to K-3 students. The short-term costs are [more than offset](#) by long-term reductions in the need for special education, remediation and social services, better health outcomes, lower criminal justice costs, and increased self-sufficiency and productivity.

**6. Supporting Mental Health:** To respond to the urgent needs caused by COVID-19, [states encouraged EMTs, retirees, later-year medical students, and others in related fields to provide services](#). Longer term effects will include increased mental health challenges, which can be met with solutions in this agenda, including [student loan relief for those who assist with this high-need field](#), a [service corps](#), and expanded [telehealth services](#).

# Goal 4: Empowering People Over Special Interests

Massive amounts of spending by narrow special interests, barriers to voting, politically cynical legislative districts, and undue corporate influence in policymaking steal power from everyday Americans and weaken our democracy. There are proven solutions to each of these problems, and every lawmaker has a choice: support the power of people or oppose it.

- **Limit Corporate Special Interest Spending In Politics**
- **At Least 70% Voter Participation And Fair Legislative Districts**
- **Personal Control For Everyone Over Their Private Online Data**



## 1. Automatic Voter Registration Makes Voting Easy and Secure:

Voter registration in the United States is very low compared to other advanced democracies—and over a quarter of unregistered Americans say they want to be registered to vote. By modernizing the computer process for registration, automatic voter registration significantly cuts costs and secures voting systems.

## 2. Support Fair Districts with an Independent Redistricting Commission:

An independent redistricting commission prioritizes voters over politicians, and is more likely to produce fair district maps that empower voters and strengthen our democracy.

## 3. Restore the Right to Vote for Those Who Have Served Their Time:

Five million Americans are denied their right to participate in the democratic process despite having served their time. The Restore the Right

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## GOAL 4: EMPOWERING PEOPLE OVER SPECIAL INTERESTS

to Vote Act protects this basic right and creates a stronger democracy for all Americans.

4. **Rein in Secret Corporate Influence in Politics**: By requiring shareholder approval, public disclosure, and a business rationale for corporate political expenditures, the “Corporate Political Accountability Act” creates increased transparency and public accountability.
5. **Get Corporate Money Out of Politics**: By ending corporate contributions at the state level, the Get Corporate Money Out of Politics Act gets states in line with federal rules and most people’s expectations: that corporations cannot open their wallets to buy policy at the state-house door.
6. **State-and Locally-Owned Broadband Infrastructure Can Ensure Faster Internet and Protect Private Online Data**: When states invest in local ownership of the infrastructure that sustains internet access, the state can better protect private data and help ensure that all families have the internet they need for work, school, and healthcare, wherever they live.



# Goal 5: Equal Opportunity for All

There can be no full recovery from either a public health or an economic perspective until we ensure that everyone, regardless of ethnicity, gender, age, or ability, can achieve the American dream. The pandemic has widened well-documented and long-existing wealth gaps, as well as underlying inequities.

- **Equal Pay For Equal Work Regardless Of Gender Or Race**
- **End Mass Incarceration**
- **Freedom From Ethnic And Racial Profiling For Everyone**



1. **Stop the Unfair Pay Gap Cycle**: The Salary History Fairness Act ends the cycle of pay discrimination by preventing employers from asking prospective employees about their salary history.
2. **Equal Pay for Equal Work with Pay Transparency**: The Pay Transparency Act will ensure that discussing salary information between employees is protected and even encouraged.
3. **Increase Job Opportunities with the Clean Slate Act**: The Clean Slate Act seals some non-violent criminal records for people who have served their sentences and remained crime-free, so that a long ago mistake does not mean lifelong unemployment.
4. **Reform Civil Asset Forfeiture**: Innocence unless proven guilty is a core right in the constitution. But many civil forfeiture laws lead to a severe punishment—seizure of cash or property—for people never convicted of any crime, while creating a financial incentive for seizing people's assets without due process. There are solutions in six states: [Nebraska](#), [New Mexico](#), and [North Carolina](#) have abolished civil forfeiture entirely, and [Arizona](#), [Iowa](#) and [Virginia](#) have curtailed it dramatically.

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GOAL 5: EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL

5. Save Lives and Protect Communities by Preventing the Rehiring of Police Officers with Records of Misconduct: The Public Safety Through Hiring Act prevents police departments from hiring officers who were previously fired or resigned while being investigated for serious misconduct or excessive force.
6. Protecting Families from Gun Violence: Red Flag Laws provide a critical tool that can be used by family and law enforcement to deescalate dangerous situations, allowing critical time to get someone the help they need.

# Goal 6: Sustainable Infrastructure, Resilience, and Innovation

Our daily lives and economic well-being depend on our ability to access technology, roads, secure housing, and energy grids. This infrastructure is the foundation of prosperity and our quality of life. From working at home to travelling safely, COVID-19 has laid bare gaps in infrastructure that many never before experienced, and which must be filled.

- **100% Of Roads, Bridges, Railways, Airports, Seaports, Levees, And Dams In Good Repair**
- **Plans To Make Every Community Resilient Against Natural Disasters**
- **Enhance Scientific Research And Technological Capabilities**



1. [Enhanced Regional Plans](#) bring together key regional stakeholders to assess needs and recommend structures and opportunities to address them, including by identifying affordable solutions for transit and passenger rail systems to connect more people in both metro and rural areas. These coordinated plans are more urgent than ever to address the fiscal crisis these systems face because of the pandemic.
2. [Infrastructure Banks](#) are a self-sustaining way to support infrastructure projects by recouping funding from the economic benefits the projects create during tough budgetary times like this. Tried across the country, from [California](#) to [South Carolina](#), this initiative shores up levees, fixes potholes, and expands economic opportunity.

## THE AMERICA'S GOALS 2021 POLICY AGENDA

GOAL 6: SUSTAINABLE INFRASTRUCTURE,  
RESILIENCE, AND INNOVATION

3. [Ending source of income discrimination in housing](#) is a critical step as more families than ever have experienced the financial shock of COVID-19 and need more secure, fair housing options.
4. Stanching the Eviction Crisis is critical to avoiding this tough period turning into a permanent spiral for millions of families. [Montana](#), [Minnesota](#), and [New Jersey](#) have established eviction moratoriums. States can also leverage federal, private, or state funds to provide rental assistance paid directly to landlords on behalf of renters at risk of losing their homes.
5. [Save Lives by Stopping Extreme Weather Utility Shutoffs](#): As many families have been largely confined to their homes during the pandemic, states can ensure that an unpaid utility bill doesn't lead to a life-threatening situation like lack of heat during the freezing days of winter, or A/C shut-off during a dangerous heat wave. This policy helps seniors, children, and anyone with a medical condition be safe at home.
6. Revolving loan funds: States can work to identify seed funding from federal relief or private investment to establish revolving loan funds for energy improvements to public and non-profit buildings in communities with the biggest need for new good jobs. [Over thirty states have such revolving loan funds.](#)



## Goal 7: Clean Air, Water, and Energy

For many people, the pandemic has made real the possibility of unimaginable catastrophes altering our lives. This is the danger of climate change, whether a community is in the path of rising coastal waters, a Category 4 storm, or an out of control wildfire. It is also the reality for communities that have poisoned water flowing from their taps, dirty air in their lungs, or live in environments that increase their likelihood of being seriously sickened or killed by COVID-19.



- **All New Energy Investments In Clean, Safe Energy**
- **Clean Air And Water For Every Community**
- **Big Polluters Pay 100% Of Damages From Pollution**

1. **Clean Water in Every Tap**: Millions of people across thousands of communities in the U.S. have chemicals in their drinking water that put their families at risk. The Safe Drinking Water Act will limit these known toxins, protecting homes, schools and businesses.
2. **Ensure Clean Drinking Water with Independent Oversight**: The Drinking Water Quality Act gives individuals and communities a path to protect the safety of the water coming out of their taps, and replaces politics with an independent, expert council totally focused on protecting state drinking water.
3. **Create Energy Jobs, Make Communities Healthier, and Protect the Future With A Climate Action Plan**: Tackling climate change can supercharge the economy by creating jobs, improving public health and reducing energy costs, when savings are more needed than ever. A state Climate Action Plan lays out a roadmap to increase investment

THE AMERICA'S GOALS 2021 POLICY AGENDA  
GOAL 7: CLEAN AIR, WATER, AND ENERGY

in clean energy, create good jobs, reduce healthcare costs, and make communities more resilient by achieving measurable and ambitious climate change reduction goals. [New York](#), [Nevada](#), [Virginia](#), and [Washington](#) have all implemented binding Renewable Portfolio Standards with specific thresholds and accountability measures.

4. [Efficiency Benchmarking for Large and Public Buildings](#): Providing heating, cooling, lighting, and electricity to buildings consumes 70% of the entire electric load generated in the United States, which is the largest source of carbon pollution and a major driver of dangerous air pollution. The Building To Building Efficiency Act creates a process for large commercial and government buildings to measure and report their energy use, and generate efficiency improvements that will save money, create jobs, and improve health outcomes.

# Next Steps

**Ready to take action?** Share this Agenda with your colleagues, meet with your caucus, and identify together which priorities are most critically needed and how you can use this as a roadmap to improve lives in your state, both now and in future legislative sessions.

As always, Future Now is here to support you. If you're looking for immediate help with this Agenda or any research requests, **we offer on-demand, live support** at our 24-hour State Line, 1-833-STATES-1.

We also offer customized services for state lawmakers that you and your caucus can leverage in advancing any policies related to America's Goals, including:

- The America's Goals [policy library](#), which provides dozens of model policies like those included in this Agenda (and additional ones that are regularly added).
- Data to help you frame your state's progress and identify areas for improvement, through our [50-State Report Card](#).
- Customized programming for lawmakers with lawmakers and experts, including a fellowship, webinars, convenings, and seminars for caucuses on setting an agenda based on shared values.

Contact us at [policy@futurenow.org](mailto:policy@futurenow.org) to learn more.